

Patrolman Samuel J. "Sam" Robins | Cincinnati Police Department

**110 YEARS AGO, ON APRIL 25,
1916**



Age: $43\frac{1}{4}$

Served: $11\frac{1}{4}$ years

January 13, 1905 to April 25, 1916

OFFICER

Sam was born on January 20, 1874 in Blanchester, Ohio to Charles and Isabella (Schueler) Robins.

We know nothing of his first 29 years until he showed up in Cincinnati as a hostler living at 421 Central Avenue. Three

years later, five men of good reputation nominated Sam to be appointed as Substitute Patrolman. He was appointed to the position on January 13, 1905.

On March 17, 1905, Sam married May E. Best. They were living at 638 W. 4th Street. The next year, they were living at 755 Carlisle Avenue. He was promoted to Patrolman on July 10, 1906. By 1909, they were living at 810 W. 9th Street. About 1911, they had a son, John Robins. In 1912, they moved to 722 W. 9th Street.

By 1916, they had been living on 9th Street for eight years and were in the process of purchasing a home in Price Hill so that, in his words, "Johnny will have a big yard to play in."

During his 11-year- career, he quietly performed his job with no disciplinary issues. Officers described him as a quiet man of retiring disposition, always congenial, and calm in the face of danger. Police Chief Robert Copelan described him as one of the best men on the force, and a steady, hard-working man."

MURDERER

William Groendyke, born Wiley Preston Groendyke on January 31, 1896 in Bentonville, Arkansas, the first of at least five children born to Indianians Frank and Lydia Emmeline (Rohls) Groendyke. In 1900, the family was back in Indiana, in Sparta, and Frank was working as a teacher. In 1910, they were living in Ripley, and Frank was working on a farm. In 1916, he was in Cincinnati and working at Proctor and Gamble. By all accounts, William came from a good, industrious, and God-fearing family.

When the family came to Cincinnati, they initially moved to St. Bernard. At 18, William was living with his family at 7136

Rosewood Avenue in Carthage, a small house near the dead end of the street and across the street from parallel train tracks. By 1916, he was single and allegedly working as a laborer. His mother declared that he was a "good boy." His neighbors considered him to be of a highly nervous temperament.

William spent the night of April 24, 1916 in downtown Cincinnati drinking, by the end of which he was either out of money or low on money. The next morning, he was out and about with a small, loaded .22 caliber revolver in his pocket and 51 rounds of ammunition.

INCIDENT

Sometime after 11 a.m., Groendyke was in Louis Katz' pawnshop at 518 Central Avenue (at Longworth Avenue). He had already purchased from Katz and taken possession of an unloaded .45 caliber revolver and was currently negotiating for a violin. Unknown to Katz at the time, he was obviously stalling for a suitable time to rob him.

Shortly before noon, Cincinnati Detectives Al Wegener and William Sweeney entered Katz's pawn shop on their rounds. They saw the young man apparently bargaining with Katz for a violin. Not wishing to interrupt, they advised Katz that they would be back in five minutes.

Soon after the detectives left, Groendyke reached over the counter and struck Katz in the head with the large revolver. Katz was only stunned and ran from around the counter and grappled with Groendyke until he pulled his .22 caliber revolver from his pocket and shot Katz's left wrist.

Just as the detective had reached the other side of the street,

they heard, "Stop! Thief!" It was Katz who was bleeding from his face and left hand. Katz screamed again, "Stop! Thief!"

Midway on Longworth Street, Patrolman Robins was on duty guarding a voting booth for a primary election. Patrolman Robins, hearing the alarm and seeing the suspect running on Longworth, positioned himself across the street in the suspect's path. He caught Groendyke and the two wrestled with Groendyke struggling to escape. Suddenly, Groendyke discharged his .22 revolver into Robins's body. Robins's hold slackened and he fell into the arms of a civilian, Jack Rubenstein, who had joined the pursuit.

Detectives Wegener and Sweeney were in pursuit and as Groendyke freed himself of Patrolman Robins, he turned toward the detectives and took a shot at them, which missed. As he was pulling the trigger for another shot, Detective Wegener fired at him three times, two of which took effect on Groendyke's left side. One went through his body and exited and the other stopped at his spine, paralyzing his lower body. Groendyke fell to the ground. The entire incident probably lasted 60 seconds.

Robins told the approaching detectives, "I am done for. Call a wagon and take me to the hospital." The detectives commandeered a private automobile and took Patrolman Robins to Cincinnati General Hospital. He lost consciousness on the way.

Groendyke was conscious when taken to the hospital and to the operating room. Surgeons expressed the opinion that he could not survive his wound, that it would likely be fatal within days.

Katz was also taken to the hospital with a bullet wound to his left arm and a laceration on his head. He survived his wound and was later released.

DEATH

Patrolman Robins died soon after arrival at the hospital from hemorrhage following perforation of the interior vena cava and left renal artery.

His longtime friend, Patrolman Joseph Weis, went to his friend's home, walked past five-year-old Johnny playing with their dog in the front yard, and into the residence. Mrs. Robins immediately sensed something serious had happened. With tears in his eyes and barely able to speak, he finally uttered that Patrolman Robins has met with an accident. She collapsed and Dr. Carroll DeCoursey and several well-wishing neighbors responded to her aid.

Patrolman Robins survived by his wife, Mary E. (Best) Robins; son, Johnny Robins (5); and likely siblings.

Members of the Holy Name Society of the Cathedral attended services at his residence on Thursday, April 27, 1916. Beginning at 9 a.m. the next morning, a throng began viewing the body at St. Peter's Cathedral. It required a full hour and a half for all in attendance to view his remains. Reverend Father Michael Mulvihill sang a Requiem High Mass.

Company A of the Police Department escorted him to his burial at St. Joseph (New) Cemetery. Pallbearers included Detectives Sweeney and Hanrahan, Lieutenant Seebohm, and Patrolmen [John Franken](#), William Reilly, and Joseph Staad.

INVESTIGATION

Detectives Secretary James Kilgariff questioned Groendyke in the hospital. He advised that he had had a few drinks the night before, but none on the day of the shooting. He advised that he

went to the pawn shop without acrimonious purposes and took a fancy to a revolver and purchased it. He admitted that he carried a loaded .22 caliber revolver. When asked if he purchased the larger gun to use in a holdup, he replied, "Well, I might just as well have been for that as for any other purpose."

Groendyke told Kilgariff that he did not know he shot Katz, but that he did strike Katz on the head. He then told him that he did not know that he shot Patrolman Robins.

On April 27, 1916, Groendyke's father released a statement alleging that his son had purchased and consumed drugs. That afternoon, Groendyke died, two days after murdering Patrolman Robins from peritonitis following gunshot wound to the abdomen. He had been unresponsive for 24 hours. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Vine Street Hill Cemetery, Section 15, Grave 2088.

EPILOGUE

By May 1916, a fund for the widow had grown to \$600 (more than \$18,000 in 2026).

Nineteen months later, on November 12, 1917, [Detective Wegener](#) would also die in the line of duty at another pawnshop in the 500 block of Central Avenue.

Though the realtor lowered the price of the home in Price Hill, there is no indication that Mrs. Robins was able to purchase it. She remarried after a time and moved to Indiana. She died at the age of 95 on May 30, 1977 in Franklin, Indiana.

John Robins married and had a daughter. He died in 1959 in Omaha, Nebraska, almost 20 years before his mother. We believe a

granddaughter, Daphne Anne (Robins) Heckenlively, and three great-grandsons, Michael Heckenlively, Robin Heckenlively, and David Heckenlively survive Patrolman Robins.

If you know of any have information, artifacts, archives, or photos involving this officer or incident, please contact the Memorial Committee at Memorial@Police-Museum.org

© This narrative was further researched and revised April 16, 2026 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO with research assistance from Joyce Meyer, Price Hill Historical Society, and Kelly Huston, great granddaughter of [Patrolman Henry Deering](#). All rights are reserved to them and to the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society.