The Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society Museum

"Preserving the history of law enforcement in the Greater Cincinnati area"

Message from the President

Greetings!

I'm often asked about the police museum and what we do, and I am always happy to talk about our mission of preserving the history of law enforcement in Greater Cincinnati. Sometimes the discussion turns to what we are doing for law enforcement today.

I'm happy to announce that last month, your police museum opened the "Cop Shop" on the first floor of our facility at 308 Reading Road.

The Cop Shop is basically a place where police officers can stop in to get a free cup of coffee and interact with other police officers while waiting for appearances at the Hamilton County Courthouse. It's staffed by volunteers and is open weekdays from 6 to 10 a.m. when court is in session. All you need is police ID.

We were fortunate to have CPD Chief Eliot Isaac on hand at our grand opening, and he's committed to stopping in to chat with officers on a regular basis. I urge you to drop by when you get a chance.

Please feel free to forward this email so we can widen our reach, and let me know if there is anything you'd like to see us report on in future issues. You can email me here.

Snapshot: a view from the past

In this new feature, we'll take a closer look at an artifact or story featured at the police museum. In this issue, we introduce you to Gene Townley, father of the "Tattoo File."
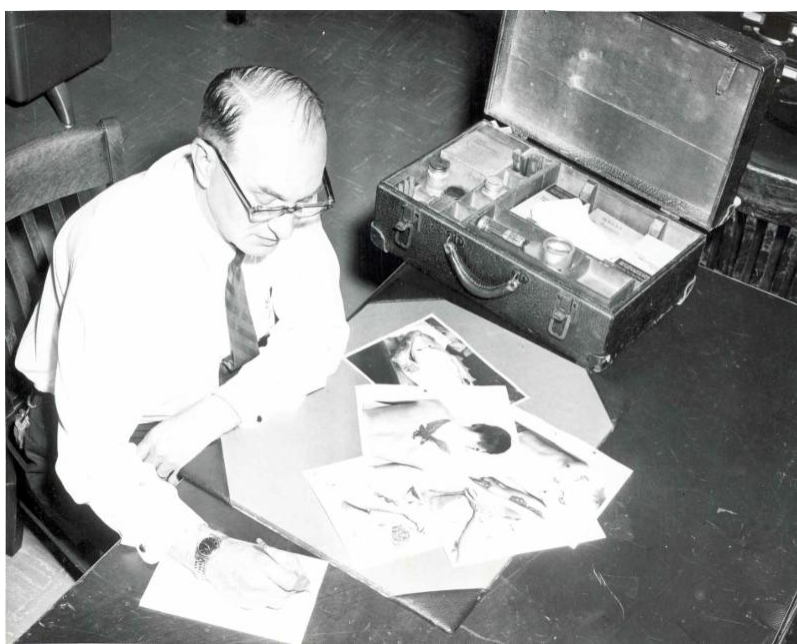
Meet your GCPHS!

This month, we continue to introduce you to the people who work to keep the traditions and history of law enforcement alive in Greater Cincinnati.

Specialist "Detective" Richard W. "Dic" Gross

On Sept. 8, 1974 Dic joined the Cincinnati Police Division as a Police Recruit. In February 1975, he was promoted to Police Officer and assigned to District 7. A year later he rotated to District 1. In 1976, he and 123 other officers were laid off. He went to Pogue's Department Store and worked in their Security Department. Officer Gross and several others were recalled to the Division in September 1977 and he was reassigned to District 1. Soon after, he was assigned as an undercover investigator.

On Dec. 8, 1985, he was promoted to Police Specialist and on March 2, 1986 transferred to the Pawn Squad of the Criminal Investigations Section. In District 1 and now in CIS, his reputation was such that, though his rank was "Specialist" he was universally known as "Detective Gross". During 2001, Detective Gross became a member of the Special Investigations Squad, was appointed as a United States Deputy Marshal and teamed up with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms to

When Gene Townley joined the Cincinnati Police Department in 1939, he had no idea that he would establish one of the Department's "firsts." After serving in as a Patrolman on a beat and as a "Vice Cop", Gene requested an assignment to the Bureau of Identification, where all suspects were taken to be photographed and fingerprinted. The B of I as it was called, also performed other duties involving photo darkroom work, fingerprint comparisons, and firearm investigations. Soon after arriving at the B of I, Gene noticed that someone had started a tattoo file in 1947, but development had stopped. Gene recognized the utility that such a file could have for law enforcement and started tinkering with it in his spare time. After about two years of "tinkering" it was ready to be unveiled, so with the approval of his captain, Paul Flaugher and Chief Stan Schrotel, the Tattoo File became an official part of the Cincinnati Police Department on Jan. 20, 1959.

Tattoos, or lack of them, had always been noted in the file of each person arrested, but not in a stand-alone file that could be readily checked. Gene realized that an easily accessed file of tattoos would be a fast reference for investigators to narrow suspect lists. He divided the files by gender, type of tattoo (initials,animals, names, etc.) and location on the body. The "Tattoo File" showed its efficacy immediately in a Clifton rape case where the young victim had noticed the name "Bill" on the suspect's arm. In under four hours the Detectives on the case had consulted the "Tattoo File", narrowed the suspects, shown the victim mugshots of the suspect, got him identified and arrested. This success was followed closely by several more, including the identification of the body of a murder victim in Mississippi. Gene had read a description of tattoos on an unidentified victim in Mississippi, thought them unique and checked his file. The FBI was involved in the case and one of the agents remembered reading about Cincinnati's tattoo file, paid a visit to Gene and found that the victim had been arrested in Cincinnati at one time and they were able to identify the victim and find the murderer.

Gene went on to establish a simple photo composite identification kit, and a Physical Characteristics File which listed scars, amputations and deformities. Gene wrote extensively about his tattoo file for publications such as *The FBI Magazine, Fingerprint Magazine*, and even a Minnesota medical association magazine. His scrapbook contains letters from all over the United States, Canada and even from J. Edgar Hoover requesting information on his tattoo file. He continued to instruct at law enforcement classes and seminars until his retirement in 1968, leaving a strong legacy.

Find out more fascinating facts and examine three rooms of artifacts at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum, open Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thanks to Vice President and

root out and prosecute Armed Career Felons. Within the first three years, the SIS accounted for 135 Federal imprisonments. During the next decade, he also worked heavily with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and United States Secret Service. Detective Gross retired on Jan. 21, 2012 with almost 40 years of service to his country and community.

During his career, he amassed an astounding 57 letters of appreciation and/or commendation including more than a dozen from almost every police chief and assistant police chief he worked for, two police chiefs from other cities, and the Attorney General from the State of Maryland.

During 1998, known for his collection of badges and police memorabilia, Dic was approached about starting a police museum. Cincinnati Police Superintendent Phillip Deistch first tried to establish a museum 100 years prior. It had been attempted at least three times in the 20th Century, including during 1955 and as recently as the late 1980s - all unsuccessfully. Specialist Gross put together a collection of 21 people, seated them as Board Members of the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society, was elected as President, and incorporated the Society with the State of Ohio during May 1999. By 2002, the Society moved into a temporary site on W. 8th Street and opened its Museum during June 2006.

Specialist Gross transitioned from the Society's first President to the Museum's first Curator. By 2013, the Museum had physically outgrown its location. Specialist Gross managed the disassembly of displays, packing of artifacts, and movement to

Curator Dic Gross (who's featured at right) for providing this month's fascinating fact.

In Memoriam

This regular monthly feature lists those in local law enforcement who have passed away. Please send recent news to **director@gcphs.com**. And as always, keep these individuals, their families and friends forever in your prayers.

- Police Officer Ralph Edward Class Sr. (1951-2016)
- Sheriff Richard Holzberger (1945-2016)
- Lieutenant David Lee Moonitz (1940-2016)
- Corrections Sergeant Robert Pierson (1959-2016)
- Police Officer Michael Lee Preston (1973-2016)
- Deputy James Quinn (1948-2016)
- Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Schneider (1944-2016)
- Patrolman Robert Vahlsing (1925-2016)
- Specialist Ingrid Weber (1966-2016)

the new, permanent location at 308 Reading Road where he assembled many more displays and still serves the community as the Museum's first and only Curator.

Join Our Mailing List!

Stay on top of all the events and news from your Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society and Museum.

Sign up today - we will never sell or give away your email address.

Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society and Museum