
SIDNEY HAROLD LYON

Superintendent of Identification 1919-1957

*Written & researched by John Burchill
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S. H. LYON
Finger Print Expert, Winnipeg Police Dept.

In my exposé of Winnipeg Police fingerprint specialists, I next look at the replacements for Fingerprint Expert and Photographer [John Gray](#), who was terminated on June 9, 1919, and not rehired after the Winnipeg General Strike.

His replacement, Sidney Lyon, was hired on August 1, 1919. Sidney applied directly for the Records Clerk and Constable position.

Born in Reading, Berkshire, England, on October 11, 1892, Sidney immigrated to Canada in 1909 and gained employment as a stenographer and commercial artist with McLaughlin Carriage. His skills in both fields would prove invaluable to the police.

The McLaughlin Carriage Company began operations in Oshawa in 1876, selling wagons, sleighs, and carriages. The company expanded and opened a Winnipeg branch as part of its Western Canada expansion in the late 1890s.

The McLaughlin Carriage Company entered the automobile sector and, in 1907, acquired the rights to assemble Buick vehicles in Canada. By 1909, they began advertising automobiles for sale at their showroom located on the corner of Princess Street and Ross Avenue.¹

As most of the advertisements for the McLaughlin company were pen and ink, Sidney likely drew them all for the Winnipeg market (and possibly beyond). An example of an advertisement for the McLaughlin-Buick Model B35 as it appeared in the 1915 Winnipeg Henderson Directory is on the following page.

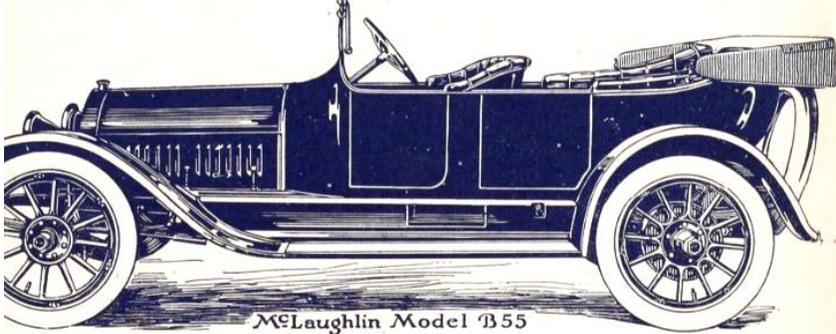
On February 27, 1915, Sidney married Ada Winifred Allen in Winnipeg. They would have three children, Dorothy, Harold and Edwin.

Following his younger brother, Sidney enlisted for service in the Fort Garry Horse on April 27, 1916. He was assigned to the Special Service Squad as part of the Military Staff Clerks. Besides being a commercial artist, Sidney had completed Junior College and spent 10 years doing

¹ The McLaughlin Motor Car Co., a subsidiary of the McLaughlin Carriage, merged with the Chevrolet Motor Car Company of Canada to form General Motors of Canada, Limited in 1918.

shorthand and “touch typing”. He was discharged from the military on January 15, 1918, holding the rank of Sergeant. His younger brother, Edwin, was killed in action by a mortar shell in a trench east of Souchez, France, on February 16, 1917.

McLaughlin Carriage Co.
LIMITED
Factory: Oshawa, Ont.
Western Branches: Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver



McLaughlin Model B55

McLaughlin Buick
Automobiles

Model C24 Roadster	\$1,150	Model C25 Touring	\$1,250
Model C36 Roadster	1,525	Model C37 Touring	1,600
Model C54 Roadster	2,250	Model C55 7 Passenger	2,250

(F.O.B. Oshawa)

Our Motor Trucks deliver the goods.
All our Models have the celebrated Overhead Valve Motors.
Service and satisfaction unexcelled.

Representatives will have pleasure in waiting on you with full details
CATALOGS ON REQUEST

RICHARD MCKENZIE, General Manager

Phone Garry 830 Private Exchange

Showrooms: 204 to 212 Princess St.

Advertisement for a McLaughlin-Buick Model B35. 1915 Henderson Directory.
The drawing was likely done by Sidney Lyon, who was the artist for McLaughlin Carriage.

At the time of Sidney’s appointment, the Fingerprint Expert, Photographer, and Records Clerk worked under the Chief of Detectives. The starting salary for this position was \$125/month in 1919, rising to \$135/month in 1929. In 1930, a new position, the Superintendent of Identification, was created for Sidney, overseeing the Fingerprint Expert, Photographer, and Records Clerks, with a salary of \$180/month.

As a stenographer and artist, Sidney was well organized and kept meticulous records. However, his knowledge of fingerprinting was rudimentary. With the departure of John Gray, he had to teach himself and travelled to the Detroit Police Department for first-hand observation.



Picture of Sergeant Sidney Lyon and his wife, Ada Winifred, shortly before his discharge from the army in 1918. Picture courtesy of his grandson, Gordon Lyon.

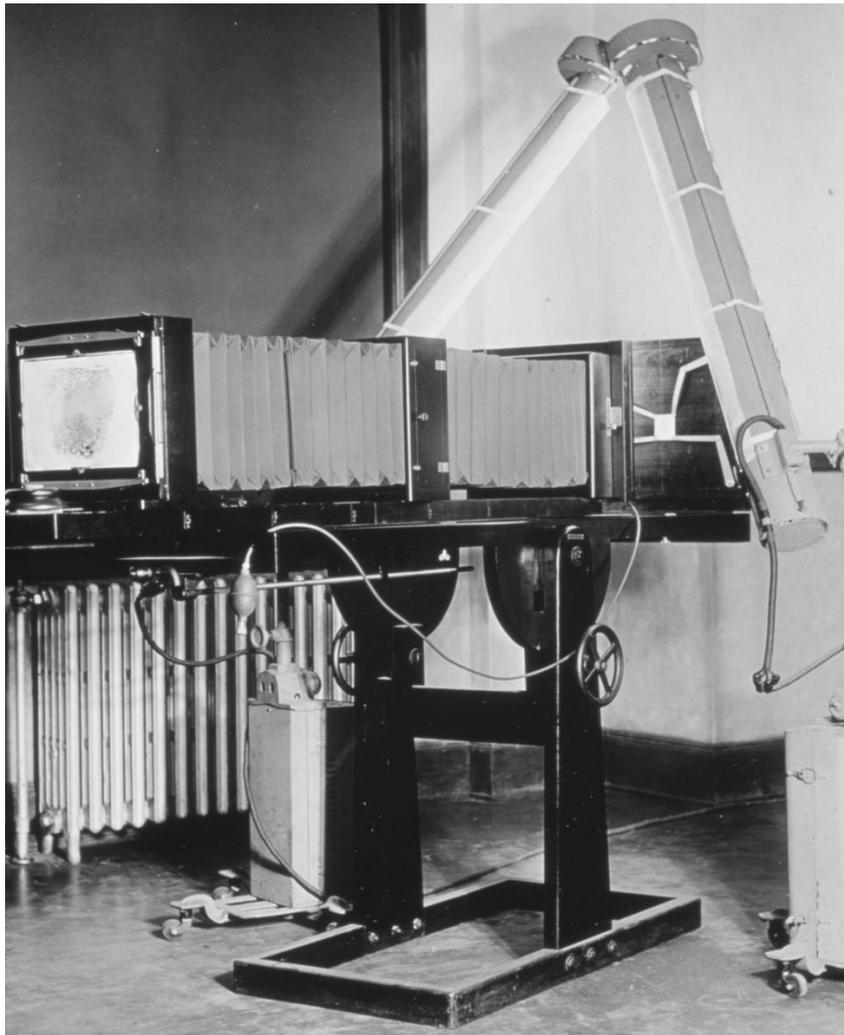
By 1921, the Winnipeg Police Identification Bureau had 10,000 sets of fingerprints on file (by comparison, the national fingerprint bureau in Ottawa had only 70,000). Fingerprints of suspects were also received from as far away as the Inspector General of Police, Sydney, NSW, Australia. Photographs were also exchanged with multiple police agencies. However, by far, the most significant relationship was with the Calgary Police. A total of 449 pictures were sent to the Calgary City Police in 1921, and 351 were received. By comparison, Winnipeg received only 24 pictures from Toronto and 16 from Vancouver, suggesting a flow of criminals westward from Calgary to Winnipeg.²

² The Winnipeg Police also had a longstanding connection with the Calgary Police. Its first Chief of Police (1885-1888), [John S. Ingram](#), had also been the Chief of Police in Winnipeg. Thomas English, a former Winnipeg Police Sergeant, was also the Chief of Police in Calgary from 1891 to 1909.

A noteworthy identification by the Winnipeg Police Identification Bureau in 1921 was that of Jack McKenzie, the deceased in a St. James Police shooting.

McKenzie (unknown at the time), with an accomplice, robbed a storekeeper at gunpoint in St. James on the night of June 3, 1921. Constable Joseph Hamm of the St. James Police was dispatched and, after a short search of the neighbourhood, encountered the two robbers in the vicinity. While being questioned, one of the suspects (McKenzie) turned a gun on Hamm, who promptly drew his revolver and fired, killing McKenzie. The accomplice made good his escape. No identification papers were found on the suspect, and a search of his fingerprints taken by the Winnipeg Police while the body was lying at the undertaker's, revealed his identity as that of Jack McKenzie, who the Winnipeg Police had previously arrested and fingerprinted on a charge of theft and had skipped bail while awaiting trial.

With the increasing number of fingerprints being taken, the Winnipeg Police invested in a specialized fingerprint camera for Sidney on February 24, 1922. Fortuitously, the camera, purchased from Office Specialty Company, aided in the first conviction in Manitoba (and one of the first in Canada) based solely on fingerprint evidence.



Winnipeg Police Fingerprint Camera, circa 1938.
The original is currently on display in the Winnipeg Police Museum.

On May 7, 1922, at about 3:00 a.m., the residence of Charles Tadman, 107 Lisgar Street was broken into. Three cases and nine bottles of King George Whiskey were stolen. A neighbour saw the thieves loading liquor into a Ford Sedan but could not identify the men. One Max Steinman, whose car stood on a vacant lot nearby, was brought to police headquarters and interrogated. He claimed to have been in bed and had several witnesses to prove it, and he was let go. A few days afterwards, provincial police liquor inspectors arrested Steinman along with three others while he was in the act of selling three cases of King George Whiskey.³ While in jail, Steinman was visited by a woman, whom he told to tell “Harry” to come and remove the stuff.

This information was conveyed to the Winnipeg Police. A search warrant was issued, and eight bottles of King George Whiskey were recovered. The woman later admitted to having drunk one bottle of whiskey, making nine bottles in all. Steinman was arrested and charged with housebreaking and theft and released on bail.

As the case was entirely circumstantial, the Chief of Detectives instructed detectives to return to the Tadman residence and collect additional evidence, including the broken glass that the thieves had removed when they entered through the basement window. The glass was seized and examined by Sydney, who developed a clear set of latent fingerprints. The fingerprints were photographed and enlarged; they matched those of Steinman taken at the time of his arrest.

As Steinman denied any involvement in the theft, the fingerprints would become a key piece of evidence against Steinman. To assist with the prosecution and confirm Sidney’s identification, Inspector Edward Foster of the National Fingerprint Bureau in Ottawa was called to Winnipeg.

Steinman elected for a jury trial and was tried before Justice Galt and a jury in the Court of King’s Bench that June. The enlarged photographs showing 16 principal points of similarity were demonstrated to the jury by Sidney and Inspector Foster. The defence tried hard to undermine their testimony, attempting to discredit the fingerprint system. Steinman supplemented his defence by producing witnesses who swore they had sold this very whiskey to him, who was an admitted bootlegger, and that he was seen in bed by two different people at the time the break-in took place.

Steinman also took the stand, testifying that on the instruction of his lawyer, he had gone to the Tadman house after being released on bail (and before the detectives had returned to process the scene), to draw a plan of the house for his lawyer’s guidance. At that time, Steinman had gone under the verandah beneath which the basement window was situated and remembered picking up a piece of glass. While two lawyers defended him, neither was called to testify that they had given him those instructions. The jury was hung, and a new trial was set for October before Justice Adamson. Inspector Foster was again brought from Ottawa, and the Crown presented much the same case. Steinman’s defence was the same, with the addition that his lawyer testified to sending him to Tadman’s house, to make a plan and that Steinman had made such a plan, but that it had been lost before trial. The jury convicted Steinman, and he was sentenced to 23 months in jail. This was the first conviction secured in Manitoba based on fingerprint evidence.

³ In 1922 it was illegal to sell alcohol in Manitoba. Prohibition came to Manitoba in 1916, closing all bars and banning the sale of alcohol. Exemptions are made for scientific, sacramental and medicinal use. The Prohibition Act of 1916 was repealed in 1923 and the sale of beer and light wine resumed.



R. v. Steinman. Crown Exhibit 4 in the original trial before Justice Galt, tendered June 30, 1922, and renumbered as Exhibit 5 in the second trial before Justice Adamson on October 25, 1922.

On numerous occasions, Sidney’s identification skills were also relied upon by outside agencies. For example, in December 1927, his services were requested by the Manitoba Provincial Police to assist with processing a murder scene in St. Laurent, on the shores of Lake Manitoba, where Ambrose Chaboyer was found brutally murdered in his home. Sidney photographed the scene and examined a blood-stained axe for fingerprints.⁴

Sidney was often invited to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) and International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conventions during the 1920s and 1930s. He was well recognized for setting up the department’s modus operandi and records filing systems – a system that other police departments had come to study. For example, in July 1956, Samuel Arthur (J.A.) Dissanayake, Ceylon’s (now Sri Lanka’s) Inspector-General of Police, Criminal Investigation Department, came to Winnipeg to examine the operations of the Winnipeg Police. During his stay, Sidney prepared a comprehensive package for him on the entire operations of the Winnipeg Police Records System, from the mugshot and fingerprint databases to the creation of crime reports, criminal records and modus operandi files.⁵

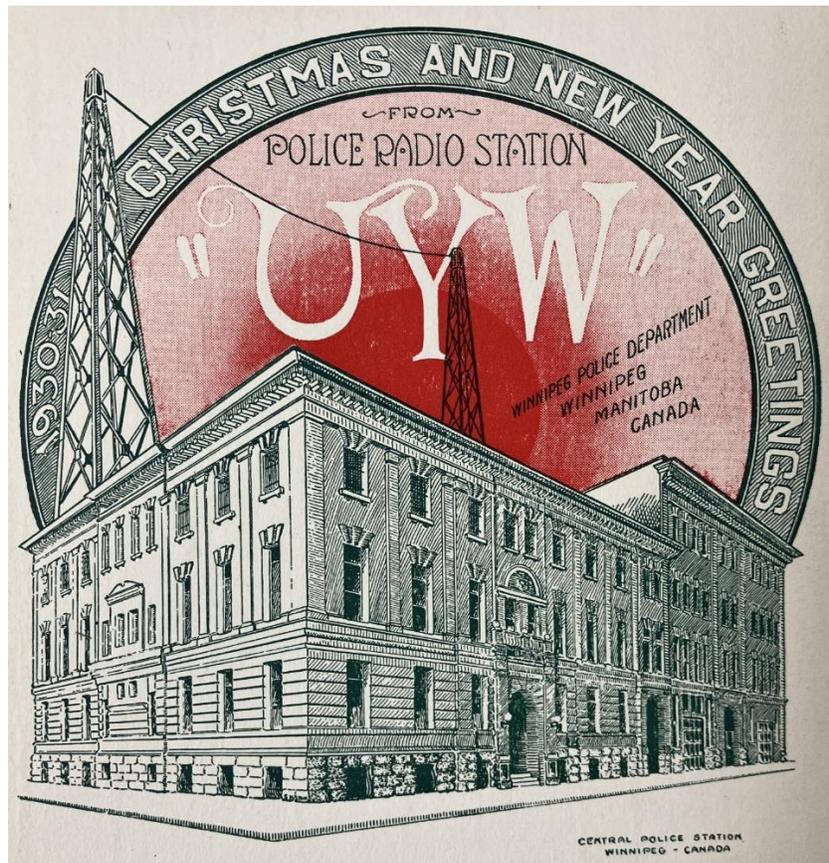
⁴ Although there is no record of the case being solved, just over a year later, the small St. Laurent community was rocked by the double murder of Marie Richard and her 16-year-old daughter Emma and the suicide of their killer, James Desjarlais, on April 19, 1929. Speculation in the local newspaper was that Desjarlais was a suspect in Chaboyer’s killing.

⁵ Sidney prepared a similar package for four Pakistani Police Superintendents (Orakzai, Khan, Safdar and Husain) who had come to Winnipeg for a training exercise in June 1954. The Winnipeg Police Museum holds a copy of the package.



Identification badges or medals for IACP Conventions worn by Sidney 1925 (Windsor), 1930 (Duluth) and 1933 (Chicago). Courtesy of his grandson, Gordon Lyon.

Sidney's skills in record keeping did not go unnoticed by the Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association, either, as he was elected secretary during the early 1920s. Additionally, his artistic skills were utilized by the Police Department to create annual greeting cards. Samples of the cards are on file with the Winnipeg Police Museum and with Sidney's grandson, Gordon.



1930-31 Winnipeg Police Holiday Greeting Card drawn by Sydney. The card recognizes the first radio signal system ("VYW") built and operated by the Winnipeg Police in Canada in October 1930.

From Winnipeg Police Museum files.



1929-30 Winnipeg Police Holiday Greeting Card drawn by Sydney.
 Courtesy of his grandson, Gordon Lyon.

Sidney retired on October 15, 1957, at the age of 65, as mandated for civilian staff. Upon his retirement, the Winnipeg Police Service eliminated the civilian Identification Supervisor position. The position was replaced by a police officer holding the rank of Detective Sergeant (equivalent to a uniform Staff Sergeant), and the number of clerks in the Crime Division was increased from four to five.⁶

The year that Sidney retired (1957), the Identification Bureau photographed and fingerprinted 1401 new individuals (and 151 “repeaters”), attended seven homicides or suicides, nine other suspicious or sudden deaths, and 21 traffic fatalities. Additionally, they examined 1,320 items in the field or at the police laboratory for fingerprints and other marks. Fingerprints at crime scenes identified 18 distinct individuals. As in 1921, Winnipeg continued to share all its fingerprint records with the Calgary Police.

Sidney died on May 13, 1973, in Winnipeg. He was buried in St. John’s Cemetery.

⁶ The first Detective Sergeant to hold the position was Thomas Allison, who will be the subject of my next story.