

Toledo Captain of Detectives Lewis B. Tracy 1862 - 1921

*“Courteous to a fault, in love with his work, sympathetic and kind, he brought all of these human traits to the work which was his. Judges, attorneys, police and court officials and hangers on about the gray foreboding building down on Superior Street all loved and respected Lou (Lewis B.) Tracy. At one time or another he was connected with every phase of the department’s work. Even prisoners looked upon him as their friend.”*¹



Lewis B. Tracy, the youngest of four boys and two girls, was born in Defiance County, Ohio, in 1862 to Alfred and Lucretia Tracy, whose ancestors were among Ohio’s earliest settlers. In 1878, at the age of sixteen, Lewis B. Tracy found his way to Toledo, securing a job at the Pearl Steam Laundry, where he met his future wife, Frances E. Fraser. The Fraser family established a noble record of civic service, including Frances’ father, Civil War veteran George S. Fraser, uncle James Fraser (also a Civil War veteran) and nephew George W. Fraser, all Toledo firefighters. James Fraser died tragically in 1894 while fighting Toledo’s King-Quale elevator fire. Nephew George W. Fraser later became chief of the Toledo Fire Department.

Tracy’s remarkable career with the Toledo Police Department began in 1898 when he was appointed a patrolman and ended with his death from heart failure in 1921. He served 23 years with the Toledo Police Department during the turbulent pre-Prohibition period, as America was emerging from the Victorian era into a time of rapid cultural change. The dark storm of World War 1 loomed on the horizon. The saloon culture was at its peak and movements were well under way that would lead to enactment of both the 18th (Prohibition) and 19th (Women’s Right to Vote) amendments.

It was in these tumultuous times that Tracy earned his reputation as a cop’s cop, tough but compassionate, tenacious but understanding. Over the span of his career, he was beaten up, robbed, shot, threatened, falsely accused of graft, bitten, had bones broken and was injured severely in a yegg-chasing car wreck, yet he always remained dedicated to his work.

Tracy rose quickly through the ranks of the Toledo Police Department. In 1906 he was appointed a plain-clothes detective and partnered with Henry Herbert, who later became Chief of Police. The two sleuths soon earned a reputation as *“the most formidable pair of detectives on the force.”*² Their night-shift beat was the Tenderloin, aka the Red-Light District, a rough-and-tumble center of vice located in the area of Lafayette and Huron streets where gambling, prostitution and other vices were unofficially tolerated in an effort to keep the immoral behavior from creeping into the more respectable neighborhoods.

Police work in the Tenderloin was not without hazard and Tracy had more than his share of physical altercations with suspects. In March of 1913, he was shot while attempting to subdue an armed man suspected of shooting up a saloon on Lafayette street. The bullet *“struck Tracy in the left side and plowed a furrow two inches long through the flesh a little below the heart”*³. He was back on the beat three days later.

On January 1, 1915, Detective Tracy was formally placed in charge of the Tenderloin: *“He (Lewis B. Tracy) was given the toughest assignment of all. To regulate the entire Red-Light-District. Tracy was assigned the exclusive duty of supervising the registration of inmates of sporting houses, which were tolerated when a segregated district was recognized.”*⁴ His job was to register, photograph and arrange regular health check-ups for all of the ‘sporting’ ladies in the Tenderloin. Tracy knew them all and they all knew him. In time, the denizens of the Tenderloin developed a deep respect for the compassionate officer they came to know as “Papa.”

“A volume would be filled should one attempt to relate the number of instances wherein “Cap” Tracy saved young girls from a life worse than Hell itself while in charge of the segregated district. Girls eager to enter a life of

¹ Memorial Committee Resolution to the Municipal Court of Toledo, October 31, 1921.

² Ibid.

³ *Negro Shoots Detective Tracy* (1913, March 4) *Toledo Blade*. page 2.

⁴ Personnel record of Lewis B. Tracy, Toledo Police Department.

*shame, have been shown the error of their ways and persuaded by "Father" Tracy to return to their homes or permit him to send for their parents to reclaim them."*⁵

In late 1915, Tracy was appointed Captain of Detectives, the apex of his career. The Toledo Blade later noted that he *"was associated with all the big murder cases here in the last 20 years."*⁶ Only a few months later, he collapsed while on duty, a result of overwork and ongoing heart problems. He was again able to return to work, but it marked the beginning of a slow but steady decline in his health.

On May 1, 1918, with World War I raging, Toledo eradicated the Tenderloin, an action ordered by the War Department to *"protect young manhood"*⁷ from the ravages of vice. During the years of the Great War, Tracy was placed in charge of the "slacker" bureau, rounding up draft-dodgers, deserters, illegal immigrants and sedition suspects. In this work, he became widely known as "Loyalty Lou" for *"the severe lectures he handed to 'slackers' and persons charged with uttering seditious remarks."*⁸

On December 29, 1918, Tracy was heartbroken by news of the tragic death of his oldest son, Howard, who died in Arizona at the age of 25, a victim of the 1918 flu pandemic. Friends and co-workers said Tracy was the never the same. As the war ended, Tracy's health continued to decline, making it impossible for him to continue patrolling Toledo's streets. He was re-assigned to work in the court house, managing prisoners, suspects and witnesses, until his failing health finally forced him to take leave from the department in August of 1921. He was never again able to return to work.

Only days before his death, Captain Lewis B. Tracy, knowing that the end was near, gave instructions for his own funeral, naming as his pallbearers Detectives William Culver, Valentine Kujawa, William Delehanty, Captain Louis Haas, Michael Daly and John Louy of the Bureau of Identification. Lewis B. Tracy died in his Collingwood Avenue home on October 29, 1921, leaving behind his wife, Frances, daughter Uretta and son Robert. A cadre of 24 uniformed Toledo policemen, led by Captain Thomas O'Reilly, led the funeral procession to his burial site on a hillside in Forest cemetery.

*"Thus passes on to the great beyond one whose word was his bond, a police official who was generous and truthful, courageous and helpful, kind and pleasant-voiced, affable and charitable, prompt and upright, honest and honorable; a loving husband and kind and thoughtful father – a faithful friend and true at all times as colleague and companion."*⁹

⁵ Memorial Committee Resolution to the Municipal Court of Toledo, October 31, 1921.

⁶ *Veteran Sleuth Taken By Death* (1921, October 29) Toledo Blade, page 1.

⁷ *Police Raid Resort; Arrest 4 Women, 4 Men; All Fined* (1918, May 2) Toledo Blade, page 1.

⁸ *Loyalty Lou Gains Name From Talks* (1918) Toledo Blade.

⁹ Memorial Committee Resolution to the Municipal Court of Toledo, October 31, 1921.