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# NORMAN (NORM) STEWART

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## Chief of Police #1

*Written & researched by John Burchill  
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The Act to Incorporate the City of Winnipeg was passed on November 8, 1873. However, the first civic election wasn't held until 1874, and it was not until February 23, 1874, that the first Chief of Police was hired.

In preparation for Winnipeg's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I thought I would start a series looking for the most significant police officers to come out of Winnipeg – individuals who made sustained and substantial contributions to policing in Winnipeg and to their community.

My first article is on Norman MacGregor Stewart, who was invested in the Order of Canada in 1978 for his community service.

Norm was born in Winnipeg on February 12, 1916. He grew up on Harbison Avenue in Elmwood and attended Lord Selkirk Junior School and St. John's Technical High School. While he didn't shine academically, his high school principal stated he was "*honest and trustworthy*" and would make a good police officer. In addition, at 6'4½, Norm excelled at sports, particularly hockey and lacrosse, playing for both the Elmwood Aces and Elmwood Pats.

Outside of school and athletics, Norm was also a member of the Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, serving in the Cadet Battalion for seven years – two years in the ranks and five years playing the bagpipes.

Norm was first hired by the Winnipeg Police on June 21, 1937. The Chief at the time, George Smith, advised the Police Commission that he would be short-staffed for the summer due to several absences in the ranks and requested permission to hire six men for night duty for the next 2½ months. Permission was granted, and Norm was one of the six men sworn in as a special constable. After 2½ months, Norm's appointment as a special constable ended. However, not for long.

On November 22, 1937, Norm was re-hired by the Winnipeg Police. After completing his basic training, he was sworn in as a police constable on December 18, 1937. His size and hockey skills obviously impressed his colleagues at the Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association (WCPAA) as he was picked up to play on the Association's senior men's intermediate hockey team.

In March 1938, the WCPAA team went to the provincial finals knocking out Sturgeon Creek, Petersfield, Transcona and Teulon in the playoffs before taking on the Treherne Indians in a best of two, total goals finals. The WCPAA lost the series 2-0.



WCPAA Hockey Team. Finalists in the 1938 Manitoba Intermediate Hockey League.  
Norm Stewart is second from the left, back row.

Norm played again in 1939; however, the team did not fare as well in the playoffs, and by the end of the year, Canada was embroiled in World War II, with many officers enlisting for overseas service, putting hockey on hold.

On February 10, 1940, Norm had not yet enlisted and was doing stakeout work with his partner John McDonald at the Radio Building, 120 Fort Street. Information had been received that the businesses in the building might be broken into.

While Norm and his partner were doing surveillance on the building, three men broke in – Mike ‘The Horse’ Attamanchuk, John Ashton Barnett and John Andrusiak – and began attacking a safe in the Motor League offices. All three were well known to the police and had records relating to property thefts. They specialized in stealing vehicles and stripping them for parts and B & E’s in which tools were generally taken. They graduated to safe attacks and were not expected to be armed since this was night work that did not involve holding anyone up. However, unbeknownst of the other two criminals, Attamanchuk had other ideas and was carrying a Webley .455 cal. revolver

When Norm and his partner tried to arrest the trio, Attamanchuk began shooting at both officers. During the ensuing gunfight, Constable McDonald was killed when he was struck in the head

with one of the bullets and Norm was wounded when he was hit with a bullet in his right hand that travelled up into his forearm where it lodged.

All three suspects escaped. Barnett and Andrusiak were eventually captured and were found guilty of being accessories after the fact of murder. Both men were sentenced to 20 years in prison. Attamanchuk killed himself a couple of days later when surrounded by police officers during a hostage-taking on Laura Street.

On March 11, 1943, Norm took a leave of absence from the police department and enlisted with the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve. He graduated from King's College (now University of King's College), where he took navigation training. He was promoted to First Lieutenant and served onboard the HMSC Lauzon doing ocean escort during the latter part of World War II until VE-Day. The Lauzon left Londonderry on June 13, 1945, for the last time and that summer was employed as a troop carrier between St. John's and Quebec City. Norm was discharged from the Navy effective December 16, 1945, and resumed active duties with the Winnipeg Police.



HMSC Lauzon, c 1945

Lieutenant Norm Stewart is third from left, second row (smiling with white officers cap)

On January 1, 1948, Norm was promoted to Detective. In 1953 he was promoted to Detective Sergeant, and on July 1, 1955, he was promoted to Sergeant of Detectives. On January 1, 1957, Norm was promoted to the senior police officer ranks as a Detective Inspector.

During the spring of 1959, the University of Indiana Center for Police Training was promoting a new style of “combat shooting” that was oriented toward police officers. The Winnipeg Police taught “Olympic Style” shooting at the time, which consisted of firing ten bullets in five minutes, one-handed, at a bulls-eye target situated 20 yards away. However, combat shooting was intended to be more realistic. It moved away from the bulls-eye target and instead used a man-sized target which had point values assigned to various areas.

As the University of Indiana planned to host a competition sponsored by Colt Manufacturing to teach combat shooting, it was felt that members of the Winnipeg Police should attend on the chance it would significantly advance the organization.

Police Chief Robert Taft authorized sending a six-man team to Indiana to learn about combat shooting. A “shoot-off” was held amongst members of the Winnipeg Police to find the most qualified individuals to send. When the scores were tallied, the six officers were Norm, Detective Ron Truesdale, and Constables Bob Taylor, Don Thorsteinson, Stan Smyth and Stan Miner. These six officers would become the first Winnipeg Police Shooting Team.



1959 Winnipeg Police Shooting Team  
Norm Stewart is on the far left.

With a budget of \$900 and transportation consisting of a Volkswagen van loaned by the WCPAA, the six officers drove to Indiana, where they competed against 433 police officers from across the United States for the first-ever National Police Shooting Championships. The Winnipeg officers won first place in the “Highest Police Team West of the Mississippi” competition during the shooting competition. The impact of this type of shooting was the formation of the Winnipeg Police Revolver Club, which began promoting the new combat shooting method for all Winnipeg officers.

In August 1961, Norm was selected to attend the FBI National Academy in Virginia, where he spent 12 weeks under the auspices of J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, taking courses in crime detection, criminal investigation, administration and organization, as well as espionage and sabotage. He remained involved with the FBI Academy Associates, NW Chapter, for the rest of his career including a term as President.

Future Chief of Police, Herb Stephen, who worked under Norm for 25 years at various ranks, and who was also an FBI graduate, told me that Norm *“was a great leader. Everyone liked and respected him. I have never seen or heard anyone speak ill of him. He never looked down on those who worked for him. His office door was always open. He was fully supportive of the FBI, and Winnipeg was the first Canadian city to host the FBI National Academy retraining conference outside of the United States. Norm was also very involved with other police-related activities, such as being a member of the shooting team and participating in many shoots outside of Winnipeg, including in the U.S. He never missed an opportunity to attend games of the police hockey team”*.

Between 1962 and 1968, Norm was promoted three more times within the senior officer ranks from Inspector of Detectives to Superintendent.

In March 1970, with the announced retirement of Chief George Blow, Deputy Chief John C. (“Jack”) Webster became interim or acting Chief while the Police Commission looked to fill the vacancy. At this time, Norm became the Acting Deputy Chief of Police. Both men competed for the Chief’s job. Norm was selected as Chief by a 3:1 majority of the Police Commission over Webster, effective November 1, 1970.

## Accusations, tempers fly after Stewart named chief



Superintendent Norm Stewart, 54, was named Winnipeg's new police chief Wednesday and the announcement triggered off displays of hot temper and accusations of "political assassination."

Mr. Stewart, a 33-year veteran with the department, has been acting-deputy chief since George Blow resigned during a controversy last March. He likely will assume his new duties November 1.

Acting Chief Jack Webster, thought by many to have been the strongest contender for the position, hasn't indicated whether he will continue with the department or seek early retirement.

Mayor Steve Juba, visibly shaken by the decision of the police commission, angrily termed the appointment "sheer hypocrisy" and "political assassination."

His refusal to congratulate or even inform Mr. Stewart of the appointment drew criticism and concern from senior officials within the force.

**NO GRUDGE**

But despite appearances, the mayor said he holds no grudge against the new chief: "It's a matter of principles . . . not personalities."

Mr. Juba said "something is drastically wrong in this affair. There's a lot of politics mixed up in this decision and there's no use trying to deny it."

The chief constable's position has been vacant for almost seven months, mainly at the urgings of Mr. Juba.

Repeating what he told members at previous meetings, Mr. Juba said Wednesday that the acting chief had earned the confidence of the commission. Refusal to make his appointment permanent was a "slap in the face," the mayor said.

**LOWER RANK**

"This man has served with the department for 34 years. He performed capably for seven months as chief and now you promote a man of lower rank over his head," he told the commission.

"You have destroyed his career and his reputation as a policeman," Mr. Juba said.

Alderman Ernest Brotman, vice-chairman of the commission, objected.

"I want to make it absolutely clear that we (the commission) have the highest opinion of Mr. Webster and his capabilities as a police officer."

"Our decision was based on the interests of the citizens of Winnipeg and this police department . . . there was nothing personal about it," he said.

Doug Groff, a citizen member on the commission, added: "There's no question that it was a highly difficult decision to make. Both Mr. Webster and Mr. Stewart are capable men."

**MAJORITY DECISION**

Mr. Juba pointed out to newsmen present that, aside from speaking on behalf of Mr. Webster, he had no real say in the matter. He said that unless the four voting members of the commission are deadlocked, he may not cast a ballot.

"It was a majority decision . . . it wasn't unanimous," he said.

He said he objected strongly to the "tactless, undiplomatic and thoroughly inhumane" manner of the decision.

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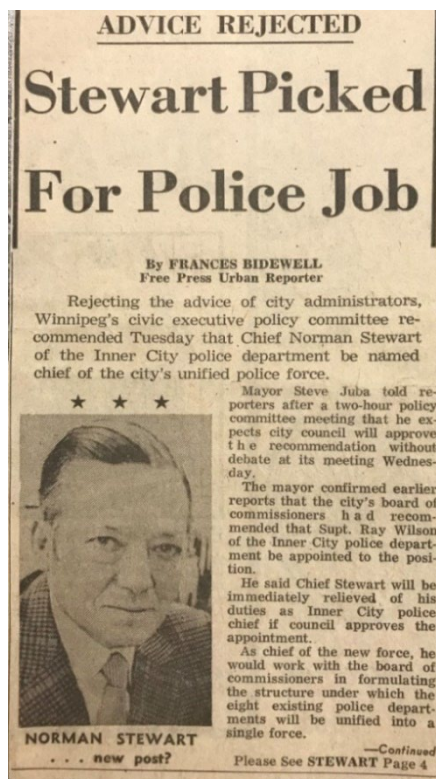
New Police Chief Norm Stewart

The Chair of the Police Commission, Mayor Steven Juba, who obviously supported Webster for the Chief’s job, came out publicly against his colleagues for selecting Norm, saying it was a *“tactless, undiplomatic and thoroughly inhumane”* decision to choose Norm over Webster. *“This man [Webster] has served with the department for 34 years. He performed capably for seven months as Chief and now you promote a man of lower rank over his head. You have destroyed his career and his reputation as a policeman”*. However, the other three members of the Commission supported their decision, saying Norm was the best choice for the department and the citizens of Winnipeg. The majority decision was subsequently ratified by Council.

On January 1, 1972, the City of Winnipeg and the surrounding municipalities were amalgamated into one large unicity with one mayor and Council. However, not all functions within the city joined together immediately. The police departments, each with their own radio systems, stations and distinct uniforms, were amalgamated with the Winnipeg Police starting in 1972. However, the final amalgamation of the eight remaining police departments did not occur until October 21, 1974, when the following six policing districts were established:

- District #1 (former Winnipeg Inner City Police)
- District #2 (former St.James-Assiniboia Police)
- District #3 (former West Kildonan Police)
- District #4 (former East Kildonan Police & Transcona Police)
- District #5 (former St. Vital Police and St. Boniface Police)
- District #6 (former Fort Garry Police with parts of Winnipeg Police who were now patrolling Tuxedo, Charleswood and Headingly)

When the final amalgamation took place, the force nearly doubled in size, with an authorized strength of 921 officers and 171 staff for a total of 1,091 members.



With the amalgamation of the various different police departments (each with its own Chief of Police), a new Chief was needed to lead the formation of the new combined force.

A total of 26 applications were received for the new Chief's position, including applications from the Chiefs of St. Boniface, St. James-Assiniboia, East Kildonan, and West Kildonan. Norm applied from Winnipeg as well as Superintendent Ray Wilson. Norm was appointed on April 3, 1974 and while he looked after the set-up of the unified force, Jack Webster became the *pro tempore* Chief of the Winnipeg Police until unification.

The Board of Commissioners, again headed by Mayor Juba, originally bypassed Norm and recommended the younger Ray Wilson instead. However, the Executive Policy Committee (EPC) rejected the advice of the Commissioners and selected Norm, citing his "*experience and background*" over the younger Wilson. The decision of EPC was ratified by Council the same day. As the first Chief of the newly unified force, Norm was issued Badge #1.

On February 12, 1976, Norm would turn 60. The City of Winnipeg Police Pension plan made for mandatory retirement at age 60. As such, City Council made plans to replace Norm. Expecting Norm would retire City Council announced on January 7, 1976, that Deputy Chief Ray Wilson would be the new Chief effective February 15, 1976. However, Norm refused to retire, stating that as a *department head* he was no longer part of the Police Pension Plan, but of the Civic Pension Plan – which had mandatory retirement of age 65.

Norm took his argument to the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench, which ruled in his favour on January 21, 1976. City Council did not appeal and Norm remained Chief of Police until he turned 65, retiring on February 21, 1981, alongside his two deputies, Ray Wilson and Joseph Tronrud.

Prior to his retirement Norm was elected President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) in 1977 for a two-year term. He was also elected President of the St. Andrew's Society of Winnipeg (1969-1970), President N.W. Chapter FBI Academy Associates, President of the Naval Officers Association, Vice-President of the Navy League of Canada (Winnipeg Division), and President of St. John's Ambulance for which he was awarded the Service Medal of the Order of St John, recognising his conspicuous and long service with the Venerable Order of St John.

During his tenure as Chief of Police, Norm was also awarded the City of Winnipeg's Community Service Award in April 1971, the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1978, and he was invested in the Order of Canada on December 18, 1978, for his community service.

Norm passed away in Winnipeg on October 27, 1998.



Norm Stewart's career medals.  
Winnipeg Police Museum.

**NOTE:** Anyone wishing to recognize a police member they feel made sustained and substantial contributions to policing in Winnipeg and its surrounding municipalities during the past 150 years is asked to send me their name and (if known) a brief description of their accomplishments.