

52.695133 latitude & -99.353277 longitude

The Naming of
**CHARLES
ROOKE
LAKE**

By John Burchill,
Vice-President

Charles Proctor Rooke,
the second member
of the Manitoba
Provincial Police to
die in the line of duty.



In 2016 I was named to a working group under Manitoba’s Geographical Names Program to recognize the dedication and sacrifice of fallen police and peace officers in Manitoba by naming geographical features, such as lakes, after them.

In recognition of the 150th Anniversary of the Manitoba Provincial Police in 2020, I recommended that a lake be named in the honour of Charles Proctor Rooke, the second member of the Manitoba Provincial Police to die in the line of duty.

Amid the pandemic and naming lakes for Manitoba’s war fallen World War I soldiers; Charles Rooke Lake was officially named on November 20, 2020. The lake is located at 52.695133 latitude and -99.353277 longitude in the Interlake region of central Manitoba.

Charles Proctor Rooke was born in Redhill, Surrey, England, on May 5, 1876. His father, Surgeon Benjamin Proctor (B.P.) Rooke, served as Inspector-General in the British Army in Bombay and was also a Honourary Physician to Queen Victoria. His uncle,

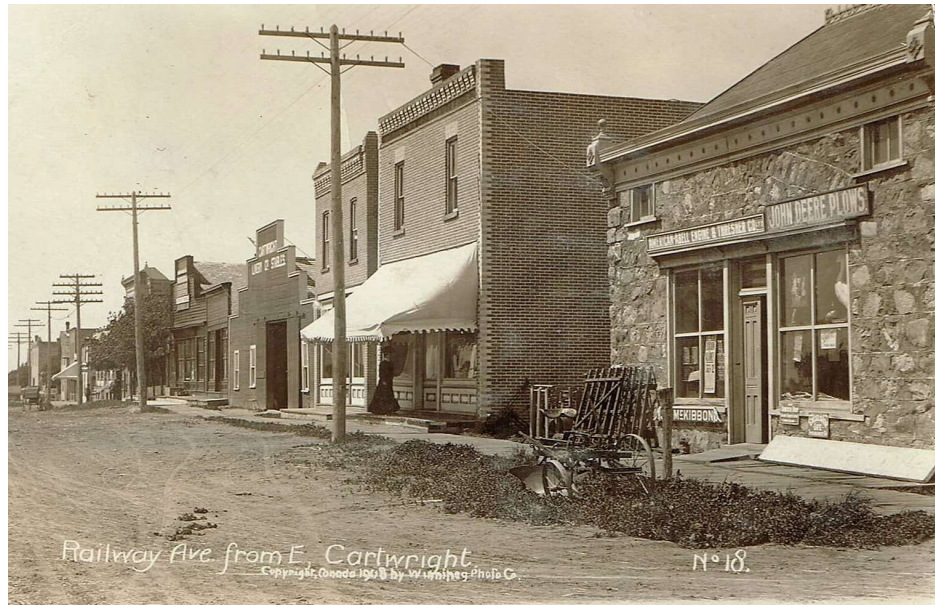
Thomas Charles Bye Rooke, also a surgeon, married into the royal family of the Kingdom of Hawaii. He was the adoptive father of Emma Grace Rooke who married King Kamehameha IV of Hawaii in 1856. Thomas Rooke also served as a representative to the legislature of the Hawaiian Kingdom from 1851–1855, and in 1858 was appointed to the Privy Council of Hawaii. Although she was much older, Charles’ cousin was the Queen of Hawaii.

Charles came to Canada in 1895 along with his brother Ernest Gilbert Rooke and settled in Holland, Manitoba, where he took up farming. While living in Holland he applied for a position with the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) in May 1899. After passing a physical examination he was taken on as a probationary officer on August 2, 1899. On September 1, 1899 he was taken on full strength and assigned to Maple Creek, North West Territories (now Saskatchewan). After completing his five year contract he took his discharge from the NWMP on August 31, 1904, and returned to Manitoba.

The year 1904 also saw an increase in horse thievery across the Manitoba border from North Dakota. One of the most notorious gangs was headed by Alex Larron who was active throughout North Dakota, South Dakota and Canada. Larron, also known as George Turner, had previously been incarcerated for horse stealing at the Bismarck Penitentiary in North Dakota. He escaped on August 12, 1901 and had worked his way west to Montana, Idaho, Washington and California working as a ranch hand. He returned to North Dakota and joined a gang of horse thieves operating on an extensive scale throughout South Dakota, North Dakota, and along the Western Canadian border.

Larron was suspected of stealing at least 22 horses from Manitoba in the Crystal City and Cartwright areas. On one occasion after crossing back into North Dakota Larron assaulted a farmer near the town of Rugby in Pierce County. He was pursued by Deputy Sheriff Erickson who overtook him at a camp in the Turtle Mountains on the U.S. side of the border.

I did not know [Larron] or I should never have attempted to do what I did. I simply told him I had a warrant at the same time producing the paper. The next instant, before I had time to think I was looking into the muzzle of a big six shooter. 'You get out of here quick,' said Larron and we did ... We organized a posse to go in pursuit of Larron but a storm came up and prevented us from starting for several days. In the meantime he got safely away and hid in the mountains.



Cartwright, Manitoba. Railway Ave, 1908

As a result of the impunity with which Larron and his gang seemed to cross the border, the Manitoba Provincial Police established a Mounted Division or border patrol. To head up the new division, the province turned to Charles Rooke. He was appointed a provincial constable and police magistrate on November 24, 1904, and stationed in Cartwright, Manitoba. Rooke immediately set out to hire a small cadre of police officers, skilled in riding horses and who were familiar with the border to fill out his new division.

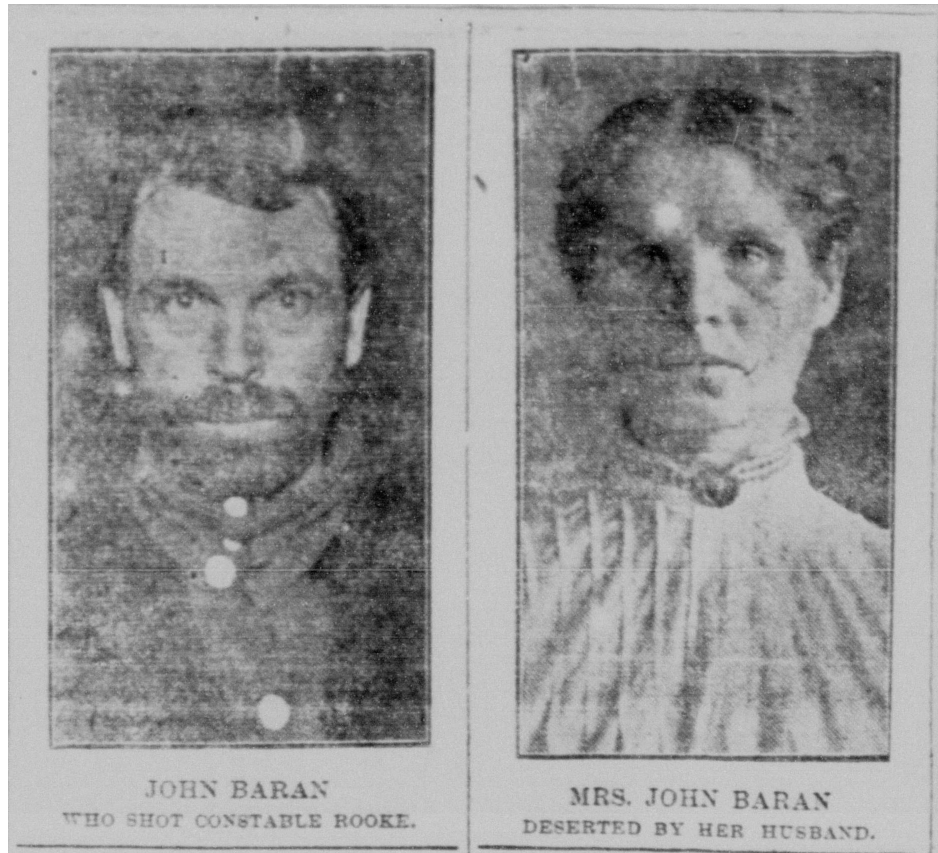
In less than a month Larron was arrested in Hecla, South Dakota, by Sheriff Cole of Brown County, and a member of Rooke's mounted division, on December 22, 1904. Larron would not agree to extradition and was sent to Bismarck Penitentiary.

On April 25, 1906, Larron's sentence expired and he was released, only to be rearrested and brought to Fargo for further extradition proceedings. Attorney Asa T. Patterson of Bismarck was hired to represent the Canadian government in its proceedings against Larron, paying him a whopping \$1159.80 (equivalent to about \$35,000 today). Patterson, however, was not able to convince U.S. Commissioner Montgomery that Larron should be extradited, principally because his victims were afraid to testify, and he was released on May 10, 1906.

Larron returned to his old ways and was suspected in a number of horse thefts in North Dakota as well as Manitoba. He was arrested again on December 3, 1906, by Sheriff Douglas of Rolette County, North Dakota, for theft. While awaiting trial in Ramsay County Jail, North Dakota, Larron escaped with another prisoner on April 19, 1907. However, while attempting to rob North Dakota farmer Thomas Kerr, he was shot through the head on June 30, 1907, thus ending the career of Larron, dubbed by some as “*Jessie James the Second*”.

With Larron’s arrest and ultimate demise, horse thefts began to dry up along the border and Rooke was transferred to the provincial police detachment in Dauphin in 1909. There Rooke had several dealings with John Baran for assaulting his wife at their home in the rural community of Gilbert Plains. She had fled to Dauphin with two of their four children, but left the other two destitute and starving with Baran. Rooke travelled to the small homestead and took the other children into care, turning them over to Children’s Aid who placed them in foster homes in Winnipeg.

Mrs. Baran, fearful for her safety, stayed in Dauphin in a state of poverty, living on assistance from the town for her support and that of her children. Baran in the meantime went to Kamsack, Saskatchewan and returned with a young Galician woman and a small child. When the town learned that Baran was back, they demanded he take over responsibility for the maintenance of his wife and children. However he refused and a warrant was issued for his arrest in January 1913 to show cause why he did not support



John Baran and his wife. Dauphin Herald, February 6, 1913

his wife. Antony Mallaneau, a school teacher in the district and Mrs. Mary Duch, a neighbor, later deposed that Baran, on learning of the warrant, stated he would kill any policeman who came after him.

The warrant was given to Constable Rooke who set out for Baran’s homestead early in the morning of Sunday, January 26, 1913. He rented a cutter sleigh with driver John Tomski who could speak Galician. They travelled about 20 miles to the Baran homestead, leaving their sleigh at the nearby residence of Steve and Dora Sulatyski.

It was planned that Tomski would do the talking while Rooke waited for an opportunity to apprehend Baran. They got to the homestead about noon and knocked. A woman, later identified as Marie Pelch, appeared at the window and told Tomski that Baran was not home. Rooke opened the door onto the porch and as he tried to open the second door, two rifle shots were fired through the door striking Rooke in the chest above his heart. Tomski dragged

the injured officer about 100 yards away from the shack, but without their sleigh he had leave Rooke so he could go for help.

Tomski went back to the Sulatyski's farm and returned with the sleigh to carry Rooke back to their house where Mrs. Sulatyski tended to his wounds. As Rooke was too badly injured to be transported, Tomski drove nine miles to the McCorvie's farm, the nearest house with a phone. Tomski called Dauphin's Chief of Police, Thomas Bridle, who notified the local doctor. Without delay Doctor Harrington took a sleigh to the McCorvie's farm. However there was little that could be done for Rooke outside of a hospital, so he was wrapped warmly and rushed to Dauphin in critical condition. They arrived after midnight where Rooke 'lay at the point of death'.

Chief Bridle notified the provincial police headquarters in Winnipeg and Deputy Chief John MacKenzie and Detective John Parr were assigned to take charge in Dauphin. Three posse subsequently organized by Chief Bridle headed out to the Baran homestead.

The posse led by Chief Bridle set out at 1:00 am for the Baran homestead in the hope that Baran would still be there. On arrival they did not see anyone around but as they approached the shack, shots were fired at them from the window. The posse returned the gunfire and waited a short time before rushing the door. Inside they found Marie Pelch badly wounded on the floor and a young child dead on the bed opposite the window. Baran had escaped.

Pelch had been shot in the chest and waist. The child had been shot in the shoulder with the bullet passing right through its body. The posse returned to Dauphin with the wounded woman and dead child, meeting with the Provincial Police officers who had arrived. Pelch would not initially provide her name, but said Baran was out hunting and that she had fired the shots.

The provincial police officers and two of the posse teams began a search for Baran along the Elphinstone Trail. After covering almost 30 miles

they came across Baran walking south on the trail, a little more than five miles from his homestead. Baran surrendered to Detective Parr without a struggle and was taken into custody. Baran claimed that he had not been home when the shooting occurred, blaming Pelch for shooting the officer. Although he was allegedly out hunting, he had no gun with him.

Baran was taken to Dauphin and detained on the original non-support warrant while the investigation continued into the shooting. Once Baran was in custody Pelch admitted that she had lied out of fear. Deposed she stated that Baran, having gone to the porch and looked outside, returned with his hunting rifle and latched the door. He then shot the constable, twice through the door, shoulder high, when he heard the door being opened.

An Inquest was held into the death of the young child and the following verdict was reached by a jury ... *"we find that the baby came to his death by being shot with a rifle in the hands of one of the posse under Chief Bridle, organized for the purpose of arresting John Baran, suspected of having shot Constable Rooke, and the death of the baby, while regrettable, was purely accidental under the circumstances and we attach no blame to any member of the posse"*.

At 7:30 am on February 3, 1913, Constable Rooke died of his wounds. An Inquest was held into the death of the officer. The jury, composed of George King (foreman), Mayor Caldwell, Nelson Taylor, John Cole, A.B. Buie, Stewart Baird, Thomas Shaw, F.J. McDonald, R.G. Ferguson, Thomas Jordan, Frank Neely and Archibald Espien, was unanimous:

We, the jury, empanelled to hear evidence as to the death of Provincial Constable Charles Rooke, find that the said Charles Rooke on Sunday, January 26, 1913, received a bullet in the breast from a rifle in the hands of John Baran and that the said Charles Rooke died on Monday, Feb. 3, 1913, from the effects of that shot.



Portage la Prairie Jail and Courthouse, where John Baran was hung and buried

Baran was subsequently charged with murder. The funeral of Constable Charles Rooke took place from his residence in Dauphin with his burial in the Riverside Cemetery. A headstone was erected by the Masonic Lodge of Dauphin.

John Baran was held in Dauphin for a Preliminary Hearing before Magistrate Munson on February 7, 1913. The Hearing proceeded slowly as most of the witnesses were Galicians and required the services of an interpreter. Baran declined to make a statement, but his lawyer, Bertram Ryan, admitted Baran fired the shot that struck Rooke, but he claimed that Baran did not know Rooke was a police officer (although Tomski indicated that Rooke had been in uniform) and had the right to defend his home. Ryan asked that the charge be reduced to manslaughter. Magistrate Munson refused the request and committed Baran to stand trial for murder at the Spring Assizes in Portage la Prairie.

The trial was held on March 6 and 7, 1913, in Portage la Prairie before Justice James Emile Prendergast, an experienced jurist. Prendergast had been a Judge of the County Court for Manitoba from 1897-

1902; from 1902-1906 he served as a Judge on the Supreme Court of the North-West Territories; and from 1906-1910 he served as a Judge on the Supreme Court of Saskatchewan. In 1910 he was appointed to the Manitoba Court of King's Bench before becoming the Chief Justice of Manitoba and the Court of Appeal in 1929.

The jury took less than two hours to find Baran guilty. As reported in the newspaper "*the crime was one in which there appeared to be no*

mitigating circumstances

indeed, the fact that Baran shot Rooke through a door, rifle to shoulder, while Rooke was rattling at the latch outside said door with not even his gun in hand is revolting to the Anglo Saxon sense of fair play. No doubt this fact, coupled with the fact that Rooke, when he was shot, was in the act of executing a warrant for the arrest of Baran for refusing to show cause why he did not support his wife and four children ..."

Preparations were made for the first execution in the Portage la Prairie jail since it was completed in 1895 with a scaffold being built in the courtyard. The public was very curious and the night before the execution a steady stream of citizens were allowed entry to see the structure. Although several dozen people received passes to attend the execution, only members of the death march, newspaper reporters and jail officials witnessed the actual hanging.

Hangman Arthur Ellis (Arthur Bartholomew English), in his first visit to Manitoba since replacing John Robert Radcliffe who died in 1911, moved quickly and efficiently when Baran appeared at 8:00 am. Within a minute Ellis had the straps and black hood in place over Baran's head and the trap doors

sprung open, dropping Baran 7 feet to his death, breaking his neck instantly.

The newspapers reported that Hangman Ellis was satisfied that the execution was conducted in a most credible manner. The paper noted that Ellis did not conceal his identity, but was heavily armed. After Baran's body was cut down an Inquest was held, during which time Ellis went for breakfast before he had to return for the burial.

The Inquest concluded that Baran's death was the result of hanging by Order of the Court and the body was then removed for burial in the courtyard. As required by the Criminal Code "*the body of every offender executed shall be buried within the walls of the prison within which judgment of death is executed on him*". A wooden coffin built in the jail was lined with quicklime and the body placed inside. It was then covered with more quicklime and the lid nailed shut. It was buried in the south-west corner of the yard only 45 minutes after the execution.



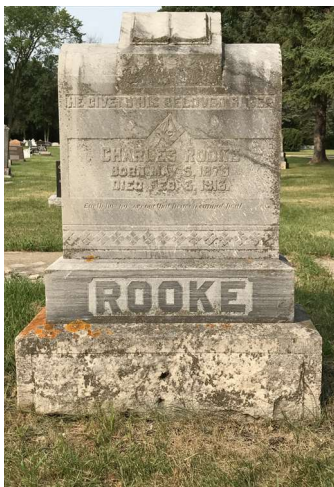
*Prendergast, James Emile Pierre,
MB Kings Bench Judge & MLA
(1858-1945)*

age 7 (a third child, Alfred, died at the age of 4 months in 1911). She received \$600 in 1914 and \$360 a year thereafter. The amount was reduced after 1915 when Elizabeth married Samuel Brooks Cliff Gooch in Dauphin.

The Gooch's eventually separated with Elizabeth, Charles and Beatrice, moving to Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1924. Elizabeth died in Vancouver on July 18, 1952. Her ashes were buried at the Ocean View Cemetery in Burnaby, British Columbia.

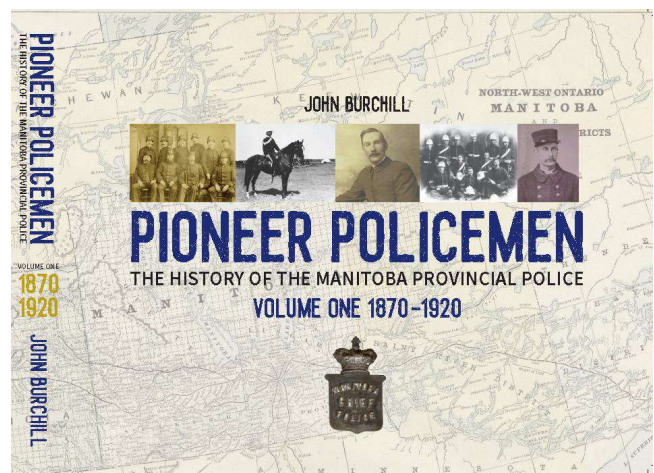
Today, Charles Rooke's granddaughter, Patricia Spencer, lives in Ontario. Subject to any COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that may still be in effect, Patricia will hopefully be able to travel to Manitoba in 2021 in recognition of her grandfather's dedication and sacrifice to the citizens of Manitoba.

More on Charles Rooke and the Manitoba Provincial Police can be found in my book *Pioneer Policeman, The History of the Manitoba Provincial Police, Vol. 1 (1870-1920)*.



*Charles Rooke - headstone,
Riverside Cemetery, Dauphin,
photo John Burchill 2018*

Constable Rooke himself died without a Will. His entire estate was valued at \$448.00 (equivalent to about \$10,000 in 2020). As he did not have a life insurance policy, the provincial government agreed to give his wife, Elizabeth ("Bessie"), a retirement allowance to support herself and her two young children – Beatrice, age 1, and Charles,



Pioneer Policemen 1870-1920