

OF BADGES, BULLETS AND BROTHELS

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Prostitution was the downfall of the City's first Chief of Police and on August 4, 1875, a group of concerned citizens further demanded that City Council do something about the "great scandal and nuisance arising from the unrestricted commerce" of the Portage and Notre Dame area houses of ill-fame that were being allowed to flourish and to drive the prostitutes from the City.

Chief Murray got the message and a regular series of raids began on the Portage avenue brothels. However, the unintended consequence was that such institutions became scattered throughout the City to everyone's annoyance. As such, they were quietly allowed to settle again in the area of Nellie street and when concerns arose in 1883 they were encouraged to move again.

While there were laws against prostitution, with the City's population increasing at a rate of 1000 people a month (mostly unattached young men) it was next to impossible for the small 20 man police force to keep up with all the petty crime, let alone the prostitutes. As such it was decided that they could ply their trade in the far west reaches of the city on Thomas Street where they remained under the watchful eye of the police until 1904 when a new morality crusade drove them once again into the streets.

In the December 21, 1903 edition of the Winnipeg Free Press (page 2), the outgoing Police Commission, in publicly responding to criticisms that the police were allowing prostitution to thrive in a segregated area, confirmed that the practice had been occurring for some time but that to do otherwise would not have lessened its social evil:

"It will be seen that for a great number of years these women have been under [control] and in one locality and kept there by each succeeding mayor and council and board of police commissioners; and the policy of isolation has become, by long years of use, the settled policy of the civic authorities. In this policy Winnipeg is not alone, for similar treatment of this class of immorality is followed by many American cities and nearly all the continent of Europe. A change of this policy, we are convinced, will not decrease the evil complained of. Prostitution exists in all cities, has existed for all ages and will continue to exist. Suppose that they were prosecuted, they will scatter throughout the city. ... Is it not better to tacitly tolerate them if they live together in houses in one locality and do not cause a disturbance? ... Briefly, these are the grounds of action in the past, and after such investigation, we are still in favor of isolation."

However, the matter of how to control prostitution going forward was left for the new incoming mayor and council to deal with as they deemed fit and, in January 1904, a

different approach was taken. The first order of business was to rid the city of the Thomas Street brothels and drive the prostitutes out of the City. On January 7, 1904, the police were ordered to raid and close down the Thomas Street brothels. As part of the street's "restoration to respectability" Council changed the name of Thomas Street to Minto Street in honour of the Earl of Minto, Canada's Governor General of the day.

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After the raid, the madams and their entourage were scattered throughout the city and once more the police became bogged down following up complaints of immoral acts. Before, when there was an understanding with the brothel keepers, it was fairly easy for the police to keep track of the prostitutes and their related activities. They even staged periodic raids in which the prostitutes were arrested, pled guilty, paid small fines and then went about their business as usual. However, when the crackdown came and the police tried to suppress the houses, cooperation ended. After the brothels were closed the prostitutes took to the streets to sell themselves and soon every young woman on the street was being accosted as a suspected prostitute and complaints were made daily to the police. A year after the brothels were closed on Thomas Street an indignant citizen wrote to the Free Press complaining that the growing number of attacks on women in the city streets was the direct result of scattering the prostitutes all over the city. It became abundantly clear with the passing years that the closing of the Thomas Street houses failed to solve Winnipeg's "social vice problems".

On April 20, 1909, Magistrate T. Mayne Daly, a former federal cabinet minister and the first Juvenile Court Judge in Canada, made a presentation to the Winnipeg Police Commission, which, in short, stated that since 1904 things had gone from bad to worse. After seeing more and more youths brought before him for prostitution and other immoral acts, Magistrate Daly moved that the 1904 resolution be repealed and that "all matters relating to houses of ill fame and immoral woman be left to the Chief of Police, he to act in accordance with his discretion and best judgment". His motion won unanimous approval from the Commission and Police Chief McRae's first order of business was to establish a "Red-Light", or segregated district, under his control on Annabella Street (or Rachel Street as it was known north of the subway) in an isolated part of Point Douglas.



T. Mayne Daly

By the end of 1909 Annabella/Rachel Street, and most of the neighboring MacFarlane Street had been completely converted to brothels. By 1910 there were more than 50 reported brothels on the two streets, all under the regular surveillance of the police, who required, among other things, that all the prostitutes have a medical examination every two weeks and produce a medical certificate when required. The

police further regulated the size of the house numbers, the type and intensity of house lights and dictated that no prostitutes could streetwalk or go "uptown" shopping without their prior approval.

By late 1910 the brothels were teeming with so much business that they began to attract the attention of the local moral reformers who levied accusations of white slavery, police corruption and accessory to immoral criminal conduct against City Council and the Police Commission. Statements made in the Toronto newspapers described Winnipeg as "a moral cesspool, the stench of which is making itself felt throughout the Dominion".



J.C. McRae
Chief Constable
1887 - 1911

At the time, and not surprisingly, Winnipeg was in the middle of a civic election campaign and most of the comments were being made by the supporters of a new "moral" mayoral candidate, Mr. E. D. Martin. However, the pressure was too much to bear and in late November 1910 City Council unanimously asked the Manitoba Government to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate the allegations of municipal corruption. The government-appointed Mr. Justice H. A. Robson of the Court of Kings Bench to head the inquiry and within a week he had his investigation underway. The incumbent mayor, Sanford Evans, ran on the strength of his record (which presumably included segregation) while his challenger, E. D. Martin, relied heavily on the witness testimony of the Robson inquiry and demanded that the laws against prostitution be enforced and that wide-open bootlegging be ended. The voters went to the polls on December 13 and Sanford Evans was re-elected by a 3-2 margin, thus vindicating him and council on their dealings with segregated prostitution.

In January 1911 Robson made public his report in which he found that the police did tolerate prostitution within a certain area and further that prostitution was a menace to the morals and the peace and good order of the area. Specifically, Robson stated:

I have to report that a policy of toleration of the offence in question in a limited area, with regulations as to conduct, was adopted by the Police Commissioners; that such an area was accordingly established by immoral women; that since October 1909 there was no attempt to restrict the increase of houses of vice in the area, and the number of houses of this class grew from 29 to 50.

That illicit liquor dealing has been general and continuous in the houses in this area, and that, as already particularly shown, the law regarding the same has not been properly enforced.

That the result of the above state of affairs has been the disturbance of peace and good order in the locality, a menace to morals and great depreciation in value of property of the neighboring residents.

However, with the victory of Mayor Evans at the polls, little attention was paid to the report and the City opted for continued tolerated prostitution and related vices in the Point Douglas area. With the close proximity of Annabella Street to the Canadian Pacific train station on Higgins Avenue, the area tended to be the first stop for many drifters, transients and out-of-town criminals, often becoming a hotbed of criminal activity which included drunkenness and general rowdyism. Regardless, most of the residents of Winnipeg preferred to have this type of activity take place in this area, and this area alone, rather than having it spread throughout the city. As a result, the police continued to observe the segregated area with little or no interference until the shooting of Cst. Traynor a few months later ...

William Patrick Traynor was born in Ireland on October 12, 1884, and eventually immigrated to Canada, settling in Brandon, Manitoba. In 1905 Traynor joined the Brandon Police Force and on July 1, 1907, he was taken on with the Winnipeg Police. Traynor was issued with badge number 68 and in 1909, after two years of walking the beat, was assigned to the newly formed motorcycle squad and issued with one of the first Indian Motorcycles. However, in 1911 a service revolver was not part of a regular officer's issue on day shift. As one officer at the time stated to a newspaper reporter: "a revolver is a very dangerous weapon even in the hands of an experienced man".



William Patrick Traynor

On Thursday, August 3, 1911, Cst. Traynor was assigned to investigate a theft complaint made by the owner of 311 Ellen Street against one of her boarders. When Cst Traynor arrived at the house the suspect boarder was not there, however his companion, Joseph Copeland, was. As Traynor suspected that Copeland and his friend may have been involved in a series of armed robberies which had plagued the city during the previous week, he asked Copeland to accompany him to the police station. Copeland agreed and then suddenly produced a revolver, shooting at Traynor several times. Even though Copeland kept shooting at Traynor, the Constable gave chase for over half a mile before Copeland made good his escape by hiding in a nearby railway yard.

Although Traynor was working by himself, taken by surprise and under fire from Copeland, he was immediately suspended by the Police Commission for allowing his prisoner to escape. Copeland and his companion, Edwin Black, were subsequently arrested a couple of days later and charged with eight armed robberies in both Winnipeg and Portage La Prairie. When Copeland was arrested he was still in possession of the gun he used in his escape from Cst. Traynor a few days earlier. Traynor's suspension was reversed a few days later when it was determined that the escape was probably unpreventable, however, the Constable was overheard by a newspaper reporter to say: "After this I will never be afraid of being shot at again".

On Wednesday, August 23, 1911, Traynor apparently lived up to this remark when he was shot in the back while attempting to arrest two notorious robbers, Charles Mecum

and his half-brother Albert (alias Frank Jones @ Charles Smith and Harry Kelly) in Winnipeg's bustling Red Light District.

Shortly after Copeland and Black were arrested, Winnipeg was subjected to an unusual number of break-ins in the Elmwood and Point Douglas areas. It was not known at the time but these were mostly the work of two American criminals, Charles and Albert Mecum, one of whom had just recently escaped from a penitentiary in Iowa. Charles Mecum, better known as Frank Jones, had been cooling his heels in the Anamosa State Penitentiary for horse stealing when his brother, Albert, decided to break him out. Albert obtained a horse and buggy from a local village along with four revolvers, a length of rope and two changes of clothing. Albert then called the Governor of the penitentiary pretending to be a lawyer from Davenport wishing to speak with Charles Mecum about the estate of his recently deceased uncle. Albert suggested that the interview could take place that afternoon in the Governor's office, knowing full well that his brother would be working in a quarry a mile from the prison and would have to be driven back for the interview. The Governor agreed and about halfway between the prison and the quarry Albert laid in wait for his brother and his guard. When Charles and the guard arrived at his hiding spot, Albert stepped out into the road and pointed two loaded revolvers at the guard. When the guard tried to pull his revolver he was shot, tied to a tree, and the brother's made good their escape.



**Wanted Poster
from State of Iowa
for Arrest of
Charles Mecum**

Soon after the Mecum brothers arrived in Winnipeg using the names Jones and Kelly and began committing a series of robberies and break and enters in the Elmwood area. Shortly after 5 O'clock on August 23, 1913, a woman ran to Cst. MacKenzie, who was walking the beat Nairn Avenue, and informed him that a house had just been broken into on Newton Avenue. The break-in was also reported to the Central Police Station and Cst. Traynor was dispatched to the scene. Cst. Traynor met with a witness who described the suspects and then spotted them on the Louise Bridge. Traynor confronted the men, later identified as the Mecum brothers, who immediately pulled their guns on him. While keeping Traynor covered they fled across the bridge into a nearby lumber yard in the Point Douglas area. Traynor gave chase and eventually caught one of the suspects, however when the second suspect drew two revolvers on him and threatened to shoot him if he did not let the other man go, Traynor relented and the men continued their escape.

Traynor, who was again unarmed, managed to secure a one-shot revolver from the lumber yard's office and with the assistance of several other unarmed officers, continued to pursue the men at a distance. Eventually, they observed the suspects run into the back of 179 Rachel Street, a brothel in the segregated area owned by the "notorious" Olga Ross. Cst's. MacKenzie and Scott pursued the suspects into the house through the back door in an attempt to flush them out. Cst. Brown remained outside

at the back while Cst Traynor went around to the front to prevent their escape. Once inside the house, the suspects drew their revolvers, one in each hand, on MacKenzie and Scott and forced them into the bathroom. The suspects then fled out the front door and fired four shots at Cst Traynor, hitting him once on the right side with a 44 calibre bullet which penetrated his lung and lodged in his liver. Before being felled by the suspects Traynor managed to fire off one shot from his borrowed gun, however, it missed its mark. Cst. MacKenzie stayed with the wounded officer while Cst's. Scott and Brown pursued the suspects, armed only with their "billies" and a handful of rocks. Cst Brown chased the suspects through several yards and back lanes, throwing rocks at them, all the while being fired upon. In all, it was believed that the Mecum brothers fired 35 shots, seven of which were directed at Cst. Brown.

The suspects then ran onto Sutherland Avenue where they boarded a streetcar and with guns drawn ordered the motorman (driver) to speed up. The conductor, seeing what was transpiring, pulled the trolley off its cables and jumped from the coach. When the suspects turned to put the trolley back on its cables, the driver threw his controller out the window and also fled from the vehicle. Cst. Brown then boarded the trolley and was fired upon several more times by the suspects who then jumped from the car and hopped onto a nearby buggy and attempted to drive off. As they were attempting to drive away a citizen grabbed the horse's bridle and attempted to hold the buggy for the police and when Frank Mecum fired at him he hit the horse instead and dropped him. Cst Brown and the other pursuing officers then boarded the buggy and after a desperate struggle with the armed men, subdued them and took them into custody. The Winnipeg Free Press quoted Harry Kelly (Albert Mecum) the following day as saying: "the kid policeman [Cst Brown] was too brave to kill" and that he had "no yellow in his make-up".

Although there was initially little hope for Traynor's recovery, he was fortunate that a doctor had been paying a local house call in the area, and was able to provide immediate medical assistance. With Traynor's condition listed as "serious" and with "little hope for (his) life", a live line-up of the suspects was conducted at his bedside by Detectives Eli Stodgill and George Smith. Traynor identified both suspects and on September 13, 1911, after several weeks of convalescing, he was released from the hospital and on October 30 he returned to work. However, because of his injuries, he was not fit to return to active street duties and was instead assigned to Acting Desk Sergeant duties at the Central Police Station.

After a Preliminary Hearing was conducted in mid-September, the Mecum brothers were committed to stand trial in October during the fall Assizes. The trial began on October 25, and on October 26, 1911, after a 30-minute deliberation by the jury, the brothers were found guilty on five charges of housebreaking and attempting to kill both Cst. Traynor and Cst. Brown. At their sentencing, the Mecums' lawyer stated that they were not bad men and that they had no intention of killing either Cst. Brown or Cst. Traynor. He indicated that they only wanted to intimidate the officers and that they could have easily killed them if they had wanted to. Judge Metcalfe did

not buy their defence and sentenced them to five years on each housebreaking charge and 10 years on each attempted murder charge for a total of 35 years.

The brothers were both sentenced to serve their time at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, however, their behaviour was disruptive and a few months later they were transferred to the Kingston Penitentiary in Ontario. On March 12, 1912, while en route to Kingston with two other convicts (George Brown and Arthur Bonnor), the two brothers nearly murdered their guards in Toronto with their fists and shackles, and were only subdued after a desperate struggle. Fortunately for the guards, the train was just pulling out of Union Station in Toronto when the four convicts were to make their escape. Three Toronto police officers (P. C. Hunt and Dets. Miller & Sockett) standing on the railway platform heard the cries for help from the frightened passengers and immediately boarded the train. According to the local papers, the police officers "spared no restraint [and] in a short time the convicts lay bleeding on the floor of the car". The prisoners were taken straight to Kingston Penitentiary where they were locked up in the Infirmary.

Less than two months after arriving at Kingston Penitentiary, on April 29, 1912, the brothers convinced a trustee (Vincent McNeil) to strike their guard over the head with an iron bar and then lock him in a cell. The trustee then called another guard for assistance and when he arrived he too was felled by the trustee and locked in a cell. At the same time, the prison surgeon was making his rounds and he too was set upon by the convicts and locked in the same cell as the two guards. All three prison officials were subsequently stripped of their clothing into which three of the inmates dressed.

Along with prisoners George Brown and Arthur Bonner, who had also tried to escape in Toronto with the Mecum's, the brothers and the trustee boldly walked to the main entrance of the prison disguised as two guards, a civilian and two prisoners. When the guard in charge of the main gate saw the party coming he thought it was an ordinary party of guards coming up with prisoners for some special work detail and he proceeded to open the doors. The guard was immediately knocked unconscious, his revolver taken, and the five men made for the country. Shortly after their escape, the five convicts were caught by prison officials and area farmers and additional sentences totalling 19 years were given to the two brothers. In 1917 both brothers were deported to Iowa where they received an additional 5 years for their escape in Anamosa.

Although the first Winnipeg Police officer to be murdered in the line of duty was not killed for another seven years, there was such a public outcry from the citizens of Winnipeg about the shooting and the vulnerability of the city to armed gunmen from the United States, that the Police Commission held a special meeting on August 25, 1911, to discuss the matter of arming the police with revolvers while on day duty. The Police Commission subsequently authorized A/Chief Newton to purchase 25 Colt automatic revolvers and 25 Colt 4" police positive revolvers for use by day shift personnel. A few days later, on August 28, 1911, the shooting also sparked the St.

Boniface City Council to authorize the purchase of firearms for its police officers as well.

As the Mecum brothers had been staying in the segregated area and had in fact shot Cst Traynor from the front of one of the brothels, the shooting also contributed to the cleaning up of the area. A few days after the shooting the Winnipeg Tribune stated "that the shooting of Cst Traynor may mean the end of Winnipeg's Red Light area and that many of the women are preparing to seek new pastures where there will not be so much notoriety ... in addition to those two shooting affrays, there have been several robberies and fights of a serious nature on the three streets inhabited by the women of the underworld. Residents in the vicinity of the area say that the district is daily becoming more infested with tough characters and that fights and drunken drawls are a daily occurrence ... today a number of residents in Point Douglas are talking of again starting an agitation for the suppression of segregation."

In a follow-up article, the Winnipeg Tribune confirmed that the Police Force had hired "Big Bill" Eddie away from the Licensing Department and appointed him and Cst Alex Boal as Morality Inspectors, ordering them to clean up the Red Light District. It was reported that since their appointment "women of low repute have become exceedingly scarce in Winnipeg ... the segregated area has been cleaned up to a considerable extent, many of the women forced to leave. If a new woman inmate arrives her character is carefully looked into before she is allowed to take up residence in one of the houses and if there is something wanting she is arrested on vagrancy charges and ordered to leave the city. The woman say the rules are very strict in the segregated area at the present time, they are not allowed to have music of any description after 8 o'clock in the evening, no more than three women, a landlady and a servant in each house and they are not allowed to sing and dance to entice men in from the street. All of these are unwritten laws of the police department and if any of them are broken the house is "pulled" and the keeper and inmates fined. The area has been cleaned up by the herding out of town of a number of undesirable women who were slowly but surely making Winnipeg into a second Chicago. The woman have now left the area and it is better off for it and those now remaining can be relied on by the police to run fairly decent houses, as such decency goes".

The same issue of the Winnipeg Tribune also dealt with the new firearms which the Winnipeg Police Commission had equipped for their men. However, the article was unflattering as it appeared that the Commission was falling behind on its resolution as the reporter stated that "the patrolmen of the city are still unarmed, or rather a few of them are served with out-of-date weapons with which they are expected to protect themselves. Automatic guns have been ordered, but they are slow to come and the citizens wonder what may happen in the meantime. If one of the constables gets into a tight corner he is liable to go under, for the revolvers now being handed out to a few of the men are totally inadequate for the purpose for which they were intended. The Police Commission ordered several hundred new and up-to-date revolvers to be put into the hands of the force however the guns purchased are of the same clumsy

and heavy make presently in use. These guns the police will not carry simply because their weight and size make them impossible to carry in one's pocket with ease. Hardly anyone will doubt that the constables should be armed with the best weapons obtainable, light enough to be carried without difficulty and small enough to slip into one's pocket so that peace officers would not again be called upon to face, unprotected, a storm of bullets such as Cst Traynor and Brown encountered".

Based on the heroics of Cst's. Traynor and Brown, the Winnipeg Police Commission submitted recommendations in late 1911 that both officers be awarded the Kings Police Medal for bravery. In 1912 both officers were selected for the award and the announcement was officially published on January 1, 1913, in the London Gazette's New Year's Honours List. The medals were subsequently sent to the Police Force and arrangements were made for their presentation at the Annual Police Inspection and Parade to be held in Victoria Park (located at Rupert & Amy) on May 28, 1913.

At the beginning of May 1913, just prior to the presentation, Cst. Traynor contracted Typhoid Fever and was confined to his bed. At 4:20pm on May 11, 1913, Cst. Traynor succumbed to the fever and was pronounced dead. It was suggested that had Cst. Traynor not been weakened by the shooting, and the bullet still lodged in his liver, he may have survived the fever. Upon hearing the news Chief McPherson and Inspector Blair attended to the Traynor house to comfort the family and to make arrangements for his funeral. Cst. Traynor was survived by his wife and three small children (ages 5, 3 & 1) and was buried on Thursday, May 15, 1913, at the Elmwood Cemetery under the auspices of the Knights of Pythias and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, both of which he had been a member.

During the Annual Police Inspection and Parade at Victoria Park on May 28, 1913, Cst. Traynor (posthumously), Cst. Brown and Ex-Chief McRae were decorated with the Kings Police Medal for bravery (Traynor and Brown) and long & meritorious service (McRae). The medals were presented individually by the Premier of Manitoba, Sir R. P. Roblin, except for Traynor's which was presented to Chief McPherson who was in turn responsible for presenting it to Cst. Traynor's widow. Although the Kings Police Medal had been issued once before in Canada for long and meritorious service, it was the first time it had ever been issued for bravery. In 1995 Cst. Traynor's youngest son presented his father's Kings Police Medal to the Winnipeg Police Museum and Historical Society for permanent display.



*King's Police
Medal*

Mrs. Traynor received a lump sum of \$550.00 from the Police Commission based on her husband's years of service (\$250.00 for the first year and \$60.00 for each additional year of service). There is a record of appeals being made to the Police Commission for further compensation due to the very strained financial situation of the family, but these were turned down as there was no provision for such situations.

According to the Grand Secretary of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), Traynor joined the Brandon Lodge on October 26, 1906, and remained a member there until he died in 1913. In those days, police officers, firemen and the like did not have their own unions or associations to help protect their families in the event of sickness or death so they joined organizations such as the IOOF to provide extra safety and insurance against injury and accident. According to the IOOF's records Traynor received 10 weeks of financial aid totalling \$29.10 and another \$21.10 for nursing charges during the time he was recovering from the shooting. The Lodge also paid another \$113.25 in sick benefits, funeral expenses and financial relief to the Traynor family after his death in 1913. The IOOF also paid Mrs. Traynor \$50.00 a year in widow's benefits and provided further financial relief to the Traynor family in later years when they needed it. In 1917 the members of the Winnipeg Police subsequently formed their own union, affiliated with Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, to handle such matters.

The shooting of Cst Traynor was an important turning point in the history of the Winnipeg Police (and the St. Boniface Police) as it resulted in the issuance of firearms to all its members and no doubt prevented further similar incidents from occurring. The shooting also restored a measure of tranquillity in the Point Douglas area, the residents of which had undoubtedly taken too much for granted with the victory of Mayor Evans at the polls. The shooting and subsequent death of Cst. Traynor may also have been one of the small stepping stones which helped pave the way for the founding of the Policeman's Union in 1917.

As for the Mecum's, they continued to live a life of crime. Charles Mecum lived until December 1961, outliving Cst. Traynor by nearly 50 years.

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