Detective Thomas Joseph “Big Tom” Faragher, Jr.

The King of Homicide Detectives

By Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, Historian, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum



Tom was born October 14, 1905 to Thomas Faragher, Sr., of Ireland, and Jennie (Weise) Faragher, of Cincinnati. Thomas, Sr. had immigrated to the United States in 1897, married Jennie in 1901, and worked as a railroad car builder. They had two daughters, Marie and Florence, before Tom was born. In 1910, the family was living at 1243 State Avenue. By 1920, Thomas, Sr. was a tank inspector for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the family was living at 1534 Race Street.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

At the age of 24, Tom signed up for the Cincinnati Police

Department entrance examination. On March 1, 1927, the Cincinnati Civil Service Commission announced that he, among others, successfully competed for the position of Substitute Patrolman. He began work on March 16, 1927 at District 1 (9th and Central).

INVESTIGATIONS

Within a year, he was already a regular patrolman working as a detective. On February 27, 1928, he and Patrolmen Clem Merz were working under Inspector Eugene T. Weatherly. The Inspector was, at that time, second in command to the Chief of Police. On October 12, 1928, Patrolmen Merz, Harry Wilke, and Faragher arrested John Spadaro of 250 West Sixth Street for accepting wagers on horse races. A year later, on March 15, 1929, while still working with Inspector Weatherly, Patrolmen Merz, Faragher and George Galbraith confiscated sixteen slot machines and arrested thirteen people at 1500 Race Street and 270 West McMicken Avenue. On July 17, 1929, they arrested John Bohn at 707 Main Street for possession of horse slips.

On April 24, 1930, he and Galbraith arrested the bartender at 1900 Western Avenue for awarding cash prizes on the pinball machine. During February 1931, they arrested three men operating a gambling establishment on the 3rd floor of a Smith Street building.

By July 1931, he was temporarily back in uniform, and the Police Division used a picture of him pointing to a stop sign for a traffic safety campaign.



By March 1933, he was back in plain clothes and working with Patrolman Kist. To our knowledge, he never wore a uniform again. Later that month, he was working with Patrolmen Walter McArthur and Wilke, investigating and making an arrest in the shooting of a man, by a woman, who was intending to shoot a different man. At the end of the month, they arrested two men for falsifying a marriage application, the charges being brought by the new father-in-law.

Two days after his 28th birthday, Patrolman Faragher married Marguerite Decker on October 16, 1933.

On July 27, 1934, Faragher went to the Cincinnati home of a suspect wanted for the investigation of a shooting in Wyoming, Ohio. When he approached the home at 821 Wade, the suspect bolted from a window. Patrolman Faragher fired a shot at the man, but it was not known whether it took effect.

POLICE DIVISION REORGANIZATION

Police Chief William Copeland determined to eliminate the use of

district patrolmen in plain-clothes investigations due to a scandal erupting out of the Fourth District. To do so, the Safety Director approved his promoting twenty patrolmen to Detective, transferring them to Headquarters, demoting six detectives to Patrolman, and transferring a total 74 men around the Division.

On August 15, 1934, Patrolman Faragher was promoted to Detective, issued Badge D-33, and assigned to Detective Headquarters. Two of his previous partners, Walter McArthur and Harry F. Wilke, were also promoted. And so was his future partner, W[alter Hart.]

Detective Faragher was not assigned to any of the specialized squads, such as Auto, Vice, Burglary, etc., so we assume he was assigned to what were considered then "general investigations" like aggravated assaults, homicides, embezzlements, robberies, jewel heists, and the like.

On August 30, 1934, he was investigating a case of two men stabbing each other. On September 2nd, it was a theft of rings from a jewelry store. On September 4th, he arrested three men for armed robbery.

On October 19, 1934, he was one of two detectives assigned to assist the famous Department of Justice operative, Melvin Pervis, in locating the kidnapper of Louisville socialite Alice Speed Stoll.

Two days later, probably because of his vice experience with Inspector Weatherly, he was investigating gambling with the Vice Squad and Detective Walter Hart at the Club Cassano. Four days later, he and Hart were involved in the arrests of nineteen Filipinos for gambling on East Court Street. Together, they made a horse-betting arrest at 25 E. 6th Street on the 29th. But more

importantly, they forged a working relationship and friendship that would last, in the case of Detective Hart, a lifetime.

HOMICIDE SQUAD

On November 18, 1934, Cincinnati Safety Director Fred K. Hoehler announced the creation of a Homicide Squad within the Crime Bureau to work in cooperation with the Institute of Legal Medicine in the study and practical application of scientific crime detection. The Institute was housed in the Medical College of the University of Cincinnati and General Hospital. Chief of Detectives, Major Emmett D. Kirgan, determined the squad would consist of five men, including, Sergeant George Schattle and Detectives Faragher and Hart, Lee Flaugher, and William Burks to begin November 25, 1934.

And so began the legendary career of Homicide Detective Tom Faragher, the investigator assigned to the greatest number of homicides and suspicious deaths of any detective in the history of Cincinnati, almost certainly of the region, possibly of the state, and maybe of the country.

They did not have to wait long for their first case. Also on November 25th, the body of a man was found stuffed into a barrel in a garage at 571 Blair Street. Their next case, and their 2nd and 3rd homicides, was a few days later on December 3rd, the double slaying at 667 Lincoln Avenue of Charles and Edith Boyd. On October 23, 1935, eleven months later, Detectives Faragher and Wilke witnessed the electrocution of the convicted double murderer.

By March 1935, Detectives Faragher and Hart were also friends outside of City Hall. They bowled together on a five-man

“Cincinnati Police No. 2” team. Detective Faragher was an outstanding bowler, including series scores in excess of 700.

During October 1935, Detectives Flaugher and Faragher were assisting Hamilton County Sherriff George Lutz and Captain Charles Cottington with a possible serial killer.

On December 7, 1935, Sergeant Schattle and Detectives Faragher and Hart, investigated a homicide at 234 East Fifth Street. On February 12, 1936, Faragher and Hart were together on another homicide. The two were on another case on February 18th. On May 19th, they were together on another. It is clear that their long-time partnership began in 1935. They were not always alone in their investigations, but they were always together.

During 1936, Detective Hart established the Cincinnati Police Holy Name Society. Detective Faragher was then and for years thereafter part of its leadership. Detectives Hart and Faragher served on the Arrangements Committee to arrange for attendance of the Society at a Mass at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral on April 7, 1940, and a breakfast to follow. Detective Faragher served on the same committee for the May 4, 1941 Mass and breakfast and participated as a server at the Mass on May 16, 1943, which was dedicated to the 124 Cincinnati police officers fighting in World War II.

During June 1936, Kentucky’s Bourbon County Sheriff, sixty miles south of Cincinnati, asked for their assistance in connection with the finding of a head and a pair of hands in a bag thrown into a roadside ditch. Detectives Faragher and Hart traced the body parts back to a Cincinnati Fire Captain, found his corpse dumped in Indiana, and found the crime scene in West Harrison Indiana. They and the Indiana State Police also found the murderers in Indiana and prosecuted and convicted them there. The reputation of the Cincinnati Homicide Squad was growing.

They investigated the June 24, 1936 line-of-duty death of Cincinnati Patrolman Lawrence Robbins in Eden Park, found the perpetrators, obtained a confession, and convicted them.

During July 1936, the Lexington, Kentucky, Police Department called for their assistance in one of their homicides.

On August 1, 1937, Cincinnatian George Obendorf died in a hospital in Colorado. Doctors were unable to diagnose the cause of his death and authorities were unable to confirm with whom he was traveling, because his traveling companion denied knowing him. She was Anna Marie Hahn. They and other Cincinnati detectives unraveled the sensational scheme of the "black widow" and the murder by poison of three men. Hahn died in the electric chair on December 7, 1938.



Police Officer Makes Crucifixion Picture.
Detective Thomas Faragher posed for Lieutenant George Schattle in this artistic photograph, made at the Cincinnati Police Department's Institute of Legal Medicine, General Hospital.

In 1938, Sergeant George Schattle was promoted to Lieutenant and put in charge of the police training school. Detective William Burks was promoted to Sergeant and assigned to the Homicide Squad, which by then was found to need only two detectives, Faragher and Hart.

On December 21, 1938, the Madeira Marshal called on the Homicide Squad for assistance in an attempted murder by poison gas of the Kramer family in his village.

Also, on the 21st, Patrolman Carl Hille announced the formation of the Police Memorial Athletic Association with a dozen or more members, including Detective Faragher. At the first Annual Police Field Day at Stricker's Grove in Mt. Healthy, on July 20, 1940, Detective Faragher took top honors in volleyball. His former boss, Lieutenant Schattle, won the trophy for ping pong.

They also played on the baseball team which beat the Cincinnati Fire Department all-star team. On December 18, 1940, Detective Faragher was elected to the Advisory Board of the Police Memorial Athletic Fund and annually reelected until at least 1943.

On March 16, 1940, Walter Whitaker shot and killed Patrolman Julius Mayer, Jr. Detectives Faragher and Hart interrogated Whitaker, obtained a confession, and convicted him of First-Degree Murder.

Detectives Faragher and Hart, in addition to homicide cases, also investigated arsons, kidnappings, critical missing persons, and major fraud investigations, and at least one $60,000 jewel heist. It appears that they were the most likely to be assigned to assist other agencies with their major investigations. During World War II, they also investigated deserters.

During 1941, Detectives Hart and Faragher investigated 43 murders and by January 1942 had already solved 41 of them, an enviable 86% clearance rate.

That is the way it went, week after week, year after year, for two decades. Detectives Hart’s and Faragher’s names appeared in Cincinnati newspapers every other week on average. If not for a murder or sensational death, for their work with the Holy Name Society or the athletic fund or for organizing testimonial dinners for high-ranking or high-profile Cincinnati Police Division or Safety Department personnel.

SPLIT

On Tuesday, October 7, 1952, Detective Hart, while on his way home from work, was forced off the road by a truck as he

traveled westbound on the Eighth Street Viaduct. His car crashed through the concrete rail, off the viaduct and down 29 feet, where it was snagged by an iron railing forty feet above Evans Street. He was pinned in a nearly vertical vehicle with gasoline streaming through and over the car for two hours until heavy equipment was brought to the scene. After the rescue, he spent three days in General Hospital.

Homicide and death investigations, back then, included processing and sketching crime scenes, processing evidence to laboratories and technicians, following the paths of suspects, interrogations, case preparation, and testimony in court. It was more than a fulltime job. It was a vocation. The auto accident and daily drudgery of high-profile case investigations took their toll on Detective Hart. During January 1955, after 20 years working with Detective Faragher, on orders of Police Surgeon Dr. M. C. Menard, he transferred to general investigations. His and Detective Faragher's professional partnership ended with approximately 1,000 deaths investigated.

Nine months later, on September 19, 1955, on his way home from work, Detective Hart stopped by the Grey Eagle Café, at 201 W. Sixth Street, to speak with an owner, Mrs. Gertrude Becraft, about his daughter's wedding reception. Ex-convicts Lemuel Trotter, Robert Lee Jackson, and Willie Barnett barged into the bar and announced a robbery. After being herded into a restroom with the other customers, Detective Hart left the relative safety of the restroom, shot one of the robbers, and was shot through the heart by another.

It fell to Detective Faragher to notify Walter Hart's wife and family and to investigate his partner's and friend's murder. He worked three sleepless days and nights and, largely due to his efforts, the three men were identified, charged, eventually arrested, convicted, and sentenced. Two were electrocuted and

one died in a state mental prison.

Detective Faragher, with other partners, continued investigating hundreds more deaths. On November 1, 1959, the charred body of Cincinnatian Mrs. Louise Bergen was found at Lake Cowan, a two-hour drive from Cincinnati. The Homicide Squad immediately interviewed Edythe Klumpp, a paramour of Bergin's estranged husband. Detective Faragher collected damning evidence and she was charged, convicted, and sentenced to the electric chair. It was his last major case.

Homicide Commander Lieutenant Charles Martin wrote on July 15, 1956 that Detective Faragher was "capable and very dependable, willing to work overtime without grumbling, very proficient in photography and firearms identification, a good team worker and a good man to have around in times of emergency." Chief of Detectives Lieutenant Colonel Henry Sandman wrote on May 28, 1958 that he was "exceptionally polite to everyone, both within and out of the Department, extremely capable at crime scene investigations, particularly homicides, and a willing worker, both on and off duty, when required."

Until 1956, he had no at-fault auto accidents and then the one he had caused no damage to either vehicle. In a rating scale of 1 to 99% efficiency, he averaged 92.5% during his career and 95.5% during his last five years. After the Department began tracking commendations in 1953, Detective Faragher earned seven in less than six years, including being named "Policeman of the Week" on WSAI radio.

Detective Faragher retired on May 15, 1960 with 33 years of service, almost 26 years of them as a Detective on the Homicide Squad. During that time, he investigated about 1,250 murders, suicides, and other deaths. His name, as a homicide investigator, appeared in regional newspapers almost 900 times.

Detective Faragher was found dead in bed, having apparently suffered a heart attack, on Friday, March 15, 1974, at the age of 68. He was survived by Marguerite, his wife of 40+ years; daughter, Kathleen (Eric) Linnes; and sister, Florence Overbeck.