

# *History of the Winkler Police*

## **The Birth of Winkler**

Between 1874 and 1879 there was a mass migration of Mennonites from Russia, most of who settled in the "West Reserve" in Manitoba. They were the first settlers to demonstrate that it was possible to live and farm well upon the open treeless prairie. The reserve of 612 sections of land became dotted with over 50 small villages, each consisting of 20 to 30 families. When the Canadian Pacific Railway constructed a spur running through the northernmost edge of the reserve, settlers were drawn to start a new community alongside the railway in 1892. The land, on which this community sprang up, belonged to Mr. Valentine Winkler and it was officially incorporated as the Village of Winkler in 1906.

## **Early Law Enforcement**

Law enforcement was first officially carried out by the Mounted Constabulary Force, established in 1870, which covered the entire Province of Manitoba. They were later named the Provincial Police Force and then renamed again to the Manitoba Provincial Police. In 1906 the need was felt to retain the services of a full-time constable for Winkler alone, and on June 16<sup>th</sup> of that year, Council appointed Jacob J. Schulz to that position at a rate of 25 cents an hour.

The duties of subsequent constables varied from time to time to include such responsibilities as a bell ringer, pound keeper, traffic control, night watchman, fire chief, weed inspector, building inspector, and license inspector. On special occasions, such as a sports day, special constables would be hired to assist for that particular day.

In May of 1907, August Graefer was hired to replace Jacob Schultz at a rate of \$35 per month. The constable position was re-evaluated regularly and appointments varied from one month to over a year in length. The rate of pay would also vary from month to month fluctuating from \$25 - \$35 per month, depending on the duties included.

In 1913 William Leiding took over the position of constable. Leiding filled that role until the end of 1917 when August Graefer was hired as a town constable for the second time.

## **Head Quarters**

In 1910 the first cell for imprisonment was built in the Fire Engine room of the Municipal Office situated at the corner of Main Street and Mountain Avenue. No need for a police office existed at that time; however, a resolution was passed to build an overnight holding facility to sober up the drunk and disorderly. In 1946 a new municipal office and fire hall was built directly half a block west of the first site and at that location (571 Mountain Ave.) in 1959, the town renovated the waiting area of the Municipal Office to create a space for the first police office. Later in 1966, when space was not sufficient, the Police Department was moved down the street into the basement of the Winkler Library located at 664 Mountain Ave. This was the location until 1971 when they moved back into the Municipal Office after the Fire Hall was removed from that location renovating it once again to accommodate the Police Department. Ten years later a new facility was built and the Police Department along with the Civic Offices were moved to their current location at 185 Main Street.

## **The Tragedy of Constable John F. Loewen**

In 1923, February 7<sup>th</sup>, John F. Loewen was hired to replace August Graefer. Tragically, Loewen's term was cut short, the result of an accidental fire that started at his residence on 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

On October 16<sup>th</sup> of that year, Mr. Loewen got up at 7:00 am and quietly hurried into the summer kitchen to light a fire to prepare a light breakfast before leaving with friends on a short trip to hunt prairie chickens. In his hurry, he mistook a can of gasoline for kerosene and when he poured the contents of the can onto the burning embers the resulting explosion spattered gasoline on his clothing which burst into flames. To extinguish the flames, Mr. Loewen dashed out of the kitchen and rolled around on the street. However, this had little effect and therefore he ran down the street to ring the town bell and thus summons the volunteer fire brigade to extinguish the flames which he evidently assumed were destroying the summer kitchen. Fortunately, the only damage to the kitchen was that the inside walls were covered with smoke and soot, but in running about a block to the belfry tower, all the clothing except for the shoes on his feet were burned from Mr. Loewen's body. After pulling the rope and ringing the bell, Mr. Loewen in great agony fled across Mountain Avenue to the residence of Dr. G . F. Weatherhead. When the doctor's wife opened the door she was so frightened by what she saw, that later she too become ill due to shock. As there was no hospital in Winkler, Mr. J. A. Kroeker provided the transportation and his brother Mr. A. A. Kroeker gave physical and spiritual comfort to Mr. Loewen in the back seat of the car on the way to the Morden Hospital. Mrs. Loewen awoke later on to find that her husband had been taken to the Morden Hospital.

That evening Mrs. Loewen and her 2-year-old son Johnny were taken to the bedside of her husband. Because of the swelling, Mr. Loewen asked his wife to open his eyes so that he could see his infant son.

At seven a.m. the next morning Mr. Loewen died and Mrs. Loewen and her family planned to hold the funeral service in the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church. However, since Mr. Loewen had served as a policeman there was considerable objection and discussion by the Church membership as to the propriety of permitting the family to conduct the funeral service in the M.B. Church. Fortunately, goodwill prevailed and the doors of the Church were opened for a fellow-citizen who in life had performed his duties of protecting not only the church membership but also their building.

After the funeral, the Winkler Village Council suggested to Mrs. Loewen that if she and her 14-year-old son Abe would continue the duties of her deceased husband and ring the town bell regularly in the morning, at noon, and in the evening until the end of the month, the Council would pay her the \$25.00 salary that was due her departed loved one. As her young son did not have the courage to ring the bell because the rope in the belfry was still covered with blood and skin from the hands of his father, Mrs. Loewen rang the town bell herself.

### **Finding a Replacement**

The day following Mr. Loewen's death, Winkler Village Council met and appointed John D. Dyck as a policeman while they began their search for a full-time replacement. John Dyck continued as constable until the end of January 1924 when August Graefer made a short return, being hired for February. On March 4<sup>th</sup> council was able to find a full-time replacement and appointed Fred Hill as constable for the remainder of the year at \$25 per month. Hill served the citizens of Winkler as the village constable until his departure in early 1928.

### **The Saga of Officer Jack Felde**

On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1928, Village Council appointed Jack Felde as "policeman" to take Fred Hill's place. Jack Felde, age 33, could not have known that he was about to enter a career that would lead him to become the longest standing police officer in Winkler's history. Not only

did his legacy span four decades but even to this day, he is remembered and revered as being a "good and fair" officer, one of compassion and understanding. Throughout his tenure as policeman, he also at times wore many other hats; that of public works foreman, cemetery caretaker, weed inspector, ice-maker at the skating rink, building inspector and even fire chief. In late 1928, the council passed a resolution that they would pay Mr. Felde an additional dollar for every person he fined and put into jail. This would have been an opportunity to pad his salary; however, people remember him as an officer that would give chances; lecturing drunken persons and often taking them home instead of locking them up.

In the 1940s Jack Felde purchased a 1926 Model T Roadster which he used to patrol the streets of Winkler, receiving a small mileage allowance for its use. Felde was also known for having a constant companion in his canine partner. Whether on patrol by foot or car, "King" a German Shepard was always at his side, until he was one of 5 dogs poisoned by an irate citizen.

During the earlier years, policing was a part of the Felde household, as troublemakers and witnesses alike were often interviewed in the kitchen of the Felde home. Mrs. Anne Felde made meals for prisoners which she delivered to the holding cell in the municipal office. Jack Felde had policed for 31 years before space for town constables was provided for in the municipal office.

In October of 1953, an agreement was entered into between the Village of Winkler and Jack Felde for the creation of a retirement fund in which each party would place an amount equal to 5% of Felde's annual salary. Jack Felde continued with part-time duty, even after his official retirement on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1964 and eventually left policing for good in 1967 after 39 years of service.

### **Expansion of the Police Department**

As the demands of the position increased, so did the complement of police officers. The Town of Winkler hired Chief Felde's son-in-law, Walter Nauer on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1958 to work as a Constable under Chief Felde. Nauer later was appointed Police Chief in 1964 when Felde entered semi-retirement. In the fall of 1963, the hiring of Herb Klassen brought the number of officers up to three. Klassen also was later promoted to the position of Police Chief in 1973. In 1974 a fourth officer was added, and then a fifth in 1975 and a sixth in 1977. The years following saw a tremendous employee turn over but the additional staff was not added until much later when finally in 1989 a seventh officer was added.

### **The First Police Cruiser**

Until 1966 police cars were simply family cars owned by officers and on occasion specially equipped with a siren, stoplight, and identifying lettering. On March 23, 1966, a resolution was passed that the tender for a police car be awarded to Wiens and Son, for one Pontiac Strato Chief, 4 door sedan, 327 cubic inch V-8 275 h.p. engine as specified at \$2,645.00. Extras included a heavy-duty battery, block heater, western equipment, heavy-duty alternator, calibrated speedometer, radio, four-way flasher, and heavy-duty front seat. The colour would be blue with a 6" white stripe on the sides, with 4" lettered "Winkler Police".

### **Expanded Policing Agreements**

In 1967 the R.M. of Stanley hired Walter Nauer to provide police protection in their municipality, in addition to his full-time employment as Chief Constable with the Winkler Police Department (WPD). Sighting several concerns with this arrangement, in January 1969 the Town of Winkler and the R.M. of Stanley, came to an arrangement whereby the WPD would provide police protection for the rural municipality as a whole. In 1970 the Village of Plum Coulee also placed a request for patrols and law enforcement. This resulted

in an agreement reached on Sept. 27<sup>th</sup> of that year whereby the WPD would make three (3) patrols per week for a retainer fee of \$100 and extra calls to be calculated at \$4.00 per hour, covering man and mileage.

On Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1971 the R.M. of Stanley terminated their agreement with the WPD as they were able to receive coverage from the RCMP at no cost. In January 1972, the Village of Plum Coulee also withdrew from their agreement as they were also of sufficient population to receive RCMP protection at no cost.

In summary, members of the Winkler Police Department provided police protection to the R.M. of Stanley for four years and to the Village of Plum Coulee for two and a half years. WPD still did respond to needs within the R.M. whenever the RCMP were not available and billed the R.M. on these occasions.

### **Historical Points of Interest**

- That the Halloween of 1969 reached proportions which required the Fire Department to assist in using water to gain control of the 100 plus person crowd which unleashed extensive property damage. Vehicles and camper trailers were overturned as well as business windows smashed. Winkler Council made a public statement commending both the police and fire departments for the fine manner in which they handled a very serious and difficult situation that Halloween night.
- The minutes of a Council meeting held January 10, 1967, indicate a resolution to advertise for a "third policeman", that he must be married, and over the age of 21.
- Back on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1969 Council served notice prohibiting overnight parking on streets during winter months because of the snow problems created. This was therefore the first Snow - Parking Ban.
- Winkler issued licence plates for bicycles? The metal plates measuring 5 ½ x 3 inches each bore individual numbers and were first issued in 1960 at a cost of 50 cents. This fee was increased to \$1.00 in 1976 and then increased further to \$2.00 in 1981. The Bylaw was rescinded in 1990.
- Winkler's former police chief, Rick Hiebert, was a Grand Master, the highest level a handgun shooter can achieve in Police Pistol and Revolver Combat shooting competitions? As a member of the Canadian Police Combat Association (CPCA), Hiebert was the only police chief to shoot at these sanctioned events.