

James W. Gessford

(22 Feb 1835 – 6 Mar 1902)

Gessford. Suddenly on Thursday, March 6, 1902 at 6:55 p.m., James W. Gessford. Funeral private from residence, 708 A street northeast, Saturday, March 8 at 8:30 a.m., mass at St. Joseph's Church at 9 o'clock. Friends invited to attend.

The Evening Star, March 7, 1902, p. 16

Answers Last Call

James W. Gessford, Former Police Officer, Passes Away Was Appointed to the Metropolitan Force in 1861 Upon Recommendation of Mayor Berret

James W. Gessford, who for many years was connected with the police department, died suddenly at his home in South Washington about 7 o'clock last night. Since his retirement from the police force he has been sick, from time to time, but yesterday he felt better than he had for several weeks, and expected he would be able to leave his house within a few days. His death came suddenly while he was sitting in his room. Undertaker J. William Lee prepared the body for burial and removed it to the home of a daughter of the deceased, at 494 Maryland avenue southwest, from where the funeral will take place Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock. The Rev. C.C. Meador will officiate, and the interment will be in Congressional cemetery.

Native of Baltimore

The deceased was a native of Baltimore, where he was born the 22nd day of February 1835. When fourteen years old he left the public schools and accepted a position to learn a trade with a carpenter and builder. Seven years later he came to this city and obtained employment with Mr. Charles B. Church in South Washington, where he remained for nine years. When the organization of the metropolitan police department was decided upon he believed such employment would suit him and he sought admission to the ranks. Mayor Berret signed his application for a position, and he received an appointment going on duty the 11th of November, 1861, as an original member of the force. In 1865 he received a promotion, and the next year he was made lieutenant. During the time he was lieutenant he served in several precincts. He also served as night inspector.

Lieut. Gessford was an efficient officer and was one of the most popular members of the force. His wife and nine children survive him. One of his sons, Capt. Harry L. Gessford, is closely associated with Maj. Sylvester at police headquarters.

His Colleagues

Only two of the original members of the force are connected with the police organization. They are John F. Kelly and Charles R. Vernon. The former is detailed for duty at the District building and the latter is at headquarters. Both these officers have served the department in every capacity. They served as lieutenants and captains and at times acted as chief of police.

The Washington Post, March 8, 1902, p. 8

Long, Faithful Service

Lieut. Gessford Became a Member of the Metropolitan Force in 1861

Lieut. James W. Gessford, who died suddenly at his home in South Washington Thursday night, after long suffering from a complication of diseases, was one of three surviving original members of the metropolitan police department. He entered the service when the department was organized, on September 11, 1861, and he served faithfully and continuously in various capacities for forty-one years. He entered the service as a private and patrolled various beats until 1865, when he received a promotion to the rank of sergeant. His services as a sergeant were such that they won for him another promotion the following year, when he became a lieutenant. In that capacity he served for thirty-six years, and was considered one of the most efficient and faithful officers in the department. He was extremely popular with the men over whom he had command in the various precincts, and his death came as a great shock to them. Previous to his indefinite furloughing on account of ill health he was in command of the Eighth precinct. The two original members of the department who survive Lieut. Gessford are John F. Kelly and Charles R. Vernon. Both have served in every grade of the department, from private to acting chief, and both are still on duty with the ranks of lieutenant and captain, respectively.

Lieut. Gessford was born in Baltimore February 22, 1835. He attended the public schools in that city until he was fourteen. At that age he left school to become an apprentice to a carpenter and builder. At the age of twenty-one he came to Washington to work at his trade and did so for nine years, being located in South Washington. When the police department was organized in 1861 he made application for admission, and the application was approved by Mayor Berret. He was especially adapted to the work, and remained in the service to the time of his death. His wife and nine children survive him. One of the sons, Capt. Harry L. Gessford, has followed in his father's footsteps, and, as a member of the police department, has risen to the rank of captain. He is attached to the headquarters staff as Maj. Sylvester's first assistant.

Lieut. Gessford died at his home, 906 D street southwest, but the remains were removed to the home of his daughter, 494 Maryland avenue southwest, where the funeral will be held at 3 o'clock this afternoon. Rev. C.C. Meador will conduct the service both at the residence and at the Congressional Cemetery, where the burial will take place. The pall-bearers will be chosen from among the officers of the police department and from the lodges of Knights of Pythias and Odd Fellows to which Lieut. Gessford belonged.

The Washington Post, March 9, 1902, p. 7

Funeral of Lieut. J.W. Gessford

The funeral of the late Lieut. James W. Gessford, of the metropolitan police department was held at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, at the home of his daughter, 494 Maryland avenue. It was largely attended by his former associates in the department, members of the lodges to which he belonged, and his many relatives and friends. The service was conducted by Rev. C.C. Meador, D.D., and the burial took place in Congressional Cemetery. The active and honorary pall-bearers were chosen from the police officials and members of the Knights of Pythias and Odd Fellow lodges, to which Lieut. Gessford belonged.