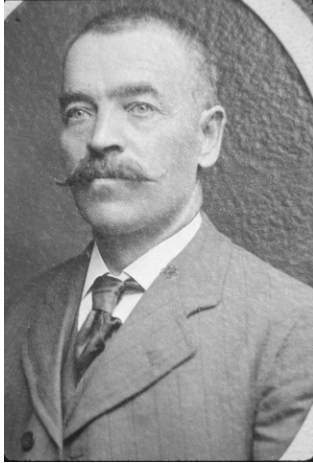

GALICIAN (UKRANIAN) OFFICERS

History of Winnipeg's Detective Interpreters

*Written by John Burchill, President
February 1, 2024. Winnipeg Police Museum*



Det. Jacob Seel, 1909

Jacob Seel was born in Josefsberg, Galicia, Austria on September 26, 1860. He married Elizabeth Heuchert (1882-1906) in Austria in 1884. Together, with their four children, they immigrated to Canada in 1892, settling in Portage la Prairie. They had seven more children, three born in Portage la Prairie (including Frank) and four in Winnipeg.

Seel had been a police officer in Austria prior coming to Canada, as had his father before him. He could speak seven languages and often assisted the local authorities in translation.

On November 22, 1902, at the age of 41, Jacob joined the Winnipeg Police Force as a detective, mainly investigating crimes in the immigrant communities.

Having the ability to speak so many Eastern European languages was an asset in Western Canada at the turn of the last Century. Between 1891 and 1914, a total of 180,000 Ukrainians left their homeland for Canada, most settled in Manitoba and areas of the Northwest that later became the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

While most fled oppression from areas under Austro-Hungarian rule, Canadian immigration policy at the time also promoted the settlement of the West by Eastern Europeans such as Ukrainians, Hungarians, Romanians, and Mennonites. It was strongly believed that these immigrant groups made the best settlers for the Prairies, because of their familiarity with agriculture, rural lifestyles, and harsh climates. As a result, the population in the West increased dramatically -- with Winnipeg, "the Gateway to the West", growing from a city of 25,000 people in 1891, to 136,000 in 1911 and 180,000 by 1921.

Many Ukrainian immigrants of this period were identified on government records as Poles, Russians, Austrians, Bukovinians, Galicians and Ruthenians, arriving from provinces in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Jacob worked as a detective for 23-years and died on May 29, 1926, while still on the Force. He was predeceased by his first wife in 1906, but survived by his second wife Anna (Rudko) and their four children. One of Jacob's son's, Frank, joined the Winnipeg Police as a Signal Operator in 1914. With a break for service during World War I, Frank remained with the Winnipeg Police until 1942 when he resigned. Frank died on March 14, 1986, and was buried at Brookside Cemetery.



Winnipeg Police Detective Branch, 1912. St. Johns Park.
Jacob Seel is far right

Although Jacob would have been considered too old to be hired as a police officer in 1902, he had already been doing private detective work for the Manitoba Provincial Police. His biggest case came in 1898 when he was asked to assist the Provincial Police in the murders of Wasyl Bojecko and his four children, Petro, Domka, Anna and Jurko, all under the age of 10, inside their small home in Stuartburn, Manitoba.

According to the Winnipeg Tribune the bodies had been hacked to death in a frightful manner. *“The floor and walls were splattered and covered with blood, looking like a slaughterhouse.”* It was the largest mass murder scene the Manitoba Provincial Police were to encounter until January 1932 when the bodies of Martin Sitar, his wife and their five children were discovered axe murdered in their Stony Hill home.

As the bodies of the Bojecko family were being prepared for burial in a single grave outside the family’s home, a .32 calibre bullet was discovered inside the mouth of one of the children by the police. A further examination discovered more bullet wounds and an empty casing inside the house. Not only had the family been brutally attacked by an axe, they had also been shot.

Attention focused on Simeon Czubej. However Czubej, in deed most of the community, was comprised of eastern European immigrants. Like Bojecko many were Ukrainians from Galicia or Bukovina, then provinces in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Stuartburn was one of the first

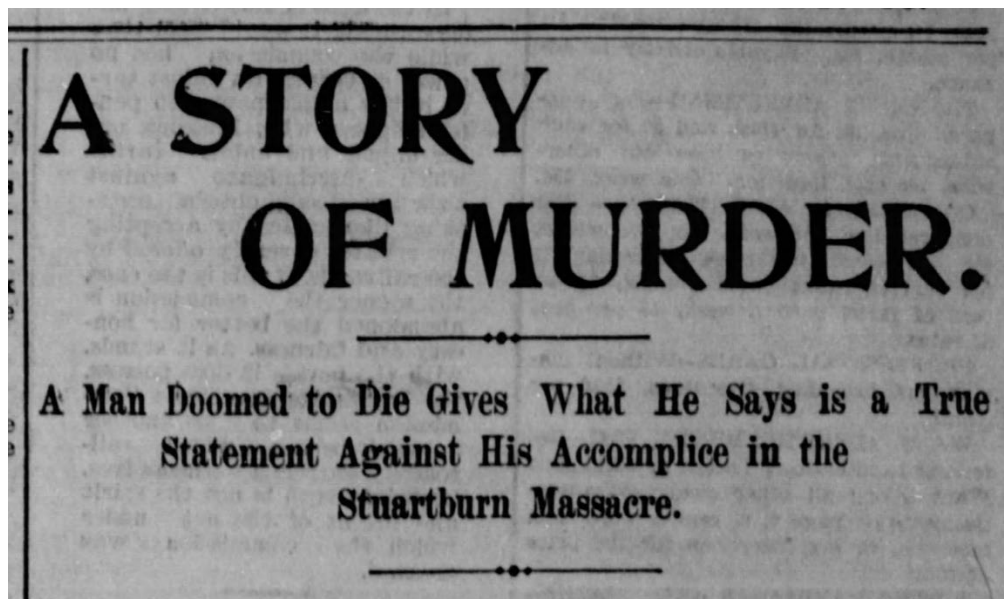
Ukrainian settlements established in Manitoba when 27 families and some single men, mainly from the village of Senkiw, set out to establish a colony in southern Manitoba in 1896.

As language and culture became a barrier in the investigation, after making little headway, the Provincial Police contracted with several Ukrainian-speaking detectives for help -- most notably the Pinkerton Agency of Chicago, but also Jacob Seel, then living in Portage la Prairie.

Seel, posing as a land buyer, succeeded in getting Czubej's confidence. According to his obituary he worked the case "*in competition with a number of the best detectives on the continent*". Presumably "the best" was Pinkerton's, who charged the Attorney General \$2031.35 (about \$75,000 in 2024) for their work on the case. Seel, on the other hand, charged \$107.25, or about \$4,000 in 2024.

On Friday, December 16, 1898, after securing a verbal confession from Czubej, Seel brought him in to be examined by Magistrate Yeo. Czubej confessed to Yeo stating he had gone to Bojecko's to rob him. He brought a revolver with him. When Bojecko refused to give him any money he threatened him with the gun. Bojecko picked up an axe to defend himself, however Czubej took it from him and struck him over the head, then proceeded to kill his children. Czubej later implicated Wasyl Guszczak as being involved in the murder as well.

Strategically, the Crown tried Czubej and Guszczak separately, with Guszczak's trial beginning on March 15, 1899, followed by Czubej's trial on March 20. When Guszczak's earlier confession was read out in court, he denied its truthfulness stating it had been obtained from him under duress by Seel and Allen, a Pinkerton's detective. However Chief Justice Albert Killam left the reliability of Guszczak's various confessions with the jury and, whether without it, the Crown had proven its case. It took the jury only 30 minutes to come back with a verdict of guilty on March 18, 1899. While the punishment for murder was a foregone conclusion, Killam delayed passing sentence until after Czubej's trial.



March 21, 1899, Winnipeg Tribune
Headline.

At Czubej's trial, Guszczak was called as a witness. While he had challenged the reliability of his confession at his own trial, he now fully admitted his involvement stating he had taken the revolver and fired "at the screaming children" as their father lay bleeding on the floor. He also confessed to using the axe on the children, but also implicated Czubej in the killings and suggested it had been Czubej's idea to buy the gun. In fact, he stated, Czubej went back inside to "make sure that Bojecko was dead, whereupon [he] Czubej took the axe, went into the house again and dealt the body of the dead man several more blows on the head and back ..."

On March 22, 1899, the jury also found Czubej guilty. Justice Killam subsequently passed the only sentence the law provided – "that of death by hanging". He set the date of their execution as May 26, 1899.

The government did not intervene and on May 26, 1899, Hangman Radcliffe led the condemned men to the newly constructed scaffold inside the Vaughan Street Jail. At precisely 8 a.m. the trapdoors swung open, dropping both men to their deaths. Guszczak's body was claimed by his young wife and buried in St. Mary's Cemetery on Osborne Street. Czubej's body was not claimed by anyone and it was taken from the scaffold and buried in an unmarked grave at Brookside Cemetery.

During his career Jacob was involved in numerous investigations from thefts and robberies, to poisonings and murders. He gained distinction by doing clever police work and unravelling a number of difficult crimes and bringing criminals to justice. He also continued to do work for the Provincial Police with interviews or translations in the murders of Frances Salomon in Stuartburn in 1902; the murder of Paul Wojeichowski near Brokenhead, Manitoba, in 1903; and the poisoning of four year old Annie Horan in Poplar Park, Manitoba, in 1907, all of which involved Galician suspects.

On May 29, 1926, while at home suffering from an unknown illness Jacob Seel died of a heart attack after, allegedly and erroneously, believing that his friend and Chief of Detectives, George Smith had been killed in a shootout. Jacob was buried at Brookside Cemetery, plot 21-0722-0.



T. Stefanik, 1912 City Council, COW Archives

On December Dec 29, 1904, the Winnipeg Police hired Theodore Stefanik as a second Detective Interpreter to assist Jacob Seel with investigations in Winnipeg's ever growing immigrant communities.

Stefanik was born on March 1, 1880, in the village of Hrycewola, Brody County, Galicia (Ukraine). He came to Canada in 1899. He married Olga Braschuk in Sifton, Manitoba, on April 28, 1901. They had two daughters. Stefanik left the Winnipeg Police on August 30, 1907, to try his hand in community advocacy and politics. He went on to gain notoriety when he was nominated and then elected in December 1911 as Winnipeg's first Ukranian City Councilor (alderman). Stefaniuk sat for one term on Council – 1912-1913.

Stefanik was one of the founders and President of the Ukrainian Mutual Benefit Association of St. Nicholas of Canada. He was closely associated with St. Vladimir and Olga Ukrainian Catholic Church. As an educational advocate, he served as organizer for schools in rural Manitoba. He died in Winnipeg on March 21, 1951. He was buried at All Saints Cemetery.

Stefanik was replaced by Jacob Kwiatkowski, who would go on to be one of the longest serving detectives in the Winnipeg Police.



Det. J. Kwiatkowski, 1909

Jacob Kwiatkowski was born on February 20, 1883, in “Tartaków, Sokal, Poland” (now Ukraine). He came to Canada as a teenager, settling in the R.M. of Springfield with his family. He was hired by the Winnipeg Police on September 1, 1907.

Common among new immigrants at the time, Jacob anglicized his last name to Kwaite for some purposes. The rationale was straightforward: adopting names that sounded more Canadian might help speed assimilation, deter discrimination, or just to aid in business. However, for most legal purposes he used the name Jacob Kwiatkowski. According to newspaper accounts he could speak Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, German and Ruthenian.

During his career Jacob was involved in numerous investigations from thefts and robberies, domestic assaults and murders. Like Jacob Seel he gained distinction by unravelling a number of difficult crimes and bringing criminals to justice. Infact, along with Jacob Seel and Alex Kolomic, he was singled out for praise by the Chief of Police on March 25, 1925, for his work on the murder of Katje Symczyshyn, which occurred on May 8 the previous year. The judge, in addressing the jury in the trial of Harry Tatarniuk, stated how struck he was in the fair and manly way the officers gave their evidence.

Dets. Kolomic, Seel and Kwiatkowski were singled out again for their efforts again for the arrests of Harry Zachary, Louie Kronenfeld, Mary Petryshyn, and George Odniak in 1924. These individuals had, for some time, been engaged in the practice of robbing individuals of cash and property. They were all found guilty and sentenced to 4 years each in the Penitentiary.

He was also singled out by the Chief of Police for the arrest of Eli Romaniuk, and the clearing up of the robbery of two clerks at the P.& B. Cash store, which netted the criminals \$4000. Romaniuk pled guilty and was sentenced to five years in the Penitentiary (his accomplice, Mike Kolcun, committed suicide as the police attempted to take him into custody).

Jacob’s family suffered a tragic loss on July 28, 1929, when his brothers Charles and Tedeous Kwiatkowski were killed at a C.P.R. train crossing near Hazelridge, Manitoba.

Shortly after joining the Winnipeg Police, Jacob married Rosalia Olszanski in Winnipeg on November 14, 1907. Together they had five children. Jacob worked as a Detective his entire 42-

year career with the Winnipeg Police, retiring to pension on February 28, 1949. He died on March 13, 1983, at the age of 99 in New Westminster BC.



Det. Peter Metnek, 1909

Peter Metnek was the fourth Ukrainian detective hired by the Winnipeg Police on February 19, 1909. He remained with the Force until August 27, 1920, with one break in his service from April 30, 1911 to May 13, 1912. His police career was unremarkable.

There are few details about Metnek, other than he indicated he was from Ruthenia when he was first hired. The Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria (1772–1918), corresponding to parts of Western Ukraine, was referred to as Ruthenia and its people as Ruthenians.

In the 1911 and 1916 Census he indicated he was born in Austria and was of the Catholic faith. He immigrated to Canada in 1901 and was naturalized in 1908. He could speak Austrian and by 1916 he was married to Agnes “Metnek”, who was born in the United States.

Unfortunately, there is no Peter Metnek in the 1921, 1926 or 1931 Census, and, although there is a Peter Metnek who worked as an Interpreter in Winnipeg in the 1935 it is unknown if this is the same person. No further information can be found about him. It is likely that Peter Metnek is an anglicized name, and that his legal name maybe quite different.

After Metnek, there were two interpreters who were hired but who did not remain very long. Little information is known about these officer other than they were born in Poland.

- Alfonso Rayda, born in Poland. Hired on April 6, 1911, he was dismissed after one day on April 7, 1911; and
- Max L. Lipshutz, born in Poland. Hired on June 8, 1911, he resigned after 3 months on September 29, 1911.

In between these two officers there was Tetsko (Theodore) Kochan. Born in Florynah, Galicia, Austria (now Poland), on November 21, 1878, he originally travelled to the United States in 1894. He joined the U.S. Army in 1898, fighting the Spanish-American War in the Phillipines. He became a recruiting officer in Philadelphia, and, after 6 years, he immigrated to Canada in 1905. He taught school for several years before joining the Winnipeg Police on April 18, 1911. He subsequently resigned on June 13, 1913, and joined the City of Winnipeg Assessment Office. He died in Winnipeg on February 2, 1972, and was buried in the All Saints Cemetery.



Det. B. Hubarewicz, 1916

The next officer hired was Boleslaus Hubarewicz. He was born in the City of Mitau in the province of Kurland, one of the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire, on August 23, 1888. He identified as Polish when he joined the Winnipeg Police as a Detective Interpreter on October 24, 1911. He had previously worked for the Winnipeg Detective Agency and held a valid teaching certificate issued by the Manitoba Department of Education on October 12, 1909.

Unfortunately, like Peter Metnek, Hubarewicz does not appear in any Census. However, there was a “Ben Hubar” (alias Boleslaus Hubarewicz) that immigrated to the United States from Winnipeg in July 1922. This is likely the same person.

No further information can be found about Boleslaus Hubarewicz / Ben Hubar. However it is likely he anglicized name, and possibly more than once.

Nevertheless, his police career was unremarkable. He resigned from the Winnipeg Police on November 30, 1921.

According to his obituary, Stanley Michael Mendofic was born May 8, 1896, in Russian occupied Poland (likely Baranowice) and immigrated to Canada when he was 16. According to the 1926 Census Stanley indicated he was Ukranian and born in Galicia.

On December 29, 1915, Stanley enlisted with the Canadian Army, serving with the 45th Battalion overseas with service in both France and Belgium. On September 15, 1916, he received a bullet wound to the face, breaking his jaw, during the Battle of the Somme. He was medically discharged on June 20, 1919.

Also serving in the 45th Battalion during that time was Alexander Kolomic (Kolomyjec). Kolomic would marry Stanley’s sister, Helene, on June 2, 1916.

At the conclusion of the war, Stanley joined the Winnipeg Police on July 21, 1919, as a Detective Interpreter. He resigned November 30, 1921, and moved to the R.M. of Springfield where he farmed.

On July 6, 1920, Stanley married Pauline Porayko in Winnipeg. They had three daughters. Eventually the family moved to Winnipeg Beach, in 1930 where they lived for the next 40 years. During that time Stanley worked as a policeman in Winnipeg Beach. According to his obituary he worked as a policeman for 12 years and as a civilian employee at CFB Gimli.

Stanley died on June 20, 1970, and was buried at Saint Michaels Cemetery, Pleasant Home, just outside Winnipeg Beach, in the RM of Rockwood, Interlake Region.

Nicholas Volodymir Bachynsky, born on September 16, 1887, in Celo Serafinily, Eastern Galicia (now Ukraine), replaced Hubarewicz as a Detective Interpreter on December 1, 1921. He came to the Winnipeg Police with impeccable credentials. He had a teacher's certificate and references from several law firms attesting to his work as a translator for the courts in Yorkton, Fort William, and most recently in Winnipeg.

Bachynsky came to Canada in 1904 and to Manitoba in 1910 to homestead at Fisher Branch. He was working as a court interpreter in Fort William, Ontario, when he married Antoinette Divozynska on August 11, 1910. He subsequently attended the Brandon Teachers College and taught at Rus School (1914-1915, 1917-1918), Wheathill School (1915-1916), Dehowa School (1922-1926), and High Plains School (1927).



Nicholas V. Bachynsky,
MLA, 1922-1958

Bachynsky resigned from the Winnipeg Police of his own accord on June 15, 1922, and returned to teaching in Poplarfield. He was subsequently he was elected a provincial MLA in 1922, 1936, 1941, 1946, 1950, and 1954. He was first elected as a member of the United Farmers Movement, became a Progressive in 1927 and was re-elected in 1932, 1936, 1941, 1945, 1949, and 1953. He was Speaker of the House from 1950 to 1958, during the administration of Douglas L. Campbell. He was defeated in the 1958 general election. Bachynsky was active in many Ukrainian organizations.

Bachynsky died in Poplarfield on August 14, 1969. H was buried in the Glen Eden Memorial Gardens, West St. Paul MB. He was survived by his second wife, and three children.

John Leonard Celmer was the next hire by the Winnipeg Police on December 10, 1921. He was born on January 15, 1895, in Volhynia, Russia.



Sgt. J.L. Celmer, 101st Bat.
Courtesy Jim Busby

Volhynia is a historical area in northwest Ukraine bordering Poland and Belarus. The area changed hands numerous times throughout history and was divided among competing powers. For centuries it was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the Russian annexation during the Partitions of Poland, all of Volhynia was made part of the Pale of Settlement on the southwestern border of the Russian Empire.

Celmer immigrated to Canada via the United States in 1912, settling in Winnipeg. He enlisted in the 101st Overseas Battalion in Winnipeg on February 1, 1916, and was transferred to the 44th Battlion for service in France. He was wounded by shrapnel in Vimy Ridge and evacuated to England for convalescence in 1917.

Celmer concluded his service in England as a Sergeant assigned to the General Intelligence Section. He was discharged on July 24, 1919, as part of general demobilization. He was fluent in 4 languages.

Celmer's career with the Winnipeg Police was unremarkable and he resigned from the Force on January 15, 1923, on account of illness. He died on January 16, 1926, in King Edward Hospital in Winnipeg, from injuries suffered during the World War. He was buried at Elmwood Cemetery. He was survived by his wife and one daughter.



Det. Alex Kolomic, 1932

Alexander Kolomic was born in Wola Błędowska, Russian occupied Poland, on August 14, 1892. He came to Canada as a youth in 1900. Nothing is known of his early life. On June 2, 1916, Kolomic (Kolomyjec) married Helene Mendofik in Winnipeg.

On May 21, 1915, Kolomic enlisted with the 45th Battalion in Souris. After his arrival in Europe, he was transferred to 31st Battalion for service in France and Belgium in 1916. Kolomic was invalidated back to Canada in 1917 with neurasthenia, a common diagnosis during World War I for “shell shock.” He had been in the vicinity of shell explosions in Vimy Ridge and Ypres.

In 1918, Kolomic joined the Dominion Police for work in narcotics and federal excise offences, until that department was disbanded in 1920. Kolomic, who was fluent in all the Slavic languages, subsequently joined the Manitoba Provincial Police on February 1, 1920. After he completed his basic training in Winnipeg, he was posted to Ethelbert effective April 1, 1920. He was given badge or regimental number 29.

Kolomic left the province to join the Winnipeg Police on January 30, 1923, as Detective Interpreter. Six years later, in 1929, he was made a Detective Second Class. In 1930 he was promoted to Detective First Class. He held that position until 1950.

Kolomic died on June 15, 1950, of a heart attack, while still working for the Winnipeg Police. He was predeceased by his wife, Helen, and their son John who was killed with the air force while overseas during World War II. He was survived by one son, Paul, a member of the Winnipeg Fire Department, and two daughters, Anne Popiel of Rivers, and Marion Wallace of Winnipeg. He was buried at the Holy Ghost Cemetery.

Emil William Grekul (Grant) was born on February 10, 1893, at Pohorloutz, Bukovina, Roumania, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now in Ukraine). He arrived in Canada in 1907 and became a naturalized Canadian citizen in 1914.



Cst. E.W. Grant, 1929, MPP

Like many who came from this part of the world where borders shifted, the residents could speak many different East European languages, including Polish, English, Russian, and German. Grekul indicated his mother tongue was “Ruthenian,” sometimes referred to today as “Old Ukrainian.”

At some point after 1916, Grekul anglicized his name to Grant. Grant/Grekul worked as an interpreter with the Registrar of Enemy Aliens during World War I and with the Labourers Bureau in Winnipeg. He married Martha Cecelia Flood in Nipissing, Ontario, on June 1, 1921. He was working at Abitibi Pulp and Paper Mills in Iroquois Falls, Ontario, at the time. They would have two children, Ruth and Edward.

In December 1925, Grant was taken on strength with the Manitoba Provincial Police as a special constable, primarily conducting liquor enforcement. He was posted at the town of Dauphin, living at 12, 5th Avenue S.W. His appointment as a full constable was confirmed in the Manitoba Gazette on October 22, 1927.

On August 15, 1929, the Dauphin Herald newspaper reported that, after four years in Dauphin, Grant was being transferred by the provincial police to Winnipeg.

On May 7, 1930, Grant resigned from the provincial police to take a position as a Detective Interpreter with the Winnipeg Police Department. He remained with the Winnipeg Police until September 26, 1934, when he resigned.

Grant subsequently left Winnipeg. It is unknown where he went afterward; however, it is believed he died in Montreal on September 14, 1961, and was buried at the Cimetière Mont-Royal.

With the retirement of Jacob Kwiatkowski in 1949 and the passing of Alexander Kolomic in 1950, the Detective Interpreter position was eliminated in the Winnipeg Police. However, the presence of Ukranian police officers has remained within the general ranks of the police service.

In 1998, Jack Ewatski became the first non-anglo (Ukranian) Chief of Police in Winnipeg.¹ Ewatski, hired in 1973, was Chief from 1998 to 2007. He was also the President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

¹ Although Jack Ewatski was the first Ukranian Chief of Police of the Winnipeg Police Service. The surrounding metropolitan police departments had several Ukranian Chiefs of Police prior to Ewatski. These include Joe Teres, who was Chief of the Transcona Police Department from 1960-1974, and John Urchenko who was Chief of the North Kildonan Police Department from 1968-1971. Both would join the Winnipeg Police after the amalgamation of all the meto police departments in 1974.

Born in Winnipeg to a Ukrainian father and Polish mother, Ewatski attended Holy Ghost School and St. Paul's High School. Ewatski worked up the ranks from Constable, to Detective, then Deputy Chief and finally as Chief of the Service. After retiring from Winnipeg, Ewatski was appointed Deputy Police Commissioner of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in 2010. He remained on the Trinidad force until 2012.



Chief Jack Ewatski, 1998-2007

See my other feature stories on the first [Chinese](#), [Black](#), [Icelandic](#), [Filipino](#), Scandinavian, Jewish, Italian, and Belgian officers.

NOTE: In 2024 the Winnipeg Police celebrates its 150th anniversary and the 50th Anniversary of the metro amalgamation. Anyone wishing to recognize a police member who made a substantial contribution to policing in Winnipeg or its surrounding municipalities during the past 150 years is asked to send me their name and (if known) a brief description of their accomplishments.