Special Deputy Elmore “Elmo” David Pressley | Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office



Age: 53
Served: 1 year
1943 to October 21, 1944

OFFICER

There is truly little that we can confirm in Elmo’s early life or those of his parents. We are fairly certain that he was born in Georgia to Austin and Carrie (Carroll) Pressley. Austin and Carrie were almost certainly born into slavery, probably in the 1840s. More than likely, they were both born in or shortly after 1846 and lived their entire lives in varying counties in Georgia.

Elmo’s date of birth is equally unsubstantiated by documents. The documents that would seem to be the most dependable indicated that he was at least the sixth child born to Austin and Carrie in April 1881. It is clear that he did not know where or when he was born, because after he moved to Cincinnati, he

gave different dates and places on official documents.

During 1900, Elmo's family was living in Cobb County, Georgia. By 1923, Elmo had moved to Atlanta and was working as a janitor.

He married Maggie Levesque in either Alabama or Arkansas. Between 1929 and 1933, they were living in Arkansas, and he fathered three children. He moved to Cincinnati in 1937. On October 5, 1937, Elmo worked for Acme Construction Company at 563 Ridge Avenue and lived at 904 Barr Street. On December 5, 1940, he was working as a pipe layer for Cincinnati Milling Machine. He continued as a laborer until 1941.

During 1941, he began working as a Special Policeman, sworn in as a Hamilton County Special Deputy and hired out to private entities for purposes of law enforcement. By February 16, 1942, that private entity was Valley Homes Subdivision, an unincorporated portion of Lockland, Ohio (now located within the corporate limits of the Village of Lincoln Heights).

On September 5, 1941, Maggie died from tuberculosis. Elmo quickly remarried a female minister and widow, Ellie Willie (Barnes) Lee on December 10, 1941. The Barnes and Pressley families had been neighbors in Georgia decades before. Elmo's family, with a new mother, was living at 933 West Seventh Street.

MURDERER

John Dudley was born September 15, 1908 in Bessemer, Alabama, the oldest of nine children born to a miner, William Dudley (of North Carolina), and Laura Smiley (of Alabama). By 1920, the family had moved to Birmingham, Alabama. We do not know how he came to be in the Cincinnati area or when or why he began using

aliases. We also do not know when or where he married his wife, Ethel Dudley. On February 14, 1942, he was still living in Bessemer and by October 1944 he was in Cincinnati using two aliases: Clarence Griffin and James Shaw.

INCIDENT

On October 18, 1944, Special Deputy Pressley was patrolling Valley Homes Subdivision and responded to 9885 Douglas Walk to assist two boys, William Malone (14) and Alphonso Harvey (11), who were locked out of their home. While he tried to gain entry for the boys, Dudley, for no known reason, stood across the street whistling loudly.

Neither Deputy Pressley nor the boys knew the man. Deputy Pressley asked him to stop, and Dudley replied, “I will whistle if I want, and no one will stop me!” Deputy Pressley warned him that he would be over to talk with him when he was finished assisting the boys.

Deputy Pressley was unsuccessful at finding an entry to the boys’ home, so he walked to the Valley Homes office, retrieved a duplicate key, walked back to the home, and unlocked the door. By then, Dudley had seemingly lost interest and was nowhere to be seen.

Having completed his task, Deputy Pressley continued his foot patrol, walking south on Douglas Walk. At 10:05 p.m., at the intersection of North Leggett and Douglas Walk, Dudley ambushed Deputy Pressley with a .22 caliber rifle and yelled, “Throw up your hands, God damn you, for I am going to shoot you” Deputy Pressley pulled his sidearm. Dudley shot him, the bullet entering just above the navel and traversing his liver and kidney. Dudley then ran, and Deputy Pressley gave chase firing

at him five times. One shot misfired and the other four missed.

Dudley ran to 9887 Douglas Walk, next door to the home that Deputy Pressley had just unlocked for the boys. Perhaps he thought he was at the same home, but 9887 belonged to Miss Cors Daniels. He tried to gain entry using the name, “James Shaw,” but Miss Daniels refused him entry.

Deputy Pressley walked to William Baughman’s residence at 749 South Leggett. Baughman called the Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office at 10:08 p.m. Deputies Bowersox, Piening, and James A. McDonough responded and found Deputy Pressley laying on Baughman’s living room floor.

Houston & Sons, a Lockland ambulance service, transported Deputy Pressley to Good Samaritan Hospital. Almost immediately, at 11:19 p.m., he was transferred to Cincinnati General Hospital where he underwent emergency surgery to repair his liver and remove his kidney.

Responding officers searched through the night but did not find Dudley.

DEATH

Deputy Pressley lingered in pain for 2½ days and died at 3 p.m. on October 21, 1944 from peritonitis of the upper abdomen. He was immediately transported to the Hamilton County Morgue. It was the first time in more than 150 years of Greater Cincinnati law enforcement that an officer was targeted for murder. The next time was more than 80 years later when another Hamilton County Special Deputy, Larry Ray Henderson, was murdered on May 2, 2025 in Cincinnati.

Deputy Pressley was survived by his wife of 2¾ years, now twice

widowed, Ellie Willie (Barnes)(Lee) Pressley, and children, now orphaned of both parents, Pearline Pressley (15), Obie Pressley (13), and Alfred Pressley (11). Deputy Pressley was buried in a single grave, without a marker, in the North Section, Row 1, Grave 34 of the Union Baptist Cemetery, without so much as a funeral notice.

INVESTIGATION

Hamilton County investigators conducted a preliminary investigation, including interviewing the two boys, Miss Daniels, and Mr. Baughman. Hamilton County Sheriff's Office Captain William J. Wiggeringloh, Lieutenants Elmer Jansen and Charles Yoas, and Deputy Joseph McDonough worked throughout the day looking for the suspect, to no avail.

Sometime later, investigators found the rifle at a pawn shop. It had been pawned by Curless Ammons of 1133 Jackson Street, also in Valley Homes. Ammons told police that 'Clarence Griffin,' had come to his home on the night of the shooting and told him that he had just shot a police officer. 'Griffin' left the rifle outside Ammons' home. Investigators determined that the rifle fired the bullet taken from Deputy Pressley's abdomen.

By the end of the year, 'Clarence Griffin' moved to 22nd and Broadway in Gary, Indiana without his wife or mother.

On March 15, 1945, Dudley was suspected in a shooting in Gary. Patrolman Hazel Fletcher, about 6:30 p.m., questioned Dudley on Washington Street. Dudley became abusive, pulled out an iron blackjack, and started striking Fletcher, knocking him to the ground. Patrolman Fletcher pulled his sidearm to defend himself and shot Dudley through the heart, killing him. Dudley was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Gary on March 19, 1945. The

shooting case in Gary was thereby closed.

Dudley’s presence and death in Gary became known to Hamilton County Sheriff investigators. Special Deputy Sim Thompson took Dudley’s wife and mother to Gary. On April 3, 1945, Dudley’s body was exhumed and identified.

Rather anti-climatically, Sheriff Handman announced that the Pressley homicide case was closed.

EPILOGUE

On January 15, 1946, the Gary Council of Consolidated War Veterans named Patrolman Fletcher as “Outstanding Policeman of 1945” and decorated him with a medal.

We do not know what happened to Deputy Pressley’s children, but there are indications that they went back to Arkansas, probably to live with Maggie Pressley’s family.

By 1950, Ellie had been living with her mother-in-law from her first marriage, Minnie Barnes. She did not marry a third time. Ellie died in Drake Hospital on January 16, 1988, at the age of 76, and was buried in Vine Street Cemetery in the Mueller Heights Section, Lot 8, Grave 4.

HONORS DUE

During April 2010, the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Registrar, retired SORTA Operations Superintendent Philip Lind, found old newspaper articles written at the time of the original incident and researched his death. The Museum notified Hamilton County Sheriff Simon Leis, Jr. His Communications Officer,

retired FBI Special Agent Stephen Barnett conducted most of the research for the next year or so, in collaboration with the Museum and other entities including contacts in Ashtabula County which, years later, proved be a red herring.

On October 4, 2010, the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office applied to the National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial to have Deputy Pressley's name added to the National Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial. The Greater Cincinnati Police Museum found no living relatives, but they arranged with Schott Monument Company for a headstone at no cost.

On May 4, 2011, at 1 p.m., hundreds of law enforcement officers, citizens, and media attended a dedication of Deputy Pressley's grave. The Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society Past Vice President, Cincinnati Police Sergeant Thomas A. Waller, was master of ceremonies for the event. The ceremonies included speeches by Sheriff Simon Leis and Director Barnett. The keynote speech was provided by the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President, retired Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer.

Nine days later, during National Police Week ceremonies in Washington D.C., on May 13, 2011, Deputy Pressley's name was finally added to the National Law Enforcement Memorial, more than 66 years after his death.

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

© 2025 – This narrative was further researched and revised on May 13, 2025 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R.

Kramer (retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society Chief Operations Officer, including research provided by FBI Special Agent Steve Barnett (retired) and SORTA Operations Superintendent Philip Lind (retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Registrar. *All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.*