

# RONALD HOUSTON

## THE MURDER OF DETECTIVE RON HOUSTON RESEARCHED & WRITTEN BY JACK TEMPLEMAN



**Detective  
Ronald Houston**

Winnipeg had seen several violent attacks on women between September '69 and that date. Most occurred in the Fort Rouge area as well as a couple on Furby Street close to the Assiniboine River.

The suspect would cut screens and enter suites to attack the women. Age was not a factor as the women ranged from 21 years to 62 years. The common elements in the attacks were violence and window entry. In the first assault, a 21-year-old girl was struck on the head but for some unknown reason, the suspect fled before committing any sexual act. The next was a 31-year-old woman who was struck on the head by a baseball bat before being raped.

The most violent assault occurred about 4:25 a.m. on May 28th at 414 Stradbrook. The suspect cut the screen to enter and found a 27 year old female asleep on a chesterfield. He shattered a whisky

bottle over her head as she slept but this did not knock her out although it caused serious injury. He then forced her to undress and covered her face as he committed an indecent act. He then stole \$400.00 rent money from her purse and fled.

Prowler reports continued in the area with the same man seen at 117 Bryce on June 1st, 7th and 8th.

A special patrol was initiated by Acting Deputy Chief Norm Stewart on June 9th with two officers being concealed on the rear porch of 399 Stradbrook, which is a house, situated between the apartment blocks at 395 and 401 Stradbrook. Two other officers were to patrol in the immediate area as backup.

It did not take long for the Special Patrol to arrest window peepers. The first one was at 10:20 p.m. on June 10th at 399 Stradbrook by Detectives Norm Wickdahl and Don Gove. On the 17th, Detectives Don Grove and John DeGroot got the next peeper with another arrest at 401 Stradbrook. Gove and DeGroot repeated with another arrest at 401 Stradbrook the next night. However, none of these peepers matched the description of the rapist.

On the 26th the stakeout was assigned to Detectives Ron Houston and John DeGroot in the house and Patrol Sergeant B.M. Stuart and Detective James Stirling as the backup unit.

## Ronald Houston

The officers entered the veranda of 399 Stradbrook at about 11:30 p.m. on the 26th. The veranda was dark inside giving good concealment and at the same time allowed an excellent view of the apartment blocks, which were so often visited by window peepers.

Things were quiet so Houston removed his shoes as he had sore feet at that time. The officers sat on each side of a table looking out. Those empty shoes became a stark reminder of this tragedy when a picture of the veranda was on the front page of the newspaper later that day. The shoes and Houston's issued flashlight were removed during the night by Acting Detectives Cal Varey and Bob Nolan



About 2:00 a.m., a man later identified as Thomas Mason Shand, 30 years, was seen at the rear of 395 Stradbrook where he went to a window that had a light inside. After pausing briefly he crossed the parking lot towards the fence of 399 Stradbrook. The male climbed on the railing and jumped over into the yard of 399 Stradbrook. The man then walked across the lot behind the house and just a few feet from the officers on the veranda. He was

heading towards 401 Stradbrook where there was a light in the basement window of Suite #2.

As soon as he passed by, DeGroot got up and went to the veranda door to follow. Unfortunately, the hinge squeaked slightly and Shand stopped and turned so that he was facing DeGroot. DeGroot yelled 'Hold it buddy - Winnipeg Police'. But Shand turned away and started to jump the fence to 401 Stradbrook.

DeGroot managed to grab Shand just as he was going over the fence and the weight of the two men broke the fence and they fell to the ground.

Unknown to DeGroot, Shand had an open stiletto-type knife in his hand ready to cut screens. At no time was Shand seen to place his hands near his pockets.



DET. JOHN DeGROOT  
Wounded

As they fell to the ground, Shand struck DeGroot in the left shoulder and he felt a sharp pain but did not realize he had been stabbed. DeGroot held on and slammed Shand against the building. Houston joined the struggle and shouted 'he's got a knife'. DeGroot grabbed Shand's right hand holding the knife and tried to pin him against the wall. Shand bit the top of DeGroot's right ear almost severing a piece of it.

Houston drew his revolver and shouted at Shand 'hold it or I'll shoot'. Shand released his bite on DeGroot and DeGroot stepped back to catch his breath as the knife wound had punctured his lung and breathing was becoming difficult.

Houston may have been distracted momentarily seeing DeGroot injured as the men separated, but whatever the reason, it gave Shand that split-second opportunity to lash out at Houston. Shand stabbed Houston in the chest with the blade penetrating his heart and causing almost instant death.

Houston was able to say 'he's got me good John' as he collapsed and dropped his service revolver. Shand dropped his knife after stabbing Houston.

DeGroot was still struggling to stay conscious as he saw Shand pick up the revolver and fire a shot towards the prone body of Houston. Then Shand turned towards DeGroot and pointed the gun at his face. Survival overtook the pain and weakness as DeGroot grabbed at the gun barrel with both hands and managed to push it aside as it fired. It was later discovered that he had a burn-type wound on the top of his right shoulder. His jacket was examined at the RCMP lab in Regina and found to have lead traces on the right shoulder.

At this point, Shand gave up his attempts to finish off the officers and ran out to Stradbrook. DeGroot managed to follow to the front of 401 Stradbrook only to see Shand running west towards Osborne Street. DeGroot managed to draw his revolver and fired two shots at the disappearing runner before collapsing onto the boulevard.

Tenants of the apartment blocks came outside to see what was happening and James Bain ran over to DeGroot on the boulevard. Bain asked if he was a policeman and DeGroot was only able to move his hand towards his pocket and Bain pulled out his wallet and badge.

At 2:13 a.m., B.M. Stuart and Detective Stirling heard the radio message go out for an ambulance and police to a disturbance at 401 Stradbrook and quickly responded only to find DeGroot on the boulevard and Houston laying beside the block.

The fire rescue truck responded quickly from Osborne & Stradbrook and the officers were rushed to Winnipeg General Hospital. Efforts to resuscitate Houston continued until 3:15 a.m. when he was pronounced dead.

# Webster Says Stab Killed Houston

## Second Attack In 25 Days, Knife-Wielding Man Sought

DeGroot was found to be suffering from stab wounds to the left upper chest and left shoulder which had collapsed his right lung and partially collapsed the left lung. Although his condition was 'guarded', he was in excellent physical condition that helped him survive and recover fully. His wife Sharon was notified by Detectives Pete Vandergraff and Ted Felbel who conveyed her to the hospital from St. Clements.

Back at the scene, Shand had cut between houses and crossed River Avenue and then Roslyn Road heading for the Osborne Bridge. Constables Thomas Sallows #53A and Erik Gruter #118A had been on beats 1 & 2 in 'B' Division (Fort Rouge) and were walking back to PSB for lunch. Their practice was to check the riverbank under the bridge and on this occasion, Gruter spotted a male in the parking lot of 105 Roslyn Road. Gruter called out to the male who bolted towards the river and jumped in and swam away. The swimmer was slapping his arms about and making a lot of noise as he reached the centre. The officers tried to keep their flashlights on him but he went out of sight and the noise stopped. The beat officers did not carry portable radios at that time and were not aware of the attack on the officers nearby. They used a call box to notify the station of a possible drowning. Later, searchers failed to turn up any signs of where the person may have climbed out of the river and dragging operations failed to locate anybody.

## Ronald Houston

Detectives attended to the scene of the attack and shootings and searched after the initial pictures were taken. About 06:00 a.m., Detective Lou Spado found what was to become the main piece of evidence, in this case, a pair of prescription glasses, knocked off the suspect during his struggle with DeGroot. Numerous officers spent the next two days going over prescription files in every city optician's office that used 'SAFILO' type frames. Finally, the prescription was found at Ramsay Matthews Ltd. in the name of T. Shand indicating they were made on February 28th, 1969. T. Shand was Thomas Mason Shand, WPD #28408.

Shand survived the river and managed to get out on the north side. His exact movements were never proven but late on Sunday the 28th he was in suite 15-35 Hargrave occupied by Alexis Nabe and Thomas Scott Mitchell. They admitted Shand confessed to killing the policeman that all the news broadcasts were talking about. He showed them the officer's gun that he still had. Claiming they were afraid of him, they allowed him to stay overnight and then Mitchell convinced Shand to go to his lawyer/friend Hugh Parker to arrange his surrender as he had been identified and a warrant had been issued for his arrest Canada-wide, Capitol Murder.



*Thomas Mason Shand*

Shand had met Hugh Parker after an earlier release from Stony Mountain Penitentiary and had lived in his home for a while and was treated like a family member. Shand had an extensive record in the city

dating back to 1960 when he broke into businesses and churches in St. Boniface and Winnipeg. One of his first violent attacks occurred in 1960 during the break-in of the St. Andrews Ukrainian Catholic Church at 160 Euclid when he was confronted by the elderly caretaker who received a cut hand in the scuffle. His violent nature showed again in 1967 when he stabbed a man in the chest outside a beverage room after a dispute. At the time of the murder, a warrant for his arrest for this stabbing was in existence.

Parker contacted the RCMP at 2:45 p.m. on the 29th, to arrange a surrender as Shand said 'I didn't want to get shot by a Winnipeg Policeman, I guess there'd be some itchy fingers'. The RCMP advised Parker they would turn Shand over to Winnipeg Police immediately and Shand agreed to this. RCMP Cpl. Denys Stewart and Constable Frank Palmer who had received the original call attended the law offices at 210 Osborne and arrested Shand at 3:03 p.m. Parker turned over Winnipeg Police revolver #301 (Houston's) and three live rounds.

Shand was conveyed to the P.S.B. accompanied by Parker and turned over to Detective Superintendent Al Biggs and Detective Sergeant Herb Stephen. Detective Sergeant Bob McNeice and Detective Len Daniels interviewed Shand but he would make no statement and be detained.

Shand was committed to trial and was convicted of Capitol Murder on October 10th, 1970. He was sentenced to be hanged on June 10th, 1971, after the jury made no recommendation as to clemency but his appeal caused the date to be moved to March 8th, 1972.

**SENTENCED TO**

**HANG IN JUNE**

**Shand**

**Found**

**Guilty**

## Ronald Houston

His appeal was dismissed by the Supreme Court on Nov. 30th, 1971. In keeping with government policy at the time to bypass the authorized death penalty for police or prison guard killers, the cabinet commuted Shand's sentence to life on Feb. 24th, 1972.

Shand served the minimum time before being released. At the time of his arrest he told the RCMP he thought of shooting himself but 'couldn't get up the guts to pull the trigger'. On November 7th, 1985, in BC, Thomas Mason Shand found the guts to do what he had been unable to do in 1970 and what the government had failed to do in 1972; he committed suicide by hanging.

After some time in the hospital, John DeGroot recovered and resumed full duties with the department. During his stay in the hospital, the true spirit of police comradeship showed once again when Sharon told him a whole bunch of policemen turned up at the farm one day and just did all the chores. In typical John DeGroot fashion, he is reported to have asked her if they did a good job on the weeds.

The Houston family was not forgotten at that time either by his comrades. Every officer who had worked overtime on this investigation had his overtime pay converted to cash which was made payable to the Houston Trust Fund. \$4,389.44 was paid out, a large sum of money at the time.

Ronald Edward Houston was born on April 2nd, 1935. He joined W.P.D. on June 3rd, 1957 but resigned on Dec. 31st, 1964 to pursue another career. He rejoined the department on Oct. 11th, 1966 and was transferred to the Juvenile Division as an Acting Detective on July 31st, 1968. Ron was survived by his wife Mary and two sons, Kenneth, 2 years and Darren, 5 years.

The funeral for Ronald Houston was held on Tuesday, June 30th, at the Transcona Memorial United Church with burial in St. Mary's Cemetery. Fellow officers served as the pallbearers and once again a very large representation of police forces came to pay their respects.

Winnipeg has been very fortunate since 1970 although other officers have laid down their lives on duty within the province. Increased training, more and better equipment and constant awareness of danger have paid off. But for the Grace of God, I could be writing articles on Rick Donovan, Kelly Harrington, Kim Koswin and others. I am thankful this is the last of this series.

Like they said on Hill Street Blues. "Be careful out there".