
ROBERT JOHN WRIGHT

First Chief Constable, Town of Tuxedo

*Written by John Burchill, President
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R. J. and Mary Wright, c. 1943
Courtesy Peggy Huffman

Robert John (R.J.) Wright was born in the village of Winnipeg on March 10, 1872. His father, Archibald, had come to the Red River Settlement in 1869 and started a saddlery business. In 1874 Archibald was elected to Winnipeg's first city council, presiding over the finance committee. He was re-elected in 1875, 1876, and again in 1879/1880. Robert's mother, Mary Ramsay, was born in the Red River Settlement.

Archibald owned and operated several businesses in Winnipeg including, at one time, the Leland Hotel. He also owned several large parcels of land just outside the Winnipeg city limits, including 2,400 acres on the south bank of the Assiniboine River, between what is now Assiniboine Park and Kenaston Boulevard.

Archibald was an avid farmer, experimenting with a wide range of crops. The family eventually lived in a house on their farm at what is now 694 Academy Road (originally Godfrey Avenue). Their son, Robert, would build a home close by on Frank Street in 1907.

In 1905 Frederick William Heubach, the former private secretary to the Land Commissioner of the Hudson's Bay Company, incorporated the Tuxedo Park Company and began to buy up land from a few local farming families, including 2400 acres of land owned by Archibald and Mary Wright for \$300,000 (almost \$10 million today adjusted for inflation). Robert would begin working for the Tuxedo Park Company at this time.

At the time of Confederation, land allotments in the Red River Settlement were laid out with a narrow area of river frontage (usually 6 chains or 396 feet wide) extending two miles away from the river. Generally, the area closest to the river was used for housing, stables, farm buildings, and gardens. Further from the river would be trees the owner could cut for wood. Extending an additional two miles would be the "hay privilege", an area of prairie land where the landowner could harvest hay. This four-mile outer limit was usually designated by a "Four Mile Road".

The "four-mile road" defining the southern end of the property bought by Heubach today is Wyper Road (west of McCreary); Four Mile Road (east of McCreary); and McGillivray east of a line drawn directly south from the end of Four Mile Road. The road jogs as these old river lots run into the square Dominion Land Survey lots laid out after Confederation. Today, Archibald Wright's land would include Old Tuxedo, part of South Tuxedo, Tuxedo Industrial Park, and part of Lindenwoods.

SUBURB TO WEST OF CITY

Tuxedo Park Co. Purchase 2,400 Acres on South Side of Assiniboine River for Sum of \$300,000.

Situation Next to New City Park—To Found Suburb With Local Improvements of Its Own.

A suburban real estate deal of more than usual proportions, was put through a week or two ago, when the Archibald Wright property, consisting of 2,400 acres south of the Assiniboine river was sold to the Tuxedo Park Co. for \$300,000. The property consists of Lots 62 and 63 St. Boniface, and lots 1 to 12 St. Charles. The property is situated between the new city park and the St. James Ferry, and will make one of the most beautiful suburbs in the city.

Winnipeg Tribune, May 13, 1905

Heubach's plan was to develop a "City Beautiful". In 1905 his company originally contracted Rickson Outhet, of Montreal, to develop an area plan, centred around the existing Manitoba Agricultural College, at the eastern edge of the Wright property (now the Asper Jewish Community Campus).

Outhet developed his skills under Frederick Olmsted, considered the father of landscape architecture, who was famous for co-designing many well-known urban parks such as Brooklyn's Prospect Park, New York's Central Park, and Montreal's Mount Royal Park.

In 1910, the Tuxedo Park Company was absorbed by a new firm, the South Winnipeg Company, also owned by Heubach and his partners. The firm had by this point increased its holdings, adding land to the west and south of the Manitoba Government Agricultural College. They then contracted with Olmsted's firm itself, to plan the subdivisions, streets, neighbourhoods and parks of Tuxedo, and the areas south of Two-Mile Road (now Wilkes Avenue).

To attract Winnipeg's wealthy homebuyers, the Tuxedo Park plan marketed the district as a "Suburb Beautiful" and aimed to incorporate a harmonious "*combination of city and country, dwelling house and garden, with adequate open space for light, health, and the beauty of the environment.*" The plan also included ample designed landscapes, boulevards, and green spaces, elements that were intended to elevate the neighbourhood's aesthetic quality, while increasing demand the sale of property.

To draw the desired market, Tuxedo also excluded all but the wealthiest households by restricting house lots to a minimum frontage that was about twice that of the City of Winnipeg and by specifying a minimum housing area that was more than twice the average size of houses in the rest of the metropolitan area.

With its new Suburb Beautiful laid out, Heubach sought to incorporate their landholdings as the Town of Tuxedo. The government of Manitoba acceded to their request and granted town status to the *Town of Tuxedo*, 1913 S.M. c. 85, effective January 24, 1913. Section 759 and 760 of the *Municipal Act*, 1913 R.S.M. c. 133, stated that every town *shall* appoint one chief constable and one or more police constables for the municipality and that every constable so appointed would have the same powers and privileges and be subject to the same liability and to the performance of the same duties as a constable appointed by the provincial government.



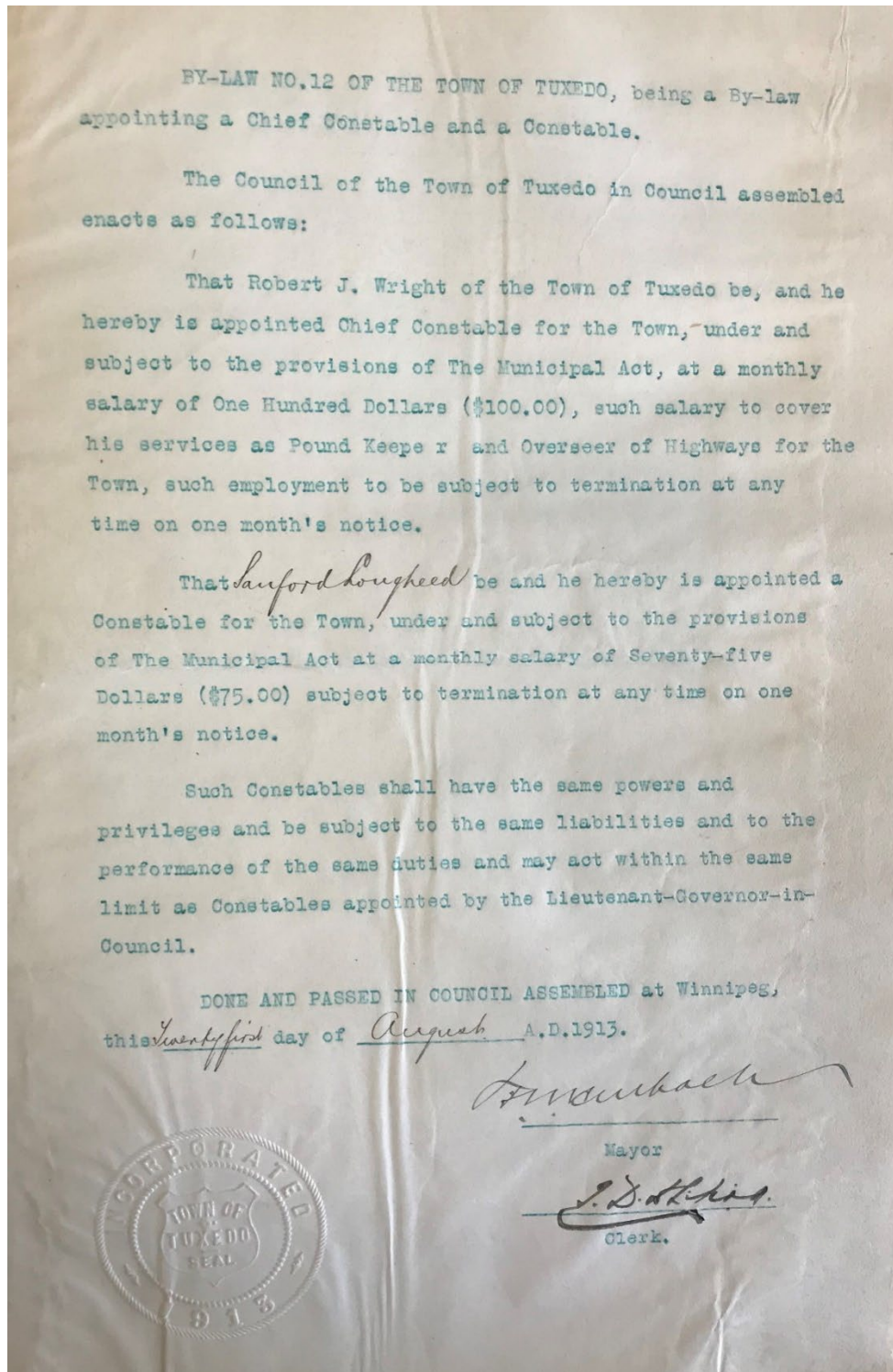
Olmsted's original layout for Tuxedo Park in 1910. A planned development for the University of Manitoba never materialized, although the green space did become the Tuxedo Golf Course. Indeed, many of the streets never materialized in what is now the Assiniboine Forest

In accordance with the *Municipal Act*, on August 21st, 1913, the Town of Tuxedo passed by-law #12 appointing Robert J. Wright as its first Chief Constable and Sanford Loughheed (who we shall read about later) as its first Constable at a rate of \$100 and \$75 per month respectively. In addition to his role as Chief Constable, Wright was also the Pound Keeper and Overseer of Highways for the town.

Robert was the embodiment of the early police constable in Canada. Policing wasn't his only function for the Town of Tuxedo, he was also the town manager or public works supervisor, responsible for overseeing most, if not all, of the day-to-day administrative operations of the town.

While the police as an institution are relatively new, the activity of policing or the enforcement of common standards within a community is not. As noted by Patrick Colquhoun in his *"Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis,"* published in 1796, there were various laws in England tending to regulate the comfort and convenience of the inhabitants of civil society in the City of London. From paving, watching, lighting, cleansing, and removing nuisances in the streets; to furnishing water, building houses, extinguishing fires, and regulating hackney coaches, carts, and other

carriages. Colquhoun later added to this list the maintenance of sewage systems, and signs and signposts, among others.



Tuxedo Town By-law #12 appointing Robert J. Wright as Chief Constable, and Sanford Lougheed as Constable on August 21, 1913



Building Tuxedo Park Sewer, March 1914. City of Winnipeg Archives, Morris Block Collection

Construction of roads, sewer, and water lines in Tuxedo, based on the Olmsted plan, commenced in 1914, with the first home built at 121 Park Boulevard in 1915. However, demand for Tuxedo lots was dampened from the outset with the outbreak of the First World War, and with the development of the adjacent Winnipeg suburb of Crescentwood. As such Sanford Lougheed was not kept on as a Constable after August 1915 and Robert focused more on the day-to-day operations of the town.

While there was a return to growth and prosperity during the 1920's after the First World War, 1929 ushered in the Great Depression and there was a general slowdown in building again until after the Second World War. Robert retired as the Superintendent of Works for the Town of Tuxedo in 1949. It was still only patrolled by two police constables at that time.

Robert died at the age of 91 on October 1, 1963, at his home on Frank Street. In addition to his work for the Town of Tuxedo, Robert was for many years Winnipeg's leading breeder and exhibitor of light horses. He was a recognized horse show judge throughout Western Canada and a life member of many horsemen's organizations. Robert was buried in St. James Cemetery. His wife predeceased him in 1947 and he was survived by two sons and three daughters.

NOTE: In 1972 the *Town* of Tuxedo with its six-man police department was absorbed into the City of Winnipeg along with the R.M. of Charleswood. Today, the areas of Tuxedo and Charleswood are part of the Winnipeg Police West District area headed by Inspector Max Waddell.