

Office of the Sheriff - Jefferson County



411 S. Center Avenue
Jefferson, Wisconsin 53549-1703

Paul S. Milbrath, Sheriff

Jeffrey Parker, Chief Deputy

Donald Hunter ★ Travis Maze ★ Margareta Gray
Administrative Captain Patrol Captain Jail Captain

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office is remembering Deputy Sheriff William Cooper who was killed in the line of duty 120 years ago. Falling in the line of duty is a timeless sacrifice that must always be remembered.

William Cooper was born in Watertown, Wisconsin on December 25th, 1852, and died in Waterloo, Wisconsin on Saturday, Feb. 8th, 1902, at the age of 49. He was a kind and loving father, a firm friend, and a good neighbor. He enjoyed a wide acquaintance, a host of warm personal friends, and his tragic death was a most severe blow to the entire community.

Below is a summary taken from historical news articles of what occurred causing Deputy Cooper's death. Please notice the difference in journalistic reporting 120 years ago:

Mrs. Fred W. Stephenson and daughter left the home of Fred Stephenson, the husband and father, and moved into in the second story of the Blaschka building, on the corner of Madison and Monroe streets in Waterloo, WI. They did this as they could no longer live with Fred Stephenson, as he had become very abusive and failed to provide for them in any manner. After his wife and daughter left him, he kept continually harassing them and he was once arrested for assaulting his daughter and was convicted. He would repeatedly go to their rooms and threaten them with violence unless they would come back and live with him.

About two months prior to Deputy Cooper's death, Stephenson got into an altercation with B.O. Nelson and received a pounding at the hands of Nelson. Nelson and Stephenson were both arrested at this time and both given a preliminary hearing. Deputy Sheriff Cooper swore out the warrant for the arrest of both Nelson and Stephenson and was one of the most important witnesses for the state; having been an eye witness to a portion of the shooting between Nelson and Stephenson and his testimony was largely attributed to the binding over of Stephenson. This made the accused very angry at Cooper and Stephenson stated repeatedly that he would "get even with Cooper".

During the day of Saturday, Feb 8, 1902, Stephenson was in Waterloo and visited several saloons. Shortly after eight o'clock in the evening, Stephenson went to the room occupied by his wife. After gaining admittance he locked all the doors and drew a revolver, telling his wife that unless she would return and live with him, he would kill her. There was a heated discussion between them and this was heard by Mr. And Mrs. Jos. Blaschka in their rooms below. Mr. Blaschka went upstairs and rapping on the door, told Stephenson to stop abusing his wife and leave the house. In reply Stephenson told him to get out or he would "fill him full of lead," and Blaschka then went after the officers to stop the disturbance. Deputy Sheriff Cooper and Village

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Marshal Woodard went to the house and tried to gain entrance to the rooms of Mrs. Stephenson but the doors were all locked and Stephenson told them that if they did not go away and leave them alone he would kill them.

For the second time, Deputy Sheriff Cooper, accompanied by Jas. D. Ryder, went to the door of Mrs. Stephenson's rooms and demanded of Stephenson that he desist and open the door. This time Stephenson not only threatened to shoot Ryder, if he crossed the threshold, but also stated that "he had it in for Cooper and would just as soon kill him as not." Someone threw a club or stone against the back door leading to the rooms above.

Stephenson, with revolver in hand, thinking that someone was trying to break in the back door, rushed to that door and the minute the way was clear, Mrs. Stephenson rushed out of the front door and down the front stairs. When Mrs. Stephenson was heard coming down the stairs Deputy Sheriff Cooper, L.T. Davies and R. Langer rushed for the front door.

As soon as Stephenson found out that his wife had got away from him, he followed her out of the front door and down the front stairs. When he reached the landing at the foot of the stairs he saw Cooper standing there waiting for him and he made a jump and passed by Cooper, but only went a few feet when he stopped. Cooper then stepped towards him and told him that he could not follow his (Stephenson's) wife and to "behave himself and be a man." At the same time Stephenson said, "Keep away or I'll shoot." Cooper advanced to arrest Stephenson, who all this time had a revolver in his hand, and as Cooper took hold of Stephenson he said, "No, Fred, you wouldn't shoot." As Cooper took hold of him, Stephenson tried to give Cooper a push and then placing a revolver against Cooper's breast fired. As he fired, Cooper still holding onto Stephenson, said: "My God, Fred Stephenson, you have killed me."

The news that Stephenson had killed Cooper spread rapidly and a warrant was immediately issued for his arrest. A team was then ordered and Sheriff McGolrick, Under Sheriff O'Byrne and L.T. Davies and Wallace Andrews as driver, then started for the home of John Parker, seven miles north-west of the city, where it was thought Stephenson might have gone. As the officers drove up to the house they found Parker in the yard hitching up a horse. He was asked if Stephenson was in the house and he replied, "yes." He was told that the officers were there after Stephenson and that they should take him dead or alive, but Sheriff McGolrick told him that he would rather take him without trouble. Parker then went into the house and had a talk with Stephenson and then returned and said that he (Stephenson) would surrender to the sheriff. Sheriff McGolrick then walked to the house and as he stepped upon the porch, and was about to open the door, Stephenson opened it from the inside and stood there with a revolver in his hand which he gave up to the sheriff.

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There cannot be too much praise said of Deputy Sheriff Cooper, who gave up his life in the discharge of his duty and in guarding the life of a woman. His bravery was the cause of his death and while he cannot be called back, his memory is sacredly honored by every citizen of the community for his efforts to protect their lives and interests. The jury found "that the said Wm. Cooper came to his death from a wound made by a bullet coming from a revolver in the hands of one Fred Stephenson." The 45-year-old suspect was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 25 years in prison February 13, 1903.

In 2010, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office learned that Deputy William Cooper's heroic actions had been lost to history. To honor Deputy Cooper, Sheriff Paul Milbrath completed paperwork requesting that his name be added to the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington DC. The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard traveled to Washington DC in May of 2011 for Police Week to commemorate Deputy Cooper's addition to the wall.