Juvenile Officer August Utendoerfer | Campbell County Court / Chief George Thomas Benz | Campbell County Police Department

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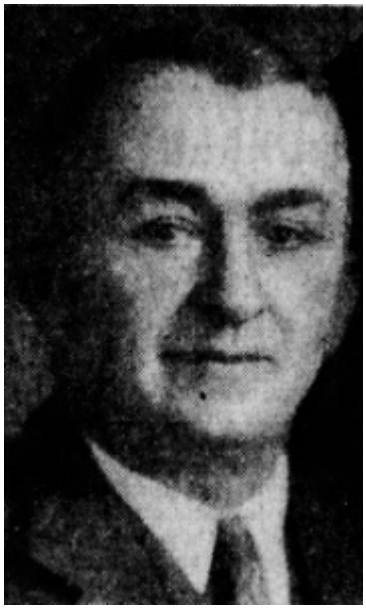


Age: 67
Served: 17½ years
April 29, 1931 to December 31, 1937 – Campbell County Sheriff's Office
January 4, 1938 to November 1942 – Campbell County Police Department
November 1942 to September 20, 1948 – Campbell County Juvenile Officer

Gus Utendoerfer (also variously known as *Uttendoefer, Uttendorfer,* and *Utendorfer*) was born September 19, 1881 in Newport, the first of three children born to German immigrants Gustave and Caroline (Steinmass) Utendoerfer. When he was 18 years old, he was living with his parents at 1120 Orchard in Newport and working as an apprentice machinist.

Gus married Helena Wohlfahrt and started a family. Four children would be born to them, but only two would survive to

adulthood. By 1910, he was working as a machinist and his family of four lived at 1010 Monmouth Street. Their third child, Edward A. Utendoerfer, was born in February 1911, but died four months later during June.

During 1918, their fourth and final child was born. By then, he was driving a taxicab for Zumstein Taxi in Cincinnati and they were all living at 205 Beech Street in Newport, a couple of blocks from the Ohio River. A year later, their oldest, Helen Utendoerfer (13), went to the river to swim and she drowned.

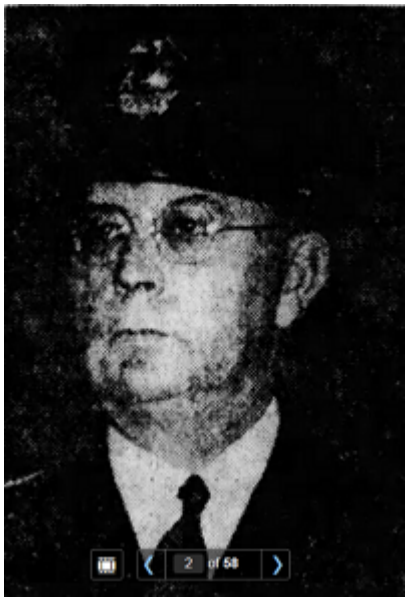
During 1930, Gus was driving for Coca Cola and the family was living at 29 Sixteenth Street in Clifton, Kentucky.

On April 29, 1931, Campbell County Sheriff Theodore Bertelsman appointed Gus as a Deputy Sheriff for the Campbell County Sheriff's Office. A couple of months later, Deputies Utendoerfer and Oscar Wells assisted in the raiding of several Newport gambling houses which had the proximate effect of having the Newport Police Department removed from the authority of Safety Commission James Fuller. It was the first time Deputies Utendoerfer and Wells were mentioned together in a newspaper article. Their partnership would be often documented over the next decade, mostly involving major investigations and busting gambling houses.

Odis W. Bertelsman (unknown relation to the sheriff) was elected in 1937 to the position of Campbell County Judge and by December had decided it would be necessary to replace the entire Campbell County Police Department. Three Campbell County deputy sheriffs transferred over, including Deputies Utendoerfer and Wells. Attired in new uniforms, they were sworn in on January 4, 1938.

Between October and December 1942, Patrolman Utendoerfer was named Juvenile Officer.

Chief George Thomas Benz | Campbell County Police Department



Age: 61
Served: 10 ¾ years
January 4, 1938 to September 20, 1948

George Benz was born March 12, 1887 in Cincinnati, the first of five born to first generation Germans, Joseph and Elizabeth Catherine (Gabriel) Benz. Within a year, his family moved to Northern Kentucky and Bellevue. During 1900, the family was living at 34 Rensford Street and his father was working as a machinist. During 1903 and 1904, George lived in the Cincinnati suburb Wyoming and worked in Cincinnati, as a telephone company electrician. Otherwise, he was a lifelong Bellevue resident and worked as an electrician for telephone companies for decades. He lived with his family at 159 Rensford Street from 1906 through 1912.

Sometime between 1912 and 1917 he married Josephine Birk and by 1917 they were living at 305 Washington Street. He was working for the Citizen's Telephone Company in Covington. By 1920, he was the wire chief for the company.

Cincinnati Bell had acquired Citizens Telephone Company in 1915 and by 1930, George was working as a building supply salesman.

He joined the Bellevue Council as a councilman before March 29, 1936.

When Odis W. Bertelsman was elected to the position of Campbell County Judge and replaced the entire Campbell County Police Department, George was one of his new hires and was sworn in on January 4, 1938. A week later, brand new to law enforcement, the 51-year-old patrolman responded to his first murder. A couple of days later, he investigated his first near-fatal auto accident in which two people suffered fractured skulls. On February 20, 1938, he investigated the finding of a deceased man in a rowboat on the Ohio River. He was performing very well in his new career.

Judge Bertelsman promoted him to Police Chief in 1944 after ousting Chief Len Plummer and Patrolman Oscar Wells for reasons that were not divulged. Chief Benz took the oath of office on November 24, 1944.

INCIDENT

On September 20, 1948, Chief Benz and Juvenile Officer Utendoerfer were returning from the Greendale House of Reform at Lexington after taking a juvenile there. Initial reports by Kenton County Police indicated the Benz was driving. The Chief’s car was demolished when it crashed broadside into a milk truck on KY 17 near Nicholson KY.

A private ambulance took both officers to St. Elizabeth Hospital.

DEATHS

Chief Benz was pronounced dead on arrival with a broken neck. He was predeceased by his brother, Louis Henry Benz. Chief Benz was survived by his wife, Josephine "Josie" (Birk) Benz and siblings, Rose H. Benz, Alma F. Vandenbush, and Irene M. Lang. He is buried in Calvary Cemetery in Evanston.

Officer Utendoerfer died of a fractured skull thirty minutes later. He was predeceased by his children, Helen Utendoerfer and Edward Utendoerfer; sister, Berna Hanseman; and brother-in-law, Clarence H. Stannus. Officer Utendoerfer was survived by his wife, Helena M. "Lena" (Wohlfahrt) Utendoerfer; children, Ruth E. (Carl W.) Luhn and Vera May (Wilbert) Simpson; sister, Sara Stannus; and brother-in-law, William Hanseman. He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Southgate.

While most of the state's GOP members were traveling to Louisville, Campbell County GOP leaders attended the funeral of Benz and Utendoerfer on September 22, 1948.

INVESTIGATION

The milk truck was driven by Robert Wilson Vatter (29) RR1, Butler KY and owned by L. P. Vastine. Vatter was cited on a technical charge of Manslaughter. Evidence and testimony indicated that Chief Benz lost control of the vehicle and skidded off the highway. Then, in trying to right the vehicle, skidded on two wheels of the wrong side of the highway and hit the milk truck. The Kenton County Coroner, Mrs. Tressa Riffe, returned a verdict of accidental death.

EPILOGUE

Juvenile Officer Utendoerfer's second daughter, Ruth E. Utendoerfer, was working for the Cincinnati Police Division as a telephone and teletype operator by 1940. She continued working as such until November 8, 1959. Ruth married Carl W. Luhn, a radio technician also working at the Cincinnati Police Division's Communication Section since 1930. He retired September 19, 1963 and the couple moved to St. Petersburg Beach, Florida where they lived together until she died in 1977.

Vera Mae Utendoerfer, married Wilbert Simpson who, six months after his father-in-law's death joined the Campbell County Police Department as a Patrolman. During 1951, he transferred to Newport Police Department and served as a Motor Patrolman. He was promoted to Detective in 1963 and Acting Lieutenant in 1967.

Their son, Thomas Simpson, after serving in the United States Navy, joined the Campbell County Police Department in 1963. But, while off duty on November 28, 1964, like his grandfather, he was killed when a car, in which he was a passenger, crashed into a truck on Interstate 74 near St. Leon, Indiana.

If you know of any information, archives, artifacts, or images regarding these officers or the incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

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