

# MURDERS IN ST. BONIFACE:

Constables Alex McCurdy and James Uttley, Manitoba Provincial Police

*Researched and written by Staff Sergeant Jack Templeman (retired)*

The newly-organized Manitoba Provincial Police Force came **into** being on February 1st, 1920 under Commissioner J.G. RATTRAY, and it was not long before it suffered a tragedy now forgotten by most people along with the rest of their history.

At 1:00 a.m. on Thursday, November 11th, 1920, Morality officers of the M.P.P. went to the Stockyards Hotel which was located at Marion and Archibald Street in St. Boniface (where the Chalet Hotel now stands) to check for breaches of the Manitoba Temperance Act.

This hotel had been raided five times previously by both the M.P.P. and the St. Boniface Police. Since this hotel was outside the City of Winnipeg proper, it was not checked regularly by the morality officers of the Winnipeg Police Force, so it operated more openly.

On this particular night, the raiding officers were led by Alex McCURDY, the senior Morality Officer. He was accompanied by Constables James UTTLEY, Jack DINEEN, Fred CAWSEY and A.W. MILLER. None of the officers were armed as offences under the Temperance Act called for fines and it was not usual to meet resistance on raids.

When the officers went into the hotel, McCURDY and UTTLEY went up to check rooms while the other three went into the restaurant portion on the main floor to check the patrons.

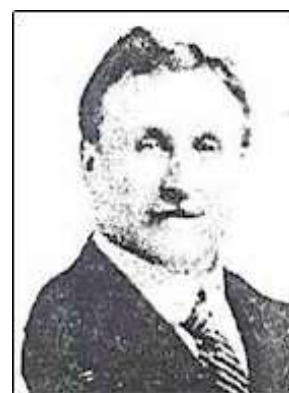
Within minutes the sound of several shots was heard from upstairs and two of the officers ran up to check. When these officers were met with more gunfire, the last officer who had also tried to go upstairs turned and left the hotel to find a telephone and summon aid from the St. Boniface Police.

According to the statement of Constable UTTLEY, read at the first inquest, he and McCURDY found a man and woman in room 8 in an undressed state so they withdrew to give them a chance to dress. This act of chivalry or whatever it might be called probably cost them both their lives.

When the officers returned to the room the man had a gun out and fired at McCURDY. The first bullet struck him in the arm and as he went down he was shot again in the head with that bullet entering above the right ear and coming out on the opposite side. Although the wound was fatal, McCURDY did not die until 8:10 am. that morning at St. Boniface Hospital.



*Provincial Police  
Badge*



*Alexander McCurdy*

Constable UTTLEY wrestled with the killer but was shot in the chest with the bullet passing through his left lung and shattering his spine causing paralysis immediately.

The killer ran out of the room and into the hallway only to be met by Constables DINEEN and CAWSEY coming up the stairs to investigate the shooting. The killer fired at CAWSEY but the gun only clicked and then he shot at DINEEN as CAWSEY fled into a bathroom. DINEEN was hit and went down in the hallway and the killer fired twice more into his back as he went by towards the stairs. Constable MILLER managed to flee back from the stairway without injury and went for help.

The killer meanwhile was joined by an associate and the two of them forced the hotel keeper at gunpoint to drive them away from the scene. They headed towards Winnipeg by Marion Street and then Tache Avenue to the Provencher Bridge where the car was stopped and they jumped out and they were last seen running into the C.N.R. yards. The hotel keeper drove on to the Winnipeg Police station on Rupert Avenue to report the shooting. When his car was searched eight live and three empty .38 cal. shells were found in the back seat.

The injured officers were taken to St. Boniface Hospital where Alex McCURDY died that morning. James INILEY fought for his life but was given little hope from the beginning. Newspaper reports described him as "lying at death's door" and "not expected to live". Five days after the shooting on November 16th, James UTTLEY also paid the supreme price. The third officer, Jack DINEEN, was hospitalized for some time with multiple wounds but recovered and eventually went back on duty.

The investigation was taken over by the M.P.P. with assistance from St. Boniface and Winnipeg Police Departments. The woman in the room was identified as a hotel employee who claimed only to know the man by the name he was registered under, "James Brown". She also denied being undressed when the officers first entered.

The mysterious "James Brown" was soon identified as, James BULLER, alias Bullard, Kidd or Grey, a well-known safe-blower and confidence man. He had owned racehorses and travelled throughout Canada and the U.S.A. He was considered dangerous and always carried two guns. Some 10,000 posters were quickly printed offering a reward of \$2,500.00 and these were distributed to all police agencies. BULLER had a history of violence and reportedly had served 5 years following a gun battle in Regina sometime before.

Although it was never proven, it was widely believed that BULLER had been involved in a bank robbery at Winkler on October 13th that year. This might explain his violent reaction to the police check as he would not be aware they were only there for a morality inspection.

That Winkler bank robbery was itself a bit unusual and illustrates the type of robbers that were roaming the southern towns at that time. Five men entered the Union Bank early that morning after waking up the teller and taking him there to open the safe. Before this, they cut the telephone and telegraph wires to the town and also the rope on the town fire bell. The teller was only able to open the vault door and the robbers spent the next hour and a half working on the

safe with three charges of dynamite. When they finally finished they made off with about \$19,000.00.

There was a town policeman in Winkler but although he heard the explosions he later admitted he was afraid to go out and besides, his wife wanted him to stay with her for protection which he chose to do. The only person who tried to do something was the local blacksmith who tried to get to the fire bell to sound a warning unaware that the rope was cut. He was shot in the legs by one of the robbers on guard with a shotgun. It was first thought the robbers had fled over the border but BULLER was quite capable of taking part in this crime and cocky enough to come into the city while the hunt was on.

Once BULLER was identified as the killer, the hunt spread across Canada and into the United States and at times into Mexico. The search went on for almost a year before coming to an abrupt halt in Chicago. In this case, the shooting was one-sided again but this time BULLER was on the receiving end.

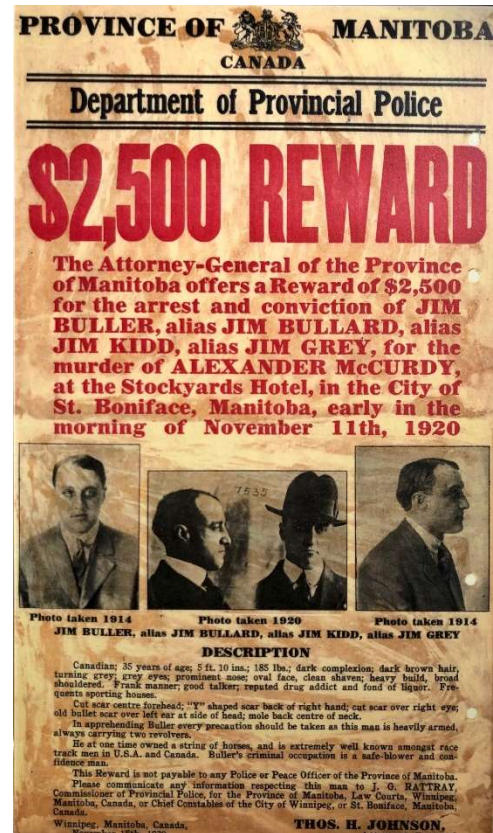
According to the verdict of the Chicago Coroner's Jury, BULLER and another criminal named Patrick Joyce came to their deaths about 4:00 p.m. on October 15th, 1921 while they were in the rear seat of a Ford automobile parked near East 24th Street on Prairie Avenue.

The report shows BULLER "died from shock and hemorrhage due to a bullet wound in the head, said wound inflicted from a bullet discharged from a revolver held in the hands of Detective Sergeant Michael J. Grady of the Chicago Police Force".

It also showed that JOYCE "died from shock and hemorrhage due to bullet wounds in the chest, said wounds inflicted by bullets from revolvers in the hands of Michael Grady, a Detective Sergeant, and Ernest Daliage, a police officer of the City of Chicago".

The Coroner's Jury also cleared the policemen with the statement, "from the evidence presented, we the jury, believe the deceased BULLER and JOYCE were in hiding for the purpose of doing an unlawful act and the police officers fired said shots in self-defence and believing their lives were in jeopardy, and while in the performance of their duty".

The reward for BULLER offered by the Province of Manitoba was not payable to any Police or Peace Officer of the Province of Manitoba but apparently was open to all other officers. The Chicago officers applied for the reward and were granted the sum of \$1,000.00 to be shared between them. There is no explanation why they did not receive the full amount of the reward.



The Order in Council authorizing the payment of the reward expressed the general feelings of the day towards murders when it said in part, "whereas it would appear that the work of the said Grady and Daliage saved the Province of Manitoba expensive legal proceedings and that same was otherwise beneficial to the Province of Manitoba, and whereas it would seem proper that the Province of Manitoba should make a payment".

The Province also showed concern for the families of the slain officers at this time when pensions were not known. An Order-in-Council directed that each widow receive the equivalent of one year's salary plus a lump sum payment of three thousand dollars. Alex McCURDY had been receiving payments of \$140.00 a month while James UTTLEY was receiving \$110.00 a month. McCURDY was survived by his widow and UTLEY left a widow and infant son. The Province also paid the cost of probate for the Last Will of James UTTLEY which was written on November 11<sup>th</sup>, the day of the shooting, as his widow "is not left in affluent circumstances".

Over the years, Manitoba has seen a number of police officers murdered while on duty, four R.C.M.P., five Winnipeg Police, two St. Boniface Police, at least one municipal policeman and an early Provincial Policeman, but no other Force suffered such a multiple tragedy as occurred for the Manitoba Provincial Police on November 11th, 1920.