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# MARHTA LOOK

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## Police Woman #567

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Martha Look, c 1964. Winnipeg Police.

On August 12, 1968, the Winnipeg Police Juvenile Branch came into existence within the Detective Division. It was staffed by ten men and four women police officers, overseen by a Sergeant of Detectives.

The “*the primary responsibility of this Branch [was] to assist the officers of the Force in the processing and handling of juveniles*”. It would be the central location for all information regarding juvenile offenders, street gangs, or youth suspected of delinquency, with a focus on prevention and intervention rather than prosecution. The objective of the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* at the time was to rehabilitate and reform – not to punish.<sup>1</sup>

Young people who broke the law were “delinquents,” not criminals. They were viewed as victims of poverty, abuse, and neglect. Their parents had failed to raise them well, it was reasoned, so the state assumed custody of the child.

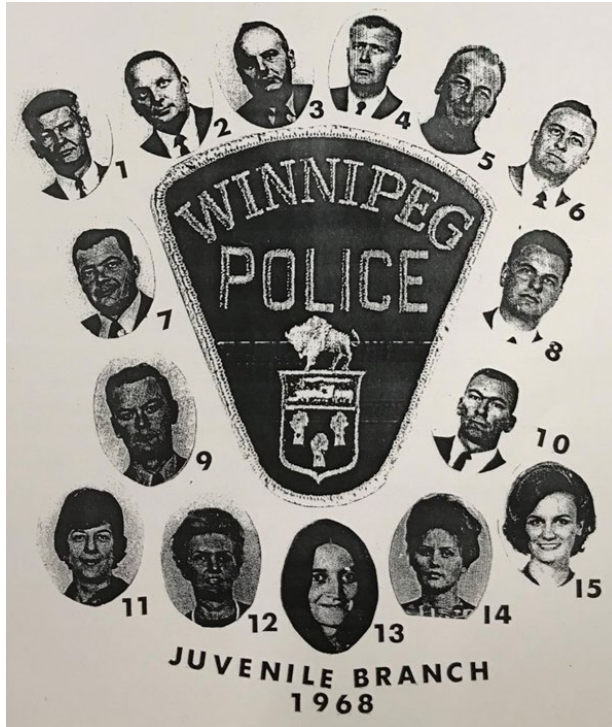
One of the first policewomen appointed into the Juvenile Branch was Martha Look. The others were Doreen Schur and Susan Irvine. The fourth was Lucienne Gelinias, who had been a policewoman since 1960 assigned to the Morality Branch.

Martha was originally hired on November 2, 1964, as a 999 Emergency Switchboard Operator. While she desired to be a police officer, there were only four positions for policewomen on the force at the time (all assigned to the Morality Branch). The detective who had done Martha’s background investigation was Detective Joseph Tronrud who would later be assigned to oversee the Juvenile Branch when it was created.

When Tronrud recommended Martha for employment, he noted that she had an excellent work ethic. She was punctual, straightforward, carried herself well, was fluent in German and had a good command of the English language. His interview with Martha likely stuck with Tronrud four years later when he was looking for suitable female candidates for the new Juvenile Branch.

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<sup>1</sup> The Youth Criminal Justice Act is the law that governs Canada’s youth justice system today. During the past 110 years there have been three youth justice statutes: the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (1908-1984), the *Young Offenders Act* (1984-2003), and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (2003-present).



First Juvenile Branch, August 1968. Martha is "12".

Interestingly the minimum/maximum age for hiring policewomen in 1968 was 25/35. It was changed in August that year to 21/31, same as for the men. The change allowed the department to hire 21-year old Susan Irvine. However, in theory, it should have excluded Martha if she had not already been an employee as she was 36-years old at the time of her "promotion" to policewoman – making her the oldest recruit at the time!!

After two weeks training, the Juvenile Branch commenced operations on August 26, 1968. Martha was assigned to work with Ron Houston looking after the "South Winnipeg" district, which at the time before amalgamation was bounded by the Assiniboine River to the North, the Red River to the East, Edgeland Blvd to the West and Wilks/Rosemount/Merriam to the South.<sup>2</sup>

As police recruit classes were not held until there were a sufficient number of new constables, Martha did not attend recruit class until January 6, 1969. She graduated from Recruit Class #70 on April 11, 1969, along with Doreen Schur and Carol Durward (who replaced Susan Irvine). Lucienne Gelinias had previously gone to recruit class in 1960.



Recruit Class #70. Graduation April 11, 1969. Martha highlighted. Courtesy Doreen Schur.

<sup>2</sup> While Houston was Martha's regular partner, she was not assigned to work with him on the night of June 26, 1970, when Houston was stabbed to death by Thomas Shand during a stake-out with John DeGroot, also of the Juvenile Branch.

That Martha was hired as a Switchboard Operator at 32 years of age and appointed a policewoman at 36 is a testament to the resilience and straightforward attitude she exhibited throughout her life and in her interview with Joseph Tronrud.

Martha was born in Płońsk, Poland, in 1932, about 60 kilometres northwest of Warsaw. Under German occupation, the town was annexed directly to Nazi Germany and was renamed Plöhnen after the German invasion in September 1939. The name reverted back to Płońsk after the end of World War II. Płońsk was also the name of the surrounding county that included the villages of Jeziorna, Błędowo, Pomocnia and others that were populated by several generations of the Look clan, including the birthplace of her father Edward and her mother Helena (nee Stöck), as well as her grandparents.

The Germans established and operated a court prison in the town. In 1940, the occupiers expelled around 1,000 Poles, whose houses and workshops were then handed over to German colonists as part of the *Lebensraum policy*.<sup>3</sup> In September 1940, Jews from the town and the surrounding areas were imprisoned in a ghetto. In total, 12,000 Jews were prisoners of the ghetto and from October 1942, they were sent to the Auschwitz extermination camp. Between 1940 and 1944, about 50,000 Poles were forcibly removed from annexed territories. This policy also included those members of the population that contained "Germanic blood" but who had been "Polonized". Often these individuals were sent to Germany as labourers and subject to conscription into the Germany army.



Origin of German colonisers in annexed Polish territories. Wikipedia Commons.

<sup>3</sup> The Nazis supported territorial expansionism to gain *Lebensraum* ("living space") as being a law of nature for all healthy and vigorous peoples of superior races to displace people of inferior races; especially if the people of a superior race were facing overpopulation in their given territories. The German Nazi Party claimed that Germany inevitably needed to territorially expand because it was facing an overpopulation crisis within its boundaries. Thus expansion was justified as an inevitable necessity for Germany to pursue in order to deal with overpopulation.

After Poland was overrun by the Nazi's Martha's family moved to Germany and resided in the general area of Hanover, moving around as the war disrupted their lives. She did not see her father, who served as a medic or "first aid man" for the German army, for several years during the war. At the age of eight she had to go out on the street in Germany to look for food during the war.

After the war was over, and two weeks before her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, Martha obtained a Visa to leave Germany for Canada. She departed from the port city of Bremen, Germany, with her family (including her younger sister Beatrice) onboard the S.S. Beaverbrae. She landed at Quebec on August 18, 1948, and traveled straight to Winnipeg for resettlement. Her father gained employment as a carpenter in construction and, from 1948 to 1952, Martha worked in the Lynbook sewing factory at 290 McDermot Avenue.

While working in the sewing factory Martha went to Daniel McIntyre Collegiate to learn English. She was one of twenty students to graduate with a level 9 diploma in English in June 1951. Shortly after she took a job as a clerk at the F.W. Woolworth Co. department store and then an office position at Christie Brown and Company before joining Hudson Bay House in 1961. During that time she also took classes in Public Speaking at Kelvin High School.

After putting in 16-years of work, Martha was granted her Canadian Citizenship on September 23, 1964. It was obviously something she had been waiting for – as immediately after the ceremony she walked into the recruiting offices of the Winnipeg Police with her citizenship document in hand and applied for a position as either a 999 Operator or as a policewoman.

From November 10 to December 1, 1974, Martha traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland, for the Centennial Celebrations of the Winnipeg Police Department. There she had the privilege of meeting with the Royal Family.



Martha meets with Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother to Queen Elizabeth II and wife of King George VI, in 1974. Courtesy Cst. Julie Zayac (retired).



On December 11, 1978, Martha was transferred from the Juvenile Branch to uniform duties in District 5 (St. Boniface/St. Vital). She received one commendation from the Chief of Police for arresting two youths suspected of breaking into homes on September 11, 1980, while she was off duty. She was also the recipient of the Governor General of Canada's Police Exemplary Service medal, awarded on September 23, 1986.

After several years of battling cancer Martha was placed on Supernumary duties in 1988 and retired to pension with just over 25 years of service to the citizens of Winnipeg on January 27, 1990. She died in White Rock, B.C. on July 4, 2009.

In speaking with John DeGroot and Graham Stewart, two of the first policemen assigned to the Juvenile Branch in 1968, Martha was a good partner, very precise and worked well with people and children in particular. However, I gleaned the most insight into Martha from Beverly Campbell (nee Zylich), who worked with Martha in the Juvenile Division from 1971 until 1975. *"As the rookie", Beverly tells me "I enjoyed working with Martha because she was a thorough teacher, giving me standards to work by... standards like 'you are an ambassador for the police department' and 'do your best, that's all you can do'. Martha was hardworking and her work was comprehensive"*.

Exemplary Service Medal

Beverly continued, *"Martha was very outgoing and made many acquaintances. She would introduce me not only to other police officers but to many lawyers, judges, city officials and businesspeople. She made a lasting impression on me for years to come by instilling values and solid approaches to life. I not only worked with but socialized with Martha, and, although I had a lot of exposure to her, Martha was still a private person."*

While Martha spoke very little of her time during the war, she did tell Beverly that, being the older sibling, she had to find food for her family at the age of 8 on the streets of Germany, possibly providing her some understanding or insight into her work with children in the Juvenile Branch.

Late in life Martha married Walter Welychka, a former member of the RCMP who had been posted in several Canadian locations and retired to White Rock, B.C. Walter died in 2003. They had no children together.

I would like to recognize the kind and generous bequest on behalf of Martha Look to the Winnipeg Police Museum by the estate of her sister Beatrice Spitznagel.