

Peace Country Historical Society  
Lower Level, Centre 2000  
11330 106 Street  
Grande Prairie, AB, T8V 7X9



September, 2024  
The Fall Issue  
Volume 14 Issue 3

## Promoting, Preserving, Publishing Our Heritage



With much of the harvest done and delivered, another unit train of 100+ cars of Canola readies for departure south.

### **Upcoming Fall/Winter Events – see details on [PCHS Forum](#) | [Facebook](#)**

Additional podcasts are being added for your enjoyment! Our first four video podcasts with reviews of the historic major fires from our region, the organizing of area Royal Canadian Legions, an appreciation of the Grande Prairie Museum, and the 2024 Heritage Fair are now uploaded. Our YouTube channel is up at [The Peace Country Historical Society Podcast - YouTube](#)

Event notices will be sent to members by direct email, and our [PCHS Forum](#) | [Facebook](#) page.

**Plan For the PCHS Remembrance Event, on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, at 7 PM  
At The Grande Prairie Museum Community Room: The RCAF at 100 Presentation**  
Bring in family military artifacts to display and spark family history discussions. Research and appreciate those artifacts' historical and military links. Invite your friends!  
**Your co-hosts are PCHS and The Alberta Genealogy Society Grande Prairie Branch.**

**November 11, 2024, Monday, Remembrance Day: PCHS Wreath Laying, Bonnett Centre**

**December 8, 2024, Sunday, Christmas Event, at 2 PM, Grande Prairie Museum**

## Peace Country Historical Society

**Vision:** To encourage the appreciation of the history of the Peace Country

**Mandate:** The mandated area of the Peace Country Historical Society is the Northwest region of Alberta

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Grande Prairie  
Janet Peterson—Event Greeter/Sign-in

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## Index

Events Notes .....	1
Index .....	2
President’s Message .....	3
A Clash of Worldviews .....	5
Bezanson Korean Vets .....	9
The Russian Refugees of 1924 .....	11
Murder on the Prairie .....	14
New Rivers of the North Revisited .....	27
Time-tested Heritage Recipes .....	4, 8

## What We Can Offer

- A chance to help set the direction for our Peace Country Chapter at membership meetings or other communication means.
- A chance to learn about Peace Country history during presentations and tours, through Facebook, the Newsletter, the Website, and at membership meetings.
- A chance to meet other people who enjoy history.
- A chance to contribute as a volunteer in various projects that we carry out.
- A chance to advocate for the preservation of the history of our area.
- Qualify to submit applications for HSA grants to fund special projects.
- We hope you choose to continue with or to join our Society.

## Editor's Message

While this newsletter has a historical purpose, I'll warn readers that you will also find a heritage recipe included. It may seem a digression, but it follows from the recent canned moose meat recollection of my early years, and now there is our first reader-inspired submission: onion pie.

Though it may be recipe (near) overkill, I've also included observations from three reliable participants who found themselves in a Timber Cruiser Stew. They are indeed just anecdotal experiences, but once you leave cultivated land to venture into the wilderness, wildlife may also have an agenda conflicting with ours. It certainly did in the following three accounts:

**From a 1992 incident report:** Walking a compass line to a cut block, I was approached by two full-grown, healthy wolves from behind. I was about 200 metres from my truck at this point. When I first saw them, they stopped a brief moment at a safe distance and then began to growl and walk towards me from two directions. I quickly pulled out my shotgun (with slugs) and fired one shot toward the wolf on my left which was no more than two metres away. The shot was quick and unaimed, more to scare them off than to kill, which it seemed to do.'

As I thought the incident was over, I continued on my way for approximately another 600 metres and crossed a stream on an old beaver dam. Once across, I heard ice crack and turned to see six wolves running toward my side of the stream. I immediately decided to clear the area and head back across the dam towards my truck. Once back across the dam, the wolves followed and surrounded me. While most of the wolves came towards me somewhat abreast, one had circled behind me without my knowing it until I heard his growl. At that point, I fired a quick shot at the wolf behind me and scared it off, but not the wolves in front.

I continued to work my way back in the general direction of my truck while watching and screaming at the wolves moving in front of me. Very quickly another wolf had positioned itself behind me and I again quickly turned and fired another shot towards it. These are the only three shots I remember firing although my shotgun which holds five rounds was now empty. I do not remember firing the other two rounds.

I pulled out my "bear flare" from my cruise vest and fired two cartridges from it towards the wolves which only dispersed the wolves a bit for a short period. When I had nothing left to fire at them, I panicked more, turned and started to run generally towards my truck. The whole time I was screaming and grabbing at whatever I could find to throw. They followed me the whole way growling and always within two to three metres of me. Although I fell twice that I remember, they never jumped me, but just stayed within that constant distance and growled.

Once I could see the road right-of-way through the trees I just ran and never looked back. When I reached the road, the wolves were gone.

**In the early 1970s**, a partner and I were cruising timber north of Prince George and a fair way off Highway 97 to the west. It was February, very cold, and we were snowshoeing back about three miles to the truck. It had been a long day, and it was twilight. We followed our tracks back to the truck by feel mostly, but it was fast going as the track had set up.

At one point we had to cross a small lake about 1/4 mile wide, and as we came onto the ice, we noticed a pack of 6 wolves come out of the bush on our left about 100 yards away. None of us had ever had much to do with wolves and had actually been assured by old timers that wolves almost never would attack a human. So we just kept a steady pace and they paralleled us.

They sometimes fell behind in their soft snow, but not for long. They closed the gap, but never got closer than about 50 yards, which, in the dark was quite close enough. It was a good story to tell in the bar, but we all wondered if we had been lucky. I never saw another wolf that winter.

**A hunter meets other hunters** (early 1960s): Leaving a truck to follow an overgrown and abandoned timber access road in a late-season evening search for deer, my view opened to a long narrow road of two hundred or more yards. Seeing movement, I squatted on my haunches and saw several animals round the distant corner. The lead animal stopped to watch me, but after several minutes continued forward.

The group that had fallen in had grown to at least 10 when I shifted my full attention to the lead wolf. It was now both obvious and approaching at a trot. Having shouldered an old Enfield in my squatting position, I had a very unsteady view of the wolves approaching at my eye level. When the leader was within 25 paces, I whistled. They all stopped. At the first shot, the leader (and pack) scattered into the roadside willows or down the trail. Only a small clump of his cleanly trimmed head hair remained on the road.

With cramps and adrenalin jitters, emptying a 10-shot magazine had even less effect. The pack scattered to both sides of the road, and several began to howl to reunite. A surrounding chorus continued to pace me as I headed back to meet up with my father. A very large grey sped across between thick willow margins a few feet ahead of me.

My father's reception at the truck mostly centered on criticism of the number of shots I had fired to no effect. While there was a value for marketable fur, there was no family recipe for anything without hooves or feathers.

*Editor:* Incident locations were near Keg River, Prince George, and Pinto Creek

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*And Now for Something Completely Different..*

### **Vinaigrette Salad Dressing, forwarded by Pat Wearmouth**

Those of you who were on the Bus Tour of Francophone Church Architecture and Museums on July 6<sup>th</sup> may recall the lunch that the **Société Historique et Généalogique de Smoky River** served us in Donnelly. Several participants remarked on the dressing used on the lettuce and green onion salad. The dressing provided a light and crisp taste to the salad ingredients, and they have kindly shared it with us:

**1/3 cup vinegar, 1/2 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon celery seed, 1/4 cup finely chopped green onions  
1 teaspoon dry mustard. Shake well and do not put it in the fridge, as it will harden. Enjoy!**



## **A Clash of Worldviews**

### **The Treaties, History, Myth, and Meaning**

Duff W. Crerar, Ph.D. Emeritus Instructor in History

I have been doing some reflection lately on Indigenous education, history, and the Treaties. In the past thirty years that I have taught university courses here, Canadian (indeed, world) philosophical and anthropological scholars have better understood the motivations and actions of differing societies in conflict, as the result of differing worldviews. A worldview can consist of a set of religious, economic, family-organization, naturist, and or science-based views that support that society's view of reality, justice, right and wrong.

These views do not have to be simple and can nest within several aspects of life without being perceived as in conflict. On the other hand, lumping one worldview of property into understanding marriage, the position of women and children, and minority people in one category has led to centuries of pain and injustice. Other worldviews, however, developed out of different experiences, especially those free of the agriculture-industry-empire-conquest view of reality. In the history of our planet, these have been forced into retreat by imperialism, settler-colonialism, and the massive, technologically-enhanced power these values exerted around the world.

Thus, when Euro-Canadians encountered aboriginal societies, the capacity for clashes of motives and meanings was almost inevitable. English Canadians (chief negotiators for the Government of Canada after 1867) held a simple worldview based on science, evolution, classical Liberalism (based on Adam Smith, not John Maynard Keynes!), and militant Protestantism (which would become something called the Social Gospel in fifty more years). This was anything but the values-set held by Indigenous peoples, even though some had been Christianized for a generation. Even Roman Catholic worldviews, though religiously developed in rivalry and conflict with Protestants, nevertheless held many of the same European values.

Indigenous people believed in the interconnectedness of all beings without dominating or controlling, while Europeans demanded a right to the land they treated for to develop and transform it, and to direct the people already on it, therefore, to change their traditional culture when it got in their way. Few believed the views of reality that preceded theirs had any value. On this, almost every European settler agreed, despite their differences back home. Europeans did not realize (or admit) that Indigenous peoples had values and knowledge far more complex and sophisticated, had no automatic inferiority complex, and were quite adaptable to change. In this rivalry of world views, conflict on almost every aspect of life was inevitable, and as soon as the political and demographic, as well as ecological state of the New Land was directed by one worldview, the other would be forced to retreat.

Religion guided indigenous people far more than it guided most Euro-Canadians. For many Westerners of that time, spirituality was partitioned off from aspects of life, or tied to a view of the world that was conditioned by their centuries of political and denominational rivalry in Europe, even, though most were members of Christian churches. The one Christian denomination and ethnic group that most aboriginal societies viewed as exceptions to this rule were Roman Catholic French Canadians, whose rituals and piety they respected, though when it came to education and children, Indigenous leaders were divided among themselves. While many were willing to consider accommodation of spiritually competing worldviews, even conversion, if that harmed family, marriage, and children, that cooperation was withheld until the Government stepped in.

Most importantly, Europeans did not respect or fully grasp the other side's views of the treaties they negotiated. Indigenous peoples realized that the meanings given to promises-words were also very different from their own.

Indigenous leaders wanted kinship links for peace and protection, but government negotiators wanted an economic bargain and domination.

Indigenous leaders saw the land deal as foundational to a community alliance, while government spokesmen saw this as a surrender or sale giving settlers private property rights.

Indigenous leaders saw Treaty Day as a ritual renewal of kinship and alliance, while governments saw it as the discharge of a minimum amount of supplies and money to meet a contract obligation.

Indigenous leaders wanted treaties to be fixed and perpetual, while governments increasingly wanted them to be short-lived and non-binding.

Indigenous leaders wanted results, while government leaders dickered over terms.

Indigenous leaders continually spoke of peace and friendship while governments talked of ownership and dependence.

Indigenous leaders wanted to talk about shared use while governments spoke of ownership and extinguishment of Aboriginal Titles.

Indigenous leaders talked of inherent rights while governments spoke of contingent rights which they could revise, limit or eliminate according to changing circumstances.

One can see, therefore, that the words often sounded the same on many treaties, but the expectations and meanings evolved over time. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 which applies everywhere except the Maritimes and British Columbia (still under legal dispute there, owing to the contempt by settlers and officials for both British and Canadian treaties) gives the foundational interpretation of several Indigenous nations having the right to make treaty as

sovereign nations. The Pontiac resistance in 1763, proved the correctness of this view, as did the careful cultivation of favorable relations up until the end of the War of 1812.

As waves of new emigrants flooded into the Canadas however, the settlers who gradually assumed government viewed treaties as limitations to their domination of the resources of Canada, and even in old Loyalist zones where native allies had been valued during the American wars, indigenous people were pushed into the margins and or forced to move away.

On the prairies, the situation was simpler, as there was no military threat, though lawless pelt-hunters gold-rushers, and whiskey traders wanted to annex the territory for the United States, and tribes facing the extermination of the buffalo were eager for treaties where they could find some security (they believed) as allies of Ottawa. But this was not important to the government negotiators, working from the Western worldview. These were not British soldiers grateful for military assistance against Americans, keeping an eye to the future. There was a moral conflict in the new worldview of Canadian governments and settlers, for, you see, settlers arriving after 1820 or so did not have any historical experience or memory of the Indigenous contribution to their freedoms under British law. Settlers are by their moral constitution as well as worldview, not grateful to the past. Their eyes are on the present and future, and themselves. They resented restrictions or limitations on their ambitions. Governments placed in the hands of the settlers thus have little time or patience for Indigenous worldviews.

Even though every Canadian treaty lists government obligations, the governments by the 1860s felt little need to honour them in spirit, but only by the stingiest of contractual considerations. Any attempt to explain the oral negotiations or understanding in Indian country based on them was shrugged off as buyer regrets or manipulation for undeserved favours and extras. Many treaties, including Treaties 7 and 8, were signed without any knowledge that Ottawa had already passed the Indian Act, which made Indigenous peoples under the treaties powerless wards of Ottawa. We know, schools, Indian Agents, laws forbidding ceremonies, movement off reserves, and many other restrictions not mentioned in the treaties accordingly were made 'perfectly legal'. In the clash of world views, it seemed that the Western European view of land and people, body and spirit, had won.

Since the 1970s, however, a growing number of leaders, scholars, and officials have been persuaded that oral accounts of history and spirituality have validity. Governments and their lawyers have continually resisted this until the famous 1998 Delgamuukw decision in the Supreme Court validated oral tradition as evidence (that is, the appropriate types of oral tradition). Though not enshrined in law, this decision made future negotiators and officials, under the gaze of the media and watchful indigenous leaders much more careful to show some respect for the older and richer view of the world. Treaty obligations have been reinforced and interpreted more carefully, because of indigenous peoples revealing (at some psychological, emotional, and spiritual cost) more of their secret history, and importantly, by non-indigenous slowly coming to understand how their worldview has been a hindrance to natural justice.

It is this clash of world views and the shifting of power from both to only the Western view that underlies the entire discussion of assimilation, rules, laws, and residential schools. The winners of this class assumed the right to direct the cultural change of the others and got away with it until the 1970s. Since then, Indigenous leaders, teachers, knowledge keepers, and elders, supported by scholars who have come to appreciate the older worldview and better explain the motives as well as choices made by Indigenous societies, have opened up the view of another world that has not “gone away”. Today, even governments admit their keeping of treaties has been at best negligent, and at worst, abusive.

Governments now admit that most treaties were only honoured minimally in goods and never in spirit. Whatever good intentions have been poisoned by the Indian Act, which only now after excruciating struggles, Indigenous people are mitigating or escaping. Apologies have followed, but the pain and readjustment will take at least another generation. We who are identified as settlers, the non-indigenous, must be willing to listen, with patience and empathy, to a past they have almost never been forced to reconsider. This is where the future lies if Canadians can come to understand this in an accommodating way. This is how treaties can be **honoured**, not broken, and not renegotiated all over again. Can these two opposing worldviews establish a better relationship? Respect, like love, is an attitude to be learned, a choice made sometimes over and over, to make things work.

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## A Heritage Kitchen Favourite to Explore

### ONION PIE from Wanda (Johnston) Zenner

1 ½ cups onions, chopped fine, 1/3 cup butter,  
3 tbsp flour, 1 cup cream, ¾ tsp salt, 1/8 tsp pepper  
2 eggs, well beaten, 8” unbaked pie crust

**Instructions:** Sauté onions in butter until light brown.  
Sprinkle with flour, and add cream slowly.  
Season with salt & pepper. Continue cooking and stir  
until the mixture has thickened. Add the eggs and stir.  
Pour into pie shell and bake in 400F oven for 30 minutes.



My cousin Elsie (Doerkson) Giesbrecht gave me this recipe.

*Editor:* Variations on the recipe might see bacon, mushrooms, or other additions to this typically German autumn favourite. Seasonal local produce allowed families to create their ancestral comfort foods.



## Bezanson Veterans Honoured with Ambassador for Peace Medal



A local law office, **Carter, Lock and Horrigan**, hosted a prestigious gathering on September 4<sup>th</sup>, to honour three Bezanson Veterans – Gunner George Burrows, Private John (Jack) Dryer and Master Warrant Officer Stanley Hanson. A very special medal, the **Ambassador for Peace Medal**, is awarded to Veterans of the Korean War should they meet certain requirements. Not only did the “medal case” include the aforementioned award but also included a document addressed to each Veteran, thanking them for their service and stamped by a representative of the Republic of Korea. The proclamation reads as follows:

### Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs

#### “AMBASSADOR FOR PEACE”

##### Official Proclamation

##### John Edward Dryer

It is a great honor and pleasure to express the everlasting gratitude of the Republic of Korea and our people for the service you and your countrymen have performed in restoring and preserving our Freedom and democracy.

We cherish in our hearts the memory of your boundless sacrifices in helping us reestablish our Free Nation.

In grateful recognition of your dedicated contributions, it is our privilege to proclaim you an ‘AMBASSADOR FOR PEACE’ with every good wish of people of the Republic of Korea. Let each of us reaffirm our mutual respect and friendship that they may endure for generations to come.

Minister  
Patriots and Veterans Affairs  
Republic of Korea



As the presentation was held in the Firm’s stylish boardroom, it also provided an opportunity to honour one of the partners, Ron Horrigan, who had recently passed away. Ron’s uncle was Gunner George Burrows.

Gayla, Ron’s wife was in attendance along with their son, Michael and was presented with a beautiful bouquet of white roses. Her appreciative smile said it all.

Wanda Zenner emceed the event and opened the afternoon's presentation by calling on Roy Carter. He recalled having many conversations with Ron regarding the Burrows family and relayed how Ron was so appreciative of the work done to ensure his relatives and others received the awards that they were entitled to. Roy finished his remarks with one of Martin Luther King Junior's famous quotes, "We are not the makers of history, we are made by history".

Wanda then provided an abridged version of each Veteran's biography and added personal anecdotes as recited to her by family members. MP for Grande Prairie McKenzie, Chris Warkentin, presented family members with the beautiful Ambassador for Peace Medal.



Gunner George Burrows' niece Gloria (Horrigan) Gillis accepted the award on his behalf. Gloria's husband and her sister Dianne, along with her husband were in attendance.



Private John (Jack) Dryer's Ambassador for Peace Medal was accepted by his niece Dorothy (Lange) Doll. Anne (Dryer) and Bill Shumard were also in attendance. Anne is the daughter of Jack's brother Arnold.



Master Warrant Officer Stanley Hanson's Ambassador for Peace Medal was accepted by his niece Brenda Sandboe. Brenda is the daughter of of Stan's wife's sister.

The formal portion of the presentation was concluded by Amanda Frayn, County of GP Counselor for Division I, who stated that it was an honour to be invited to such an event. Carter, Lock & Horrigan provided refreshments and a large charcuterie board with various choices to temp your taste buds. Many thanks to Nicola Heaney & her team of organizers.

It was such an enjoyable, commemorative afternoon steeped in Military History. There was also sense of reverence as everyone took a moment to reflect on the sacrifices made by their family members as well as thoughts of the families of the 516 servicemen who did not return home.



*Photos by Anne Shumard, Wendy Bosch (Downtown Assoc.)*

*Written by Wanda Zenner – September 2024*

# The Russian Refugees of 1924

## 100 Years in Canada

### Background from Susan McIntyre and Connie Polushin

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in the 1920's, there was a vast external migration of people. By 1924 there were an estimated 170,000 refugees in Constantinople and another 16,000 situated in Harbin, Manchuria who had escaped the bloodbath. These displaced people were of two varieties: those who had been well placed in the former Tsarist society and whose lives and livelihoods were in danger as a result; and those who, also loyal to the Tsar, were modest farmers in certain danger of losing their land and religion to the new ideology of communism. These primarily "White Russians" would have fallen into the 1921 League of Nations definition of *refugee* by needing protection and having experienced threats to life and wellbeing in their country of origin.

A Russian Bakery Delivery Cart in Harbin



In a brief window of opportunity, a small group of Russians located in Harbin were able to immigrate to Canada, but not without challenges and drama. The Canadian government with its partner, the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR), were open to taking and settling families who were willing to commit to farming the land. They were not, however, willing to take many risks in the process. Col. Orest Dournovo, a leader with good connections, gathered the first group of 21 families for the journey. They were required to pay for their own passage and collectively hold \$25,000 (\$375,000 in 2021 currency) to immigrate. This first group traveled by rail to Dalian, China, by junket to Japan, and sailed on the *Empress of Russia* from Japan to Vancouver in June 1924. Others had to wait to gather funds to make the trip and in September of that year a second group sailed on the *Empress of Canada*.

### Arrival in Canada

During the journey, it was discovered that the group was short of funds to land. It was only with the help of the Russian Refugee Relief Society of America (RRRSA), were they able to secure enough funds to remain in Canada. The first group, once passing means and health examinations, arrived by rail in Wetaskiwin in June 1924. They were first settled on the banks of the Battle River in tents until moving to the communal homestead in Homeglen, near Rimbey, where they began a four-year commitment to farm communally. The second group was able to join them in September of that year and others came in 1927.

Unfortunately, very few others were able to leave before the doors to immigration from China were closed.

From the beginning, these newcomers worked hard and fulfilled their commitment to Canada. They were too late to plant crops in the first season and focussed on building shelters for the winter, gardens and working outside of their community to earn funds. The Government and the CPR had brought the group over under the belief that they would be communal farmers, like the Doukhobors, but in fact the group was not homogeneous and even those who lived in the community wanted the life of farming independently. Within the four years, the non-farmers dispersed to find other livelihoods. Some began to farm on their own land locally and many others went to the Peace River country to file on homesteads there.

In 2024, the descendants of these first settlers looked back on these first settlers from every corner of the country. A few remained in farming, but most have entered every sector of the economy. They have surpassed the very dreams for education and success that their forebearers had for them. It is time to honour them.

## Religion

Within the community, there was a significant group who were very devout Old Greek Orthodox. They held fast to the old ways of worship from the church in Constantinople. Worship, prayer, and adhering to the tenets of the faith were fundamental to their lifestyle and had been much of the impetus to leave Russia. They were traditional in lifestyle, rudimentary in education and appearance, with long beards on the men and head coverings on the women. In fact, their clothing was reminiscent of the peasant style going back generations. Many were only two generations from emancipation.

Immediately, they started building the “Bolshoi Dome,” a make-work project that would give the workers some well-needed cash. It was intended as a place of gathering and worship. Unfinished, they soon built a log church for worship and a cemetery for the consecration of the dead. Many of these settlers rest there today in marked and



now, unmarked graves. The group had a priest among them, and he surely kept the community’s liturgy. The neighbours, who were welcoming and integrating, recall that when the new arrivals would worship on their homestead, their hymns could be heard throughout the valley.

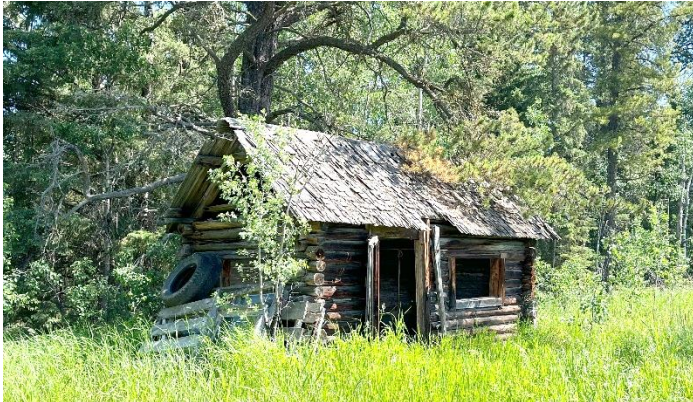
## **Colonel Orest Dournovo**

Instrumental in bringing these and many other Russian refugees from Manchuria was Col. Orest Dournovo. A man of education, military service, and connections, Col. Dournovo worked tirelessly before and after coming to Canada to bring immigrants of good character to settle. He took his commitment to the Government as an oath to ensure that the newcomers would be non-Bolshevik, hard-working agriculturalists. He prevented scammers from duping would-be immigrants, attempting to sell them land unseen, and others who may have been complicit in what he called, the “Bolshevik Bloodbath.”

Dournovo was working against a tightening timeline. The Russian Consulate in Harbin was pressuring the refugees to register; China wanted them gone; they had no passports, which made countries unwilling to take them; and there was pressure for them to emigrate to South America, a place seen as inhospitable to northern people. From his new home in Calgary and with his family being supported by the income of his daughters as domestics, Col. Dournovo was able to bring over 1000 Russian refugees to Canada. His heroic efforts certainly saved the lives of many people.

## **Today**

Currently, when global migration is at the highest level in history, it is critical to remember the importance of welcoming refugees, who if given the opportunity, contribute to the



economy and development of the country. Canada gave these Russian refugees a chance beginning in 1924 and have been paid back with generations of citizens who are proud and productive Canadian citizens. The first refugees broke the land and helped make Canada into the great agricultural nation it has

become. Since then, the descendants have been educated and have contributed to every sector in the country. The Russian Refugees are a reminder of the importance of welcoming those displaced by war and political upheaval. Canada continues to welcome immigrants and refugees as it did in 1924.

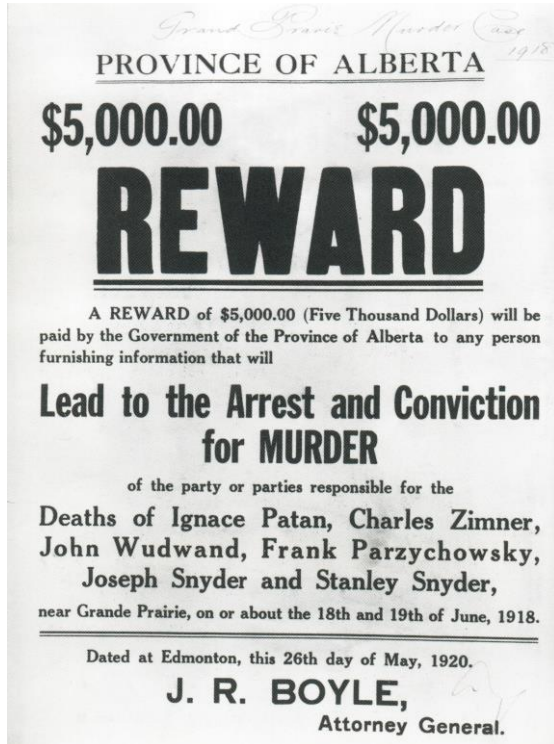
*Editor:* Among the generations of these descendants are many who enlisted and served in the Canadian military and RCMP. This was a centennial commemoration year for both the arrival of these Russian refugee families, and the formation of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

# Murder on the Prairie

The Investigation and Trial of Dan Lough, 1918-20

by Dr. David Leonard

In June 1918, six men of eastern European descent were murdered just northwest of Grande Prairie. Though countless investigations and two trials were held, the case was unsolved and remains the biggest unsolved mass murder in Alberta's history.



The aftermath of World War I was a busy time in the frontier district of Grande Prairie. Railway traffic was picking up, businesses were expanding, and the district was undergoing a settlement wave. On 15 March 1919, Grande Prairie was incorporated as a Town. It was surrounded to the north, east and west by dozens of hamlets and country stores. The census of 1921 showed the Municipal Districts of Bear Lake and Grande Prairie to have a combined population of 6,362, with 1,061 people living in the Town.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the new settlers were veterans of the war who obtained land through the Soldiers Settlement Board. Many carried physical and emotional scars from their war experience. People on the home front had also suffered during the previous four years with news of fallen loved ones, or by

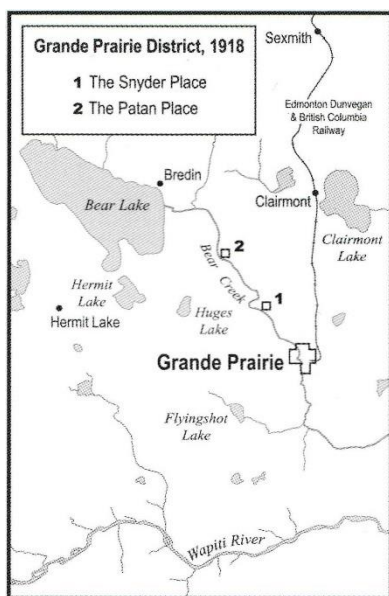
simply trying to maintain homes and farms while husbands, brothers and sons were on the battle fields of Europe.

Most veterans taking land grants were of British origin, but settlers from eastern Europe had also become prevalent of late, most having arrived just before the war. Some met with hostility, especially when casualty lists began to grow because few “foreigners” joined the service. To some, they represented the “Huns” with which Canada and the rest of the Empire was locked in a death struggle. War’s end brought its share of violence to the area. In his Annual Report for 1918, the Superintendent of the Peace River Division of the Alberta Provincial Police stated:

**There has been an increase in the number of offences dealt with; the increase following upon the increase in population. It is becoming more than ever apparent, however, that the strength of this Division must be increased to keep pace with the changing conditions, if crime and vice are to be effectively dealt with. The men**

**available to police this district are insufficient, and it is impossible to give prompt attention to all complaints.**

Most criminal activity in the Division occurred in the district of Grande Prairie. In February 1920, the Grande Prairie detachment was made into a separate "Subdivision" of the APP, with officers assigned to Beaverlodge, Sexsmith, Spirit River and Sturgeon Lake. The year before, the Sub-judicial District of Grande Prairie was created. Most cases heard during the first sessions of court involved physical violence, with one war veteran, Nobby Clark, appearing six times in a 21 month period to face charges of assault, threatening violence, carrying a concealed weapon and pointing a firearm.<sup>1</sup> He also appeared before the Justice of the Peace in Spirit River three times on similar counts.



Map of Grand Prairie area where the mass killings took place. Numbers 1 and 2 mark the two murder scenes.

The major crime on the Prairie, and indeed in all of Alberta, during this time was brought to light at about 4:00 am on Thursday, 20 June 1918, when Dan Lough saddled a horse on his farm three miles northwest of Grande Prairie and raced towards town.<sup>2</sup> Arriving at the recently opened office of the Alberta Provincial Police, he banged on the door, waking Corporal William Allen. Lough explained that some foul play may have occurred on the farm just to the south of his because he overheard a loud argument, with someone yelling "Help!" and someone else replying in a gruff voice, "I'll help you!" That was followed by a loud commotion.

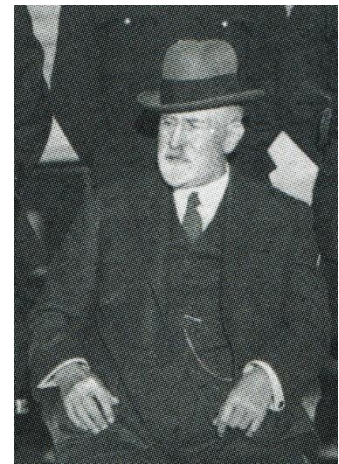
After dressing and telling his wife to remain inside, Lough stated that he went out into his yard and headed through a bog to the farm house of Joseph Snyder and his nephew, Stanley. When he approached the house, Lough said he noticed that a fire had just broken out, so he thought the best course of action was to notify the police.

Upon hearing the story, Allen asked Lough to fetch Albert Thompson, a liveryman who owned an automobile. As Lough did this, Allen quickly dressed and the three were on their way to the Snyder place, Lough riding is horse. When they arrived, they found the shack burned to the ground. When they examined the ground around the charred ruins, they found traces of blood near where the door had been. Blotches of blood led to a nearby log, and Allen determined that a heavy object, like a human body, had been dragged feet first from the log to the shack. No fresh tracks were found nearby save those of Lough who said he had gotten wet from walking through the bog.

While Thompson returned to Grande Prairie to bring out former APP constable Hugh Jackson, Allen began to examine the ruins of the shack and was soon assisted by the local coroner, Percy H. Belcher, who had also been summoned. They determined that the remnants of a body was in the former dwelling. When they examined the sod roof, which had not burned, they discovered the body of Stanley Snyder punctured by a bullet behind his left ear. A later autopsy revealed the charred body inside to be that of his uncle, Joseph, who had been shot just under one eye.

The head of the Grande Prairie detachment of the APP, Sergeant Patrick Egan, arrived on the scene later that day. Before leaving town, he telegraphed his commanding officer, Inspector Albert McDonnell, headquartered in Peace River. McDonnell replied that he would soon be on the scene. Discovering a .38 calibre revolver near the body of Stanley Snyder, Egan concluded that it was a case of murder-suicide. However, three days later, another local farmer named Alex Peebles came to the police to tell them he thought there was something wrong at the farm of his neighbour, Ignace Patan, on NE8 TP72 R6 W6, which was about four miles northwest of the Snyder place.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, Patan's horses were in Peebles' wheat field, and, when Peebles drove over to the Patan house, he could find no one around and the door locked. As a vicious dog was present, he decided not to investigate further.

By this time, Inspector McDonnell had arrived and was in charge. He dispatched Sergeant Egan and Corporal S. McPherson to the Patan place. When forcing open the door of the house, they discovered two decomposing bodies covered by canvas and bedding. They also found a corpse in the storehouse and another in a nearby wagon. Coroner Belcher was again summoned and, with the help of Peebles, the bodies were identified. Ignace Patan, found in the house, was a recent immigrant from Poland who had earlier settled in Illinois. He owned the house and farm and was thought to have a considerable amount of money in his possession. James Wudwand, also found in the house, was a recent immigrant from Russia who was then working in a livery stable in Grande Prairie. Charles Zimmer, found in the wagon, was a German trapper who had just sold his homestead and was thought to have about \$2,000 in his possession. Frank Parzychowsky, found in the storage shed, was a Ukrainian blacksmith from North Dakota who also had a farm near the Patan Place.



Coroner Percy Belcher

All bodies, save that of Patan, had the appearance of being shot a few days earlier. Patan appeared to have had his throat slashed. Inside the house was a concoction containing wood alcohol, indicating a drinking party had taken place. The only money discovered was \$108 found in the pocket of Wudwand.

A jury was then convened by Belcher which determined that all six men on the two farms had been murdered, the earlier theory of murder-suicide at the Snyder place ruled out because the revolver used had been found on the sod roof, impossible for a suicide victim to throw it there after killing himself. The Snyders were shot by a .38 calibre revolver which turned out to have belonged to Ignace Patan, implying whoever committed the murders at the Patan place also committed those of the Snyders as the revolver contained five empty shell casings. A ring of keys belonging to Patan was also found at Snyders'.

It was also determined that Patan, Zimmer and Wudwand were about to depart for Fort Vermilion and had about \$5,000 among them after withdrawing money from the Union Bank in Grande Prairie. Parzychowsky was supposed to have gone to the Patan place on the evening of 18 June to wish them farewell. Alex Peebles recalled having passed by the place at about 10:00 that evening, thought he noticed five people in the farmyard but could not recall who they were.



On 25 June, two headlines in the *Grande Prairie Herald* read, **“Terrible Tragedy Happens Near Grande Prairie”** and **“Added Mystery Following Snyder Tragedy Near Grande Prairie.”**

The stories went on to detail the known facts. Belcher quickly rounded up witnesses and appointed a Coroner’s Jury.<sup>4</sup> The witnesses included neighbours of the victims, James Dunlop, Dan Lough, Ben Harmer and Alex Peebles for the Patan *et. al.* case, and Peebles, Thomas Newton, Francis Belcourt and Fletcher Bredin for the Snyder Case. Other witnesses included John McAuley who was a fur buyer with the Selkirk Trading Company familiar with the victims; Sylvester Bowen, a Grande Prairie merchant familiar with the Snyders; Albert Thompson, the garage owner whose car was used to take Corporal Allen to the Snyder place; William Caldwell who confirmed Patan had recently purchased some .38 calibre bullets from his store in Grande Prairie; Thomas Foote, a trapper and labourer familiar with Patan and Wudwand; Vernon Snowden, an accountant at the Union Bank who confirmed the monetary withdrawals by Patan and Zimmer; George Sylvester who testified that many people knew that Patan, Zimmer and Wudwand had much cash with them; Andrew Hobel, a labourer and the last living person to see Parzychowsky alive; and Drs. Joseph Conroy and Martin MacDonald who examined the corpses. The Jurymen in both cases included John Thompson, Ross McMillan, Herbert Matherson, John Crerar, William Pratt and William Salmond, all of Grande Prairie.

The Coroner’s jury concluded that the men at the Patan farm were killed between 9:30 pm on 18 June and noon the next day. Shortly thereafter, Inspector McDonnell was told two men named Norman Keelor and Earl “Shorty” Salisbury had set out from Grande Prairie on the early morning of 20 June, heading south towards the Wapiti River. As they were already accused of stealing an expensive coat, McDonnell suspected they might also be the murderer(s).<sup>5</sup> He therefore dispatched Corporal Allen and Constables Bremner and McMullen to track them down. Sam Raymond and Tommy Foote, trappers familiar with the district, went along as posse members.

When the posse came upon Salisbury, who professed to be scouting for a homestead, he was arrested without trouble. However, when they came upon Keeler, he did resist and was wounded in the arm. The two men were then brought in to headquarters and incarcerated, but it was soon verified that they had left town prior to the killing, so murder charges against them were stayed.<sup>6</sup>

The next few weeks saw a wave of finger-pointing. McDonnell established the practice of apprehending possible suspects in broad daylight, rather than interviewing them at home, which led to more finger-pointing. Few people slept well at night, especially since the sun now rose so early and set so late. Everyone had a theory, but, as no direct evidence could be found, no one was charged, which added to the frustration. Adding to the fear was the fact that blood-stained dollar bills were soon noted to be circulating in the district.

Another bizarre twist took place in mid-July when a friend of Rosie Parzychowsky, the widow of Frank, had a premonition that some gold was hidden at the Patan place. Rosie knew that her husband had about \$450 in gold with him at the time of his murder. Given permission to look over the place, Rosie did indeed find about \$440 in gold in an old boot in a woodshed, which she

immediately placed in the Union Bank in Grande Prairie.<sup>7</sup> This was after a thorough investigation of the premises had supposedly been made. Rosie herself had been visiting in Washington State at the time of the crime and learned of her husband's killing only after she returned.

One month after the murders, the *Grande Prairie Herald* published an editorial entitled **"Police Assistance Needed Badly:"** **We have felt for a long time that the Alberta Police Force was inadequate, but we certainly did not realize the extent of their inadequacy until the recent killings showed them up.**

**In the first place, the district is too large to be handled by the number of men in charge. The Royal North West Mounted Police never had less than six men in the territory, where the present provincial system has only two, with at least 2,000 more settlers. Think of trying to police a district 250 miles long and 100 miles wide with only one man! That is what the present force is trying to do. The men on detachment duty are as a rule efficient enough, although the best man on the force may have been driven out by the apparent ignorance of the men higher up.**

**The first of the murders was discovered within two hours after it had been committed and it should have been an easy matter to patrol all trails and districts and apprehend all those who could not give a satisfactory account of themselves. Were a Corporal and several assistants in charge here, this might have been possible.**

**The second murders were reported to the police some little time before they were investigated. What was Inspector McDonnell doing? We have nothing to say about Corporal Allen. As far as we know, he is a competent officer. We do know, however, that he has been demanding assistance for some months past and has received none.**

**The right time has come when alleged incompetents must be removed. We must have protection, and if the government won't give it, we must protect ourselves. Furthermore, we do not care whether it is the Provincial Police or some other from which it comes, so long as it protects our homes and families. But protection we must and will have. It may be said that capable men cannot be secured; but they can be secured if they receive decent treatment and support.**

**Much valuable time has been lost; and it is doubtful when, if ever, these murderers will ever be apprehended. Some of the men in charge of the case are capable and experienced, but lacking in the necessary support and are late on the ground. What is going to be done to remedy these conditions we do not know, but something should be done immediately, if our wives and families are not to be terror stricken any longer.<sup>8</sup>**

The editorial was probably written by the editor of the *Herald*, E.W. Mitten. It was followed by a petition to the provincial Attorney General signed by 226 "Women of the District of Grande Prairie" asking that "immediate steps be taken toward the proper and adequate policing of the

Grande Prairie District and Northern Alberta.”<sup>9</sup> The complaints were legitimate in that, with the advent of the Provincial Police in 1917, law enforcement was diminished in the province in general. According to J.D. Nicholson, who helped set up the APP, “It was very difficult to secure suitable men” at the time.<sup>10</sup> With the war raging, there were simply not enough young men available who had training in, or who were inclined towards, police work.<sup>11</sup> Many of the first APP constables were Mounted Police pensioners returning to service. The Grande Prairie Detachment then consisted of three men and would experience an annual turn-over of about 75% for the next few years.



On 23 July 1918, the *Herald* contained a reward announcement by the Attorney General for \$1,000 for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the murderer(s). At the same time, John D. Nicholson was dispatched to Grande Prairie to take charge of the case. Nicholson was a career North West Mounted Police officer, having joined the force in 1885.<sup>12</sup> In 1911, he retired from the force to become “Chief of Detectives” for Alberta. When the Alberta Provincial Police was created, he was named Assistant Superintendent and provincial chief detective.

John D. Nicholson in 1906

The first Superintendent of the APP was Albert McDonnell, recently Superintendent of “N” (Peace River) Division of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. In later years, Nicholson wrote: *I found it impossible to work harmoniously with the Chairman of the [APP] Commission [P.C.H. Primrose] and the Superintendent [McDonnell] so I tendered my resignation as Assistant Superintendent but retained my position of Chief Detective. Shortly after, the Commission was abolished and Supt. McDonnell retired.*<sup>13</sup>

In fact, McDonnell accepted an appointment as Commander of “E” Division of the APP, stationed in Peace River where he had earlier taken out a homestead. The Division then included the detachment in Grande Prairie.

Nicholson arrived in Grande Prairie on about 16 July to what was probably not too auspicious a greeting by the Police. In later years, he wrote:

*Owing to past prejudices, I did not expect much assistance from the Police. The officer in charge of investigations for that force was none other than Inspector McDonnell, who was the main cause of my resignation from the A.P.P. The A.P.P. resented my efforts and made known their objections very effectively so effectively, in fact, that they asked the Attorney General to withdraw me from the case.*<sup>14</sup>

Nicholson later professed to have been appalled that nothing had been done to secure the two crime scenes, and curiosity seekers had been allowed to wander around them. He nonetheless set out to investigate both sites and interview people.

On 16 September, Nicholson disclosed to the Deputy Attorney General that his primary suspects were Dick Knight, Albert Manyshack, John Kapalka, Joe Tomshack and Dan Lough.<sup>15</sup>

They were all closely acquainted with the victims and aware that Patan and Zimmer had much money with them. In later years, he added Mike Durda and Richard Knechtel to his list of suspects during the fall of 1918.<sup>16</sup>

In November, Nicholson made a trip to Edmonton. When he returned, he discovered the international Spanish flu to have hit the district hard, making it difficult to conduct interviews. Indeed, Sergeant Samuel Ross, who now led the APP Detachment in Grande Prairie, had just died of the disease and three of his officers were ill. The only one unaffected was Corporal Allen and he had to take the body of Ross to Edmonton. Nicholson, therefore, was prevailed upon to take over the Detachment and manage it by himself for a while. When the epidemic eventually subsided and more staff was assigned to the district, interviewing continued. Important witnesses to die from the flu were Frank Palowski, James Hawes, Albert Cressy, and Ann Lough, Dan's wife.

As the investigation continued, Nicholson's favourite suspect became Dan Lough, a 43-year-old farmer from Illinois, the son of German immigrants. In August 1914, he took out a homestead just northeast of Sexsmith which was 12 miles north of Grande Prairie.<sup>17</sup> He was then married with two children and would soon have two more. After proving up his land in February 1918, he sold it to I.R. Hunter and purchased SW2 TP72 R6 W6 from Charles Zimmer. This was directly north of the Snyder place.

Nicholson later recalled that his suspicion about Lough was based mainly on verification that Lough was aware Patan, Zimmer and Wudwand were all carrying considerable cash. Indeed, Lough had just purchased Zimmer's farm for \$2,000. Lough also acknowledged that he had visited the Snyder place at 9:30 the evening of 19 June and stayed with them for more than an hour to help with a lame colt. Nicholson reasoned that Lough would have told the Snyders he was heading over to the Patan place and, therefore, was compelled to dispose of the Snyders after killing the men at Patan's. The killings at Patan's might not have been difficult because, save for Parzychowsky, an abstainer, the men were probably in a stupor from drinking the wood alcohol concoction.

It was noticed by Corporal Ross that the only identifiable fresh tracks in the Snyder yard on the morning of 20 June had been those of Lough. It was also noted that Lough was wet up to the waist when reporting to the police, possibly from washing off blood in the bog between his place and the Snyders'. It also seemed odd to Nicholson that Lough had gone straight to the police upon discovering the fire at the Snyder's rather than alert nearby neighbours. Furthermore, Nicholson once visited the Lough farm at 2:00 am and found Dan and his wife sleeping peacefully with his door open when everyone else around was locking their doors at night in lieu of the murders.

With his theory building, it was with some concern that Nicholson learned, on 6 August 1920, that Lough was planning to leave the country with his family and re-locate in Illinois.<sup>18</sup> Nicholson confronted Lough, who must have been aware of the detective's suspicions, but Lough

maintained that he himself was going only as far as Edmonton to see his family off to visit relatives in Illinois. Nicholson agreed to this trip, which was monitored by APP officers in Edmonton, and Lough was soon back in Grande Prairie. His family was also soon back for they had been refused entry to the United States.<sup>19</sup>

On 18 October, Lough sold his farm and moved with his family into a newly built house on Bear Creek flat in Grande Prairie.<sup>20</sup> Shortly thereafter, Ann Lough contacted the Spanish flu and passed away in early November along with their youngest child.<sup>21</sup> On 19 November, the *Herald* disclosed that Lough was about to put his moveable farm assets up for auction and “there will be

absolutely no reserve as sickness has made conditions necessary for Mr. Lough to dispose of his holdings here.”<sup>22</sup> On 3 December, the *Herald* carried a “notice to creditors” from Lough, calling on “all those owing to me on lien notes” to “settle at once.” His departure for Illinois was announced in the *Herald* on 10 December, but he appears not to have gone, probably on Nicholson’s instruction, and soon moved with his three children to a farm 12 miles east of Grande Prairie.

All through the rest of 1919 and into 1920, Nicholson proceeded to build his case, interviewing many witnesses. In January 1920, McDonnell resigned from the APP to become a police magistrate in Peace River. In February, the Peace River Division was divided into the Sub-Divisions of Peace River and Grande Prairie. In Grande Prairie, Sergeant Hugh Trickey was placed in charge as Inspector. At this time, the APP were dealing with many cases, including the murders of John Wynnichuk and John Dougherty near Hythe.

On 13 April 1920, the *Herald*, now edited by Charles Kitchen, published a story by “A Disgusted Citizen” which purported that:

*Any policeman with average intelligence, directed to the investigation of the problems of crime, will not fail to observe that the six murder cases were not efficiently handled. Inefficient police officers are a serious danger to old or new countries.*<sup>23</sup>

Two months later, “Another Disgusted Citizen” wrote:

*Two years have practically passed since one of the foulest murders in the annals of Canadian crime took place in our midst, and what has been done to bring the murderer or murders to justice? – apparently nothing....*

*Our police officials need not imagine that the murder of these six men will be forgotten, I will guarantee to say that in the surrounding country, not a family sits down to meals but that the murders are referred to, especially is this so with our foreign population, as they discuss it at every opportunity....*

*Let the citizens of the North voice our opinion in this matter and awaken our police department to their duty.*<sup>24</sup>

To Nicholson’s disgust, the “Disgusted Citizen” turned out to be none other than Patrick Sullivan who had been appointed a special plainclothes detective assigned to Grande Prairie to help with the investigation.<sup>25</sup> His admission of this brought his prompt dismissal, but not before he was able to spread further talk about the perceived incompetence of Nicholson, Trickey, and,

indeed, the entire APP. He even published a story on the affair in the popular tabloid, *Jack Canuck*, for November, 1920.

Nicholson had been stymied by his inability to unearth any concrete evidence and, on 26 May 1920, the reward for the six murders of 1918 was raised to \$5,000.<sup>26</sup> After three weeks and no new information surfaced, he formally tabled an "Information and Complaint" document against Lough for the murder of Stanley and Joseph Snyder. This was exactly two years and one day after the Snyder murders were discovered.<sup>27</sup> Two days later, Lough was brought before Magistrate Percy Belcher to hear the charges in the Oddfellows Hall in Grande Prairie which was packed with onlookers.

The witnesses for the prosecution included J.E. Thomson who was foreman of the Coroner's Jury convened by Belcher right after the murders; Albert Thompson, the garage operator who had driven Corporal Ross to the Snyder place; John McAuley, a merchant in Grande Prairie who dealt often with the Snyders and swore they were quiet, unassuming people whose only firearm was a shotgun; Ben Harmer, a neighbour of the Snyders who corroborated McAuley's story; Henry Gordon who drove Lough and his family to Spirit River in August, 1918 to take the train to Edmonton; Inspector Hugh Trickey of the Alberta Provincial Police in Grande Prairie who confirmed the physical evidence left him by Corporal Ross; and Detective Nicholson who spoke longer than the other witnesses that afternoon in support of his findings and theory.

Standing beside his attorney, Martin Eager, Dan Lough pleaded not guilty but said nothing else and was commanded by Belcher to stand trial at the next sitting of the Supreme Court of Alberta to be held in Grande Prairie. Lough was then remanded to the custody of the Provincial Police and was soon on his way to the provincial jail at Fort Saskatchewan while his three children, Isabel, Fred and Joe, aged nine, seven and five, were placed in the Children's Shelter in Edmonton.

On 30 July, Lough was formally charged with the murder of Patan, Zimmer, Wudwand and Parzychowsky. The trial for all six murders was held over until 9 and 10 December, 1920 when Supreme Court Justice William Simmons was scheduled to be in Grande Prairie. The Crown Prosecutor was to be E.B. Cogswell, and the lawyer for the defence, again, Martin Eager. The jurors appointed were W.J. Boyd, J.F. Harris, George Crummy, Robert Cochrane, Fred Roberts and George Robertson.

At the trial, the same prosecution witnesses were called as before, save Thomson. Two others added were Alex Peebles and Dr. J.H. Conroy. With no new evidence uncovered since the hearing in June, the case for the prosecution went much as before.<sup>28</sup> This time, defence lawyer Eager was able to mount a calculated argument as to why this was insufficient. He pointed out there was absolutely no evidence of Lough having visited the Patan place on the evening in question. He then pointed out the fact that the gun in question was found next to the body of Stanley Snyder, which was consistent of the murder-suicide theory first advanced by Corporal Egan. Eager also challenged Nicholson by arguing that Lough's decision to go straight to the

police instead of some neighbours on that June morning in 1918 was the proper one, and one which most citizens would have taken. He concluded by saying, "Gentlemen of the Jury, there is nothing more I can say, there is no evidence against the accused and [I] therefore have no hesitation in leaving the accused's fate in your hands."



Grande Prairie in 1916

Justice Simmons then pointed out the major facts of the case as revealed by the evidence and instructed the Jury to retire and consider a verdict. According to the *Herald*, "The prisoner throughout the whole proceedings had the same demeanour as he had shown on other occasions and at no time did he show any emotion." The Jury stayed out almost an hour then returned to pronounce its verdict of not guilty. Dan Lough was then released from custody.

That Nicholson realized he did not have a strong case is revealed in a crime report he submitted to the Deputy Attorney General, A.G. Browning, on 22 November, 1920 in which he maintained:

*Although there is not sufficient evidence for a conviction, there is a strong circumstantial case which should be put before a judge and jury to decide.*

*A large number of Grande Prairie citizens believe Lough to be implicated in those murders and there should be considerable comment if the case were dropped and the accused, if he is guilty or innocent, should be tried as all the evidence that could be secured in two years on those cases will be available now.<sup>29</sup>*

The following day, his new crime report stated:

*I advise that this case be adjourned to the next sitting of the [Supreme] Court if possible, as I do not believe there is sufficient evidence to go on with.<sup>30</sup>*

Probably sensing the exasperation of the people of the district, Browning followed Nicholson's initial advice and ordered the trial to proceed that December.

Nicholson's uncertainty about his case was verified two months after the trial, when he formally charged Richard Knechtel with the murder of Patan, Zimmer, Wudwand and

Parzychowski, apparently on information supplied by Dan Lough.<sup>31</sup> This case was even more circumstantial however, the most critical evidence being that Knechtel knew all of the victims personally and married Rosie Parzychowsky just six months after the murder of her husband. Nicholson also wondered about Rosie's ability to locate the \$440 in gold at the Patan place although she was out of the country at the time of the killing. There was also a report that Knechtel once told a neighbour that he was furious with Patan about something and would "fix" him one day.<sup>32</sup>

Richard Knechtel was born in Germany in 1883 and came to the Clairmont district to homestead on NE7 TP72 R6 W6 in June, 1911. The homestead was about three miles away from each of the Patan and Snyder places. It was he who identified the set of keys at Snyder's as belonging to Patan. According to Nicholson, Knechtel was "a German Pole and strong pro-German."<sup>33</sup>

The preliminary hearing into Knechtel took place before Magistrate Belcher on 9 February, 1921.<sup>34</sup> Several of the earlier witnesses were again called and again gave the same testimony. Also testifying were Knechtel's wife, Rosie, and John Parzychowski, Rosie's stepson, over the objection of defence attorney Eagar. No incriminating evidence was brought forward however, such as a relationship existing between Rosie and Knechtel at the time of the murders, and, when all testimony was over, Belcher dismissed the case. One week later, the Clairmont local of the United Farmers of Alberta placed a notice in the *Herald* declaring:

*Whereas our community is disgusted with the Police mismanagement of the whole prosecution of the case – therefore be it resolved that while we as a community are most anxious to have the guilty party or parties brought to justice, yet we deem the Attorney General's Department inexcusable for having brought this expense and shame on our fellow citizen without evidence, and their whole course of action is not worthy of anything but censure.*<sup>35</sup>

Richard Knechtel continued to farm in the Clairmont district until his death in 1949, remaining a respected citizen.<sup>36</sup> Rosie lived in the district until 1982. Dan Lough and his three children moved back to Illinois shortly after his acquittal and appear not to have been heard from by people in the area since. There were no more arrests in the case of the six murders, although many people were to express many theories about the culprit(s) over the years.<sup>37</sup>

One theory could have held that, since all six victims were of German or eastern European ethnicity, the perpetrator(s) could well have been people of British sympathies, disgusted with the fact that so many young men of British descent were perishing in Europe while people from the homelands of the enemy had taken up homesteads in Alberta. By the summer of 1918, many veterans who had served their term with the army were settling in the district, and many bore strong animosity towards things German and eastern European, or, as the common term had it, "Bohunk." The press and polite society usually referred to them simply as "foreigners."



Even though the gun used for five of the murders belonged to Patan, the perpetrator(s) must have had experience with pistols, for not a bullet was wasted and each of the five shots was true to the mark, either in the back of the head or through the eye.

In his initial investigations, Nicholson concentrated on Europeans living northwest of Grande Prairie, with names like Hoble, Moosenko, Lakosky, Maneyshack, Durda, Palowsky, Tomshak, Crystal, Semak, Kapalka, Holdas and Swerodosky, as well as Lough and Knechtel. Indeed, Nicholson even drew up a list of all Germans and Austrians in the area who owned fire arms.<sup>38</sup> He also had transferred to Grande Prairie one of the few Ukrainian constables of the APP, Frederich Varsari, specifically to interview and gain the confidence of eastern Europeans around Grande Prairie.<sup>39</sup> Though most of the suspects were German or eastern European, every member of the Coroner's jury and the two trial juries were British, as were all the witnesses in the Lough case.

Detecting a certain bias was Frank Durda who told APP investigator William Block: *We all know there is a war going on, but how is it that six men are killed and no one knows anything about it? The police are investigating our people about it all the time but no one cares about us. I myself think that the murders was done by some returned man from the war.*<sup>40</sup>

The party who came to receive the strongest consideration next to Lough during 1919 was Frank Lakosky, a veteran who was, reportedly, an excellent marksman.<sup>41</sup> Once diagnosed as a manic depressive, he had recently spent time in the provincial mental home in Oliver.<sup>42</sup> He also apparently bragged about killing Germans during the war.

The only non-eastern European suspects seriously investigated were Richard Knight and F.R. Beckham. Knight, of Sexsmith, was known as a bully and bootlegger and had suddenly come upon considerable money. He had earlier bragged he was going to make some easy money soon and, indeed, he later deposited a dollar belonging to one of the victims in the Union Bank in Grande Prairie.<sup>43</sup> Knight, however, could prove he was in Sexsmith at the time of the murders. F.R. Beckham, the Agent for Western Trust in Grande Prairie, took over the assets of the murdered men and also seemed wealthier than his salary would allow. He was the favoured suspect of detective Sullivan who considered him the "Master Criminal in the murders" and reported that he slept with a revolver and was reputed to call out "murder" in his sleep.<sup>44</sup> No concrete evidence was unearthed on Beckham however.

The most thorough investigation of the case in recent years was undertaken by Wally Tansem of Wanham, Alberta, and, later, Grande Prairie, who, unfortunately, passed away before publishing his findings. He held the theory that the culprit was probably Lough, and he even went to Illinois to interview Lough's descendants but was not able to discern any new information.<sup>45</sup> He also concluded, as did the jury, that opportunity and motive were insufficient grounds for conviction, and other incriminating circumstances, such as the Loughs appearing unafraid after the murders, were too shallow to consider.

No extra money was discovered in Lough's possession, and the fact some currency was circulating about the district with blood on it was normal for rural areas where cuts and scrapes were common. Nor was Lough known to own a revolver. His decision to alert the police rather than some neighbours about the purported incident at the Snyder place was also quite natural and appropriate for most people. That he was home on the evening of 19 June was confirmed by his wife, Ann, who, although not around for the trial, was interviewed by Constable F.G. Baxter before her death.<sup>46</sup>

The crime remains a mystery. The Alberta Provincial Police kept their file on the case open and continued to conduct interviews over the years, with various parties emerging as suspects.<sup>47</sup> Should readers wish to delve further into the details, the manuscript of Wally Tansem was published in 2012 as *Foulest of Murders*, under the auspices of his wife, Doris, and his daughter, Brenda LaCroix, of Grande Prairie.

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<sup>1</sup> For these and other criminal cases in the Grande Prairie district following World War I, see PAA, accession #79.119 (Criminal Case files from the Grande Prairie Court House), files for 1918 to 1925.

<sup>2</sup> See the details of the events that day in PAA, accession #72.370 (Annual Reports of the Alberta Provincial Police), report for "E" Division by Inspector Albert McDonnell. See Dan Lough's account in PAA, accession #72.26 (Attorney General Criminal Case files), file #2937, 18 July, 1918.

<sup>3</sup> See the Inquest file in PAA, accession #67.172 (Attorney General Inquest Files), #1115 (Patan, Zimmer, Wudwand and Parzychowsky), and #116 (the Snyders).

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.* Throughout the investigations, the names of the victims were spelled various ways.

<sup>5</sup> The story of the arrest can be seen in PAA, accession #76.347 (Alberta Provincial Police Administrative files), #214.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See Rosie Knechtel's account of this in her deposition of 1921 in PAA, accession #67.172, *op. cit.*, #1115.

<sup>8</sup> *Grande Prairie Herald*, 18 July, 1918.

<sup>9</sup> The hand written petition with names included can be seen in PAA, accession 67.126, *op. cit.*, file #1115.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholson quoted in Horan, *On the Side of the Law* (Edmonton: Institute of Applied Art), p.32.

<sup>11</sup> See the problems that were encountered in setting up the APP in Sean Moir, *The Alberta Provincial Police, 1917-32*, Master's Thesis, University of Alberta, Department of History, Fall, 1992, pp.75-90. See the personnel case files for individual constables in PAA, accession #75.125 (Personnel files of the Alberta Provincial Police).

<sup>12</sup> See Nicholson's autobiography in John Horan, *op. cit.*, pp.7-34. See also the file on J.D. Nicholson in PAA, Information Files.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholson in Horan, *op. cit.* For the rift between Nicholson and McDonnell, see Moir, pp.129-31.

<sup>14</sup> See J.D. Nicholson, "The Perfect Crime" in *ibid.*, p.227. Nicholson, who was probably writing from memory, was very inaccurate when it came to dates and names of people.

<sup>15</sup> See Nicholson's report in PAA, Accession #67.172, *op. cit.*, file #1115.

<sup>16</sup> See Nicholson in Horan, *op. cit.*, p.231.

<sup>17</sup> See Lough's homestead file in PAA, accession #73.313 (Department of the Interior Land Files), #3225718.

<sup>18</sup> See Nicholson's report of 29 June, 1920 in PAA, 67,172, *op. cit.*, file #1115.

<sup>19</sup> See the *Grande Prairie Herald*, 29 June, 1920.

<sup>20</sup> See Nicholson's crime report for 13 October, 1918 in PAA, accession 67.172, file #1115.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, report for 19 November, 1918.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> This issue of the *Herald* is not included on the microfilmed newspaper but can be seen in PAA, accession #75.125, *op. cit.*, file #351.

<sup>24</sup> *Grande Prairie Herald*, 15 June, 1920

<sup>25</sup> Apparently, the article was passed to one H.T. Kent of the *Herald*. Sullivan was also charged with assaulting the editor of the *Spirit River Echo* and trying to seduce a woman in Beaverlodge. By his own admission, he was "erratic" and frequently drunk. See APP, accession #75.125, *op. cit.*, file #351.

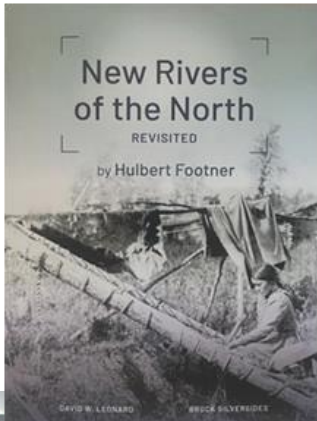
<sup>26</sup> See the *Grande Prairie Herald*, 8 June, 1920.

<sup>27</sup> See the transcripts of the case in PAA, accession 75.26, *op. cit.*, #2937C.

<sup>28</sup> See the transcript of the trial in PAA, accession 79.119, *op. cit.*, file #54. The proceedings of the trial were reported in the *Grande Prairie Herald* on 14 December, 1920.

<sup>29</sup> PAA, accession #72.26, *op. cit.*, Crime Report of J.D. Nicholson, 22 November, 1920.

- <sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, Crime Report of J.D. Nicholson, 23 November, 1920.
- <sup>31</sup> See PAA, accession 72.370, *op. cit.*, Report of the Grande Prairie Detachment for 1921, p.2.
- <sup>32</sup> See Nicholson crime report, 10 June, 1920 in PAA, accession #67.172, *op. cit.*, file #1115.
- <sup>33</sup> Nicholson Crime Report, 10 June, 1920 in *ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> See the transcript of the trial in PAA, accession #79.119, *op. cit.*, file #102. See also the *Grande Prairie Herald*, 15 February, 1921.
- <sup>35</sup> The hand written petition can also be seen in PAA, accession #67.172, *op. cit.*, file 1116.
- <sup>36</sup> He did have at least one run-in with the Law when, in March 1928, he was convicted of “causing a disturbance.” See PAA, accession #79.119, *op. cit.*, file #510.
- <sup>37</sup> See Isabel Campbell, *Grande Prairie: Capital of the Peace* (Grande Prairie: Isabel Campbell, 1968), p.58.
- <sup>38</sup> See Nicholson’s crime report of 15 September, 1918 in PAA, accession #67.172, *op. cit.*, file #1115.
- <sup>39</sup> Varzari also investigated the Winnychuck case. See Nicholson’s crime report of 5 December, 1918 in *ibid.* See also the personnel file on Varzari in PAA, accession #75.125, file #368.
- <sup>40</sup> Durda quoted by William Block, 5 September, 1918 in PAA, 67.172, *op. cit.*, file #1115.
- <sup>41</sup> See various reports in *ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> See Nicholson’s crime reports for 16 August, 1918 and 28 December, 1919 in *ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> See Nicholson’s crime report for 15 September, 1918 in *ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> See Nicholson crime report for 14 June, 1920 in *ibid.* See also Sullivan’s file in PAA, accession #75.125, *op. cit.*, #351.
- <sup>45</sup> Tansem’s interview with the author, summer, 1991.
- <sup>46</sup> See the deposition of Constable F.G. Baxter taken by Inspector H.N. Trickey, 28 June, 1920 in PAA, accession 72.26, *op. cit.*, file 2837.
- <sup>47</sup> See the Annual Reports of “E” Division in PAA, 72.370, *op. cit.*



### A Full House at the GP Museum

On September 25th, David Leonard spoke on his re-launch of Hulbert Footner’s travels now revised and given historical context, both photographically and culturally. Footner and his partner encountered both Indigenous and Metis peoples on their journey, and captured their reality during that journey in 1911.

