William Christian Boers, Jr.

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Bravest of the Brave

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





Bill was born June 15, 1872 in Cincinnati, the first child born to German immigrants William Christian and Pauline (Stecher) Boers, Sr. Before he was 18 or 19, Bill began working as a laborer. For the next five years he worked as a painter at a carriage manufacturing company.

Military Service

A month after his 18th birthday, on July 21, 1890, Bill enlisted for three years as a Private in Company D – Garfield Rifles – of the First Infantry Regiment of the Ohio National Guard. None of the companies apparently saw any action while Bill was enlisted. On July 21, 1893, at the expiration of his enlistment, Private Boers was honorably discharged. He was assessed in the discharge

papers as, “Conduct excellent – a model soldier.”

Boers Brothers

Bill and his two brothers were strapping young men, renowned for their strength and athletic ability. So, while otherwise occupied, the three combined as a circus trio known as the Boers Brothers. Bill soon tired of traveling, but when the circus was in town, all three performed. Bill was a strongman who could hold up both brothers on his outstretched arms.

Auxiliary Police

On February 18, 1894, about 100 unemployed ‘workingmen,’ calling themselves the Willing Workers Society, met at the Fisher and Grimm’s Hall on Vine Street to commiserate about their idled status. From the rear of those congregated, Frank Temmen called for an assault on the armory to seize guns and ammunition, hold a mass meeting of unemployed men, and march on the Mayor’s Office on February 19, 1894. He organized 27 men to conduct the raid and determined that if they were not satisfied with the mayor’s reply, they would blow up City Hall and burn the city. Cincinnati Police Superintendent Phillip Deitsch, having learned of this, with Detectives Herman Witte and R. A. Crawford, tracked Temmen down, arrested him, and charged him with Inciting a Riot.

Superintendent Deitsch then doubled the on-duty personnel in the district stationhouses. Requiring more assets and having too little time to arrange for the Governor to call up the Ohio National Guard, he arranged for volunteers to staff a special detail to guard the armory. One of those was 21-year-old Bill

Boers. Soon, about 20 men from the 1st Regiment (Cincinnati) of the Ohio Militia were called up to guard the armory until February 23, at which time a number of the Police Calvary took over.

After a trip to Ohio's capital, First Infantry Regiment Colonel Hunt returned with $50 on June 5, 1894, which was split among the fourteen volunteers that guarded the armory.

Railroad Police

Legend has it that by 1896, Bill joined the railroad police, and that during June 1896, he single-handedly stopped and overpowered three armed bank robbers at the Eighth Street rail yards as they ran with the loot from a bank on the northwest corner of Eighth Street and Freeman Avenue. The legend furthermore credits Mayor John Caldwell, a Republican, with offering Bill, also a Republican, a job with the Cincinnati Police Department. We cannot find provenance for this occupation or incident, but it so clearly matches his past and future exploits, we do not doubt the probability.

Cincinnati Police Department

What we do know is that on July 7, 1896, six men of good reputation petitioned the Cincinnati Board of Police Commissioners to nominate Bill for the position of Substitute Patrolman. He was appointed July 28, 1896, took the oath of office on August 5th, and was issued Badge 394.

In short order (shorter than most), on January 5, 1897, Sub-Patrolman Boers was nominated for the position of regular

Patrolman, was approved by the Commissioners on January 12th, and took the oath for that position on the 20th.

Within three months, Patrolman Boers had so impressed another legend, Superintendent of Police Philip Deitsch, that Deitsch selected him to be in one of two companies that traveled to the Nashville Exposition celebrating Tennessee's Centennial.

By November 1897, Patrolman Boers was working out of the Third District stationhouse on Bremen (now Republic) Street. Between then and May 1898 he was transferred to the Ninth District stationhouse (State and Dutton Streets).

Runaway Mule Cart

Patrolman Boers was working in the West End at 8:30 p.m. on July 6, 1900 when the Warsaw Avenue streetcar struck a mule-draw cart driven by Morris Brown on the Eighth Street Viaduct. Brown was knocked from his cart and landed on his head. The mule bounded headlong toward Evans Street with three small boys inside the cart holding on for their lives.

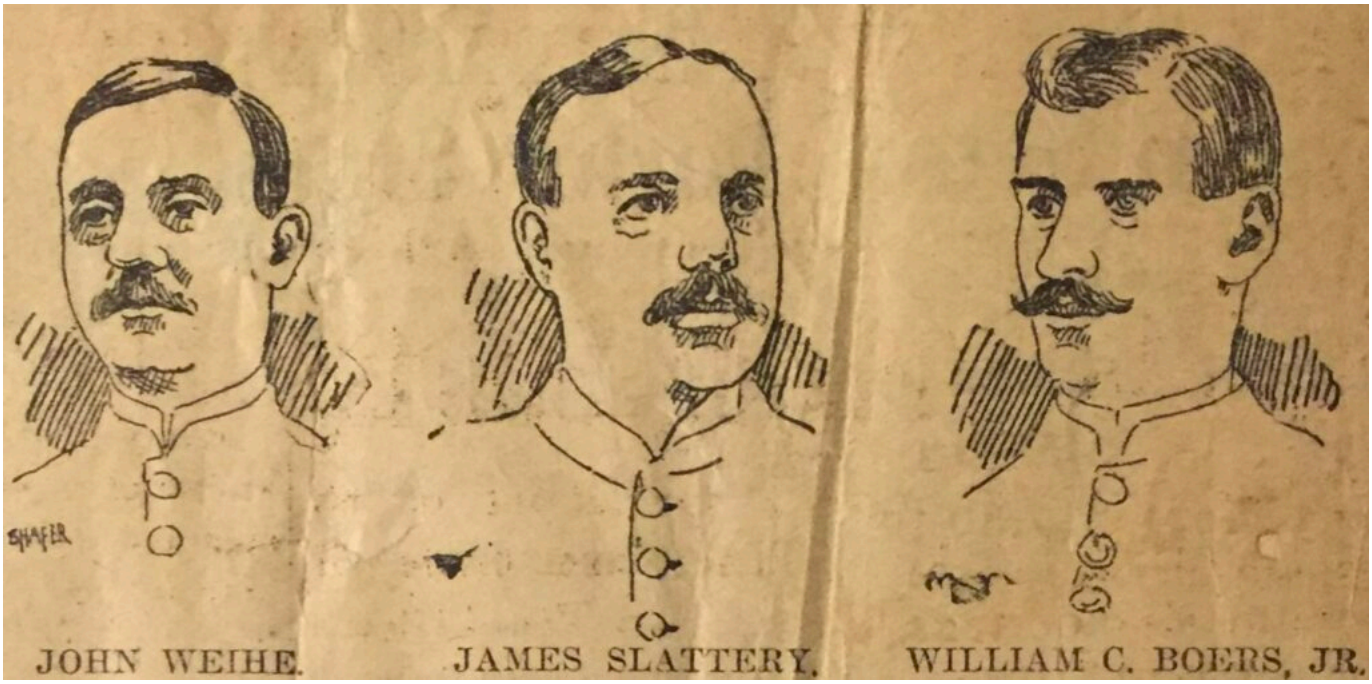
Patrolman Boers, seeing the potential for multiple deaths and serious injuries, placed himself in the mule's path. The strongman wrestled the runaway mule to a stop, saving the boys and pedestrians.



Patrolman Boers did not report the incident, however, on July 31, 1900, a citizen reported it to the Police Commission and the matter was referred to the Superintendent of Police Philip Deitsch for an investigation. The Superintendent, on September 17th,

recommended Patrolman Boers be placed on the very highly prestigious Roll of Honor. The Police Commission adopted the recommendation.

When he was listed, Patrolman Boers was issued a Roll of Honor lithograph to commemorate the honor (which now hangs at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum). He was one of only three (including Patrolmen James Slattery and John Weihe) to be thus honored in 1900.



Man With a Gun

On March 3, 1901, an 18-year-old man reprimanded by his mother for striking his sister, grabbed a revolver and threatened the mother. Boers responded and found the woman cowering in the corner of the room and the boy still pointing the firearm at her. Without concern for himself, Boers ran in and disarmed and arrested the boy.

Millcreek Distilling Company Fire

On May 9, 1903 there was an explosion and fire at the Millcreek Distilling Company at 1509-1511 West Sixth Street at Evans Street. An employee, Leon Mathis, ran to the upper floor to close the fire shutters. On the way down, he was met with flames coming from the second floor. Trapped on the third floor, he crawled out onto a windowsill. Patrolman Boers, single-handedly, carried a 30-foot, wooden ladder to the building and, with the fire raging below him, climbed the ladder, rescued Mathis, and carried him down the ladder to the ground. Very soon thereafter, the fire climbed through the building to the roof.

Runaway Horse and Carriage

Less than two months later, on July 3, 1903, Patrolman Boers, off duty but still in uniform, was at West Sixth Street and Central Avenue, which was crowded with pedestrians shopping at the Sixth Street Market. An out-of-control horse, owned by J. B. Randall and attached to a light runabout at Fifth Street and Central Avenue, dashed up Central Avenue toward the shoppers. Boers leaped into the street and seized the horse’s bridle. He failed to immediately pull the animal down and was dragged under the pounding hooves of the horse. Lieutenant Kane and Patrolman O’Hara responded and secured the horse. Boers, with his clothes torn into rags, was badly hurt. His helmet, club, watch, and revolver were scattered over the street. His hip and right leg were badly bruised. The crowd, who had been previously at risk, cheered the officer.

Boers was taken to the City Hospital. Afterward, he arrived at Headquarters and the Chief saw him bloodied and battered and his

clothes in tatters. Boers was on reduced pay every day that he was laid up and was responsible to replace his uniform out of his own pocket. Ten days later, though still physically impaired, he was back on his beat.

Several weeks later, Chief of Police Millikin received a letter from Lewis Goldsmith, of May, Stern, & Company relating his witnessing of the runaway horse incident near their store and urged the Chief to put him in for the Alms Medal. The Chief referred the letter to the Board of Public Safety. From July 3 to July 12, Patrolman Boers was allowed full pay for the time he was off injured. But, for this event, he was not nominated for the Alms Medal.

He took off sick three more times in October, November, and December due to recurrent physical problems.

Saves a Child

Sixteen days after the Sixth Street Market incident, on Sunday, July 19, 1903, at about 10 p.m., a woman and her five children were standing at the edge of the streetcar tracks in front of a large crowd of people at the end of the Sedamsville Streetcar Line. An electric car came along and one of the children stepped out in front of it and froze. The motorman saw the child and made a gallant effort to stop the car, but it looked for a moment like the child would be ground to death.

Patrolman Boers, who was standing near, saw the child and the approaching streetcar, again risking his own life, with incredible athleticism, jumped in front of the moving car, grabbed the child, and leaped off the tracks just in time for the fender of the car to catch the child’s dress, tearing it. Neither the girl nor Boers were injured.

The mother refused to give her name and Boers was too modest to report the event. But witnesses told of it and on Wednesday, July 22nd, he was a hero among the Sedamsville denizens. It was thought that he would be recommended for the Roll of Honor, but having already received one, we believe he was not eligible.

Department's Strongest

On September 24, 1903, the *Cincinnati Post* reported that Patrolmen Boers and James Connor might, at the Department's Annual Inspection, have a contest of strength to determine which is the strongest. At the time, Night Chief of Police Samuel Corbin had been considered to hold the title. Both Boers and Connor were considered to have no bad habits and regarded as perfect physical specimens. In the Police Gymnasium, both lifted similar weights, but it was obvious that the weight they lifted was not their maximum and heavier weights would have to be borrowed for the hoped-for public contest.

We have no indication whether or not the contest was held, but thereafter Patrolman Boers was consistently called the "strongman of the Department." Indeed, On March 23, 1904, after working out daily at the Police Gymnasium, famous strongman of the time, Henry Holtgrewe, opined that Boers was the best weightlifter in all of Cincinnati – other than himself.

Another Child and Streetcar Incident

Once again on a Sunday night, once again involving a streetcar, on July 10, 1904 Patrolman Boers came close to losing his life; this time while saving 2½-year-old Violet Hitchens of No. 4 Nevada Street. That he was not killed under the wheels of the

Crosstown car No. 683 at Gest and State can be attributed only to his incredible strength.

Boers was in the front seat of the car as it sped down State Avenue when the child toddled into the street, to the middle of the tracks, too late to stop the car. Quick as a flash, Boers climbed under the railing on the inside of the car, ran a few paces with the car, and threw himself directly into the path of the car, grabbed the child, and threw her outside the danger zone. Boers was dragged underneath for 20 feet until the car could be stopped.

Two women fainted over the near catastrophe and the mother of the girl was hysterical. Spectators pulled what they thought would be his mangled corpse from beneath the car, but due to his strength, he was able to withhold himself from death under the wheels. He admitted however, that had his ordeal lasted another yard, he would have lost that battle. He suffered a crushed right hand and bruised leg. The child was inconsolable until Boers bent down, picked her up, and cradled her in his massive chest.

Once again, he made no report of the incident to his Lieutenant in the Ninth District. Even his brother officers had no idea of the rescue until told to them by firemen who witnessed it. When approached about the incident, he laughed and asserted, “Oh, I only did my duty – anyone else would have done the same.” Neighbors of the Hitchenses started a petition to assure Boers would be commended by city authorities for his bravery. Dozens of people came to the Ninth District stationhouse just to shake his hand.

On September 26, 1904, Patrolman Boers was ordered to appear before the Board of Commissioners “with any witnesses bearing upon the rescue of a child at Gest and State Avenue, July 10,

1904.” On September 28th, Violet Hitchens, Captain J. W. Treinen, Mr. and Mrs. J. Fletcher, G. Burns, R. Fiber, and R. X. Wessel testified. Based on the hearing, Patrolman Boers was awarded the Alms Medal for bravery, to be issued at the next Annual Police Inspection in October.

Another Man with a Gun

Fourteen days after saving Viola Hitchens, on July 24, 1904, Sallie Preston called the Ninth Street Station to report that a man, Charles McWilliams, pointed a gun at her and her husband at 672 Evans Street. Boers responded. Upon seeing him, McWilliams ran from the house and dove into ragweed in The Bottoms. Disregarding the danger, Boers pursued him into the ragweed. All that could be seen of the pursuit was their heads bobbing up and down above the height of the weeds. Zig zagging in and out and doubling back on his tracks, McWilliams finally escaped, only to be arrested the next day.

Wild Woman with A Knife

Almost two weeks later, on August 5, 1904, Patrolmen Boers and Henry Lammert came across John Garrett and Mable Johnson arguing at 6th and Delhi Streets. Garrett had struck Johnson, and Johnson pulled out a knife and slashed Garrett’s coat. Boers jumped into the fray and the woman, slashing wildly, sliced Boers’ hand, nearly severing one of his fingers. He locked up both.

Presentation of the Alms Medal for Bravery



Thousands gathered at Government Square on Saturday, October 8, 1904 to witness the review of the Cincinnati Police Department and awarding of medals. The entire Department formed up in Over the Rhine and marched down to Government Square headed by Schmittie's Band. Following them were the ten patrol wagons, the mounted patrol, and the regular officers in order of height. Captain J. F. Ellison, President of the Chamber of Commerce, after complimenting the mayor as head of one of the finest police forces in the country, then Chief Milliken as a worthy replacement for Chief Deitsch, awarded Patrolman Boers with the Alms Metal for Bravery, which was accepted for Boers by J. J. Faran, member of the Board of Public Safety.

A photograph of the medal hangs at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum. A relief depicting the incident is impressed into the solid gold center.



Attack Dog

On April 1, 1908, with a reorganization of the Police Department to put older officers near the borders of Cincinnati, and the younger officers into the interior, Patrolman Boers was transferred from the Ninth District to the Fourth District (754 West Fifth Street).

Apparently, Patrolman Boers' reputation did not carry over well from the Ninth to the Fourth District, because on June 29, 1908, when he and Patrolman Ottoway arrested a dozen men at 1012 Taylor Alley for shooting craps, and Ottoway went to call for a wagon, one of those arrested sicked an attack dog on Boers. The club in Boers' massive right hand came down atop the poor dog's head, crushing his skull and killing him. The paper is silent as

to what Boers did to the owner of the dog.

Another Fire Rescue

On June 14, 1909, an arsonist started a fire in the basement of a tenement house at 827 West Sixth Street and it quickly burned through the vacant first floor, trapping several individuals on the second and third floors. The Fire Department responded with sufficient ladders but too few personnel to affect enough rescues. Patrolman Boers took one of the ladders, again without assistance in carrying it, climbed to the second floor, entered a smoke-filled apartment, while the fire blazed below him, and found Mrs. Lizzie Bowen. He gathered her up and carried her to and down the ladder to safety.

Another Man with A Gun

Five weeks later, on July 22, 1909, a citizen reported to Patrolman Boers that a man was killing his wife at 717 West Fifth Street. Boers rushed to the address. He heard a woman screaming and as he approached, Henry Dodson, a giant of a man, drew a gun and pointed it at the officer, yelling, “If you come in here, I’ll kill you!”

Boers went in. In a desperate fight, during which “guns were drawn, and pieces of furniture were used as weapons,” the two giants fought while the wife barred the door, preventing any assistance from outside. Patrolman Boers finally overpowered Dodson and arrested both the man and his wife.

Yet Another Gun

On January 23, 1910, a woman came up to Patrolman Boers at night and told him that John Foster of 325 John Street had threatened her with a pistol. Boers found Foster at Fourth and John Streets with a fully loaded and primed revolver. We have no details of the arrest, but the article mentions that the revolver was so large those attending court gasped at the sight of it.

Premonition

On April 13, 1917, 15-year-old Evelyn Boers dreamed that her father would be murdered. She did not reveal this to her mother, but she cried all day at school and her teacher and classmates were unable to console her.

Final Man with A Gun

On the night of April 16, 1917 Mrs. Margaret Jones, a Fourth District character known as Hi-Ball Meg, came to the stationhouse and appealed to Desk Sergeant John Lemmick for protection from her husband, Frank C. Jones, who was armed with a gun. Sergeant Lemmick dispatched Patrolman George W. Kaderli who was just coming on duty. Though going off duty, Patrolman Boers told Kaderli that he would go with him because he knew Jones and could calm him down. Patrolman Boers and Jones were both members of the same Loyal Order of Moose, Junior Order of Maccabees lodge.

When they got to 834 West Fourth Street, Patrolman Boers, said, “I’ll go in and see if I can quiet Frank.” Mrs. Jones walked in with him.

Jones was standing at the kitchen doorway and as Patrolman Boers approached, Jones raised a revolver and shot twice. One round hit Boers in the pit of his stomach and the other went wild. It

was Mrs. Jones' and Boers' impression that her husband was shooting at her. Patrolman Boers pushed Mrs. Jones to safety, yelling, "Look out, Margaret. He's after you! He got me, but don't let him shoot you."

Kaderli pursued Jones, firing at him, and Jones leaped from a second-floor window to Sweeney Alley, breaking his left ankle. Kaderli easily apprehended the hobbled Jones and found two revolvers on him.

"Ma, I tried it once too often."

Doctor J. Stewart Hagen said that when told that his wounds were not survivable, Patrolman Boers calmly prepared for the end. With his wife and daughters at his side, he directed disposal of his personal effects. His son William was with friends and could not be found in time. He told his wife, "I want William to have my medal for bravery."

Then he told her, "Ma, I tried it once too often. This time they got me." They were his last words.

EPILOGUE

Patrolman Boers' second cousin and contemporary, Edward William Hughes, while in the United States Navy was aboard the U.S.S. Benning when a boiler exploded. He exhibited incredible bravery in saving the lives of sailors and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Some say bravery at that level is in the blood.

For a full report on his death, justice for the murderer, and his survivors, go to Patrolman William Christian Boers, Jr. in our Fallen Officers section.

If you know of 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 created October 16, 2023 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President. All rights are reserved to him and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.