



# JOHN BEATTIE

## THE DEATH OF CONSTABLE JOHN BEATTIE

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John Beattie had the distinction of being the first Winnipeg Police Officer killed on duty.

Most people think Bernard Snowden was the first officer killed on duty and they are correct if you only consider the deaths caused at the hands of criminals. John Beattie died performing his duty as surely as the others.

THE DEATH STUNNED THE CITY AS THE  
POLICE COMMISSION ORDERED A PUBLIC  
FUNERAL SIMILAR TO A MILITARY FUNERAL.

John Beattie was born on the 20th of August 1882, in Newcastle-On-Tyne, England. He came to Canada about 1908 and after working at several jobs on the 18th of March 1911, he joined the Police Force along with a chum Bill Greengrove. Beattie became Constable #141 and Greengrove was #142.

Only twenty-seven days later John Beattie was electrocuted at the scene of a fire on Main St. at Water Avenue. He was 28 years of age when he died.

At that time officers worked twelve-hour shifts and Beattie began at 7:00 p.m. on the 10th of April. About 2:00 a.m. on the 11th, a fire broke out in the

building at Main and Water in the area used by Wilson & Labelle Painters. The building also housed J.E. Alton, Tea Merchant and a Stationery Shop owned by Mr. M. Keroack who also owned the building. Firemen fought the fire for almost two hours & the building was badly damaged.

About 4:00 a.m. Constables Beattie and John Rogers #144 were guarding the scene along with Firemen Grant, Sinclair and Barber. Firemen Grant and Sinclair entered the ruins with Constable Beattie following. Suddenly Beattie screamed and the firemen saw that he had grabbed a wire which had the insulation burned off but was still 'live'. Constable Beattie's clothing was wet from the rain and he was standing on the wet floor setting up a deadly combination. Fireman Grant knocked the wire from Beattie's hand and Beattie collapsed. Beattie was quickly carried out and across the street to a doctor's office but he was pronounced D.O.A.

The death stunned the City as the Police Commission ordered a public funeral similar to a military funeral. The officer in charge of the Salvation Army Band offered its service at the funeral; that was the first time this service was offered for a Non-Salvationist. On April 15th, the funeral took place from Thomson's Undertakers. The casket had Beattie's helmet and baton laid on top.

Over 500 people crowded into the funeral home and several thousand more lined the streets when the cortege moved off to the Elmwood Cemetery. Thirty-six uniformed officers led the procession and Chief Constable J.C. McRae and Deputy Chief Chris Newton led the official party of mourners. Pallbearers were fellow Constables David Dickie, George Headon, William Morrison, Hector McNeill, William Smith and William Webster. Reverend F.S. Lewis conducted the service.



John Beattie's next of kin, his widowed mother, was advised of the death by cable. Beattie's grave in Elmwood Cemetery is unmarked and forgotten along with many others.

Other facts I found of interest regarding this occurrence were that the building was one of the oldest in Winnipeg at that time having been built in 1868 by Dr. John Christian Schultz. Dr. Schultz served in the senate and was arrested in this building by Riel who imprisoned him. Schultz managed to escape and survived to become the 5th Lieutenant Governor of this province from 1888 - 1895.

Constable John Rogers who was also at the fire scene didn't last too long after as he was 'dismissed' for 'insubordination' on the 19th of June 1911.

Constable Bill Greengrove who joined with Beattie didn't do much better as he was 'permitted to resign on 13th of February 1912 for 'conduct unbecoming an officer.

*Staff Sergeant Templeman wrote this article in August 1989. The loss of Constable Beattie had been forgotten for many years and not recorded in previous history books. Since Staff Sergeant Templeman's research and article, the unmarked grave of Constable John Beattie has been identified. In 1994, on Friday, October 7th, the department finally recognized this loss with a memorial service at the cemetery during which a headstone was dedicated by Police Chaplain Const. Day assisted by Salvation Army Chaplains. A guard of honour dressed in the uniform style of that era was present along with a police piper.*