

# BERNARD SNOWDON

## THE MURDER OF CONSTABLE BERNARD SNOWDON

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*Bernard Snowdon was the first policeman killed while on duty.*

Constable Bernard W. Snowdon joined the Winnipeg Police Department on October 25th, 1912 and was assigned number 172A. He was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England in 1887. Although single when he joined he was married

and had a 2-year-old daughter when he was killed. The family lived at 472 Kylemore Avenue.

On April 6th, 1918, Constable Snowdon was on beat patrol on the east side of Main Street between Rupert and Higgins. He was required to call in from a single box every half-hour. When he failed to report at 00:30 and again at 01:00 the signal operator notified the duty sergeant who instructed a patrol sergeant to check his beat.

At 01:30 Patrol Sergeant Alexander Donald found the back door to Rosenblatt's Hardware & Clothing Store open. He entered and found Constable Snowdon face down on the floor, dead. It was first thought the officer had been struck on the head and shot in the back but a subsequent investigation determined the head injury was probably caused as he fell. Powder burns on his overcoat indicated he was shot in the back at almost point-blank range with the bullet striking his heart causing instant death.

Chief Constable Donald Macpherson and numerous other officers including the entire detective division were called into work on the murder. The method of entry to the store was unique for that time in that the culprits had cut a hole in the door under the lock to gain entry.

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Information of a similar m.o. (modus operandi) had been received just weeks earlier from Fort William and Port Arthur Police and only a week before a shop at 485 Main Street had been entered by this method. Items of clothing and articles such as knives were usually stolen. A description of suspects had also received from the Lakehead Police.

Detectives were given a very valuable clue right away by the store owner who noticed a flashlight left for repairs was missing. His description of the men who brought it in for repairs was very similar to that of the suspects from the east and they might have used it as an opportunity to 'case the joint'. Even more interesting was the fact that the suspects were staying in the Maple Leaf Hotel next door at 655 Main St. (now the Manwin Hotel) which also happened to be owned by the Rosenblatt family.

Detectives checked the hotel but the suspects were not there so the room was staked out. Warrants were issued for the two men who were registered there.

At 12:35 hrs, on the 6th, detectives spotted the suspects at Higgins and Main and arrested Frank Sullivan, 47 years and Philip Johnson, 32 years. A third man with them at the time, George Ball from 394 Jarvis Ave. was also arrested but released on the 8th as a material witness. Sullivan and Johnson were from the east and had previous records. Both gave their occupation as 'bushman' which was probably a term for working in the lumber camps. The arresting officers were Deputy Chief Chris Newton, Detectives George Smith, Eli Stodgell, James Hoskins and Brent Kilcup.

At 18:35 hrs, John Edward Stoike, 17 years, was arrested by Detectives James Thomson and James Melville when he went to the suspect's room at the Maple Leaf Hotel. He identified himself with the name Craig but it was established that he was

an escapee from Portage la Prairie and had met and joined up with Sullivan and Johnson in Fort William.

Sullivan was held in "A" Div. at Rupert Station while Johnson was held in the North End "E" and Stoike was detained in "B" Div. in Fort Rouge. On April 22nd they were all committed to stand trial and were then transferred to the Provincial Goal.

News of the police slaying shocked the city the next morning and Chief Macpherson had waited until 07:00 to advise Mrs. Snowdon but when he got there with Insp. Blair, they found her in a hysterical condition having been given the news by some other person.

The funeral for Constable Snowdon was held from Thomson Funeral Home on Main Street with burial in Elmwood Cemetery beside the graves of Constables Traynor and Ward of "A" Division and Sergeant Rice of "E" Division. Pallbearers were selected from each division with Consts. G. Headon and H.A. Steeman from "A", Consts. H.C. Mills and J. Shields from "B" and Consts. L.C. Ingram and S.F. Hull from "E". Drill Inst. George Jamieson was in charge. A very large crowd of citizens along with almost all other police officers from Winnipeg and surrounding municipalities attended the funeral.

The three accused were tried separately in July and each found Guilty and sentenced to death on September 27th, 1918.

Johnson was first tried and he blamed Sullivan by claiming that he was only the lookout while the others were inside. When Constable Snowdon entered the shop and was about to grab Stoike, Johnson had followed and said something, which distracted the officer and caused him to turn. Constable Snowdon had then grabbed Johnson but was immediately shot in the back by Sullivan. He struck his head as he fell. Sullivan wanted Johnson to go back from the hotel and beat the officer to death so he could not identify

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them but Johnson refused stating he was already dead. Johnson applied for clemency after his conviction but it was turned down.

Stoike was next and he also blamed Sullivan claiming he had been sent back to the hotel while the other two intended to chop into the office of the American Loan Company next door. Sullivan had admitted shooting the policeman back at the hotel and also ordered Stoike to hide the three revolvers and the stolen goods. He put the guns in an old blacksmith shop behind the Empress Hotel and the stolen goods in the Nugget Hotel. He dropped some bullets and an empty casing in a sewer outlet. The police recovered all the items.

Sullivan came last on July 13th and he would only maintain that he was innocent and the others were lying to save themselves.

The judge emphasized their intent to resist arrest was a planned act when they carried guns into a burglary and also that each had the same common purpose. So it was only necessary to find if each were guilty of the break-in and therefore the murder regardless of who fired the shot. The jury took approximately 30 minutes.

On September 25th the Federal Cabinet commuted the death sentence of Stoike to life imprisonment mainly because of his age at the time of the murder.

Sullivan and Johnson got a slight reprieve also because of a mix-up with the federal hangman Mr. Ellis being otherwise engaged at another hanging in Montreal on Sept. 27th. The reprieve was brief, as Mr. Ellis was available on October 2nd, 1918, and at 07:04 hrs. the two men stood side by side on the gallows. Sullivan died instantly due to a miscalculation of the rope by Mr. Ellis and Johnson was pronounced dead six

minutes later. Some 60 witnesses saw justice carried out only a few days short of six months from the time of the crime. An inquest was held immediately at the jail and the cause of death was listed as 'death by legal execution'.

The Police Pension Fund at that time was a by-law, which provided for payment of \$250.00 for the first year of service and \$60.00 for each additional year. A subsection also provided for an additional amount of half the payout in the event the officer was killed on duty.

The Police Commission approved leaving his name on the payroll to the end of April making his service 5 1/2 years. The payout came to \$775.18.

In June, the Commission also approved a pension effective in July for Mrs. Snowden at \$30.00 a month until re-marriage, death or in any event not beyond 7 years. A \$10.00 allowance was approved for the child for 12 years. Constable Snowden's name was also to appear on the June payroll with full salary being paid to Mrs. Snowden which appears to make up for May and June.

In October, the Commission authorized payment of \$250.00 for the funeral which appears to have been a kind gesture as the cost of another funeral for a constable who died of sickness was deducted from the payout to his widow.

In Feb. 1925, Mrs. Snowden requested an extension of the pension due to illness preventing her from working and the Commission granted five more years to June 1930. The pension was now \$40.00 and \$15.00. Shortly before the expiry, in Sept. 1929, she advised the Commission that she had remarried and was now living in B.C. Her pension was stopped but that of the child continued to the scheduled date in 1930.