

# **Sheriff David Lamphere – Dearborn County's First Sheriff**

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*By Captain James D. Schaffer, Ret., Researcher  
Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society*

When Dearborn County was organized in 1803, the task of building civil government on the frontier fell to a small group of trusted local leaders. Among them was David Lamphere who holds the distinction of serving as the county's first sheriff, from August 23, 1803 until November 23, 1804 when he was replaced due to his departure from the county.

Dearborn County itself was created by proclamation of William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, on March 7, 1803. At the time, the new county covered a vast region along the Ohio River frontier. Its boundaries stretched from the Ohio state line on the east to the old Indian boundary line on the west and north, and south to the Ohio River—encompassing what

today is all of Ohio County, part of Switzerland County, and portions of several additional counties reaching northward toward Fort Recovery.

This part of the Indiana Territory, later becoming Dearborn County, was from June 22, 1798 until April 30, 1802, a part of Hamilton County (now Ohio), with the county seat being Cincinnati. From April 30, 1802 until January 24, 1803, the area was under no county organization, and from January 24, 1803 until March 7, 1803, when Dearborn County was officially formed, it was part of Clark County, with the county seat being Jeffersonville.

Lamphere's background is difficult to trace for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the region went through multiple jurisdictional changes. It had been part of Hamilton County in the Northwest Territory, followed by Dearborn County in the Indiana Territory. Secondly, the spelling of Lamphere's last name may appear as Lamphere, Lamphier, Lamphear, Lanphere, or Lanphier. Last, major obstacle was due to the loss of records in the Dearborn County courthouse fire of 1826. However, it can be assumed that in order to be appointed sheriff, Lamphere would have already been known to local leaders, already resided in the area, and was considered a trusted citizen by officials.

It is believed that Lamphere was born around 1761. The family name, prominent in Westerly Rhode Island and nearby Stonington Point, Connecticut, is known to have emigrated westward. Although no verified birth date, birthplace, or family lineage for him has yet been identified in surviving county histories, territorial records, or cemetery indexes, his selection for office suggests he was already a member of the frontier community. Because Dearborn County had previously been attached to Hamilton County, it is possible that Lamphere lived in Ohio before serving in the new Indiana jurisdiction.

In 1803, the sheriff was one of the most important officials in local government. Lamphere's responsibilities would have included enforcing criminal law, serving court writs and summonses, collecting taxes across widely dispersed settlements, supervising elections, overseeing prisoners, and conducting public sales ordered by the courts.

No confirmed burial site for David Lamphere has been identified. This absence is not unusual for early settlers of the Indiana frontier, many of whom were buried in small family plots later lost to time, agriculture, or development.