

The Ghost of Thomas G. O'Connor; A Portland, Oregon Policeman

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Sometimes a ghost taps you on the shoulder, and you find yourself going on an unscheduled trip.

On a sunny August day, Thomas G. O'Connor's ghost found me at the Portland Police Museum. The museum docent pointed to a picture frame and said it was reserved for him. He died on 29 August 1867, the first Portland policeman to be killed in the line of duty. All of the other frames in the hall contained photos of strong-looking men in police uniform. His frame was empty, and little was known about him.

I felt his presence that day, and I feel it today. He wants me to tell his story. He wants me to find a relative who has a photo. I have tried to ignore his request. He is not related to me, and I don't have enough time to do my own research. However, I keep coming back to the search.

The Shooting

In 1867, Portland was a booming town of 6,717 inhabitants.¹ It was a major crossroads for commerce, and it drew more than its share of vice. The small police force headed by Marshal Henry L. Hoyt had their work cut out for them as they kept the peace.²

On 10 April 1867, the Portland Common Council met and appointed two Deputy Marshals, one for day and one for night.³ Thomas O'Connor was one of the new deputies. A man with the same surname, M. O'Connor, was one of the council members who made the appointment.⁴

Four months later, at 2:45 a.m., on 21 August 1867, Frank Miguel walked out of the Union Hotel on the corner of Yamhill and First Streets in downtown Portland.⁵

By day, First Street was a bustling retail center with two-story buildings filled with people conducting business.⁶ At night, the street was dark, and police patrols were posted to ensure the peace.

¹ *S. J. McCormick's The Portland Directory For The Year Commencing January 1868* (Portland: A. G. Walling & Co., Printer, 1868), 29. [Hereafter: Directory.]

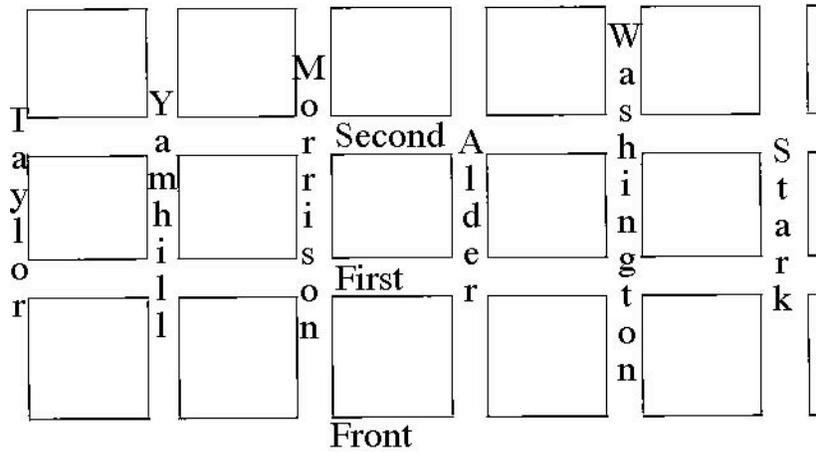
² 1867 Directory, first unnumbered page.

³ *The Daily Oregonian*, 11 April 1867, page 3, column 1.

⁴ 1868 Directory, pages 1, 71.

⁵ *Portland Oregonian*, 22 August 1867, page 3, column 1.

⁶ *The Oregonian's Handbook of the Pacific Northwest* (Portland, OR: The Oregonian Publishing Co., 1894), 119.



Miguel held a dragoon revolver, a cap and ball six-shooter, in his hands. He had been threatening people with the gun earlier in the evening. By the time he reached Morrison Street, he was shooting the gun in the air.

Miguel and his guns had a history. In 1861, he was arrested for attempting to shoot Officer Brannan. In May 1867, he threatened to shoot a man named Buckskin Bill and was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon.

On this fateful night, Deputy Marshal Thomas O'Connor and Officer Townsend were on duty on Washington Street. When they heard the shots, they ran up Front Street to the What Cheer House on Yamhill and Taylor. They were told the shooting was over on First Street. When they arrived at First and Morrison, they found Miguel shooting his gun.

A chase ensued over the cobble-stone streets. Miguel stopped at First and Stark in front of the Oro Fino Saloon. The two-story Oro Fino and its wooden sidewalk became the stage for a frightful drama.

Miguel raised his gun to O'Connor's breast. O'Connor grabbed Miguel's hand and pressed the gun downward as Miguel squeezed the trigger. A bullet ripped into O'Connor's leg.

Townsend, fearing for his life, shot Miguel in the stomach, but it did not stop him. Miguel seized Townsend, choking him by the throat. Townsend managed to aim his pistol and shoot again. The bullet went through Miguel's cheek and mouth, and the fight was over.

Townsend left to find assistance while O'Connor, raised on his elbow, kept Miguel covered by the pistol. Officer Brannan arrived and relieved O'Connor. Mr. Lyons from the What Cheer House hitched up his horse to the hotel baggage wagon and drove to the scene. O'Connor was placed on the wagon and driven to the hotel where Dr. Chapman dressed the wound. Unfortunately, the ball could not be removed.

Miguel was taken to the city jail. His wounds were mortal, and he died the next day.⁷

⁷ Immaculate Conception Church Register, page 191. MSS 1580, reel 1. Located: Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon. [Hereafter: Cathedral Register.]

During the next few days, updates on O'Connor's condition were posted in the newspaper. On 23 August, it was "as favorable as could be expected considering the serious nature of his injury.....There is thought to be a fair chance for saving his leg....However, the tragedy may result to Mr. O'Connor, it is most unfortunate for him and his family, he being a poor man and dependent upon his salary for a living."⁸

Six days later, O'Connor died. A death notice in the newspaper invited friends to attend the funeral.⁹

In this city, August 29th, at 8:30 am, Thomas G. O'Connor, aged 43 years 8 months. The funeral will take place from the residence of the family, corner of Front and Clay streets, at 2 o'clock this afternoon. Friends of the family are invited to attend.

G. F. Fierens, pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, known as "The Cathedral," penned this entry in the church register.¹⁰

On the thirtieth of August 1800 and sixty seven, we the undersigned Pastor of Portland, Oregon, have given Christian burial in St. Mary's Cemetery of this parish to the body of **Thomas G. O'Connor**, husband of **Ann McLoughlin**, deceased in this city at 8 1/2 o'clock on the twenty ninth instant, aged forty three years and eight months.

O'Connor's spirit touched me as I read the newspaper accounts and the burial entry. He was incredibly brave. Unfortunately, medical treatment in 1867 could not prevent infection from spreading.

O'Connor's Family

This should be enough research to satisfy a ghost. I found newspaper articles about his shooting and death, and I found that he had a family. It was not enough for *this* ghost. I felt him nudging me to do more. I needed to find his family.

On 6 December 1867, the Portland Common Council granted three months' salary to be paid to Mrs. Annie O'Connor.¹¹ The 1868 Portland directory lists Mrs. Anna O'Connor living on the corner of Front and Clay, the same address as that given in the funeral notice. She then disappears from the directories and is not listed in the 1870 census index. O'Connor was young when he died. Perhaps he married Annie in Portland. Sure enough. An entry in Multnomah County marriage register shows he wed Anne McLaughlin on 13 Sept 1863 in Portland. John Julian and Mary Dunn were the witnesses.¹²

⁸ "Portland Oregonian, 23 August 1867, page 3, column 1.

⁹ "Portland Oregonian, 30 August 1867, page 2, column 4.

¹⁰ Cathedral Register, page 192.

¹¹ Jewel Lansing, *Portland People, Politics, and Power, 1851-2001* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 124. *Chronological Index Of Ordinances Passed By the Common Council of the City of Portland, 1854-1891* (Np, Nd), 15.

¹² Multnomah County Marriage Records 1: 179.

O'Connor
 Do State of Oregon
 W. Langhlin } County of Multnomah } S.S.

This is to certify that the undersigned
 a minister of the Roman Catholic Church, by authority
 of a license bearing date the twelfth day of Sep-
 tember A.D. 1863, and issued by the County Clerk of
 the County of Multnomah, did on the thirteenth day
 of September A.D. 1863, at the Church of the immacu-
 late Conception in the County and State aforesaid
 join in lawful wedlock Thomas O'Connor of the
 County of Multnomah and State of Oregon and
 Anne W. Langhlin of the County of Multnomah and
 State of Oregon with their mutual assent in the
 presence of John Julian and Mary Deann witnesses

Witness my hand
 Patrick Macken Pastor
 Church of the immaculate Conception

Filed Oct. 3. 1863

Research the Associates

When we find a name of a witness or an associate, we should research that person. They often lead to another person who leads to another person who leads to an answer to our research question.

John Julian, witness to the O'Connor marriage, is listed in the 1864 Portland directory as a bookkeeper at the What Cheer House; the same hotel where O'Connor stopped for information on the night of the shooting; and the same hotel that sent out a baggage wagon to pick him up.¹³

An 1861 advertisement for the What Cheer House¹⁴ says, "this favorite and well established House is what it always has been, the best and cheapest House in Portland. The proprietor will spare no pains to insure Travelers and Boarders accommodations equal to anything on this Coast. This House is Conducted on Temperance Principles. The What Cheer Baggage Wagon will be at the Wharf on arrival of each Steamer, to convey passengers and bags to the House free of charge. A good Safe for keeping Treasure, Valuables, &."

M. O'Connor, What Cheer House proprietor, is found in the 1860 Portland census.¹⁵ He was 31-years-old and born in Ireland. Other O'Connor names at the What Cheer were Mary, aged 21, born in New York; and Mary, aged 3, born in California.

M. O'Connor is listed in the Portland directories from 1861 through 1867 as the proprietor of the What Cheer House. In 1868, James Lyons is listed as the proprietor. There was a Mr. Lyons who brought the What Cheer wagon to the crime scene. Possibly O'Connor sold his rights to the hotel to Lyons.

¹³ 1864 Directory, page 51.

¹⁴ 1861 Directory, page 82.

¹⁵ 1860 US Census, pop. sch., Multnomah County, Oregon, Portland, 478 (stamped), 5 (penned), dwelling 41, family 29, M. O'Connor; NARA M653, roll 1056.

Observations: M. O'Connor was born around 1829 in Ireland. Thomas G. O'Connor was born in 1824. They are close enough in age to be brothers. A M. O'Connor was a member of the Common Council that hired Thomas G. O'Connor as a policeman. When Thomas was shot, the baggage wagon from the What Cheer drove a quarter mile to pick him up. This is indirect evidence, but the sum of it suggests a family relationship that needs to be researched. I felt that nudge again.

The Widow Remarries

On 31 December 1868, Anne wed James Fraser at the Cathedral. A Margaret O'Connor was a witness. Could Margaret be related to Thomas?

The thirty first day of December 1868 and sixty eight after one publications of the banns of marriage and a dispensation of Disparitatis Cultus having been granted by the Most Rev. Archbishop F. N. Blanchet, we the undersigned pastor of Portland, Oregon, have received the mutual consent of marriage between **James Fraser** widower of Sara Ann Kenwardley of this city (non Catholicus) on the one part, and **Ann McLoughlin** of this parish, widow of **Thomas O'Connor** on the other part, in the presence of James Miles and **Margaret O'Connor**. G. F. Fierens, Pastor

James and Anna Frazer are found in the 1870 Portland census. The two eldest children were born before Anne's marriage to James. Thomas G. O'Connor is probably their father.¹⁶

Frazer, Jas. S, 52, Brass & Iron Moulder, real estate valued at \$1400, personal estate valued at \$500, born England

- “ Anna, 36, keeping house, born Ireland
- “ Mary, 6, born Oregon
- “ Wm, 4, born Oregon
- “ James, 9/12, born Oregon (Oct.)

With names and ages, it was back to the church register to do a line-by-line search. Mary and William were found.

Mary Catherine O'Connor, daughter of Thomas O'Connor and Ann McLaughlin was born on 12 November 1865 and baptized on 27 November 1865. The sponsors were Moses Stacy and Rosa McLaughlin.¹⁷

William O'Connor, son of Thomas O'Connor and Ann McLaughlin, was born on 23 February 1866 and baptized on 6 August 1866. The sponsors were Daniel Holton and Rose Catherine Monestes.¹⁸

Anne Dies

¹⁶ 1870 U.S. Census, pop. sch., Multnomah County, Oregon, Portland, page 122, dwelling 994, family 882, Jas. S. Frazer; NARA M593, roll 1287.

¹⁷ Cathedral Register, page 131.

¹⁸ Cathedral Register, page 161.

A year later, on 14 March 1871, Rev. Julian DeCraene buried Anne McLoughlin, James Fraser's wife, in St. Mary's Cemetery.¹⁹

Her death announcement in the Portland newspaper let me know that she, too, was brave. I felt another nudge. I needed to continue researching this family .

“Mrs. Anne Frazer, residing on Fourth Street in the upper part of this city, was found dead yesterday morning. The circumstance naturally created considerable excitement in the neighborhood which was greatly increased by whispers of suspicion that her husband had poisoned her. Mr. T. J. Dryer, the Coroner, ... proceeded to hold an inquest. The body was examined by Doctors Ryan and Baker, and their statement was given to the jury. ...

“We, Jas. C. Ryan and Wm. D. Baker, being practicing physicians, ... having examined carefully the body of Anne Frazer, we found all the internal organs in a normal condition, with the exception of the uterus. We found a schirrus cancer, which had affected the entire neck with a considerable portion of the body of the uterus.”²⁰

Guardianship For The Children

Guardianship proceedings for Anne's children were filed.²¹ It was claimed that James Frazer, a habitual drunkard, was not a proper person to care for the children. When Anna was buried, James was drunk at the funeral. He allowed another family to move in to the house and intended to give the children to them. Fortunately, family members intervened. C. S. Savariau, husband of Anne's sister, was appointed guardian for the O'Connor children. Charles S. Frazer was appointed guardian for his half-brother James.

William and Mary O'Connor inherited two-thirds of the house and lot at Lot 6, Block 18 in Caruther's Addition, and James Frazer inherited the other one-third. The inheritance was subject to the life interest of James Frazer.

That life interest was short. Frazer died on 3 March 1872. A newspaper announcement gives the details.

About 11 o'clock Sunday night Mr. James S. Frazer, a brass foundryman who has a shop on the south side of Main street, between Front and First, fell overboard from the little steamer *Swallow*, at the foot of Taylor street, and was drowned.... Mr. Frazer has two sons residing in the city, with one of whom he resided.²²

The court closed the guardianships on 2 June 1903 with no trace being found of guardians or wards.

No Trace?

¹⁹ Cathedral Register, page 174.

²⁰ *Portland Oregonian*, 14 March 1871, page 3, column 1.

²¹ Multnomah County Guardianship #349 (Mary and William O'Connor) and # 321 (James Frazer).

²² *Portland Oregonian*, 5 March 1872, page 3, column 1.

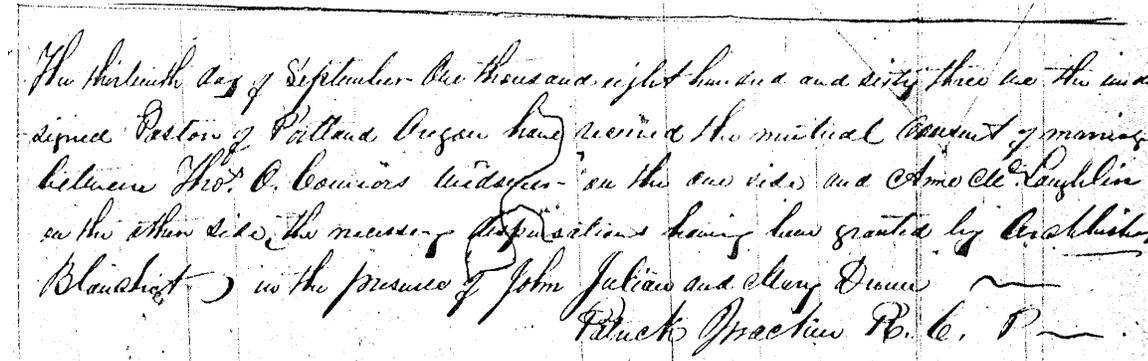
For a genealogist, the words, “no trace,” are fighting words. There has to be a trace. It’s just that it’s not obvious.

Two children of the right age to be O’Connor’s children are found on the 1880 Marin County, California census.²³ They are listed as niece and nephew to Michael O’Connor, a hotelkeeper. The ages and birthplaces are an almost identical match to the Oregon censuses. Michael O’Connor is clearly Thomas G. O’Connor’s brother.

O’Connor, Michael, 52, hotel keeper, born Ireland, parents born Ireland
Crowley, Timothy J, 30, son in law, lawyer, Massachusetts, Ireland, Ireland
Crowley, Mary, 23, daughter, at home, California, Ireland, New York
Crowley, Henry, 3, grandson, California, Mass., California
Crowley, Mary, 2, granddaughter, California, Mass, California
O’Connor, Mary, 16, niece, at home, attended school, Oregon, Ireland, Ireland
O’Connor, William, 14, nephew, at school , attended school, Oregon, Ireland, Ireland

Another Family

O’Connor’s spirit nudged me again and told me that I had missed something. Look for the original records. I did, and there it was in the church register. The marriage entry showed he was a widower!²⁴



The thirteenth day of September the thousand eight hundred and sixty three the undersigned Pastor of Portland Oregon have received the mutual consent of marriage between Tho^s. O'Connors widower on the one side and Anne El^l Laughlin on the other side the necessary dispensations having been granted by Archbishop Blanchet in the presence of John Julius and Mary O'Connell
Patrick Prackin P. C. P.

Could O’Connor have another family that he wanted me to find? It took a bit of digging, but the family was reconstructed.

Thomas G. O’Connor and Alice Slattery were the parents of Michael, John, and Margaret. Alice died before 1860 at Denison, Iowa.²⁵ On 12 March 1863, Thomas and his three children arrived in Portland.

Children:

²³ 1880 U.S. Census, pop. sch., Marin County, California, SD 1, ED 235, 15 [stamped] 109C [penned], dwelling 148, family 168, Michael O’Connor; digital image by subscription Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed 15 January 2005); from NARA T9, roll 68.

²⁴ Cathedral Register, page 113.

²⁵ 1860 US Census, pop. sch., Crawford County, Iowa, Denison Twp, 49 (penned), 503 (stamped), dwelling 423, family 1317, Thomas G. O’Connor; digital image by subscription Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed 25 January 2005); from NARA M653, roll 316.

1. Michael was born in January 1847 in Ireland and died after 1900, probably in Olympia, Washington. He was married, but he had no children.²⁶
2. Margaret was born about 1850 at Lebanon Springs, New York and died 15 November 1943 in Portland. She married John Barrett and had seven children.²⁷
3. John O'Connor was born 16 June 1855 in Knox County, Illinois, and died 23 March 1898 in Portland. He was married to Kate Christie, and they had eight children.²⁸

O'Connor's spirit is nudging me again. He is telling me to search out his descendants to see if they have a photo to donate to the Police Museum. That's what he wanted all along, and I was trying to ignore him. When a ghost finds you, there is little else you can do.

²⁶ 1900 US Census, pop. sch., Thurston County, Washington, City of Olympia, SD 1, ED 228, 5 (penned), dwelling 125, family 125; digital image by subscription Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 15 January 2005); from NARA T623, roll 1752.

²⁷ Joseph Gaston, *Portland Oregon Its History and Builders* Volume II (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 176-178. "J. F. Barrett," *History of the Columbia River Valley From The Dalles to the Sea* Volume II (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1928), 500. *River View Cemetery Interments* (Portland, OR: Genealogical Forum of Oregon, 1999), 67. Cathedral Register, page 176.

²⁸ "John O'Connor," Harvey K Hines, *An Illustrated History Of The State Of Oregon* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1893), 1174. *Daily Oregonian*, 16 March 1863, page 3, col. 1. John O'Connor death certificate, City of Portland Death Certificates, reel 5.