

G-Man Honored with Indiana State Historical Marker

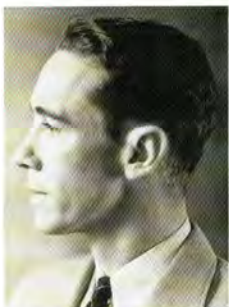
by William E. Plunkett (1982-2009)



George W. Barrett at his murder trial in Indianapolis in December 1935



An April 1935 photograph of Nelson B. Klein, which he provided with an updated application at the request of Director Hoover. His original was tattered and torn.



Donald C. McGovern

The sleepy little town of West College Corner, IN was the scene of a shootout on Friday, August 16, 1935, at 6:30 PM witnessed by the Miller brothers —Ellis, 6, and Neal, 7, who heard gunshots fired from a Colt .45 Bisley model single action revolver by a nasty career criminal named George W. Barrett.

Barrett exchanged gunfire with a young Cincinnati FBI Special Agent, Nelson B. Klein, who pulled his holstered Colt .38 Super Automatic and fired ten rounds at Barrett.

Klein and his partner Donald C. McGovern had gone to West College Corner, IN that day to arrest Barrett on a San Diego, CA warrant for car theft. They had received information that he was visiting his brother, John B. Barrett, at 403 Woodland St. and that Barrett was most likely going to flee the area. The Agents knew Barrett was a rough customer as he had killed his own mother in 1930 in Kentucky for which he had been arrested, tried and acquitted twice.

The Miller boys were visiting their grandparents, Mary and Otis Miller, at their home at 303 Union Street.

Their grandparents would be interviewed individually on August 18, 1935, and provided similar fact-filled and signed sworn statements to Indianapolis FBI Special Agent George B. O'Connell and Cincinnati FBI Special Agent Donald C. McGovern. They explained that on August 16 at approximately 6:30 p.m., they were on their porch and saw Barrett walk south on Mound Street carrying something (revolver) wrapped in a towel. Otis



A Side of Marker



B Side of Marker

would testify to this at Barrett's murder trial in Indianapolis in December 1935. They saw Agents Klein and McGovern drive up and park their government vehicle, a black Buick sedan on Mound St. beside Murphy's detached garage behind the Murphy house at 221 Union Street, which could be entered from an alley east of Mound Street.

At the time the Agents exited their vehicle, the Millers did not know Barrett had preceded Klein down the alley or moments later hear Klein yell to Barrett, "Just a minute, we're federal officers!"

Klein followed Barrett who was heading east down the alley, with Agent McGovern taking a cover position at the southwestern corner of the Murphy house, facing east. The Millers then heard gunshots, which sounded like they came from neighbors' backyards.

They then saw and heard Agent McGovern fire his revolver from his cover position firing one shot at Barrett.

The *G-Man and the Diamond King*, a book about the incident, was published in May 2015 and as a follow-up, I met with the Miller brothers on October 24, 2015, to possibly glean additional information. The Millers provided details of the incident which they had never divulged previously. Prior to the shooting Ellis had been playing in a cherry tree in the yard of his grandparents' residence when he heard gunshots which he said, "sounded like cannons." He fell out of the tree, landed on the extended rope of a clothes line and then hit the ground. Neal, being almost two years older, picked up Ellis who then ran to his grandparents' enclosed porch and sat crying on his grandmother's lap. To this day Ellis occasionally recalls the incident with some discomfort right before trying to fall asleep at night.

Neal, after hearing the first gunshot and being inquisitive or, "nosey," as he put it, crossed Mound Street and ended up in Murphy's backyard hiding in the flower garden. He was less than 20 feet from Barrett who had been wounded in both knees by Agent gunfire and was sitting behind a tree, still holding his empty revolver.

Neal was even closer to Agent Klein's body which was lying in a "puddle of blood."



Miller brothers in 2015, Neal on the left, Ellis on the right

Agent Klein had been hit by five bullets from Barrett's weapon and died at the scene. Neal said, "as a kid, I couldn't believe how much blood a man had in him."

Eventually, the police would ask Neal to leave and he wandered back across Mound Street, to his grandparents' house. Barrett would be placed in an ambulance and taken to Ft. Hamilton Hospital in Ohio to be treated for his gunshot wounds to both legs. He would be given a sedative but was allowed by his doctor to be interviewed that evening by Special Agent In Charge (SAC) Earl J. Connelley and Agents Samuel K. McKee and Robert H. Klett of the Cincinnati FBI Office. Barrett would lie and say that he thought the G-Men he fired upon were really gang members from Kentucky who had come to kill him in retaliation for a long-time family feud.

At the time, the case made national headlines for a number of reasons: Klein was the first Agent killed under the agency's new Federal Bureau of Investigation name in 1935. His killer, Barrett, a former moonshiner, was only the second man tried under a new federal statute making the murder of a government agent a capital offense and the first executed. Barrett was convicted of murder and hanged on March 1936 in the Marion County jail yard in Indianapolis, IN.

Eighty-two years after the death of Agent Klein, an Indiana Historical Marker was dedicated at the Stateline Ball Park/Town Grove, which is approximately a hundred feet from where the incident took place. Well over two hundred residents, FBI employees from the Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Louisville Offices and



Boutonniere provided to the three women speakers (Cincinnati SAC Angela L. Byers, Carolyn Portwood of the West College Corner Town Council and Casey Pfeiffer of the Indiana Historical Bureau)

law enforcement members were in attendance. The event was organized by the Society's Cincinnati and Indianapolis chapters in conjunction with the Indiana Historical Bureau.

The master of ceremony was Cincinnati SAC Angela L. Byers with speakers: Carolyn Portwood, West College Corner town council member; Indiana Historical Marker Director Casey Pfeiffer; Indianapolis SAC W. Jay Abbott; Louisville ASAC Jeffrey L. Coburn and Stephen R. Kramer, Chairman of the Cincinnati Police Museum providing the history of the event. "America the Beautiful" was played by the 35th Indiana Pipes & Drums with the Hamilton County (Ohio) Police Association Honor Guard raising of American, Indiana and FBI flags at the park gate. The Irish National Anthem and National Anthem were performed by the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Glee Club of Cincinnati. Klein's mother was from Ireland and he served with the 69th New York Infantry "Fighting Irish" during WWI. The invocation and benediction were provided by Pastor Jason Bantz, of the First United Presbyterian Church of College Corner, OH. While the Marker was unveiled by Carolyn Portwood and Foundation Chair Timothy P. Tracy, "Amazing Grace" was played by the 35th Indiana Pipes and Drums.

In closing, taps were provided by a representative of the Marion County (Indiana) Sheriff's Office Honor Guard. The Cincinnati and Indianapolis FBI Citizens Academy Alumni provided refreshments at the park pavilion. Only one of the Miller boys, Ellis 88, was present. His older brother Neal was conspicuously absent.

Dedication photos courtesy of FBI Cincinnati TFO Jeffrey Corcoran.

William E. Plunkett is the author of *The G-Man and the Diamond King: A True FBI Story of the 1930's*. See page 38 for more details about the book.



Front side of Marker unveiled by Society Foundation Chair Timothy P. Tracy and Carolyn Portwood of the West College Corner Town Council



Foundation Chair Tim Tracy honored Service Martyr Nelson Klein by placing an American flag at his gravesite



Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Glee Club of Cincinnati