

# The Early 1900s

Researched and Written by Jack Templeman

## CHIEF DONALD MACPHERSON



The next Chief Constable was **Donald MacPherson**. He had been the Deputy Chief Constable and was well qualified for the position. Chief MacPherson continued to modernize the department and was responsible for establishing the first School of

*Chief Donald MacPherson* Instruction in 1912. He also arranged for the department to purchase its first mechanized Patrol Wagon or "Paddy wagon" in 1913 along with an ambulance. The police signal system came into use the same year so that the beat patrol officers could communicate with the station or receive calls from the station.

In 1913 the Winnipeg Police Department was honoured with the awarding of three King's Police Medals. This high award was created in 1909 and given throughout the British Empire. The award could be for either long and distinguished service or gallantry. At that time only one KPM had been awarded in Canada and it was for long service to a Chief in Ontario. The 1913 awards all came to Winnipeg with a distinguished service award to retired Chief Constable John C. McRae and the first gallantry awards in Canada to Constables **William TRAYNOR** and **Hugh BROWN**. Unfortunately, Constable Traynor died of typhoid fever just two weeks before the ceremony so the medal was presented to his widow.

## Krafchenko Makes Sensational Escape

The beginning of 1914 was to bring one of the dark times in the history of the department with the Krafchenko affair. John Krafchenko was arrested in Winnipeg for the murder of the bank manager in Plum Coulee and was detained in the Rupert Station although the case was the responsibility of the Manitoba Provincial Police. His lawyer persuaded one of the police guards to smuggle in a gun and rope with which Krafchenko escaped. Unfortunately for him, the rope broke as he tried to climb down from the third-floor window but he did manage to get away although injured. He was eventually captured, tried for the murder and executed. The investigation of the escape led to the arrest of one of the jailors, Constable **Robert James REID** who was sentenced to 7 years in the penitentiary while the lawyer got 3 years. REID and another prisoner were killed just a few months later in an accident at the prison. The lawyer was eventually reinstated to the bar after his sentence.

The First World War from 1914 to 1918 brought a heavy strain on the department with a reduction in manpower due to men taking leave to join the military. Some 152 members left to serve and 29 gave their lives in the bloody trench war in Europe. Of the survivors, only 78 men returned to the department and some of them did not last long due to their war injuries and poor health. Many of



the officers had received battle awards and honours.

The department was involved in an unusual riot in 1916 that became known as the "Army Riot" and was aimed directly at the police. It started with the arrest of some drunken soldiers on Main Street who were brought to the Rupert Avenue Station and detained. Word spread and a great number of other military personnel came to the station to demand their release. The police officers were able to barricade the station but the rioters managed to smash every window on the front of the station before extra military troops arrived to restore order. The irony of the situation was the fact that the original arrests had been made by military police and the offenders were just being lodged in the city police cells until taken to Fort Osborne Barracks. This did lead to the huge metal gates being installed on the front doors of the station in case such a thing might occur again.



*Mary Dunn*

The Police Commission at this time received delegations from local groups demanding that policewomen be hired on the department and in December 1916, Mrs. **Mary DUNN** became the first official "Woman Police Constable". She was assigned to the Morality Department and her duties were described as "aiding women in distress" and "wayward children". She worked only in the station and was not issued a uniform or equipment except for keys and such. The pay scale for female constables was set below that of the most junior recruit and for the next fifty years, no female officer was allowed to attain the rank of the first-class constable. A second female was appointed in

January 1917 and for many years the department authorized only 2 female constables.

The next major occurrence in this period was the murder of Constable **Bernard SNOWDON** in April 1918. He was working the night shift on a beat on Main Street when he came upon a break-in. He entered the building unaware that there were two men inside and a lookout outside who followed him in. He was shot in the back and died instantly. The failure of Constable Snowdon to make his hourly call on the police signal system caused other officers to check his beat and his body was discovered. The quick response of the whole detective department soon led to the arrest of the three responsible males. Two were eventually executed and the third who was a youth was sentenced to prison.



*Bernard Snowdon*

The final occurrence in the career of Chief MacPherson began in 1917 when most of the members of the department formed a union. This was not only in contravention of a police notice prohibiting a police union but the members also associated themselves with the Winnipeg Trades and Labour movement which meant that they could technically go out on a sympathy strike that involved some other union. Chief MacPherson did not act against this breach of discipline which would prove to cost him dearly in the future.

In 1919 as the soldiers were returning from the War unemployment was very high and working conditions for those with jobs were poor with long hours and low pay. There was also a lot of resentment across the country by many who felt that foreign immigrants had taken over all the





available jobs. The result of these conditions led to the demand for a general strike in cities across the nation. It was only in Winnipeg that the unions were strong enough to bring the city to a standstill for several weeks beginning in May. There was concern that the police were in sympathy with the strikers and because their union was affiliated with the other unions they may strike themselves.

The Police Commission refused to deal with the police union and although the union officers stated they would never go on strike or sympathize, they were given the option of getting out of their union or face immediate dismissal. A deadline was set and on June 9th and 10th Chief MacPherson called each officer and staff member into his office and requested that he sign the oath of allegiance to the department and the city and to reject membership in a union.

Altogether 252 members were dismissed on those days while 22 signed the oath. This in effect wiped out the entire police department and another black period came over the police force.

**Chief of Police MacPherson Dismissed;  
Deputy-Chief Newton to Reorganize Force**

The next day, June 11th, the Police Commission instructed Chief MacPherson to take a leave of absence but he refused. The Police Commission then dismissed Chief MacPherson. This action later led to his demanding a reason for his dismissal but he was never given the satisfaction of an answer although at one point he was given a letter of reference and received a financial settlement.

One of the 22 members who signed the oath was the Deputy Chief Constable who was appointed acting Chief Constable. The City Council asked for government help and several members of the Royal North West Mounted Police were brought to the city and several local military units were ordered to assist the local government. Also, Council authorized hiring numerous "Special Constables" at \$2.00 a day. At one point there were 1,400 Specials employed and Council authorized an increase to 2,000 if necessary. There was no time to put these Specials into uniform or properly equip them so they were issued white armbands, badges and rough wooden clubs or batons. Some of the Specials who had served in the military formed a Mounted Special Unit for quick response throughout the city if necessary.