

## IN REMEMBRANCE

# John Kenneth Hansell

1915 - 2019



For many years Sgt. John Kenneth Hansell (Ken) badge #117 had the distinction of being the oldest living retired Winnipeg Police officer. As such, he possessed somewhat of a celebrity status and would receive regular visitors or be seen at Police events. During one occasion in August of 2013, young officers from Division 11 picked up Ken from his home, and drove him to the Public Safety Building to partake in various activities including a luncheon. He would always reminisce about the days of old, and marvel at the profound changes since he was on “the beat”.

Ken was born at 523 Banning Street in Winnipeg on June 16, 1915. His family was quite large with the children totaling 5 boys and 1 girl as siblings. Tragically, their father passed away when Ken was 2 years old, leaving their mother to care for everyone by herself. Their life afterwards was described as “tough with many hardships” but the family prevailed. While growing up Ken worked in a number of capacities including delivering meat for a butcher shop, mechanics assistant, salesman, server, and digging ditches for the City of Winnipeg (Engineering Department). During the depression years however, with jobs being scarce Ken found himself unemployed.

Fate intervened however, and Ken ended up joining the Winnipeg Police Department in 1936 when he received a job offer after apprehending an armed suspect during the robbery of a drug store. The story received a fair amount of media attention, and highlighted the courage and bravery of this young man.

On March 23, 1936 at 9:30 pm, 20-year old Ken Hansell was walking down Portage Avenue when he saw a suspicious car stop in front of the Beverley Pharmacy (at 811 Portage). He observed 2 men exit the car and walk towards the drug store, with both pulling handkerchiefs over their faces just before



entering the business. Peering through the window, Ken could see the men inside with one standing in the middle of the store brandishing a gun while the other was emptying the till. Ken positioned himself by the door, and tackled the pair as they exited the business. In the ensuing struggle, one managed to escape while the second was overpowered and held for Police by Ken and 2 other passersby who stopped to assist.

The local media picked up on the story and Ken became front page news in both the Winnipeg Free Press and Winnipeg Evening Tribune newspapers. With all the attention, the Police approached him for consideration as a potential officer. On March 26, Ken was given a tour of the Central Police Station at Rupert/Lily and asked to write a composition of his observations. To the Police supervisors, his submission demonstrated excellent penmanship, suitable composition, and a good memory for detail. He formally submitted his application for employment on April 1st, and after being examined and cleared by the Police Surgeon, Ken officially commenced duties as a Probationary Constable in "A" Division on April 7, 1936.

Ken later took a leave of absence to serve with the Canadian Air Force during WW2, completing a tour of service between April 19, 1943 and May 1, 1946. He officially returned to Policing on May 15, 1946, after the war ended. During his Military Service, Ken married his wife Catherine in 1944, and built the family home at 499 Burnell Street where they later had 2 children, a son (Garry) and a daughter (Donna).

After returning to Policing duties, Ken was later promoted to Patrol Sergeant on February 1, 1952, and then to Sergeant on April 1, 1958. He retired from the Police Department on May 11, 1969, having worked out of all the stations including "A" Division being the Central Police Station at Rupert/Lily, the "E" Division station at Charles/Magnus, and the "B" Division station at Nassau/Jessie. Police records state Ken left the force after receiving a position with the Province of Manitoba.



Afterwards, Ken spent many happy years with his wife and children with the family cottage being a favorite place to spend time. Sadly, Catherine passed away in 2010, leaving Ken alone in the house he built for them on Burnell. Ken remained in this same house until the age of 102, at which point he moved to Deer Lodge Centre.

Ken passed away on June 29, 2019 at the age of 104 years, having been retired for just over 50 years which is an exceptional period of time.