

Tribute held for Wilmington police officer slain in line of duty in 1891

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officer honored

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The Wilmington Police Department honors Officer Charles W. Schultz with a headstone dedication Thursday to recognize that he was killed in the line of duty in 1891. Schultz's previously unmarked grave now stands as that of a hero. / ROBERT CRAIG/THE NEWS JOURNAL

WILMINGTON — No one knows why a policeman killed in 1891 was not honored with other city officers killed in the line of duty.

But on Thursday at Cathedral Cemetery, the city's Department of Police – fixing what Chief Christine Dunning called “this historic injustice” – paid overdue tribute to the late Officer Charles W. Schultz.

The public memorial culminated a long effort by retired city Officer Laymen Grant.

Grant had read retired officer Thomas Monahan's history of the city force and an article University of Delaware Professor Mike Dixon had written about Schultz, noticed his absence from the honor roll of fallen officers and brought it to the city's attention.

Schultz's previously unmarked grave now stands as that of a hero, commemorated Thursday with a new headstone, prayer, speeches, gunfire tribute, taps, police sirens' wail and bagpipes playing “Amazing Grace.”

His story had come as news to descendant Gary Beeson, who drove from Indiana with his wife, Susan, for the ceremony, attended by more than 100 citizens and police, retirees to recruits.

“I don't know why I had never heard of any of this in the family,” said Beeson, whose grandmother, Mary, was the youngest of Schultz's five children, just 2 when he died. “We had no idea.”

Schultz, 37, was walking his Ninth Ward beat at about 12:20 a.m. Friday, Jan. 30, 1891, when he ordered two suspicious men to halt. Instead, they shot him.

One bullet grazed his skull, the other hit his abdomen. A neighbor heard Schultz's cries for help and got him to a nearby doctor's office with a phone. Other police came and they took him in the police wagon to the new Delaware Hospital at 16th and Washington streets. He died at 5:10 p.m.

Despite a massive investigation, his killers never were caught.

Dunning credited Dixon, Monahan and Grant – who led the service and designed the new headstone created by Paul White of Silverbrook Cemetery – for ensuring “that one of our own is remembered properly.”

She read a City Council tribute and presented it to the Beesons.

Tony Rispoli, president of the Wilmington Association of Retired Police, gave them a memorial statuette and read the list of 10 city officers killed in the line of duty. His name also is to be added to the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the city's memorial.

As Thursday's memorial ended, Rispoli and Beeson radioed headquarters, their message broadcast by the dispatcher, saying Officer Schultz was “out of service.”

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Moments later came the long wail of police car sirens citywide.

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