

# HISTORY OF THE WINNIPEG PARK PATROL

120 YEARS OF POLICING WINNIPEG'S PARKS 1897-2017

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Winnipeg has more parks per capita than any other city in North America. With over 900 residential parks and 12 major Regional parks, Winnipeg has more than 10,260 acres of parkland.

Although Winnipeg has an abundance of green space, it still enjoys some of the safest parks throughout Canada, which can be attributable to the efforts of Winnipeg's Park Patrol, formerly known as the Park Police.

Although they were never listed in the national police directory, with 14 sworn members at its height, Winnipeg's Park Police were at one time one of the larger quasi-municipal police services in Manitoba. Their members are fully trained, sworn peace officers, who meet the same hiring and training standards as members of the Winnipeg Police Service. In fact, all full-time members of the Park Police were graduates of the Winnipeg Police Academy.



*Park Police - 1987, John Burchill*

With offices formerly located in Assiniboine Park, Kildonan Park and Kings Park, the Winnipeg Park Police operated primarily as one-officer units and provided 7-days a week coverage to most of the major regional parks and operated on a 24-hour a day schedule out of Assiniboine Park. In addition to three marked cruiser cars and an unmarked traffic unit, the Winnipeg Park Police also operated a bike patrol during large special events.

Today they are known as the Park Patrol however they can trace their history back 115 years to 1897 when the Public Parks Board hired their first Special Constable.

On January 9, 1893, the City of Winnipeg adopted the *Manitoba Public Parks Act*, which gave them the authority to form a Parks Board responsible for the management, regulation and control of all parks, avenues and boulevards within their jurisdiction, and to expropriate land within six miles of the City for the development of public parks.

Immediately after its formation, the Parks Board purchased three large sections of land for \$51,500 to develop Assiniboine Park (later re-named Ft. Rouge Park in 1905), St. John's Park and Central Park. The Parks Board also assumed control of boulevard maintenance and tree planting for the City's main streets, beginning with Broadway, James, Assiniboine, Kennedy, Hargrave and Donald.



As the Parks Board spent a considerable amount of money to develop these properties, plant trees and shrubs, flower gardens and build roads, they were empowered by the *Public Parks Act* to protect their investment and all members of the Board, its officers and watchmen, were *ex-officio* constables. However, it appears that no "police" officers were specifically appointed by the Parks Board to maintain order in the Parks until August 13, 1897, when reference is first made to the appointment of special constables for the City's "social parks".

Unfortunately, the Minute Books do not identify who these special constables were and the pay lists for the Board have long since been destroyed. However, on

April 24, 1900, the Minute Books identify Mr. Morris as one of the Board's special constables, when he was assigned by the Board to identify who was responsible for damaging the trees planted along the City's boulevards.

Due to the huge investment made by the Board in purchasing, planting and maintaining its trees, many of which still graciously line our City's streets and parks, the Public Parks Act made it an offence to willfully injure, hurt, deface or destroy any tree, shrub or plant on any property under the control of the Board. If convicted, the penalty was a hefty \$50.00 fine or 30 days in jail, plus restitution. Section 17 of the *Winnipeg Park By-law No. 85/2009* still makes it an offence today to damage or injure a tree in a City park. The fine is \$150.00.

On May 4, 1904, the Parks Board bought John Smith's farm along the banks of the Assiniboine River in the Municipality of Tuxedo for \$39,903 and designated the land as a new park. The original Assiniboine Park was re-named Ft. Rouge Park the following year, and plans were made to develop John Smith's old property into a new premier city park, aptly titled Assiniboine Park.

The next reference to a specific Constable was made on April 10, 1907, when the Parks Board appointed D. Sutherland as a Constable at a salary of \$75.00/month. It is unknown if Mr. Morris remained on as a Constable, but it was apparent that D. Sutherland was responsible for policing both the City's Parks and boulevards as half his salary was paid for by the Parks Committee and the other half by the Boulevard Committee.

Before 1909 there is no indication that the Parks Constable wore a uniform, however, on May 12, 1909, the Board adopted a motion to provide the Constables with a uniform. As the motion was for Constables (plural), it is apparent that there was more than one employed (or considered for employment) by the Board.

On June 9, 1909, the Parks Board appointed D.G. White as the Parks Policeman for the expansive new Assiniboine Park. His salary was \$50.00/month and included a house on the property for him to live in.

On May 11, 1910, the Parks Board authorized the purchase of a bicycle for Constable White to patrol the park, and the following year they increased his salary to \$55.00/month. Also at this time, the Parks Board acquired the land that would become Kildonan Park from the Municipality of West Kildonan for the sum of \$163,819.17.

On May 3, 1911, the Board appointed A.J. Mclvor as a Special Parks Constable for a limited term of 6 months at a salary of \$75.00/month and authorized the purchase of a bicycle for him to use as well. Mclvor's salary was higher than that of White's as he did not get a house to live in.



*Park Police - 2009*

On July 13, 1910, the Parks Board Minutes indicate that Sutherland was suspended and then reinstated for being absent without leave. The Board noted that Sutherland would be dismissed if it happened again. The last reference to Sutherland was on May 24, 1911, when 19-year old Herber Jones and his companion Maggie McLeod drowned when their canoe swamped on the Red River across from Kildonan Park. Park Constable Sutherland called the Winnipeg Police, who called the Provincial Police as the accident happened within their jurisdiction. As Sutherland's name is never mentioned again in the newspapers or Minute Books, it appears that A.J. Mclvor would replace him as the Parks and Boulevard Constable once his probationary period was over.

By 1915 Constable White's salary as the Assiniboine Park Constable had risen to \$70.00/month (plus a house) and Constable Mclvor, who was now a full-time employee, received \$80.00/month as a "Park Patrolman". There were now 21 urban parks controlled by the Parks Board, including the newly opened Kildonan Park in the municipality of West Kildonan. To patrol these new parks and all the boulevards under the authority of the Parks Board, Mclvor's bicycle was replaced with a motorcycle.



On May 3, 1916, the Parks Board authorized the appointment of J. MacKay as a new Boulevard Constable at a salary of \$75.00/month and it appears that A.J. Mclvor became solely responsible for patrolling the Board's urban parks, other than Assiniboine Park, which was still policed by Constable White.

By 1920 Constable White's salary had increased to \$110.00/month, while Mclvor and MacKay now received \$130.00/month for patrolling the urban parks and boulevards respectively. They worked six days a week and received two weeks of paid holidays a year. By comparison, Senior Constables with the Winnipeg Police Force were receiving only slightly more in pay at approximately \$140.00/month.





Park Police - 2009

On Wednesday, June 15, 1927, the Parks Police suffered its first and only death in the line of duty when Constable White died as a result of injuries he had received several days earlier. According to local newspaper reports, Constable White had been on patrol in Assiniboine Park during the evening of June 12, 1927, when a vehicle driven by W.H. Bell struck him.

On July 7, 1927, the Board appointed Henry Cake to succeed Mr. White as the Assiniboine Park Constable. He received a salary of \$125.00/month. However, there is no mention that he took over the house used by Mr. White.

In fact, the Board's expense accounts for 1928 show that his salary did not include the use of a house in the park.

In 1929 the Parks Board acquired a small parcel of land from the Municipality of St. James across the river from Assiniboine Park and in 1931 completed a footbridge across the river joining the two parks together. Also in 1929, the Parks Board purchased a large section of land along the Red River from the Municipality of St. Vital for development into St. Vital Park. The following year they purchased the land for Wildwood Park from the Rural Municipality of Ft. Garry. By now the City-owned 1385 acres of parkland, only 295 of which was inside the City limits.

Due to the depression and the subsequent war years, the Parks Board did not greatly expand their holdings outside the City. However, by the 1960s they began to develop new parks, such as King's Park in the Rural Municipality of Ft. Garry.



In 1960 the Metropolitan Corporation of Winnipeg was formed to manage the various utilities where they used by all the regional governments (ie: water, transit, etc), and in 1961 the Metro Parks and Protection Division was created to look after the major regional parks previously controlled by the Parks Board. The Parks constables

became a part of this new Division and their shoulder flashes were changed as a result.

With the unification of the various municipalities surrounding Winnipeg in 1972, the new *City of Winnipeg Act (Unicity)*, S.M. 1971, c. 105, s. 661(1) provided for the employment of watchmen to enforce all laws within the public parks and other properties owned by the City. By virtue of s. 661(2) these watchmen had *"all the authority and powers of, and [were] subject to the same liability and to the performance of the same duties as, a constable under the Provincial Police Act"*.

These sections were re-enacted as 672(1) and 672(2) when the new *City of Winnipeg Act*, S.M. 1989-90, c. 10, received royal assent in 1989. While there was no mention of a Park Police,



only watchmen, this was corrected in 1997 after a review by the Manitoba Law Reform Commission in 1996 questioned the propriety of all special constable appointments under the Provincial Police Act. As a result s. 541.1 of the City of Winnipeg Act was added providing for a Park Police:

## PARK POLICE

541.1 The city may appoint a peace officer to maintain order and protect public or private property in a park and may vest the officer with the authority to cause any person to be removed from a park where the officer finds the person

- (a) contravening a by-law that applies to the park; or
- (b) disrupting order or causing damage to public or private property in the park.

When the current *City of Winnipeg Charter*, S.M. 2002, c. 39, came into force in January 2003, all reference to the Park Police and watchmen was removed and replaced by s. 176(1) and (2), providing Council with the authority to appoint special constables for the purposes of the City, such special constables having the same authority as a constable under the *Provincial Police Act*. The Park By-law No. 85/2009 authorizes the City's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to appoint enforcement officers.

However, in 2005 the Public Works Department put forward a recommendation that the Park Police be converted to a Park Patrol and in 2008 Council approved the conversion of the Park Police to a Park Patrol/ Park Watch with a focus on providing park security, ambassadorship, and by-law enforcement. More serious and higher risk law enforcement would be the sole responsibility of the Winnipeg Police. The transformation from "Police" to Park Patrol was complete by 2010. Car decals and uniforms were changed, removing the word "police".



By 2017 the Public Works Department had quietly discontinued the Park Patrol. There was no fanfare and only a marginal note in the City of Winnipeg's 2018 Asset Plan that the elimination may have resulted in an increase in vandalism in the parks. Today security in Assiniboine Park is handled separately through the Assiniboine Park Conservancy.

This article originally appeared under the title *Winnipeg's Other Police Department (A Brief History of the Parks Police)* in the 2001 edition of the Manitoba Police Association Yearbook, Winnipeg MB, p. 27.

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