# Patrolman George S. Lentz | Hamilton Police Department



Patrolman George Lentz

Age: 49
Served: 10 years
April 25, 1908 to August 6, 1918

**OFFICER**

George was born October 20, 1868 in Fairfield Township – along with two brothers and two sisters – to Walter and Margaret (Schambach) Lentz; who immigrated to the United States from Germany after they married. George began his adult life as a farmer and, for a time around 1900, he owned the farm with a partner. He was working as a salesman when he married Emma Seramm on June 26, 1906 and moved to 262 Walnut Street in Hamilton.

George joined the Hamilton Police Department as a Patrolman during June 1908 when Mayor Thad Straub increased the Hamilton

force by fourteen officers.  By 1911, he was one of 26 patrolmen on the department.

Patrolman Lentz was out with most of the other Hamilton policemen and those from surrounding jurisdictions rescuing people during the great flood of 1913.  After almost forty continuous hours of rescue work, by the evening of March 27, 1913, he was listed among the missing and feared dead; but he survived.

Patrolman Lentz celebrated his 10th anniversary during June 1918.  Among other social activities, Mr. and Mrs. Lentz were locally renowned Euchre players and tournament participants and Mrs. Lentz was a member of the Miami Club.

**MURDERER**

James Boyd “John” Ledford was born October 9, 1876 in Jackson County, Kentucky, the eighth of at least nine children born to farmers John C. and Nancy Jane (Turner) Ledford.  His father died when he was 10 years old.

He married Susie E. Sowers in 1899 and by 1900 was living in Madison, Kentucky dealing in groceries.  By 1910, he had four children and working in a general store.  During 1913 and 1916 he had two more children and then moved his family to Hamilton, Ohio.  He took a job with the Mosler Safe Company.  We have no indication that he ever committed another criminal act.

**INCIDENT**

On the evening of July 20, 1918 Ledford was out looking for trouble and carried with him a four-pound hammer as a weapon.

During the early morning of Sunday, July 21st, Patrolman Lentz deemed it wise to take the hammer from Ledford, who was by then highly intoxicated.

Ledford went to his home on Shuler Avenue near the Miami & Erie Canal, retrieved his Winchester .32-20 caliber rifle, and went hunting for Patrolman Lentz. He stopped first at the Mosler Safe Company and inquired of the guard who had taken his hammer from him. When the guard replied that it had been Patrolman Lentz, Ledford informed the guard that he would "get" the officer.

Ledford found Patrolman Lentz at 1:20 a.m. on Shuler Avenue near the Fire Department's Company No. 7's Hose House. He approached Patrolman Lentz, stuck the rifle in his left side, and discharged the weapon. The bullet ripped through a lung and his diaphragm.

Several firemen and citizens apprehended Ledford, though he resisted. The fireman and citizens turned Ledford over to Inspector Dulle, Detectives Hetterich and Mueller, and Officers Leonard and Johnson. They locked him up in the Butler County jail fearing that Ledford would be lynched if locked up in the Hamilton city jail. Dr. Edward Cook was called and he had Patrolman Lentz removed to Mercy Hospital.

Initially, there was hope that Patrolman Lentz would recover. He fared well on his second day. He later developed a fever, but then was able to sit in a chair within a week.

**DEATH**

He took a turn for the worse and, sixteen days after the shooting, he died on August 6, 1918 at 11:30 p.m.

He was predeceased by his oldest brother, Fred Lentz who died suddenly three months prior. Patrolman Lentz was survived by his wife of 12 years (and now a two-time widow), Emma F. Lentz; stepsons, Frank A. Seymore and Henry W. Seymore; siblings, Mrs. Barbara Hafertepen, Mrs. Mary Leugers, and Joseph Lentz; and step-brother Nicholas Fries.

His funeral was held at his home at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, August 9, 1918 and a large contingent of police officers escorted him to a Mass of Christian Burial at St. Joseph Catholic Church and to St. Stephen's Cemetery where he is buried.

**JUSTICE**

Hamilton Police Chief Charles Sticker signed a warrant against Ledford on Wednesday, August 7, 1918, for Murder of the 1st Degree. He was arraigned on Thursday morning, August 8th. On August 10th, Coroner Edward Cook examined fifteen witnesses at his inquest and determined that Patrolman Lentz came to his end through homicidal violence by Ledford.

Ledford was indicted for Murder of the 2nd Degree by the Butler County Grand Jury on September 13, 1918. At his subsequent arraignment on September 19th, Butler County Common Pleas Court Judge Walter S. Harlan said, "Never was there a clearer case of 1st Degree Murder." He was defended by Attorney Robert Shank, and pleaded Not Guilty. Judge Harlan set a trial date of September 24.

The case was delayed and began on November 11, 1918, with Judge Clarence Murphy presiding. On the 22nd, a jury returned a guilty verdict for only Manslaughter.

We do not know what sentence was given, but before December 1919 he was already being considered for pardon by the Board of Pardons. By the 1920 federal census, he was already back in Hamilton living at 202 Cereal Avenue with his wife and five of his children. Only one household member, his 16-year-old son, had a job. By 1930, he had moved his family to Novi, Michigan and was working on a farm. By 1935 they were in Northville, Michigan on another farm, and by 1940, Salem Michigan on still another farm. He died in Oakland, Michigan in 1955, having enjoyed 35 years of freedom with his family after murdering Patrolman Lentz.

**EPILOGUE**

A letter to the editor regarding this case resonates still today:

"The trouble is not with our courts. Only last week Judge Harlan denounced the laxity of the Board of Administration when sentencing another murderer, John Helton. The law may be satisfied but public opinion is not."

Mrs. Lentz was voted a pension of $25 per month, the highest permissible at the time.

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

*© This narrative was revised July 6, 2018 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Memorial Committee Chairman, based on his research and research provided by Joyce Meyer, Price Hill Historical Society, and Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Historian. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.*