

Sam Wong – Murder

Wednesday, November 4, 1931

While researching Winnipeg's first Chinese detective I came across a series of unsolved homicides in the Chinese community. While they will not be solved due to the passage of time, I decided to include them in this week's unsolved mysteries.

~John Burchill

In the early hours of November 4, 1931, 40-year old Sam Wong, the owner of the Quong Wo Chong Kee teahouse, 28 Pacific Avenue, was gunned down, the victim of an apparent gambling turf-war in Chinatown.¹

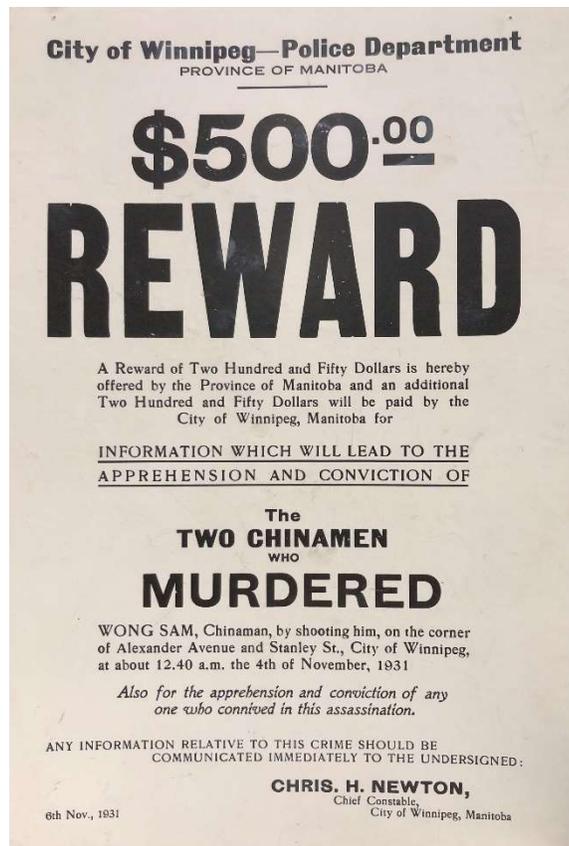
Shortly after midnight, Wong left the Nanking Restaurant, in the Coronation Building, 238 King Street, with friends Toy Mon and Lee Shu. After turning west onto Alexander Avenue the trio noticed they were being followed by two men. Between Princess and Stanley Streets the two men fired five shots in their direction and then fled.

A .38-calibre bullet passed through Wong's abdomen, one bullet went through Toy Mon's cap and the third passed through Lee Shu's clothing. Wong was rushed to the Winnipeg General Hospital by police ambulance where he died the next day. A \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest of Wong's killers was posted by the Province of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg. Another \$500 was posted by the Wong Wun Sun brotherhood.



Winnipeg Tribune,
November 4, 1931

¹ Traditionally, Chinese given names are structured by a two-character pattern. The first part is the generation name that is shared by all members of a generation, and the last character is given to the individual person. The reason Chinese people write their surname first is to show respect to the ancestors. As such Wong Sam would be Sam Wong, with Wong being the surname, although he would use Wong as a first name in respect of his ancestors.



Toy Mon described the two men as Chinese. One was about 35 years old, 5'3" or 5'4", stout build, wearing a light grey cap, dark pants, and a light brown "mackinaw" coat (made of a thick, blanket-like material similar to melton wool). The other was taller, about 5'5", thinner build, 40 years old, and wearing a light cap and Gabardine raincoat. Toy did not recognize them.

A few hours after the shooting John James Jones, a constable with the Canadian Pacific Railway working yard duty at the rear of Stanley and Alexander discovered a .38 calibre Smith & Wesson revolver (serial #523039) with three loaded shells and 3 spent casings.²

A second Smith & Wesson revolver (serial #475572) was picked up near the area of the shooting by George Carlo and turned over to Sergeant Stelfox who found that it contained four live rounds and two spent shells.

Both revolvers were traced to gun sellers in the San Francisco area, but the original owners were never identified as the two businesses were no longer in operation.

As Wong was actively involved in the Chinese National League (CNL), an organization strongly opposed to the illegal gambling and opium-smoking that occurred in Chinatown, it is believed the shooting was in retaliation for several police raids on gambling dens in Chinatown for which the CNL was blamed for tipping off the police.³

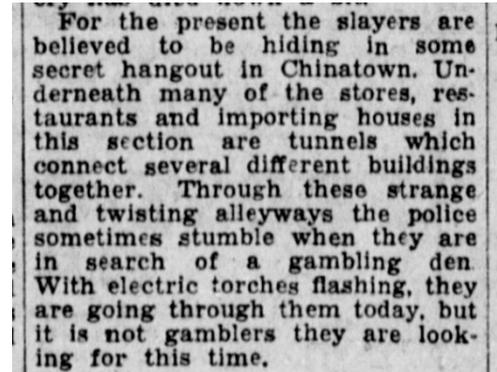
An earlier shootout between rival gangs or "trongs" related to the gambling trade broke out in the same area on September 11, 1931, when numerous shots were exchanged across King Street between Alexander and Pacific. Information was received that eight "hatchet men" or gunmen were brought in from British Columbia following the shootout, however, six left shortly before Wong's murder when the two sides agreed to a truce. It is speculated the two remaining men may have been involved in Wong's murder.

² At the time a CPR spur line ran in between Princess and Stanley streets.

³ In September 1931 the Winnipeg Police charged 94 people with gaming offences, 9 for running a gaming house and 85 "found-in". Sixty-one of those charges were from two raids on Chinese gaming houses at 236 King Street.

According to the Winnipeg Tribune, it is believed the killers may have been sheltered underneath Chinatown in the maze of tunnels that connected the buildings (not unlike the tunnels unearthed beneath the city of Moose Jaw, which are a tourist attraction today).

Wong’s killers were never caught and the murder remains unsolved. However, it is not the only unsolved murder to rock the small Asian community in Winnipeg.



Winnipeg Tribune, November 6, 1931

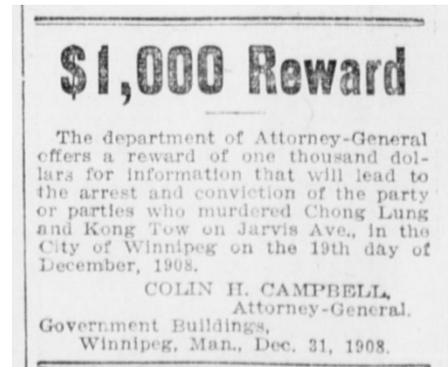
Murders of Lee Chow, Look Wing, Kong Pow and Chang Lung, 1907-1908



On December 13, 1907, 35-year old Lee Chow and 25-year old Look Wing were killed at their laundry shop on Salter Street. Both men were apparently tied up and assaulted with an axe and meat cleaver before their business was set on fire. No suspects were identified and the murders remain unsolved.

Almost a year to the day 44-year old Kong Pow and 47-year old Chang Lung were found murdered at their laundry shop on Jarvis Avenue on December 19, 1908. They had also been hacked with an

axe and their throats cut by a knife. No suspects were identified and the murders remain unsolved.



Winnipeg Tribune, January 2, 1909

More recently the MACP has also profiled the unsolved murder of 70-year old Wesu Ono at her Lyle Street home on January 19, 1981, and the murders of Linda and Kiyo Shimizu at their Langside home in 1989.

Read more at: <https://macp.mb.ca/unsolved-mysteries/>