

POLICE CHIEF MURDERED

Aaron McCord, Lebanon's Chief of Police, murdered in the line of duty in 1890



by Randy Jaye

Aaron C. McCord was born to Elisabeth Daub and Henry Dobler McCord in 1849 in Lebanon, Pa. He married Louise Geb Dale and had five children: Clara, Emma E., Ann, Alfred and Aaron Chandler.

McCord's law enforcement career started in 1881 as a private watchman. In April 1882, he was elected to the Lebanon Police Department by the city council.

In August 1882, his first published arrest recorded by the Lebanon Daily News was a rather comical incident where he encountered a man so oblivious and intoxicated he could not walk. McCord procured a wheelbarrow, loaded the man into it, and then wheeled him down the street to the police station.

McCord was an eight-year veteran of the Lebanon Police Department when Chief John M. Mark tendered his resignation. On March 12, 1890, P.L. Weimer, mayor of the City of Lebanon, promoted McCord to Chief of Police.

The Murder of Aaron McCord

On the evening of March 27, 1890, Andrew L. Shirk, a local painter and butcher, was extremely intoxicated and carelessly waving two revolver pistols while walking around the downtown Lebanon area. His friends could not convince him to put the guns in his pockets. At around 10 o'clock, Shirk fired one of his guns at a box in front of the Central Hotel at the southeast corner of Eighth and Cumberland Streets. Police responded to the incident, but Shirk fled the area before they arrived. At around 11 o'clock, Shirk appeared in front of the Eagle Hotel at southeast corner of Ninth and Cumberland Streets and began vomiting near the entrance of the hotel's restaurant. The bartender, Lincoln Light, confronted him and asked him to move away from the building. Shirk staggered down Ninth Street and began yelling profanities back at Light, and then suddenly fired a shot over his head. Light promptly closed the bar and restaurant. Three policemen responded to the scene including Chief Aaron McCord and Light told them

that Shirk, who was known to them, was intoxicated and responsible for the reckless gunfire.

A short while later, Shirk returned to the Eagle Hotel with two other men and saw Light and Chief McCord on the street and questioned why the bar and restaurant was closed so early. Chief McCord accused Shirk of the illegal shooting, but he denied it. Chief McCord said, "Andy, I must arrest you for your actions." Chief McCord began escorting Shirk to the Lebanon Police Station, but Shirk suddenly reached toward his pocket and McCord said, "None of that, Andy; come along peacefully." After Shirk and McCord walked about a block away from the Eagle Hotel bartender Light heard a gunshot. Chief McCord fell to the pavement in front of the C.K. Light Clothing Store at 806 Cumberland Street with a bullet wound to the right temple of his head.

Shirk fled down Cumberland Street passing Police Officer Benjamin Young, who was running towards fallen Chief McCord, to the Eckert Brothers livery stable at the

corner of Seventh Street and Walnut Alley. Shirk then pointed a gun at the hostler, Adam Doll, and forced him to saddle up a horse.

Meanwhile, unconscious Chief McCord was carried into nearby Ross' drug store where Dr. A.B. Gloninger and Dr. S.S. Meily were summoned to attend to him. They were unsuccessful in their attempt to remove the bullet from his brain. McCord was then transferred to the Good Samaritan Hospital and Dr. Gloninger, assisted by Dr. Weiss, made unsuccessful attempts to remove the bullet. At 1:30 am on March 28, 1890, only sixteen days after being appointed Lebanon's Chief of Police, he died.

The Assailant's Escape and Capture

Police Officer Lengle said he saw Shirk riding down Eighth Street and turning onto Chestnut Street as he fled in a westerly direction. No one followed Shirk as he made a getaway out of Lebanon.

Later in the day of March 28, 1890, Shirk was spotted in Annville and Palmyra and then made his way to Hummelstown where he entered the Hoffer Hotel. P.H. Seltzer, a Lebanon businessman, recognized him and knew he was a fugitive from stories published in that morning's Harrisburg Patriot-News.

"My God, that is Shirk, the man who shot the chief of police," Seltzer yelled.

E.M. Hoffer, owner of the Hoffer Hotel said to Shirk, "You are the man we have been looking for."

Hoffer then attempted to capture the fugitive by holding him by his coat, but Shirk stepped back and drew a revolver pistol. Before Shirk

was able to shoot anyone Hoffer's brother George knocked the gun from his hand and a local man, W.F. Shoemaker, grabbed his arm, threw him to the ground and confiscated his second revolver. Shoemaker held Shirk down until Hummelstown police officer Lee Manbeck arrived to arrest him.

The news of Shirk's arrest created quite a stir in Lebanon as people were thankful that he was no longer on the loose. Constables Gates, Zone and Sattazohn were sent to Hummelstown to bring him back to Lebanon. Shirk was transported by train and when word got out of his arrival time 1,500 to 2,000 people gathered at the Lebanon train station, and more than 1,000 lined both sides of Eighth Street from the railroad tracks to the jail building, to get a glimpse of the prisoner.

Aaron McCord's Funeral

On April 1, 1890, Aaron McCord's funeral was held at his residence at 113 North Fifth Street, Lebanon. More than 1,500 people came to pay their respects. Services officiated by Rev. B.W. Schmauk were held at the Salem Lutheran Church, and McCord's body was viewed by many people in a room in the building's basement. The funeral procession included a horse-drawn hearse carrying McCord's coffin which was led by the Sons of Veterans Drum & Bugle Corps. McCord was laid to rest in the Mount Lebanon Cemetery.

A DEADLY SHOT.

**Chief of Police Aaron McCord
Laid Low by an Assassin's
Bullet.**

A. L. SHIRK'S CRIME

**A Faithful Officer Killed while
in the Discharge of
His Duty.**

THE MURDERER IN JAIL.

**Captured at Hummelstown this Morn-
ing--The Story of a Spree that Had
a Shocking Termination.**

The Trial and Verdict

In June 1890, the trial of A.L. Shirk was held at the Lebanon County Courthouse in front of hundreds as the courtroom was both packed and buzzing from excitement. The likes not seen in Lebanon since the infamous Blue Eyed Six murder trial in 1879. Judge McPherson presided over the case while prosecutors included District Attorney P. Simon Keiser and J. Marshal Funck.

McCord was ably represented by ex-Judge R.M. Henderson, Charles M. Zerbe and E.D. Miller.

The Commonwealth attempted to establish their case of murder in the first degree as they called many witnesses to the stand including Frank Yost, Lebanon police officer, F.A. Brenner and A.C. Paine who both saw McCord waving a gun around at the Central Hotel prior to the shooting, William Mease, Lebanon police officer, and Lincoln Light, bartender at the Eagle Hotel. None of these witnesses could describe exactly how the shooting occurred.

The only eyewitness that actually saw the shooting occur was Jerome Shimp who testified, "I was standing on the opposite side of the street... they [McCord and Shirk] were coming down from the Eagle Hotel, they were hooking arms...when they had a short tussel, Shirk tore loose from McCord [and] Shirk...drew out a revolver [and I] saw him put his hand up and fire at McCord's head...Shirk stepped into the gutter and said I killed him and ran away."

Shirk took the stand in his own defense claiming self-defense and testified, "at Light's clothing store I felt something in my pocket, and, as McCord pulled my revolver out of my overcoat pocket, I threw up my hand to catch it, and the revolver went off and McCord dropped to the pavement."

On June 7, 1890, after less than one day of deliberations the jury returned with a verdict of guilty of second degree murder. Judge McPherson turned toward Shirk and said, "Prisoner, stand up. The sentence of the Court is that you pay a fine of \$1, costs of prosecution and undergo an imprisonment in the Eastern



The Eagle Hotel at the southeast corner of Ninth and Cumberland Streets, Lebanon.

[State] Penitentiary for a period of 12 years. If the imprisonment was longer, we would give you the full extent of the law."

Judge McPherson was so disappointed with the Shirk sentence that he became an advocate to get the penalty for a second degree murder charge increased to a maximum of 20 years in the State of Pennsylvania.

The Assailant's Incarceration and Release

On June 9, 1890, Sheriff Miller took 28-year-old A.L. Shirk by train to the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia to begin serving his sentence. By several accounts, Shirk was a model prisoner and worked in the penitentiary's garden.

In January 1897, attorney Geo. B. Woomea, applied to the Board of Pardons in Harrisburg for Shirk's early release.

On September 7, 1899, A.L. Shirk was released from the Eastern State Penitentiary after serving only nine years and three months for killing Lebanon's Chief of Police. Good prison behavior cut his sentence short by two years and nine months.

Shirk immediately moved his household possessions from 1103 Chestnut Street, Lebanon, and his



wife and son to Carlisle and settled in that city.

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., honors law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty throughout the history of the United States.

In 1996, as a result of research conducted by Wendy Dressler, of the Lebanon Police Department, the names of Aaron McCord and Cyrus Shaeffer (another fallen Lebanon police officer who was murdered in 1903 by a homicide suspect) were engraved on the memorial's granite wall.