Patrolman Charles A. Skeen | Middletown Police Department



Age: 39
Served: 14 months
February 1, 1925 to April 10, 1926

OFFICER

Charles was born January 5, 1887 in Indiana to a carpenter, Frank Gilmore Skeen, and Mahala Isbell (Mills) Skeen. By the time he was 13 the family was living in Middletown. At 23 years he was working as a tire setter at Miami C&M Company and living at 125 Milburn. During 1912, he was an assembler and living at 125 Beech Avenue. Later, he was a papermaker. On February 1, 1925, Charles joined the Middletown Police Department. By 1926, he and his family of five were living at 925 Beech Street.

MURDERER

Albert F. Conley claimed he was born about 1896 in Oxford, Georgia, near Atlanta. However, there are indications that he was born in 1893 in Alabama to Edward B. Conley and Georgia Ann Kenada Conley and was involved in two cuttings there; one while in his late teens and another of a policeman. He also claimed to have moved to Middletown with his wife on April 15, 1925. However, he was listed in the 1924 City Directory as living at 712 17th Street during 1924. On June 16, 1925, his brother, Edward Conley Jr., also by then of Middletown, was found guilty of shooting to kill a man and sentenced to a term at the Ohio Penitentiary. His father, Edward Sr., would later be arrested in Middletown in 1929 for cutting his wife. Meanwhile, Albert, now 33 years old, was running some gambling and bootlegging houses during Prohibition. Dry Agents from Seven Mile had recently raided some of his gambling rooms and he had made statements that he would kill Dry Agents if they raided his home.

INCIDENT

On April 10, 1926, a woman called the Middletown Police Department at 4:10 p.m. Patrolman Carl Sandlin took the call and she reported that there was trouble at 712 17th Street. Patrolman Sandlin inquired as to the type of trouble and the woman replied, “come down and find out!” Patrolman Skeen was off duty at headquarters but, considering the circumstances of the call, he offered to go with him.

They arrived, about 4:30 p.m. Patrolman Sandlin stepped onto the porch and knocked on the door. There was no response. He looked to two women, Annie Walton and Jennie Bagett, on the porch next door and asked if they had heard a disturbance and they said they had not. Suddenly, from inside the house, a

double-barrel shotgun exploded and shot came through the screen door and into Patrolman Skeen's back and head. Patrolman Skeen yelled, "He's got me – get him!" As Patrolman Skeen fell down the steps, another load of shot was fired at Patrolman Sandlin and missed. Patrolman Sandlin returned fire, striking the shooter with a glancing blow to the head.

One of the neighbors called the police for backup and Patrolman Raymond Frazier and Detective Hugh King responded. Suddenly, Albert Conley ran from the back of the house and the officers gave chase. Conley fired another blast and struck Patrolman Frazier in the side and he went down. As Conley was reloading on a neighbor's porch, Patrolman Sandlin shot him, the bullet going through a lung, and made the arrest.

DEATH

All three of the injured men were taken to Mercy Hospital. Patrolman Skeen died at 5 p.m. from "shock and hemorrhage from a load of shot from a shotgun into the back of [his] head."

Patrolman Skeen was the first murder of a Middletown officer. We know of only 6 murdered Middletown officers and 5 of these died during the last half of Prohibition between 1926 and 1930.

Patrolman Skeen was survived by his grandmother, Mary Ellen (Wisecup) Skeen; parents, Frank and Mahala Skeen; wife, Bettie Virginia Skeen; and children, Martha Skeen (17), Thelma Skeen (12) and Betty Skeen (4). Funeral services were conducted Wednesday, April 14, 1926, at their residence. Patrolman Skeen is buried in Woodside Cemetery in Middletown.

INVESTIGATION

Mrs. Carri Conley, Albert's wife, was held as a material witness. Later it was determined she was not at the house at the time of the ambush.

Butler County Coroner Hugh Gadd held an inquest. On Saturday, April 17, 1926 he came back with a verdict of first degree murder by Conley. At the time, it was still a mystery as to whom the woman was that called the disturbance in to Police. It was never determined whether his wife made the call. There was a rumor that Conley was lying in wait for Seven Mile officers because his rooms having been raided.

Conley was initially near death, but on April 19, he had recovered to the point that he was unruly and combative and required restraints, including a straight-jacket. On April 29, 1926, with a rumor prevalent in the community that harm would come to Conley when he was released from the hospital, Police secretly moved him to the Butler County Jail.

On May 1, 1926, Conley appeared before Judge Todhunter, pleaded Not Guilty, and was bound over to the Grand Jury. On May 13th, the Grand Jury handed down indictments for 1st Degree Murder of Patrolman Skeen and Shooting with Intent to Kill Patrolman Frazier. On May 20th, he was arraigned in Butler County Common Pleas Court and pleaded Not Guilty. On June 1, Judge Clarence Murphy set his trial date on July 6.

After a week's delay, voir dire of the jurors began on July 13, 1926. Assistant Prosecutor H. H. Haines prosecuted the case and attorneys Owen K. Blythe (of Cincinnati) and J. B. Connaughton defended Conley. The State closed its case the next day on July 14, 1926 at 11:45 a.m. Conley's defense was that he was consuming moonshine all day in advance of raids by Seven Mile Dry Agents and had no memory of the event. But Middletown

Patrolman Ralph Bauer testified that Conley, while being guarded at the hospital, gave him a detailed account of retrieving the shotgun, loading it, and grabbing an ammunition belt from the kitchen door. Closing arguments were made by Prosecutor P. P. Boli and the jury had the case by the afternoon of July 16. The jury found him guilty, but recommended mercy. On July 29, 1926, 3½ months after the ambush, Judge E. J. Kautz sentenced Conley to a life sentence of hard labor without hope of pardon.

Conley died 38 years later in the Madison Correctional Institute on January 29, 1964 at the age of 71. His remains were brought back and buried in a plot owned by his brother at Woodside Cemetery.

If you have information, artifacts, archives or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

This narrative was revised April 20, 2018 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Museum Memorial Committee Chairman. All rights are reserved to him and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.