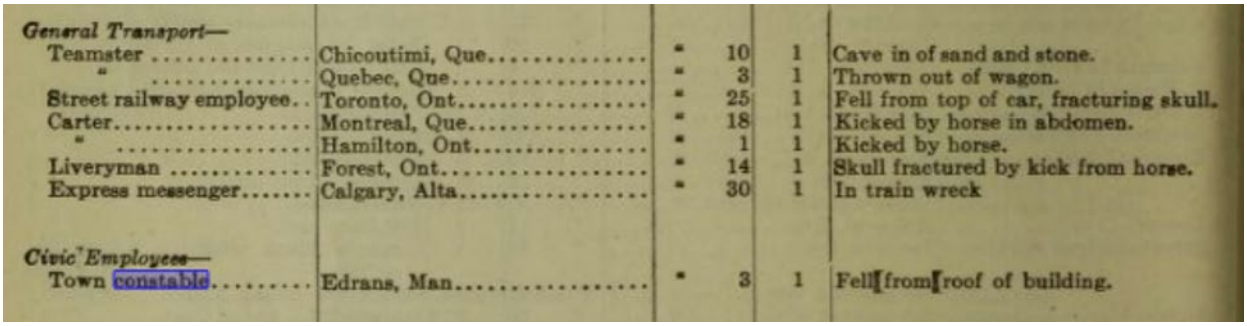
JAMES BRYANS

Edrans (Manitoba) First Constable
(and possible line-of-duty death)

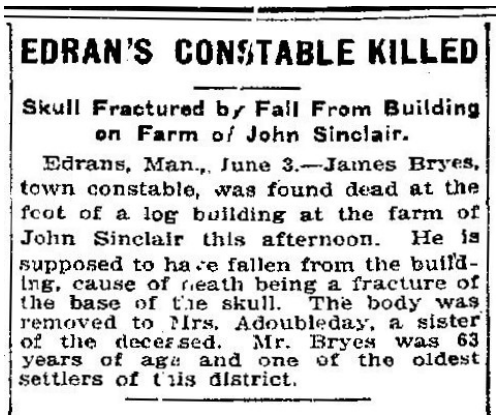
Written & researched by John Burchill
Winnipeg Police Museum, November 7, 2026

While researching the old federal Labour Gazette, which reported monthly on all fatal industrial accidents in Canada, about a railway constable who died in 1909, I came across the following entry for another constable who died on June 3, 1907:



General Transport—					
Teamster	Chicoutimi, Que.	"	10	1	Cave in of sand and stone.
"	Quebec, Que.	"	3	1	Thrown out of wagon.
Street railway employee	Toronto, Ont.	"	25	1	Fell from top of car, fracturing skull.
Carter	Montreal, Que.	"	18	1	Kicked by horse in abdomen.
"	Hamilton, Ont.	"	1	1	Kicked by horse.
Liveryman	Forest, Ont.	"	14	1	Skull fractured by kick from horse.
Express messenger	Calgary, Alta.	"	30	1	In train wreck
Civic Employees—					
Town constable	Edrans, Man.	"	3	1	Fell from roof of building.

While the name of the Edrans, Manitoba, town constable is not mentioned, a search of the newspapers at the time located an article about the accident in the Winnipeg Free Press:



EDRAN'S CONSTABLE KILLED

Skull Fractured by Fall From Building on Farm of John Sinclair.

Edrans, Man., June 3.—James Bryes, town constable, was found dead at the foot of a log building at the farm of John Sinclair this afternoon. He is supposed to have fallen from the building, cause of death being a fracture of the base of the skull. The body was removed to Mrs. Adoubleday, a sister of the deceased. Mr. Bryes was 63 years of age and one of the oldest settlers of this district.

Winnipeg Free Press, June 4, 1907

A further search of the Find-a-Grave website found James "Bryant" buried at the Edrans Community Cemetery on June 3, 1907. The Manitoba Vital Statistics database had no entry for James Bryant or Bryes, but it did have one for James "Bryans," who died on June 4, 1907, in North Cypress. Was James Bryes the same person as James Bryant and James Bryans? Did he die in the line of duty as a constable?

In an unrelated conversation with Dick Scott, a former Winnipeg Police Inspector and later Chief of Police in Brandon, he suggested I call Danny Henderson, another longtime Winnipeg police

officer whose brother, Garry, was the former Reeve of Edrans. I called Garry, who now cares for the Edrans Cemetery, to look at the headstone's inscriptions. Garry sent me a picture that confirmed the spelling as Bryans and included the following inscription from his friends: "*[James] always gave his strength to the weak, money to the needy, sympathy to the suffering and his heart to God*".[1]



James Bryans headstone, Edrans Cemetery
Picture courtesy of Garry Henderson

James Bryans was born in Ireland on or about Mar. 20, 1845 and immigrated to Canada with his family about 1855. The family originally settled in Usborne Township, Ontario, before James, his sister Dorca, and brother William moved to the Edrans area around 1900.

Edrans is located in the Municipality of North Cypress-Langford, just northeast of Carberry, Manitoba. The townsite was cleared in 1899, and surveyed into lots in 1900. A branch line of the C.P.R. railway was built west from MacGregor, and the first passenger train arrived in Edrans on November 14, 1900. With regular train service, Edrans grew quickly, and by the fall of 1901 it consisted of two general stores, a butcher shop, a planing mill, a confectioner, a blacksmith shop, a boarding house, two livery barns and several homes. A hotel, the Sinclair House, was built in 1900; a bar was added later where many woodcutters spent part of their hard-earned wages.[2]

In 1901, the School District of Edrans #1142 was organized. The first classes were held in Bredin Hall until a school could be built. The first trustees were: Tom Seaman, G. B. Johnston, and *James Bryans*.[3]

For the first few years, wooded areas around Edrans provided the main source of wood. Hundreds of men came to the area each winter to cut thousands of cords of wood; most of it was done as piecework at fifty cents a cord. In 1901, Blackwoods started a brickyard, which was later sold to the Edrans-Brandon Dry Prest Brick Co.in 1903. A spur line was built from the main railway tracks. This brickyard served as a market for many hundreds of cords of wood used to bake the bricks in the kilns.

In 1903, residents of the Edrans area signed a petition to build a jail, as too many lawbreakers were active during the wood-harvest season. *James Bryant* (sic) was appointed constable and issued a badge and a club.[4]

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[1] The headstone also says he was 62 years, two months, and fourteen days old (making his birthday March 20, 1845). The saying on the headstone is similar to one on the Monument to Major General Charles Gordon, who died in Khartoum in 1885, although we have no information Bryans had been a soldier, just a farmer.
[2] Carberry Plains, Century One, 1882-1982 (1982) Carberry Plains History Committee, page 78.
[3] *Ibid,* page 79.
[4] *Ibid,* page 80.

Like most small towns and villages in Manitoba, local constables often had other jobs and were appointed from the local populace to carry out duties ranging from poundkeeper, fire guardian, and jailor to helping repair bridges, sidewalks, and roadways. Presumably James had multiple roles, which may have included helping fix or repair local buildings.

On November 19, 1903, the McGregor Herald reported that the "*[Edrans] Chief Constable made a raid on the Edrans Hotel on Sunday, 15th inst., and found four men in there drinking at the bar something stronger than water. Summons have been applied for, and the case will be up before Police Magistrate Seamon in the end of the week.*"

On May 24, 1906, the McGregor Herald reported that Bryans petitioned the liquor licensing commission to deny an application by the Edrans Hotel to extend its liquor license. While the matter was adjourned, supporters of the license tried unsuccessfully to have Bryans ousted as a constable for North Cypress. One of Bryans' arguments as a school trustee was that the Hotel was only 66 feet away from the school, and he petitioned the Board of Education to use their influence to cancel the license. This led to acrimonious letters to the editor that appeared in the McGregor Herald on February 21, 1907.



Edrans, Main Street. Ingram Store, Hamblins Boarding House, and Bredin Hall.
Undated picture postcard. Carberry Plains Archives

Looking for more information on Bryans' death, I reached out to the Carberry Plains Archives, which sent me a copy of their local newspaper from June 1907. The article stated: "*On Monday last, James Bryans, a well-known and respected resident of Edrans, was accidently killed by falling from a building [owned by John Sinclair] on which he was working … As he was alone at the time he met his death no positive information can be given as to how it happened. … The deceased was well known throughout the country and has been a prominent figure in the life of*

the community in which he resided. He was a man of unimpeachable character, a strong temperance man who at all times had the courage to stand by the principles he practiced and advocated. For many years he acted as police constable and discharged the duties of that office with commendable courage, sometimes provoking the enmity of those who did not agree with him in his efforts to enforce the law and restrict the liquor traffic".

Bryans died a bachelor. He never married and had no children. He was predeceased by his brother and four sisters. He was survived by one sister, Dorcas Doubleday, in nearby North Norfolk. She died in 1917, also at John Sinclair's home in Edrans. At his death, Bryans' property included a quarter section of land (NE-26-12-13-W) just south of Edrans, four cows, and two young cattle.[5]

I asked Garry Henderson if there were still any town constables during his time as Reeve of Edrans. Garry indicated there were not; policing was handled by the RCMP. However, they did appoint a "fence viewer" and an animal impounder. The fence viewer was to view fence-line disputes, and the poundman would impound animals usually for a day or two until the owner was found and the damage to crops was agreed upon.

While James Bryans was the constable in Edrans, it is unclear whether he was acting in his official capacity when he fell off the roof of John Sinclair's building, although it was reported as a workplace accident. Did his work as the town constable (*qua* civic employee) require him to help to fix or repair John Sinclair's roof? Should he be listed in the fallen officer memorial? Perhaps more information will surface with this article.

Whether or not Bryans was acting as a constable at the time of his death, I wanted to write this story because of the role constables played in the small towns and villages of our province, but also because of the help I received from an unexpected place – a conversation with a policeman who knew a policeman, whose brother was a Reeve of the same small town I was researching an incident about 120 years ago. I find these social connections can be more valuable than any AI chatbot in locating historical information (which would not have revealed any information about James Bryans, the constable, and likely would have confused his life and death with a totally unrelated person).

Visit your local museum and historical society. Talk with a real person and engage with the history of our great province. You may be surprised at what you learn.

Thank you to Dick, Danny, Garry, and the Carberry Plains Archives.

[5] While there are several references to this being the same James Bryans, born in 1843, who lived in Morden, had nine children, and died on June 4, 1907 (*and is the person buried in Edrans*). This is NOT the same person. There was a big celebration for Mr. James Bryans of Morden and his wife Mary when they moved to Maidstone, Saskatchewan, the week of July 3, 1907 (a month after James Bryans' death in Edrans). This other James Bryans died in Maidstone on November 7, 1912. His wife, Mary, also died in Maidstone on May 26, 1929.