

THE RAPE OF FLORENCE STUART

Researched and written by Patrol Sergeant Mark Hodgson

On January 27th, 1919, Canada was still at war with Germany, and returning soldiers were finding that times were not so rosy. In fact, there had been several days of rioting in Winnipeg and the newspapers had reported that police indicated that they were unable to ensure public safety with their present strength. Also the country's prime minister, Sir Wilfred Laurier was on death's doorstep. With all the turmoil of the time it was no wonder that the rape of one Florence Stuart didn't even rate a mention in the local newspaper.

Florence Stuart was a sixteen-year-old telephone operator for the Manitoba Government Telephone Company. Stuart was born on March 2nd, 1902. She had lived in Winnipeg since she was two years old. She lived at 2025 Gallagher Ave. with her family (the house still exists, pink house three or four from the east end of the block). Florence attended Cecil Rhoades school and obtained a grade 6 education.

Florence had only worked at the telephone company for six months on January 27th, 1919 and worked a swing shift at the time. She worked from 09:00 to 13:00 and then returned to work from 19:00 till 23:00. At the end of her shift that night Florence was supposed to be escorted home by her older brother, who was a recently returned war veteran.

Unfortunately, Florence's brother was late. It appears Florence became impatient and left the Manitoba Government Telephone exchange on Sherbrook near Portage Ave. at 23:10. At the time she was with a co-worker, a Miss Leeson. The two got on the Sherbrook Streetcar and headed north. In the area of Notre Dame Ave. Leeson got off. The streetcar was quite full and Florence Stuart felt quite secure on the car.

At Logan Ave., Florence Stuart got off the Sherbrook streetcar and waited on the northeast corner of the intersection for the Logan Ave West Streetcar. Almost immediately the Logan West car arrived and she boarded the car. This car wasn't that full, but enough that Florence still felt secure. Unfortunately, this was a false sense of security.

Unknown to Miss Stuart, on the streetcar with her was Marvin Suggitt. Suggitt, who can only be described as a sexual predator. Suggitt was a metal worker in the city. He lived at 198 East St. in the area of the city now known as Weston. Suggitt had just come from the Elmwood curling rink and had been drinking there all night with a friend. Suggitt was an average-sized man for the day, medium build, about 5'8' tall and he wore glasses. He was married and lived with his wife at 198 East St. It is unclear whether Suggitt had any children.

For reason unknown even to this date, it appears Suggitt took an instant interest in Florence Stuart as she got on the Logan Streetcar. Florence sat at the very front of the streetcar across from the driver. Suggitt was about halfway back in the car. Suggitt was seated beside Annie Corderley of 1329 Logan Ave. Corderley was a bookkeeper for the Lake of the Woods Flour mills in the city. Corderley had just come from a dance at the Traveller's hall on Bannatyne Ave. and got on the Logan Streetcar at Main St. At the time she sat down, she was joined in the seat by Suggitt, who, Corderley would later claim smelled of liquor.

As the streetcar pulled away from Sherbrook, Suggitt began looking suspiciously at Miss Stuart and this caught the eye of James McKenzie, age 16, of 1284 Alexander Ave. At 23:25 the car reached the entrance to Logan Park (Logan Park is now called Stanley H. Knowles Park and is located between Electra & Winks St. just north of Logan Ave.) This was Florence Stuart's stop.

At 23:25 Florence Stuart got off the streetcar at the front, which put her approx. 30 feet from the front gates to the park. Even though Florence's home was no more than 250 yards from the park gates; it appears Florence has some preconceived fears of making the trip alone. So as she had done every night since she started working, she got off the streetcar and immediately began jogging towards her home through the park. The writer speculates this was a safeguard to give Florence a running start if she was ever attacked.

As Florence left the train, Suggitt got up and as the streetcar started to pull away he exited from the rear of the car. Florence heard the crunching of the snow behind her and as she looked back, her worst fears appeared before her eyes. Miss Stuart immediately began running towards her home only yards away. Unfortunately, the style of woman's wear of the day was not designed for sprinting and Suggitt who was chasing Florence Stuart caught her about halfway through the park on a trampled snow path.

As Suggitt caught Miss Stuart, he threw her to the ground beside a wire fence. Florence immediately began to fight Suggitt and began screaming for help. Suggitt attempted to muffle her screams with his hand. At that time a car drove by on Gallagher, Florence thought for sure the occupants of the vehicle had heard her screams as the vehicle came to a stop, but to her dismay, the vehicle continued on. By this time Florence has still not given up the fight. She had left considerable scratches on Suggitt's arms and when he tried to shove a rag in her mouth to stifle her cries, she bit down hard on his hand.

But unfortunately, Florence ran out of energy, but in a last attempt to dissuade Suggitt she attempted to hit him in the face. It appears this knocked off Suggitt's eyeglasses. This last act of desperation failed to stop Suggitt, but would later prove to be the act that would lead to Suggitt's capture. Suggitt undaunted by Florence's resistance lifted poor Florence's dress and tore off her underclothing & in the

vernacular of the day "made the connection". Suggitt's only words to poor Florence were "I Won't Hurt You".

After the dirty deed was done, Suggitt fled and left Florence in the snow only a few short yards from her home. Florence quickly regained her composure and began screaming for her father.

At the Stuart household, Florence's father Charles Stuart was waiting up for his daughter. He heard the screams. Charles Stuart ran to the front door and looked out. There he saw Florence, her clothing ripped and her undergarments hanging down. As Florence approached the house, Charles Stuart called his wife Kate. Charles Stuart then ran to his daughter. She briefly told her father what happened. Charles left Florence with her mother and began searching the area for the culprit.

After an unsuccessful search, Charles Stuart returned to 2025 Gallagher Ave. There he instructed his wife to attend to the neighbour's home and phone the police. Shortly after midnight, Winnipeg Police Constable George G. Jenkins arrived at 2025 Gallagher. At that time Florence Stuart was still quite upset and Cst. Jenkins was unable to get much more than that the simple fact that poor Florence was raped by a man with glasses. Jenkins seized Florence's clothing and returned to police headquarters on Rupert Street.

The clothing was later turned over to the Inspector of Detectives George Smith, (who would later become Chief of Police). On January 28th, the case was turned over to Det. Sgt. R Batho and Det. Sidney E. Young. At 06:30, the two detectives attended to 2025 Gallagher Ave. and re-interviewed Florence Stuart. After interviewing Florence, the detectives and Florence's father attended Logan Park to view the scene and see if they might find some evidence that would lead to the culprit.

Charles Stuart took Det. Sgt. Batho and Det. Young to the location of the assault. Batho and Young began searching the area. During the early morning search, the detectives found a victory button, two ladies' hairpins, a shoelace and what would later turn out to be the key piece of evidence in the case. In the snow near the site of the attack, Det. Young found a set of eyeglass frames, with one lens missing.

At that point, the two detectives returned to police headquarters and turned over the eyeglass frames with the one lens to Inspector of Detectives George Smith. At that point for some unexplained reason, the case was turned over to Det. Elmer R. Hudson. On January 28th, Inspector Smith gave the glasses found in the park to Hudson. Hudson didn't exactly start the investigation out with a bang, due to the fact when he was given the glasses he immediately dropped them and broke the one remaining lens.

Undaunted by his minor setback, Hudson took the glasses to every optician he could locate in the City of Winnipeg. At these businesses, the prescription was tested and checked against the business' records for anyone with that prescription. As several

hundred people could have a certain prescription, the frame style and size of the lens could also help to narrow the owner of the glasses.

On the morning of the 28th of January, Det. Hudson attended FW. Dudley Jewellers at 542 Main St. There, Dudley confirmed that he had filled a prescription for the eyeglasses of that prescription and he also told Hudson that the bow and the chain were from a mount that he sold and he believed that he was the only optician in Winnipeg that sold that mount. The prescription "1 pair 40 x 33 Rless Toric Lens R75 by 165L 7.5 by 15 belonged to Marvin Suggitt of 198 East Street Weston".

With a confirmed suspect, Hudson returned to police headquarters and got the police photographer and Identification record keeper, John Gray. The two then attended Logan park, where several photographs were taken of the scene. While at the park, by a stroke of luck John Gray found the missing lens for the glasses that were originally found in the park.

After photographing the park, Gray and Det. Hudson attended 198 East SL in Weston. Hudson and Gray arrived at 19:00 on January 28th. They were met at the door by Suggitt's wife Janet. When asked if Suggitt was home, he appeared at the door.

Before identifying himself, Hudson asked Suggitt if he had been drinking the night before. Suggitt stated that he hadn't been drinking the night before. Knowing Suggitt had been prescribed glasses by Dudley, Hudson asked "Do you wear eyeglasses Suggitt?". Suggitt replied he didn't wear glasses.

Hudson then replied, "Have you ever worn eyeglasses?". Suggitt replied, he never wore glasses. Hudson asked Suggitt where he had been the night before. Suggitt replied he had been curling at the Elmwood Curling Rink. Hudson then asked what time he arrived home. Suggitt replied: "about a quarter to twelve". At that time Suggitt was arrested by Hudson and was told he was going to be taken to the central police station. At the central police station on Rupert, the accused was taken to the detective office and searched by Hudson and Gray. Gray found three postcards, which had lewd pictures on them, and an FW Dudley optician business card on the accused. Gray then asked Suggitt where were you drinking last night. Suggitt replied that there was no sense lying and indicated that he had been drinking on Higgins Ave., but didn't know the address. Suggitt then told Gray that at 19:30 on January 27th, he left the house on Higgins and went to the Elmwood Curling Club and curled six ends. Suggitt then indicated that he left the rink at 23:00 hours and he didn't remember anything else clearly but figured he got on a streetcar to Main Street and Logan Ave. From there he got a streetcar westbound on Logan Ave. and got off near his house. When asked if he met any girls on the way, he stated he had not.

The accused was then detained in custody. Hudson and Gray returned to Suggitt's home. There they asked Suggitt's wife if she could retrieve her husband's glass case. Mrs. Suggitt complied and returned and gave police a glass case with FW Dudley marking on the box. This was seized by Det. Hudson.

The next day January 29th, 1919, at about 09:00 Marvin Suggitt was brought to the Identification office. Their photographer John Gray, took Suggitt's police gallery photograph. Gray also photographed Suggitt's injured left forearm, and Suggitt's left thumb as it had a bite mark on it. Gray then got Suggitt to take his clothing off. Gray examined Suggitt's underwear and found blood in the crotch area. When questioned about the blood on his undershorts, Suggitt replied "my wife has her monthlies, I may have got that from her". The underwear was seized and turned over to DeL Hudson.

Later on that same week Hudson tracked down two key witnesses. They were Annie Corderley, who had sat beside Suggitt on the Logan West Streetcar and James McKenzie, who was on the same streetcar and observed Suggitt looking strangely at the victim. McKenzie also saw him jump from the streetcar after Florence had got off. The witnesses were brought to the Central Police Station and picked Suggitt out of a line-up.

On January 30th, 1919, Hudson attended the Consolidated Optical company in the Canada Building. There he met with the manager, Charles J. Atkinson of 81 Lenore Street. With both lens and the frames in hand, Hudson asked Atkinson to test the glasses and see if he had ever filled a prescription for these glasses and see if he could identify if they came from his company. The glasses were tested and Atkinson checked the records for that prescription and the frame type. He found that the prescription was very uncommon and that only one optician in the city dealt in that frame. Atkinson told Hudson that on November 26th, 1918, he filled that prescription for FW Dudley and produced a charge slip for the order.

Then on February 7th, 1919, in the Police Court at the Rupert Street Police Station the preliminary enquiry was held. The presiding Magistrate was Mr. R.M. Noble. Acting on behalf of the accused was Mr. E.J. McMurray and for the Crown, Mr. Graham. Numerous witnesses were called including Florence Stuart's father, the doctors that examined her and the poor girl herself. Also appearing for the crown was Dr. Francis McKenty, who prescribed the glasses the accused was wearing the night of the assault. But the most convincing evidence came from the police officers, Dudley the optician and Atkinson from Consolidated Optical.

McMurray delivered a spirited defence trying to discredit Hudson and Gray's testimony by continued attempts to provoke the members of the police with slights to their character and their answers. On several occasions, McMurray would interrupt the officer's answers, and in the last question McMurray posed to Hudson he attempted to portray Hudson as a man with little compassion. McMurray asked Hudson if he had questioned Suggitt's wife about his whereabouts on the night in question. When Hudson responded: "No, the only thing she tried to get me to tell her was why he was arrested, as she was in a nervous condition and there had not been any charge laid against him yet and I did not feel like telling her". McMurray quipped back "so you have a little heart". Hudson responded: "I certainly have".

When it came to Dudley and Atkinson, their testimony was flawless. Due to the uniqueness of the frames, the very uncommon prescription, and the fact it was a very recent order, both were able to swear they had worked on the glasses and they were indeed the ones made for Suggitt. With the above evidence before the Magistrate, the case was committed for trial.

On February 27th, 1919, Suggitt was tried in the Court of King's Bench before Chief Justice Mathers. With the evidence of the police and the optician, there was no doubt of Suggitt's guilt and the jury found him guilty. Mather sentenced Suggitt to 15 years in the federal prison system. It is unknown what later came of Suggitt.

As for Hudson and Gray, they were later both recognized for their excellent police work by the police commission. Dudley, the optician, was also recognized for his help to the police department and was reimbursed for his time and given \$50.00 from the police secret service fund.

One sombre twist of fate to this story; though Hudson and Gray were fine examples of dedicated law enforcement officers, they were later fired prior to the 1919 riots and were never rehired due to their involvement in the police union.