

Chief John Fleetwood Dennis ~ End of Watch: February 3, 1957

John Fleetwood Dennis was born in Berkeley County on August 30, 1926, to Richard C. and Lessie Dennis. He grew up on the family farm with his four brothers and two sisters. Fleetwood attended Berkeley High School where he was running back on the football team. He graduated in 1945 and married Evelyn Brinson. By 1946, Fleetwood was serving in the United States Army and stationed in Burbank, California.

Fleetwood served on the Bonneau Police Force and the Moncks Corner Police Force. In January of 1957, Fleetwood left the Moncks Corner Police Department to accept the position of Chief at Bonneau Police Department.

On February 3, 1957, Chief Fleetwood Dennis responded to the report of a car operated in a reckless manner in town. When he arrived, he found the car had hit a highway sign and wrecked into a fence. Chief Dennis arrested the occupants, Robert Baxley and Ernest Floyd, both of Lake City, for drunk and reckless driving. After asking local resident, Billy Page, to drive the car back to the Berkeley County Jail, Chief Dennis placed the two men into the back seat of his patrol car to take them to jail. As he turned around to drive towards town, Chief Dennis was shot from behind. Although mortally wounded, Chief Dennis rolled out of the moving car, drew his service revolver, and emptied it into the rear of the car. As the driverless car careened into a nearby ditch, Baxley and Floyd jumped out and ran.

Chief Dennis was transported to a local hospital but died shortly afterward. He was 30 years old.

Ernest Floyd was arrested a short time later, not far from the scene of the shooting. Robert Baxley was arrested in Lake City, about eight hours later when he went to the Police Department to report that his car had been stolen. His brother, Leonard Baxley, was with him and was also arrested.

Funeral services for Chief Fleetwood Dennis were conducted on the afternoon of February 5th, at the Bonneau Baptist Church, and he was buried in the Baptist Cemetery. Chief Dennis was survived by his wife, Mrs. Evelyn Brinson Dennis; his son, John F. Dennis, Jr.; his three daughters, Elizabeth, Debbie, and Annie; his parents, his four brothers and two sisters.

Stating that the county was controlled by the Dennis family and that his client could not receive a fair trial, Robert Baxley's attorney, H.E. Yarborough filed for a change of venue to move the trial outside of Berkeley County. That motion was denied. The murder trial began on May 16, 1957. At the last minute, Robert Baxley changed his plea to guilty, and the 40-year-old farmer was sentenced to life in prison. His brother, Leonard Baxley, was charged with accessory after the fact of murder, and his trial was continued to the next term of court.

Chief John Fleetwood Dennis was inducted into the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers Hall of Fame in 1986, never to be forgotten.

Deputy Clarence L. Woodard ~

Berkeley County Sheriff's Office

End of Watch: February 5, 1936

Clarence Lamar Woodard was born on October 10, 1887, near Givhan's Ferry, to Thaddeus Seal and Frances Amelia Hill Woodard. He grew up working on the family farm with his two sisters and a brother. In 1907, Clarence married Florence Kinsey and soon they had four children, Myrtie, Morris, Amelia, and Coley Blease. The family lived on a farm in Bamberg County but in 1916, they moved to Berkeley County and Clarence became a door-to-door salesman for the Watkins Company.

By 1919, Clarence was hired as the Jailer by Berkeley County Sheriff Walter McGregor Dennis, and he and his family took up residence at the County Jail. In 1923, when Sheriff Charles P. Ballentine, Sr. took office, Clarence was appointed to serve as a Deputy Sheriff.

In the early morning hours of January 30, 1936, Deputy Woodard was driving William Elmer Edwards to his home in Loris. Edwards was working at the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Pinopolis, and the Deputy was most likely assisting him in getting home due to a family emergency. At around 3:15 in the morning, while rounding a curve, Deputy Woodard's automobile skidded on the icy road, and jumped a ditch, striking a pine tree. A passing motorist found Deputy Woodard unconscious and seriously injured. Edwards' injuries were not as serious. Deputy Woodard was rushed to the hospital in Moncks Corner with head and chest injuries, along with multiple fractures to his left leg and arm. Deputy Woodard appeared to be improving when pneumonia set in and he died in the hospital on February 5, 1936. He was forty-nine years old.

Funeral services for Deputy Clarence L. Woodard were conducted on February 7th at St. John's Baptist Church, and he was buried in the church cemetery. He was survived by his wife, his mother, two daughters, two sons, two sisters, his brother, and his grandchildren.

Deputy Sheriff Clarence L. Woodard was inducted into the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers Hall of Fame on May 3, 2017, never to be forgotten.