

**Richard Power, Pioneer Police Chief
(1870-1880)
Original title The Death of a Chief**

Researched and written by Detective Sergeant John Burchill

It was a small cemetery, smaller than I had expected for one that was over 120 years old. There were less than a hundred headstones scattered throughout the small fenced in area behind the St. Charles Catholic Parish located along the banks of the Assiniboine River at St. Charles Road.

Time and vandalism have taken their toll on most of the older headstones, for many of them lay broken or crumbled near the bases where they once stood. Father Desmond, the Rector of the Parish, indicated that many of the severely weathered and decayed headstones had been removed from the cemetery after they had fallen, leaving those lying below nameless and forgotten.

Once of those who failed to meet the test of time was Richard Power, Manitoba's third Chief of Police. He was also the first police officer to die while on duty in Manitoba, one of the first to die in all of Canada after Confederation, and the first of only six Police Chiefs/Directors to make the "supreme sacrifice"...¹

Until the purchase of Rupert's Land by the federal government in 1869, the entire north-western portion of what is now Canada was controlled (including law and order) by the Hudson's Bay Company. Following the creation of Manitoba on July 1, 1870, the Canadian government under John A. MacDonald appointed Adams Archibald as Lieutenant-Governor and sent him to Fort Garry to establish an interim government and put into operation all the governmental and legal machinery that provincehood required.

One of the first appointments made by Archibald was that of Frank Villiers to the post of Chief Constable for the Province of Manitoba and Louis de Plainval as his Sub-Chief. Both men had been officers in the Canadian Army under the command of Colonel Garnet Wolseley which had been sent to Fort Garry to establish control of the area from the provisional government of Louis Riel prior to Archibald's arrival. Their appointments were dated September 27, 1870, in a letter from Archibald to Prime Minister John A. MacDonald.

¹ In 2020, with the assistance of the Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police and the Province of Manitoba Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund, I arranged for a headstone to be placed at Richard Power's gravesite alongside that of his father, Michael Power.

Villiers and de Plainval immediately began hiring members for a full-time mounted police force and on October 10, 1870, the "Mounted Constabulary Force" was ready to undertake its duties. The first constables appointed in and for the province of Manitoba (in alphabetical order) were: William Alloway, Timothy Carrol, James Cross, Edwin Doidge, Michael Fox, George Kerr, Elijah Ketts, Leon Kivet, Neil McCarthy, John Melancon, W. Miller, Henry Montgomery, William Montgomery, George Nichol, J. Paterson, A. Persy, Robert Power, John Stevenson, and Maxime Villebrun.



An old post office building on Main Street, not far from the Hudson's Bay Fort, was fitted up as a police station and courthouse with a log house to the rear of the building transformed into a jail. Initially this Provincial Police Force was stationed around the province in Winnipeg, Portage la Prairie, Pointe de Chiene (Oak Point), St. Norbert and Lower Fort Garry, but as Winnipeg grew larger and larger the men were stationed almost exclusively in Winnipeg.

By May 1871, the population of Winnipeg had grown substantially and it was reported by Judge Johnston in his address to the first Grand Jury of Manitoba that there were no less than twenty-one saloons, or "dens of wickedness" in the area which contributed to numerous cases of personal violence. He concluded his address by stating that a new courthouse and jail were required to meet the growing needs of the population. By the end of 1872 the total number of saloons had risen to twenty-eight and brawls, violence, and alcohol seemed to be part of the way of life in Winnipeg. One of the local saloons was often called "The Bucket of Blood" because of the frequent bar-room brawls. An annual Y.M.C.A. conference even labelled Winnipeg as "one of wickedest places in the Dominion".

Although Winnipeg was growing at a steady rate, financial problems faced by the Provincial government forced them to reduce the Mounted Constabulary Force's budget. As a result of these budget cuts, on August 5, 1872, the force was reduced to just 16 men, and on March 12, 1873, it was reduced again to just seven men. It further ceased to be a mounted force a month later when a local newspaper (the Manitoban) reported on April 5, 1873, that their horses had been sold off as well. As a result of these reductions, since the majority of the province's population was concentrated within 20 miles of Winnipeg, the entire force was stationed within this area, with postings at Selkirk, Kildonan and St. Norbert. There was no attempt by the Province to provide general police protection outside this area and most communities had to rely on volunteers.

In addition, as a result of these cutbacks, on May 1, 1873, Louis de Plainval, who had succeeded Villers as Chief Constable in 1871, resigned. He was subsequently replaced by 22-year old Robert Power, one of the youngest Chief Constables ever appointed in Canada (Note: Marc Kowal, a current member of the Brandon Police Service, was Chief Constable in Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, when he was only 19).

By November 8, 1873, Winnipeg had grown to almost two thousand inhabitants and was incorporated as a City. Section 97 of the Winnipeg Act provided that an elected council of five persons could establish a police force in the City. The first Mayor of Winnipeg, Frank Cornish, was elected on January 5, 1874, and on February 28, 1874, the newly elected City council appointed John S. Ingram as the first Chief Constable for the City of Winnipeg with D.B. Murray and Frank Edgar (shortly replaced by William Bruce) as his constables.

With the formation of the Winnipeg Police Force and with the official swearing-in of one hundred and fifty members of the North-West Mounted Police at Fort Garry on November 3, 1873, the Mounted Constabulary Force was all but disbanded on February 28, 1874. All that remained of the Force was Richard Power who was re-appointed "Chief Constable for the Province". As a result of this move there was no longer any attempt by the government to provide general police protection for the province. However, a subsequent Municipal Acts passed by the province gave all municipalities the power to appoint their own constables.

With the formation of the Winnipeg Police force, Ingram and his men took over the old jail and courthouse formerly used by the Provincial Police and Chief Power was moved into a new courthouse and jail that had been erected at 357 Main Street near William Avenue (357 Main Street was re-numbered in 1882 to 496. The difference in numbering can be attributed to the sale of Fort Garry to the City of Winnipeg. Initially Main Street ended at the Fort and when the land was sold the fort was torn down and Main Street was extended). As the Winnipeg Police had taken over many of his former duties, Power was also tasked with being the head Licence Inspector, Gunpowder Inspector, Constable of the County of Selkirk and Jailor for the Province of Manitoba.



*Manitoba Provincial Police
Headquarters, Jail and Court House
William & Main, c. 1880*

Although Richard Power was a very young man for the position he filled, he was considered worthy of it and distinguished himself in a number of

important cases in the Province's early history. The local newspapers described Power as "a fine looking man, magnificently proportioned, every inch a soldier with the courage that nothing could daunt". Power was also a Second Lieutenant in the Winnipeg Troop of Cavalry and his trade mark was a Cold 45 with a 9 inch barrel slung around his waist with enough cartridges to take on a small army. While the newspapers considered him a "terror to evil doers", his friends numbered in the hundreds. As Power constituted the entire Manitoba Force (he was allowed to hire an assistant in October 1875, and a few additional men in the ensuing years), he was often responsible for making arrests and conducting investigations on his own, or with the assistance of town constables or duly appointed deputies.

During his career as Chief Constable, Power escaped death twice; once in September 1874, shortly after being made Chief Constable, when he was shot at by Edward Martin as he attempted to arrest him in Scratching River (Morris); and again in 1879 when a shot by Edward Daniel's misfired as Power tried to arrest him in Kildonan. However, Chief Power was not so fortunate in his next encounter with a fugitive from justice ...

Mike Carroll was one of those frontier individuals who was known as a "hard case". He had been in and out of jail most of his life, having served time in Eastern Canada for numerous robberies and prison breaks. Carroll's vocation brought him to Manitoba and subsequently to Manitoba's Jail when he was arrested by Power for breaking out of the jail in Rat Portage (Kenora). When advised that he might be returned to Ontario to serve the duration of his sentence in Port Arthur (Thunder Bay), Carroll vowed that he would drown any police officer who tried to return him to Port Arthur in the waters of the Lake of the Woods - even if he perished himself.

Chief Power and Detective McKenzie subsequently returned Carroll to Rat Portage for trial. The trip went off without incident and on July 3, 1880, Carroll was tried and convicted before Magistrate Brereton. However, due to his history of prior escapes, Magistrate Brereton sentenced Carroll to serve his time at Stony Mountain Penitentiary which he believed offered better security than the one in Port Arthur.

On the morning of July 22, 1880, Carroll was taken out of the Provincial Jail and sent out to the government offices on Main Street with three other prisoners to cut wood. With only one guard sent to watch over the four prisoners, the inevitable happened and Carroll escaped from the job site. Before the lone jailor could secure the rest of his prisoners and summon help, Carroll managed to cross the Red River on the newly laid railroad foundations and headed south along the tracks towards Emerson.

Chief Constable Power, who had been ill during the day, was informed of the escape. He immediately saddled a horse and with Provincial Constable J.B. Bell he headed south along the tracks in pursuit of Carroll. About ten miles south of Winnipeg Power discovered Carroll hiding in a haystack, his feet bloodied and bruised (his jailor had taken his shoes from him before cutting wood to prevent or lessen the likelihood of his escape). Carroll was placed under arrest, secured in handcuffs and returned to Winnipeg along the tracks by handcar.

At about 11:30 p.m., the trio arrived in St. Boniface only to find that the ferry across the Red River had shut down for the night. Not wanting to cross the river on the "pile bridge", or the new railroad foundations, Power summoned a small night boat owner to assist them in crossing the river. Power was the first to enter to boat, and when he turned to assist Carroll into the boat, Carroll jumped down onto the gunwale and upset the boat, throwing both himself and Power into the river. Neither man rose to the surface. After a three hour search Power's body was recovered nearby. Carroll's body was recovered almost 12 hours later, downriver towards Selkirk. It will never be known if Carroll tipped the boat intentionally, however he had previously threatened to drown any police officer who tried to return him to jail - even if he perished himself.



*Red & Assiniboine Rivers
with Ferry Bridge in background
(MB Provincial Archives)*

Power's body was subsequently brought to the Provincial Court House where it stayed until funeral ceremonies were held on Sunday, July 25, 1880. The funeral was one of the largest ever to take place in Winnipeg (up to that time), with the funeral procession consisting of members of the Winnipeg Field Battery, the Winnipeg Infantry Company, the Manitoba Militia, the Winnipeg Troop of Cavalry, members of government and the City and Provincial Police Forces. The procession wound through the streets of Winnipeg and after funeral services were held at St. Mary's Church, the body of Richard Power was marched to the St. Charles Cemetery where he was buried with military honours next to his father, Michael Power (also a military officer and the first official jailor in Manitoba).

Power left behind 3 brothers, 2 sisters, a wife and two small children. Fortunately for his family, Power had a \$3000.00 life insurance policy which would have left his family relatively comfortable.

Power had died while serving the people of Manitoba. He was one of the first police officers ever appointed in this province, he served with the Manitoba Provincial Police for nearly 10 years, 6 as their Chief, and he also served with honours in the Provincial Militia. It is unfortunate that there is little to record his passing except the columns in a 120 year old newspaper.

In recognition of Richard Power's service to the citizens of Manitoba on the 150th anniversary of the province and his hiring as one of Manitoba's first police officers in 1870, I made a short video for the Manitoba Police and Peace Officers Memorial that debuted on September 27, 2020. [See here.](#)

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