
JOHN GRAY

Fingerprint Expert, Photographer, and Records Clerk

*Written & researched by John Burchill
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John Gray, 1909. WPS Museum

In my exposé of Winnipeg Police fingerprint specialists, I next look at the replacements for Chief Clerk [Charles Driver](#), who resigned in 1907 to take a position as a Superintendent with the Canadian Detective Bureau.

His first replacement, Charles A. (Stanley) Banyard, didn't remain long, taking a position as Clerk to the Municipal Commissioner.

Banyard's replacement was John Gray. Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on January 6, 1886, John immigrated to Canada in 1906 at the age of 20. He had some clerical experience working as an office boy before coming to Canada.

On April 25, 1908, John joined the Winnipeg Police as an Elevator Operator. On May 20, 1908, he was *elevated* to constable and then to Chief Clerk.

At the time, the Chief Clerk was also in charge of the Identification Bureau. However, on May 3, 1911, the position of Fingerprint Expert, Photographer, and Records Clerk was created under the Chief of Detectives – likely the result of the national Criminal Identification Bureau being established in Ottawa that February. This was now a separate position from the Chief Clerk (retitled as the Secretary to the Chief). The fingerprint expert received a higher monthly salary of \$100, exceeding that of the other clerks, who were paid between \$55 and \$65 per month.

Initially, on par with the Secretary to the Chief, the fingerprint expert's salary remained stagnant, exceeded by all but the most junior clerks over the next decade, notwithstanding the specialist nature of the position. In fact, it was not until 1930, when the position of Superintendent of Identification was created, that the salary again exceeded that of all other non-police staff, except the Clerk of the Court. By then, however, it was too late for John.

When the local media referred to John, it was typically by the outdated term “Bertillon expert.” For example, in 1913, when, during an alarming use of explosives by “yeggmen” to crack open safes,¹ John was assigned to gather evidence at the site of the explosions.

¹ A Yegg or Yeggman was a slang term for a robber or safe blower. The word is said to come from a famous burglar, possibly named John Yegg, a pioneer in the world of burglary. Allegedly, the first criminal to use nitroglycerin to blow open safes.

SAFEBLOWERS OPEN FIRE ON OFFICER

Crack Strongbox at C.N.R.
Depot in St. Boniface and
Get \$200 in Cash.

CONSTABLE HAD NO GUN

Had to "Duck" When Yeggs Start-
ed to Shoot---Interior of Build-
ing Wrecked.

One of the explosions, reported in the Winnipeg Free Press on October 6, 1913, ripped the doors off the steel safe inside the CNR Depot in St. Boniface. It was the fourth safe that had been blown within a week. Three charges of nitroglycerin were used, blowing the doors off the safe, leaving the building "*like a cyclone had hit it*".

John Gross, a newly hired, unarmed St. Boniface police officer walking the beat, responded to the explosion. He was met by two "yeggmen", who fired several shots at him in their escape. Not surprisingly, Gross resigned a month later, likely feeling unequipped to handle armed robbers without any protection himself.

John Gray was called to take control of the scene. He found fingerprints ("*miniature photographs of the criminals*" as the media called them) on several items, including pieces of soap, and the soap cup into which the glycerine was poured. John had also been called to the other explosions, where fingerprints were also found.

Winnipeg Free Press, Oct-06-1913

The other safe attacks, at Arbuthnot Lumber, Commonwealth Lumber, and the Empress Laundry, all in Winnipeg, believed to be by the same individuals, were also examined by John.

YEGGMEN CRACK SAFE IN THE OFFICE OF LAUNDRY WITH NITRO-GLYCERINE

Yeggmen Crack Safe [at Empress Laundry]. Winnipeg Tribune, Sep-30-1913

While the St Boniface Police Occurrence Books show no arrest was made, several weeks later, on November 6, 1913, J.C. Scarth and James Kelly, both of Ontario, were arrested in Saskatoon. Believed to be part of a gang of five safecrackers operating throughout Western Canada, Scarth was alleged to have had "*enough nitro-glycerine to more than blow up every safe in Saskatoon*".

Scarth was also found in possession of a .38 calibre and .32 calibre handguns; five pounds of dynamite ("*partly cooked*"); 50 feet of fuse; and 100 rounds of ammunition. According to the local police, Scarth "*practically admitted*" to blowing up safes in Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton and Moose Jaw. Scarth subsequently pleaded guilty on November 18, 1913, in Saskatoon for possession of explosives and received a 5-year penitentiary sentence.

John was also mentioned, peripherally at least, during the escape of accused murderer, [Jack Krafchenko](#), who had broken out of the Winnipeg Police Jail through an unbarred window in the police photography room that John used to process prisoners.

However, it was during a trip to the Manitoba Archives that I came across an original set of fingerprints taken by John Gray on September 4, 1911. The fingerprints were in the prosecution's criminal case file of Charles Warren.

This form is not to be pinned. 1063-11

No. W
 Name Charles Warren
 Aliases _____
 Winnipeg Police Station _____
 Prison Reg. No. 3210

Classification 9 R 10 15
18 R 10

RIGHT HAND				
1.—Right Thumb	2.—R. Fore Finger	3.—R. Middle Finger	4.—R. Ring Finger	5.—R. Little Finger
	<u>4</u>	<u>13</u>		<u>15</u>
(Fold)				(Fold)

Impressions to be so taken that the flexure of the last joint shall be immediately above the black line marked (Fold). If the impression of any digit be defective, a second print may be taken in the vacant space above it.
 When a finger is missing or so injured that the impression cannot be obtained, or is deformed and yields a bad print, the fact should be noted under REMARKS.

LEFT HAND				
6.—L. Thumb	7.—L. Fore Finger	8.—L. Middle Finger	9.—L. Ring Finger	10.—L. Little Finger
<u>20</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>12</u>		<u>16</u>
(Fold)				(Fold)

LEFT HAND	RIGHT HAND
Plain impression of four fingers taken simultaneously	Plain impression of four fingers taken simultaneously

Impressions taken by John Gray At Winnipeg _____ 1911
 Classified at Central Bureau by W. H. ... Date 4th September
 Tested at Central Bureau by _____ Date 21st 9 1911
 (A)

Fingerprints of Charles Warren #3210, taken by John Gray, September 4, 1911.

Warren had been arrested by Detectives Stodgill, Bishop, and Newton for possessing and attempting to sell counterfeit Winnipeg Electric Railway streetcar tickets, believed to have been manufactured in England.

A copy of Warren's fingerprints and photograph taken by John were sent to the London Metropolitan Police, which confirmed that Warren had arranged for the manufacture and production of 5000 sheets of 24 tickets (120,000 tickets) through an English printer in Notting Hill, London, under the name of G. Hopkins.

Sergeant Frederick Ried of the Metropolitan Police confirmed that Warren was the same person as "G. Hopkins", who had provided the template for the tickets to J. Tamblын Printers, saying they were for a "miniature railway" to be used at an exhibition in Winnipeg.

A statement was taken on September 26, 1911, from Ernest Thorne, identifying Warren as the person he dealt with, selecting his picture from a series that was presented to him by Sergeant Ried.

Warren's fingerprints and his police identification photograph were returned to Winnipeg, along with Thorne's statement and the sample tickets and written instructions that "G. Hopkins" had given to him.² Warren subsequently entered a guilty plea on October 30, 1911, and was sentenced to one year in Jail by Judge Robert Hill Myers.

Notwithstanding his expertise, John was one of 228 police officers dismissed on June 9/10, 1919, for refusing to sign an Oath of Loyalty during the 1919 General Strike.

While the majority of the police officers were taken back on strength after the strike ended on June 26, 1919, John was not.

² The Metropolitan Police also confirmed that Warren had been born at Chinnor, near Wellingford, Oxfordshire, England, on February 12, 1880; that he had previously worked for the Great Western Railway from 1900 to 1906 and had been released from service when he was arrested and imprisoned for debt.

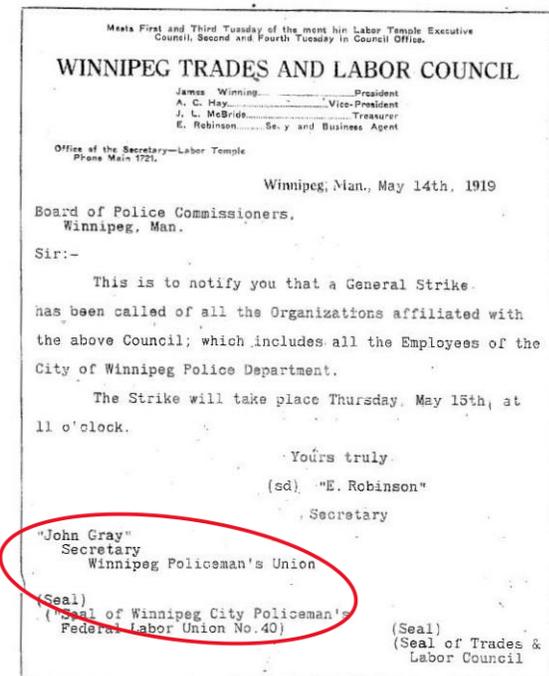
In a letter to the Police Commission on June 26, 1919, John was one of several officers singled out by Acting Chief Chris Newton who should not be taken back on strength for the “good government and discipline of the Force”.³

John’s offence against the good government and discipline of the Force? His involvement in the Winnipeg City Policemen’s Union.

Although the Winnipeg Police Commission passed a resolution on May 11, 1917, that “no Union or Association allied with any other body whatsoever be permitted to be organized amongst members of the Police Department”, several police officers began organizing their own union.

In July 1918, the policeman’s union was sanctioned through the Department of Labour in Ottawa, as the Police Federal Union No. 40. By this time, about 90% of the police force belonged to the union. While it was a standalone union, they did have ties with the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, an organization created through the joint membership of other major unions throughout the City.

On October 28, 1918, following a motion by Alderman John Queen and seconded by Alderman Abraham Heaps, the City Council recommended to the Winnipeg Police Commission, after a heated debate, that they recognize the newly formed police union in a vote of 9 to 8. Alderman Fowler, who voted against the motion, stated the police could not have two masters and that “Council will have a great deal of trouble with this policeman’s union if they accept it”.⁴



After several working conditions were agreed to in January 1919, John and several other members of the police union, including Sgt. Livingston and Det. Hudson, appeared before the Police Commission on April 16, 1919, with a proposed schedule of wages. Under a growing cloud of labour unrest, the Winnipeg Police Commission agreed to a new working agreement with members of the police force who were threatening a strike of their own, regarding pay and working conditions, on April 30, 1919.

Soon after this agreement, the City was faced with the beginnings of a General Strike. As tensions rose and conditions deteriorated, the Commission received a written notice on May 14 from the Trades and Labour Council of a General Strike, which included support from employees of the Winnipeg Police Force – signed by John Gray, as Secretary of the Winnipeg Policemen’s Union.

³ Others mentioned involved in the union included Sgt. John Livingston, Cst. Henry Evertt, Asst. Morality Officer George Lovatt, Acting Stn. Sgt. George Headon, and Det. Elmer Hudson.

⁴ Alderman Queen and Heaps, who both went on to successful political careers as members of the Social Democratic Party, were arrested and charged with seditious conspiracy for supporting the Strike.

KITCHEN ASKS SOLDIERS TO STAND TOGETHER

EXTRA

Winnipeg Telegram

LAST EDITION

WESTERN CANADA'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER

26TH YEAR

WINNIPEG, MONDAY, JUNE 9, 1919

NUMBER 102

POLICE FORCE FIRED

Although the Police Union had voted in favour of the strike, the Strike Committee established by the Trades and Labour Council requested the members of the police force remain on duty to enforce the law and maintain order. However, the Police Commission felt the police officers – being aligned with the Trades and Labour Council – could not have two masters and ordered Chief Constable MacPherson to interview every member of the police force and order them to both quit the union and sign an Oath of Loyalty; those who refused faced immediate dismissal.

In the end, 228 members refused to sign the oath and were summarily dismissed, while 23 members who did sign remained employed. In response, the Commission authorized the hiring of special constables to patrol the streets and keep order. Following the dismissal of almost the entire police force, the Commission removed Chief MacPherson and reorganized the force under Deputy Chief Chris Newton, who was appointed Acting Chief.⁵

After the strike, most of the members of the police force were permitted to rejoin and retain their original ranks under the condition that they now sign the Oath of Loyalty. Acting Chief Newton also took advantage of the strike to submit a report to the Police Commission, recommending that several men not be rehired due to their conduct during the event. This list included all the officers who represented the Executive of the police union, including John Gray. Further, it included men whom the acting chief did not want back for his own reasons.

While perhaps not as groundbreaking as Charles Driver, looking at the background and investigations in which John was involved provides us with a backdrop to our policing history at the time – from roving bands of criminals (“yeggmen”) carrying out safe attacks with nitroglycerin, to the creation of the Fingerprint Expert, Photographer, and Records Clerk position, to the early control of crime scenes by the Fingerprint Expert, to the early use of Winnipeg Police identification records internationally – as well the working conditions of officers without guns, and the pay inequities among police and staff members that assisted in the creation of the Winnipeg Policeman’s Union.

As for John, he went back to Aberdeen, Scotland, after his dismissal with his wife Isabella and son John. He became an electrical engineer. He died in Aberdeen on December 8, 1948.

⁵ For more background on the police involvement in the 1919 Strike, see Rod Hutter’s article in the [Police Museum’s 2019 Annual Report](#), pages 12-19.