

BLOODY JACK

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By the time Jack Krafchenko was 33 years old he was a living legend. Before he turned 34 he was dead.

John Larry Krafchenko was born in 1881 in Romania to Ukrainian parents. In 1888 the Krafchenko's immigrated to Canada and settled in Plum Coulee, Manitoba, a small town south-west of Winnipeg near the American border. Although he spent little time in school, Krafchenko was apparently quite bright. He could speak several different languages including Russian, German, Italian, Bulgarian and English. From all accounts, he was fluent in these languages and his ability to converse in them was to benefit him greatly in the years to come.



John Larry (Jack) Krafchenko

From his earliest youth, Krafchenko exhibited a violently aggressive streak towards authority figures and by the time he was fifteen he had been arrested for theft and sentenced to jail. Shortly after getting out of jail, Krafchenko travelled to Australia where he trained to become a professional wrestler. After a few matches in Australia, he returned to North America and wrestled extensively throughout the United States and Canada under the name of "Australian Tommy Ryan" and "Pearl Smith". By 1902 he had given up his wrestling career and returned home to southern Manitoba where he toured as a temperance lecturer.

Krafchenko's life of crime began to unfold after his return to Manitoba. During his speaking engagements as a temperance lecturer, he passed numerous bad cheques throughout Manitoba and was finally caught in Regina and sentenced to 18 months in the Prince Albert Penitentiary. En route to Prince Albert, he jumped through the window of the moving train, while handcuffed, and attempted to escape. His guard jumped through after him and he was recaptured.

Notwithstanding his escape attempt en route to Prince Albert, Krafchenko was put in charge of painting the outside walls of the penitentiary. Not being one to pass up on an opportunity he struck his guard over the head with a paint can and escaped with three other inmates. While the other three inmates were caught, Krafchenko travelled back to Manitoba where he held up a shipment of money (\$2500.00) at gunpoint and then fled to the United States. Once in the United States he worked his way to New York, held up several banks in New York and then slipped onto a freighter bound for England. Once in Europe he continued on his merry way and robbed banks in England, Germany and Italy. He was reputed to have robbed a bank in Milan where

he locked the manager in the vault and then joined the crowd outside to watch the excitement. From Italy, he moved to Russia and married there in 1905.

In 1906 Krafchenko returned to Canada with his new wife and settled near Plum Coulee and it was not long before he found another bank to rob. The Bank of Hamilton between Plum Coulee and Winkler was his first target and although he was recognized he again escaped to the United States and remained at large until 1908 when he appeared as a witness for one Thomas Henry Hick. Thomas Hick had been arrested for the November 21, 1908, shooting death of Eccles Lennox in a sleeping car in the C.P. Railyards on Higgins Avenue. The evidence against Hick's was that the murder weapon found at the scene belonged to him. At Hick's trial, Krafchenko came forward and stated that the gun was actually his. While the court could not prove that Krafchenko was the murderer, the charges against Hicks were dismissed since he could not be tied to the gun. Krafchenko was subsequently arrested after his testimony for the 1906 robbery at the Bank of Hamilton and was sentenced to Stony Mountain Penitentiary for three years.

After his release from prison, he and his wife moved to Graham, Ontario, where he worked as a boiler-maker at the National Transcontinental Railway shops. In the summer of 1913, he was fired from his boiler-maker job because of his violent nature and he returned to Winnipeg. After he returned to Winnipeg, because of his underworld connections, he was paid a small amount of money by Winnipeg's Chief of Police, Donald MacPherson, to find out who was involved in a series of safe blowings. Krafchenko took the money and never reported back to Chief MacPherson. On November 2, 1913, Krafchenko was arrested on "suspicion" of being involved in a robbery at a resort in Kildonan. Although he was arrested with two loaded revolvers in his possession, he was released for lack of evidence. Krafchenko was later to state that he felt the only reason he was arrested was because of the trick he had pulled on Chief MacPherson.

During several trips to his hometown of Plum Coulee during November, 1913, Krafchenko decided that the Bank of Montreal in Plum Coulee was the perfect target for a robbery. After watching the bank he discovered that, during the lunch hour, the only person in the bank was the manager, Henry Medly Arnold. On November 18, 1913, Krafchenko went into the Hingston/Smith Arms Company in Winnipeg, ordered six Winchester rifles, a 9mm Browning automatic and a 7.65 Luger handgun. He told the clerk he was the owner of the Plum Coulee Hardware Store and that he wanted the rifles shipped to him along with an invoice but that he would take the two handguns with him. On Wednesday, December 3, 1913, at 12:30 Krafchenko entered the bank in Plum Coulee wearing a heavy coat and a handkerchief pulled over his face. He pulled out the 9mm Browning and robbed Mr. Arnold at gunpoint of \$4200.00. As Krafchenko fled from the bank to a waiting taxi he turned and fired one shot at Mr. Arnold, killing him instantly.

The shooting was witnessed by at least three different people, all of who indicated there was one gunman. Furthermore, one of the witnesses, a schoolgirl named Mary

Doerksen, identified the man seen leaving the scene as John Krafchenko. The other witnesses could not identify the man as Krafchenko, but gave descriptions of the suspect that matched Krafchenko.

On December 4, 1913, a Coroners Inquest was held into the death of Mr. Arnold. On December 8, the Coroners Jury returned its verdict stating "that the late H. M. Arnold came to his death by reason of a bullet wound through the ribs and the left lung and was shot from a revolver by a disguised man, unknown to us, but the evidence that has been produced points strongly to the fact that the disguised man was one John Krafchenko".

After leaving Plum Coulee Krafchenko had the taxi driver, William Dyck, take him three or four miles outside of the town and then drop him off. Krafchenko threatened to come back and kill Dyck if he told anyone who he was and advised him to make up a good story regarding where he had been. Krafchenko then worked his way to Winnipeg and rented a room at 546 William Avenue. He advised his landlady, Martha Thomas, that his name was Dr. Fairchild from Oak Point and that he was in Winnipeg to perform an amputation. He only stayed one night on William and then moved into a room at 439 College Avenue telling the landlady he was a school teacher from St. Johns College named Andrews.

While in Winnipeg Krafchenko called on a few of his old friends and tried to enlist their support in helping him escape. One such person was taxi driver Benjamin Rolph who eventually went to see ex-Winnipeg Police Chief J. C. McRae and told him where Krafchenko was staying. Based on Rolph's information Krafchenko was arrested on December 10, 1913, at 439 College Avenue by Winnipeg Police Chief MacPherson, Deputy Chief Newton, Chief of Detectives Smith, Inspector Headon and Provincial Police Chief Elliot. While no shots were fired during the arrest the Browning and Luger guns were found in Krafchenko's room, loaded, and within his reach.

A total of \$1550.00 in Bank of Montreal notes were recovered. \$810 was found hidden beneath the fence near the front door of the house and an additional \$740, that Krafchenko had given to Benjamin Rolph, was turned over to Chief MacPherson.

Although it would appear that Benjamin Rolph led the police to Krafchenko, in his book "The True Intrepid", Bill MacDonald suggests that it was a young William Stephenson (who later became a World War II spy whose career Ian Fleming based his James Bond character on), that spotted Krafchenko while he was making deliveries for the Great North West Telegraph company.



*Central Police Station ("A" Division)
Rupert Ave. & Louise St.*

Although Krafchenko was rightfully a Provincial Police prisoner because the murder happened within their jurisdiction, the Winnipeg Police Department had drafted their own arrest warrant for Krafchenko. The warrant

was for "Unlawfully giving a Revolver" to Ernest Larsen, a youth who was presently serving a three-month sentence for possession of a handgun. It seems the Winnipeg Police and the Provincial Police were rivals and each wanted to take credit for Krafchenko's arrest. When Krafchenko was arrested he was not charged with the murder of H. M. Arnold but was instead charged with the Winnipeg offence. Krafchenko was held on Winnipeg's charge until December 22, 1913, when the charge was withdrawn and he was officially "arrested" on the Provincial Police warrant of "Murder and Robbery". Chief MacPherson decided that in respect of Krafchenko's history of escapes that he should be held in the Winnipeg Police Jail rather than in the Provincial Jail. The reasoning was that he could be walked safer from the police jail to the police court which was in the same building than he could from the Provincial Jail to the Provincial Court which would require Krafchenko to go outside.

Krafchenko's preliminary trial got underway on January 5, 1914, before Justice Bonneycastle in the Winnipeg Police Courts. Percy Hagel was retained to represent Krafchenko and the Crown was represented by W. H. Hastings. The preliminary lasted until January 9, 1914, when Krafchenko was committed to stand trial in Morden, Manitoba, in March. After the Judge's decision Krafchenko was taken back to his cell where he was guarded by Constables Robert Ried and William Flower. It seems that Krafchenko told wondrous stories to his two guards, stories of money, diamonds and jewellery, and lamented that if only he could get out he would share his hidden treasures with them. Flower paid no attention to the stories, but Ried was fascinated. It seems that Krafchenko's lawyer, Hagel, was also interested in Krafchenko's stories and together the two men planned to help Krafchenko escape from the jail.

Hagel and Ried met several times at the Clarendon Hotel or at Hagel's office in the Builders Exchange Building to discuss their plans. Hagel also enlisted the support of John Buxton and John Westlake a former employee in Hagel's law firm. Buxton, a former caretaker at the Builder's Exchange Building, was to get a gun and rope and give them to Ried who would sneak them into Krafchenko. The gun and rope were then to be used by Krafchenko to escape from the second floor jail area. Westlake, a former clerk in Hagel's law firm, was to hide Krafchenko in his suite until Krafchenko could be smuggled out of the city. Hagel indicated that he would be responsible for picking Krafchenko up outside the jail once he escaped and would take him to Westlake's place.

Hagel wanted Buxton to use one of two revolvers he had in pawn for use in Krafchenko's escape, but Buxton was worried that it might be traced back to him so he had a youth, John Walley, steal one from Ashdown's Warehouse. Walley stole a 32 Calibre Colt Automatic handgun bearing serial #137743 and gave it to Buxton who turned it and a clothesline over to Ried in Hagel's office. Ried smuggled both of these items into Krafchenko's cell on the night of January 8. Krafchenko was supposed to have escaped that night, but Hagel got drunk at a bar and forgot to come by the police station to pick him up.

In the early morning hours of January 10, 1914, Krafchenko pulled the Colt out from underneath his mattress, pointed it at Ried and Flower and stated "I'm going to leave here boys and I'll kill anyone who tries to stop me. Go into the closet and don't come out or try to call for help for 10 minutes". He then ordered Ried to throw his keys to the floor and then used the keys to lock both constables into a nearby closet. The key chain also contained a key that allowed Krafchenko access to a photography room. The photography room had an unbarred window that faced the street. He threw the clothesline out the window and started to climb down, however, the rope was so thin that it broke and he fell 30 feet to the pavement and sprained both knees, an ankle and his back. It is unknown how he made it to Westlake's place in the Burris Building, 4-686 Toronto Street (located on the corner of Ellice and Toronto), but one could assume that if Hagel was to pick him up on the 8th he probably picked him up that night as well.

On Monday, January 12, 1914, a Royal Commission was called to investigate how Krafchenko was able to escape from the Winnipeg Police Station with a gun and a rope. Everyone in connection with the Krafchenko case was called to testify including Constable Ried who was kept on the stand for a gruelling 10 hours. At 10:45 on Saturday, January 17, Ried broke down on the stand and admitted to the Commission the role he played in helping Krafchenko escape. After giving his testimony both Ried and Hagel were arrested. Ried was immediately suspended from the police department and on January 22, he pled guilty and was sentenced to 7 years at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. While only in his 30's, Ried was later to die in Stony Mountain while serving his sentence.

On January 18, after all the necessary information was obtained from Ried members of the Winnipeg Police Department surrounded the Burris Building. While the Colt Automatic was found loaded and within Krafchenko's reach, both he and Westlake were arrested without a fight.

Both Westlake and Hagel were held in custody until they appeared in court together on March 10, 1914, before a jury and Judge J. Curran. Westlake claimed he didn't know who Krafchenko was and Hagel claimed he was being framed by the Winnipeg Police Department for the beating he had given a street constable on November 1, 1911. (Hagel was only given a \$20.00 fine for "Assault and Beat" in relation to the offence). On March 20, 1914, after every attempt was made by the defence to have the charges dismissed by Judge Curran, the Jury found Hagel and Westlake guilty of assisting Krafchenko escape. Westlake was sentenced to 2 years and Hagel to 3 years in Stony Mountain. Although Hagel was disbarred from practicing law in Manitoba after his conviction, in 1922 he was welcomed back to the Manitoba Bar where he continued to practice law until he died in 1944. As for Buxton, he testified for the Crown against both Hagel and Westlake and, according to the Winnipeg Free Press, and after the trial was over he was "given his life anew in another country, having been spirited out of Manitoba, with the aid of the Attorney General's Department".

Krafchenko was tried in Morden, Manitoba, before a jury and Justice J. C. Mathers. The trial started on Wednesday, March 18, 1914, and was completed on April 9, 1914, with the Jury finding him guilty of murder. Krafchenko was sentenced to hang and on Thursday, July 9, 1914, at 7:00 a.m., one of the west's most infamous criminals fell to his death at the Vaughan Street Jail. His body was later buried at the Brookside Cemetery.

Interestingly, at trial, Krafchenko's lawyer asked the court if his client would be permitted to make an unsworn statement from the dock instead of giving evidence on his own behalf. After consulting with the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal, Justice Mathers refused and Krafchenko elected not to give any evidence at trial. While it is unknown what Krafchenko might have said in court, upon his death Reverend W.B. Heeney (who had been with Krafchenko up to his execution) released a statement made to him by Krafchenko to him prior to his death. An edited version of the statement, which appeared in the July 10, 1914, edition of the Winnipeg Free Press, was as follows:

"I intended to rob the bank, but not until Friday, for the simple reason that on that day it was likely to receive a consignment of cash. [However] Buxton sent out a man to do the job. I was angry and went into town, and met the man (who was an old pal of mine), told him that if it was going to be done I would do it myself ... I entered the bank and the other man remained outside. I told Arnold that the robbery was soon to be committed ... Meanwhile, the other man, looking through the window, saw what was going on and came in ... I told him to go to the safe but he could not get it open. Arnold said it was locked. I told the other man to stand guard over Arnold. I opened the safe, then the other man took all the bills and started toward the front door ... Arnold followed the other man through the front door ... I had a gas gun, and I fired it at Arnold, but at the same moment Arnold fell, for at the same moment a bullet fired by someone else struck him. The other man kept running."

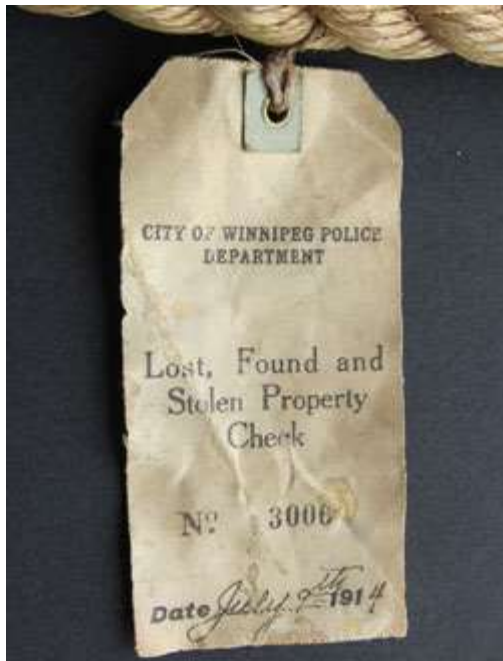
Basically, Krafchenko admitted to the robbery but blamed the murder on an unnamed accomplice. Although Krafchenko admitted to "shooting" at Arnold, he claimed he only had a "gas" or air gun and that the real shooter was the "other man". Unfortunately, none of the witnesses to the shooting identified a second person. William Dyck, the cab driver who drove Krafchenko out of Plum Coulee, also stated that he was alone. Furthermore, when he was arrested in Winnipeg, Krafchenko was in possession of a substantial amount of the stolen money.

The Colt Automatic that was used in Krafchenko's escape was entered into evidence at Hagel's trial. After the trial was over the gun was retained by veteran Crown Prosecutor, John Allen. Upon Allen's death, the gun was turned over to the Law Society of Manitoba and subsequently turned over to the Archives of Western

Canadian Legal History located in the basement of the Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba. In 1991 the writer made arrangements with Cameron Harvey, Associate Dean, Faculty of Law, for the gun to be donated to the Winnipeg Police Museum. The gun is now in storage until it can be displayed at the Museum on a permanent basis.

Enquiries with the Colt Manufacturing Company further confirmed that a "Colt 1903 Hammerless Pocket Automatic Pistol", bearing serial #137743 was shipped to the J.H. Ashdown Warehouse in Winnipeg MB, on October 7, 1912. A historical information sheet regarding the manufacture and shipping history of the gun from Colt's is also on file at the Winnipeg Police Museum.

Another artifact that has come into the possession of the Winnipeg Police Museum is a piece of the original rope that Hangman Ellis used in the execution of Krafchenko.



The rope was turned over by the family of former Winnipeg Police detective James Hoskins, still bearing the original Winnipeg Police Property Tag (#3006), dated July 9, 1914. On the reverse side of the Tag reads the following:

City Police Detective Dept, Winnipeg Man, July 9-1914

Hangman was Mr. Ellice

Attached is a piece of the rope which hung one John Krafchenko, gunman + bad man. At the hour of 6:59 am, July 9-1914 in the Provincial Gaol yard in Winnipeg Man. Kraf died in 7 minutes. James Hoskins. Police detective.

According to the Winnipeg Free Press, there were 49 people present for the execution of John Krafchenko. The 12 members of the Jury, Drs.

Carscallen and Rogers, Deputy Chief Newton of the Winnipeg Police along with Inspector Jack Street, Inspector Knox, Morality Officer George Headon, Constable John Lovatt and two other constables in plainclothes. There were five representatives of the local press. T.H. Ferguson, the Crown Prosecutor was also among the spectators. James Hoskins was likely one of the two constables in plainclothes.

It was not uncommon for the hangman to sell pieces of the rope after the execution or give pieces of it away to the victim's family. In fact, the Winnipeg Police Museum also has a piece of the hangman's rope that was used in the execution of George Jayhan, who was hung for the murder of Sergeant John Verne of the St. Boniface Police on July 24, 1934.

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