

Wild Shootout Devastated 1870's Police Force

They are frequently cited symptoms of our turbulent city's troubled state: gun violence, police shootings, sensational trials with controversial results.

Although the impact of each event cannot be minimized—or excused—it also is worth recalling that the most devastating such sequence in Los Angeles' history occurred more than a century ago, in 1870, when a midday shootout on dusty Spring Street in the heart of downtown left half of the city's eight-man police force dead or wounded.

One of those killed was William Crossman Warren, the only police chief in Los Angeles' history to die in the line of duty. And when the legal smoke had cleared, the gunman who had shattered the young LAPD would go free—in part because he was one of the department's own.

More than a decade earlier, Warren—then in his early 20s—left his mother and two sisters in their native New York and journeyed West, riding into the pueblo in 1858.

Pursuing a natural affinity for police work, Warren soon made his mark as city marshal/chief of police. He was hunting stagecoach robbers and horse thieves, all the while collecting city taxes and license fees for an annual salary of \$800.

Warren, in fact, became something of a local hero—and newspaper favorite—when he arrested the notorious outlaw Wade Helm and a particularly troublesome and daring local burglar, who stole two botanists, along with the food that was cooking on them.

By 1860, Los Angeles' well-deserved national reputation for violence worsened as tensions between immigrants from the free and slave states intensified with the approach of the Civil War. Charged with keeping the tenuous peace, Warren was busy looking for tough cops to patrol the pueblo's mean streets, and doubled the size of the police force from three to six.

Despite public protest, one of those Warren hired was Joseph F. Dye, a Confederate sympathizer and menacing killer who began riding for the law in 1861. Even by the loose standards of the day, Angelenos had trouble distinguishing Dye's policing techniques from simple bushwhacking. He was forced to resign in 1867 after one too many prisoners died trying to "escape" his custody.

But tough cops were hard to find, and one year later, Warren rehired Dye. Soon, they came to their own parting when the chief—newly empowered by the City Council to discipline his officers—began pressuring Dye to ease up.

By 1870, relations between the chief and his subordinate in the now-eight-man department had soured to the point that Warren was heard to say: "If Joe Dye ever crooks his finger at me, I'll shoot him like a dog!" Naturally enough—this being Los An-



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Los Angeles Police Chief William Crossman Warren, above, was shot to death in a downtown gunfight by Officer Joseph F. Dye, left, in 1870. Half of the eight-man police force was killed or wounded that day. Dye was later acquitted.

Descending the courthouse steps, they began walking across Spring Street when Dye called out to the chief:

"Warren, oh, Warren!"

Dye confronted Warren, demanding a cut of the reward he felt he had earned by maintaining the telegraph.

With just three feet between them, Warren turned, crumpling his pistol behind his back. Dye accused the chief of robbing him of his rights, and Warren called Dye a "damned dirty liar."

Strapped, Dye, who was holding a cane with his left hand, began reaching for his gun. But Warren already had his weapon drawn. He emptied both barrels of his derringer at point-blank range, but barely grazed Dye's face.

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The wounded officer staggered back, recovered his balance, drew his Colt revolver and began firing. Warren, pulling out his six-shooter, ran behind Officer Jose Redonda and fired more shots at Dye. One of Dye's shots hit Redonda, who tumbled to the courthouse steps with a bullet through his upper arm.

Warren, deprived of his human shield, continued firing, but missed Dye. By then, bullets were flying in all directions. A bystander was hit, as was Officer Robert A. Hester, who fell wounded in the dusty street. Dropping both of his weapons, Warren fell to the ground in a seated position with two bullets in his groin and a third lodged in his silver pocket watch.

"I'm killed!" screamed Warren.

Struggling, Warren picked up one of the guns with both hands and aimed it at Dye.

Dye tackled him, grabbed the chief's shoulders and took a Mike Tyson-style bite out of his ear before horrified onlookers pulled him off.

Warren, still breathing, was carried to a nearby paint shop and died the next day at age 34.

A jury acquitted Dye, finding that he had acted in self-defense. It was an unpopular verdict, and Dye remained on the force.

Three years later, while walking to police headquarters downtown, Dye was killed by a single shotgun blast fired by his nephew, Mason Bradfield, whose life he frequently had threatened.

Almost four decades later, Warren's grandson, Eugene Biscailuz, a colorful cowboy, would begin a career with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department that would last more than five decades, two of those decades as sheriff.

Los Angeles Police Sgt. Roberto Mantz helped to piece together the story on the city's only chief to die in the line of duty.



View looking southeast on the 300 Block of N. Main St. c. 1870s.

City's first permanent bridge, a covered bridge, carried Old Aliso Road, now named Cesar Chavez Avenue, across the Los Angeles River.

In 1870, whites outnumber Hispanics and Indians for the first time. In addition, the first permanent bridge was built across the Los Angeles River.

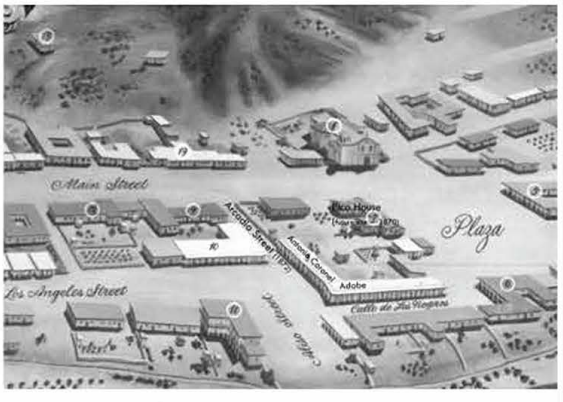
On October 31, 1870, near the corner of Spring and Temple Avenue, City Marshal William C. Warren was shot and killed by another Los Angeles Police Officer, Joseph Dye, as a result of a dispute.

William Crossman Warren, elected City Marshal May 1, 1865, killed in the line of duty November 1, 1870.

R.J. Wolf was elected City Marshal December 5, 1872 and serves as such until December 9, 1874.

Francis K. Baker, appointed November 5, 1870 (City Council notes state: "appointed Chief of Police"), elected Marshal on December 9, 1870 to December 4, 1872.

In 1870, the City Council appointed three of its members to form the first Board of Police Commissioners.



Calle de Los Negros map.

The Chinese Massacre occurred on this infamous street, Calle de Los Negros, as it was known in 1871. This street received its unfortunate title in the early days of Los Angeles when the property was owned primarily by citizens with dark complexions. The block, located at Aliso Street where Los Angeles Street now crosses the freeway, was made up mostly of saloons and brothels. Reputedly at least one murder a day occurred here. Living on the street were mostly Chinese people, 19 of whom were hanged nearby, outside of John Gollier's Wagon Shop, Los Angeles south of Commercial Street, during the massacre in October 1871. In 1877, the block was torn down and renamed Los Angeles Street. The Los Angeles Police Metropolitan Detention Center, the site where Parker Center formerly stood and the federal building are located there today.