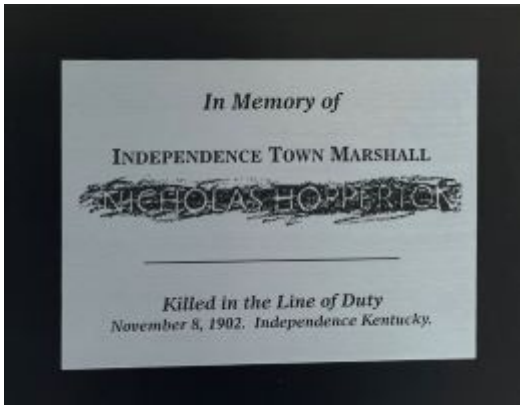


# Town Marshal Louis Nicholas “Nick” Hopperton | Town of Independence



Age: 32

Early 1902 to November 8, 1902

## OFFICER

Nick was born during May 1870 in Kentucky, possibly in or near Pendleton County, to Edward and Elizabeth (Hawkins) Hopperton. His father immigrated from England with his brother at 22 in 1843 and married Elizabeth Hawkins of Grant County during 1856. Nick was the seventh of their eight children. His father died on or near Nick's fourth birthday in 1874. We believe his mother remarried a man named Hanson and had a ninth child by him. When Nick was ten, the family was living in the Napoleon area of Gallatin County.

We know nothing of Nick's next twenty years until he married Sallie O'Donnell during 1895. By 1897 he was working as a laborer and they were living in Covington on Stanford Avenue. During 1899, they had a daughter, Mary, but she died as an infant.

By 1900, he was working as a security hand for a railroad and

they were living in Independence. During 1901, they had another daughter.

During early 1902 Bruce Northcutt resigned as the Independence Town Marshal to become a Kenton County deputy sheriff. Nick was appointed to fill out his term. By the end of the year, Marshal Hopperton had earned the love and respect of every citizen of Independence and Sallie was six months pregnant.

## **MURDERER**

William (Billy) Rice was the oldest of seven, born December 25, 1876 in Kentucky to Lamuel and Edna Rice. His father was often intoxicated and when intoxicated he was violent. He had been beating his wife (Billy's mother) for a long time; on occasion chasing her from the home at gunpoint and sometimes taking shots at her. She would run to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Beers until Rice sobered up. One day while intoxicated, Rice caught Mrs. Beers in the field and assaulted her with a tobacco stick, knocking her unconscious. Mr. Beers heard her screams, grabbed his .32 caliber revolver, and raced to the field. Just as Rice was about to land another blow as she lay on the ground, Beers shot him dead.

Mr. Beers was acquitted in the homicide and Billy Rice had a poor disposition about it, believing Beers to have been guilty of Murder. He followed in his father's footsteps, getting drunk a lot and harassing those around him. He was considered a dangerous man, though he had never been in any serious trouble before the end of 1902.

## **INCIDENT**

On November 8, 1902, Billy Rice, fresh from hunting, about 9 a.m., rode into Independence and to Fleming's Saloon. As he

walked in, he brought his double barrel shotgun with him. By 11:30 a.m., he was intoxicated, abusing other patrons, and threatening to shoot them. He was told to leave, and someone called Marshal Hopperton.

Marshal Hopperton responded and met Rice as he sat on a beer barrel in front of the saloon. He took the shotgun and ordered Rice to leave town. Rice cursed him and Marshal Hopperton slapped him across the face and told him again to leave town immediately. As Rice turned to leave, Marshal Hopperton returned his shotgun and followed him to the edge of town.

Just as Rice reached the corporation limit, about 12:30 p.m., he wheeled, leveled the shotgun at the marshal's midsection, and pulled the trigger. Buckshot exploded into Marshal Hopperton's abdomen knocking him down. He got up, pulled his revolver, and shot Rice three times, knocking Rice down. Rice got back up, walked over to Marshal Hopperton, and, from point blank range, fired another salvo into Marshal Hopperton's chest. Though every vital organ in his core was destroyed, the marshal raised himself one more time, shot Rice again, and then fell dead.

## **FUNERAL**

He was predeceased by his father, Edward Hopperton; daughter, Mary Hopperton; and we believe siblings, Isaac Hopperton and Sarah Hopperton. Marshal Hopperton was survived by his wife, Sallie (O'Donnell) Hopperton; daughter, Bess May Hopperton (18 mos.); mother, Elizabeth (Hawkins) Hanson; and siblings, John Hopperton, Charles Hopperton, George Hopperton, James Hopperton, and Harriet Elizabeth Hopperton. He was buried November 10, 1902, in Independence Cemetery in what was described as the largest funeral seen in Independence to that date. Alvin Daniel Hopperton was born 2½ months later on

January 25, 1903.

## **JUSTICE**

Onlookers picked up Rice and took him to Dr. Metcalfe's residence where the doctor noted wounds to Rice's left arm, the center of his lower jaw, and the left chest. About 1 p.m., Menninger's ambulance arrived and took him to St. Elizabeth Hospital in critical condition. By midnight, he was sinking rapidly and was not expected to live.

On November 10, 1902 it was reported that Rice was improving and, even with four bullets still in him, was expected to live.

The Coroner, Dr. Tarvin, opened an inquest on November 11, 1902. All testimony was essentially identical, regardless as to whether it came from friends of Marshal Hopperton or Rice. Coroner Tarvin found that Rice shot and killed Marshal Hopperton.

By November 23, 1902, Rice was walking around the hospital and expected to soon leave it and be arrested. Still in the hospital, he hired attorneys Graziani and Louis Manson on November 25, 1902 to defend him. A preliminary hearing was set for Friday, December 5, 1902. Rice considered that date unlucky and feigned relapse in order to have it postponed.

Rice appeared at a preliminary hearing on December 11, 1902, before Judge Stephens and defended by Louis Hanson. There he pleaded that he was not guilty by reason of self-defense. He was bound over to the Kenton County Grand Jury and released with a bond set at \$500.

On February 17, 1903, the Kenton County Grand Jury failed to indict Rice and he went free.

## EPILOGUE

Mrs. Hopperton, while living in Gallatin County, contracted tuberculosis and died on April 29, 1945 at 70 years of age. She was buried with her husband 42 $\frac{1}{2}$  years after his death. We believe they are survived today by three grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Sergeant Ed Bailey, Independence Police Department, assured Marshal Hopperton's name was added to the Northern Kentucky Police Memorial on May 10, 1999 and to the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D. C. on May 13, 1999.

If anyone has information, artifacts, or photographs regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Museum Director at [Memorial@Police-Museum.org](mailto:Memorial@Police-Museum.org).

*© This narrative was further researched and revised on October 30, 2019, by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (RET) with original research assistance from Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Curator, and Marshal Hopperton's granddaughter, LaVerne Sharp. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society.*