

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Christmas Eve Murder and the Notorious Georges: Community Identity in Northern British Columbia, 1913/14

Jonathan Swainger

Department of History, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC, Canada

Email: swainger@unbc.ca; swainger@telus.net

Abstract

Based upon archival and newspaper sources, this article explores the relationship between the notoriety of South Fort George, Fort George, and Prince George (the Georges) in British Columbia's northern interior, and the sense of self and place for residents on the eve of World War I. The investigation of Harry Porters' Christmas Eve murder glimpses gender, class, and ethnic sensibilities linking the region with the rest of the province and nation, along with the British Columbia Provincial Police force's reliance on peace keeping in an era that was beginning to reassess what professional policing might entail. The result demonstrates that while the Georges imagined themselves as resting on the periphery of the white settlement frontier, the evidence indicates that in seeking acceptance by opinion leaders elsewhere in the nation, locally self-identified respectable people eagerly embraced the norms of post-Edwardian Canada. That the Georges tawdry reputation persists into the early twenty-first century suggests that the resilience of this notoriety reflects forces at play well-beyond British Columbia's northern interior. Framed in this fashion, the Christmas Eve murder sheds light on the legacies of reputation on the white settlement frontier, the influence of gender, class, and ethnicity in the construction of crime, and the evolution of professional policing.

The discovery of a battered body outside of South Fort George's "segregated" red-light district in British Columbia's northern interior two days after Christmas 1913 was remarkable.¹ For despite a persistent community

¹ Chief Constable W.R. Dunwoody, testimony before Thomas Herne, Stipendiary Magistrate, January 9, 1914, British Columbia Archives (hereinafter BCA), GR 2486, box 83.0932.0096, file R v. Onooki [hereinafter as (Onooki, 1913)], hearing transcript, 15 and "Assailant of Harry Porters

reputation of alcohol-fueled disorder and “manly” excess, the notorious Georges—South Fort George, Fort George, and Prince George—were not beset with disorder and crime (Figure 1). Indeed, for the years straddling World War I, it is only in 1913 that the local British Columbia Provincial Police (BCPP) duty logs suggest a rough and tumble community where constables faced a rising tide of what commentators imagined was settlement frontier lawlessness.² Yet even the tumult of 1913 failed to distinguish the Georges within a boozy and boisterous province. As such, when the police detachment telephone rang around 9 am on December 27 with news of the body, we might forgive the shudder of anticipation that likely passed through the detachment. Something out of the ordinary had finally occurred.

Led by Chief Constable William Dunwoody, Constable G.C. Aldridge and Dr. W.A. Richardson set out for the scene where they found the body of a thirty-something white male who, as the later medical examination revealed, was frozen stiff.³ His death was unnatural. The victim, with his coat and trouser pockets turned inside out, was lying in a blood-splattered circle testifying to a violent clash. Aldridge was tasked with collecting artifacts from the scene—a fractured brick matted with blood and hair and blood-splattered sticks—in addition to measuring the distance from where the body lay off an old wagon trail back toward the nearby Blackwater road. The constable also measured and recorded the details of two sets of footprints left in the snow. Questions asked at the nearby brothels failed to further the investigation. Once the body had been removed, inquiries at the near-by Bates & Rogers

is Not Yet Apprehended,” *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 1. For examples of the white settlement frontier’s image, see Karen Dubinsky and Franca Iacovetta, “Murder, Womanly Virtue, and Motherhood: The Case of Angelina Napolitano, 1911–1922,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1991): 505–31; Karen Dubinsky, “Sex and the Single-Industry Community: The Social and Moral Reputation of Rural and Northern Ontario,” in *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880–1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 143–62; Nancy Forestell, “Bachelors, Boarding-Houses, and Blind Pigs: Gender Construction in a Multi-Ethnic Mining Camp, 1909–1920,” in *Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s–1960s*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 251–90; Angus McLaren, “Males, Migrants, and Murder in British Columbia, 1900–23,” in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 159–80; and Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

² The duty logs were each constable’s daily responsibility from 1913 to 1922. See Jonathan Swainger, *The Notorious Georges: Crime and Community in British Columbia’s Northern Interior* (Vancouver: UBC Press and Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2023), 73–82.

³ W.A. Richardson arrived in the region as head medical authority for railway contractors Foley, Welch, and Stewart. He established a medical practice on Hamilton Avenue in South Fort George and later played a key role in the construction of a hospital at Foley’s Cache alongside the Nechako River. See Untitled, *Fort George Herald*, November 2, 1912, 1; “Dr. Richardson,” *Fort George Herald*, October 18, 1912, 3. Dunwoody had an extensive career, including an appointment as assistant commissioner in late September 1930 before retiring in 1932 owing to failing health. See “Police Inspector Wins Promotion,” *Vancouver Sun*, September 30, 1930, 1 and “Dunwoody in Promoted in Police Force,” *Victoria Daily Times*, October 1, 1930, 15; “Dunwoody to Leave Provincial Police,” *The Province* (Vancouver), September 1, 1932, 4; and “Promotions in BC Police,” *Victoria Times Colonist*, September 1, 1932, 4.



Figure 1. Map of British Columbia.

bridge construction camp on the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTP) revealed that the deceased was laborer Harry Porters.⁴ Shortly after completing his crime scene measurements, Aldridge made an initial arrest.⁵ On the following day, Dr. David Lazier performed a post-mortem, observing that the deceased had been beaten to a bloody pulp. A puncture wound behind and slightly

⁴ Chief Constable W.R. Dunwoody, duty log, December 27, 1913, BCA, GR 445, box 8, file 7. On the GTP, see Frank Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders—The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996).

⁵ Constable G.C. Aldridge, duty log, December 27, 1913, BCA, GR 445, box 8, file 7.

below his left ear had fractured Porters' skull, freeing a piece of bone that hemorrhaged his brain. This, in Lazier's opinion, was the cause of death.⁶ He added that the corner of the broken brick found at the scene fit neatly into the puncture. Two more arrests followed on December 29 and then a third on December 30. Despite these efforts, the police had no idea who had killed Harry Porters.

What followed mirrors that which sociologist David Garland has described as a cultural performance.⁷ But inasmuch as his approach centers on explaining capital punishment's persistence in the United States, the aftermath of Porters' violent death offers an exposition of community identity, policing, race, gender, and faith in the efficacy of capital punishment in post-Edwardian northern British Columbia. In doing so, it maps the re-establishment of order in the aftermath of a shockingly uncommon event that provided community and opinion leaders in the Georges with an opportunity to signal their membership in a provincial and, indeed, national community of shared values.⁸ In that, we witness an inversion of the processes Garland detailed. Rather than exposing persistent localism in a criminal justice system imbued with notions of "we the people," this re-assertion of order—of the ordinary—demonstrated how residents in British Columbia's northern interior wished to exchange what many believed was an undeserved reputation for lawlessness with one adhering to the imagined order and assurance of state power. And, for the unsympathetic and foolish man charged with murder, the impress of the commonplace meant that in the ensuing six months, there would be few opportunities to escape the path to the gallows.⁹

Reputation and a Homicide

An unstated yet central ingredient coloring the perception of Harry Porters' death was the Georges' reputation for boozy truculence. This notoriety was hardly unique. Resource extraction economies across North America spawned unapologetically rowdy masculine cultures.¹⁰ Yet while other caricatured communities managed to shed the association with hard-drinking and sometimes brutish behavior, the Georges remained shackled to a coarse reputation that persists into the twenty-first century. This notoriety originated in 1909/10

⁶ Dr. David Lazier, testimony before Thomas Herne (Onooki 1913), hearing transcript, 2 and "Assailant of Harry Porters is Not Yet Apprehended," *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 1.

⁷ David Garland, *Peculiar Institution America's Death Penalty in an Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 7 and 51.

⁸ Garland, *Peculiar Institution*, 131.

⁹ My characterization of this case is partially colored by Sylvie Frigon, "Mapping Scripts and Narratives of Women Who Kill Their Husbands in Canada," in *Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*, eds. Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 3–20.

¹⁰ See Jeremy Mouat, *Roaring Days: Rossland's Mines and the History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995); Dubinsky and Iacovetta, "Murder, Womanly Virtue, and Motherhood"; Forestell, "Bachelors, Boarding-Houses, and Blind Pigs"; John Belshaw, *The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of The British Columbia Working Class, 1848-1900* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2002); Craig Herron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 383; and Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*.

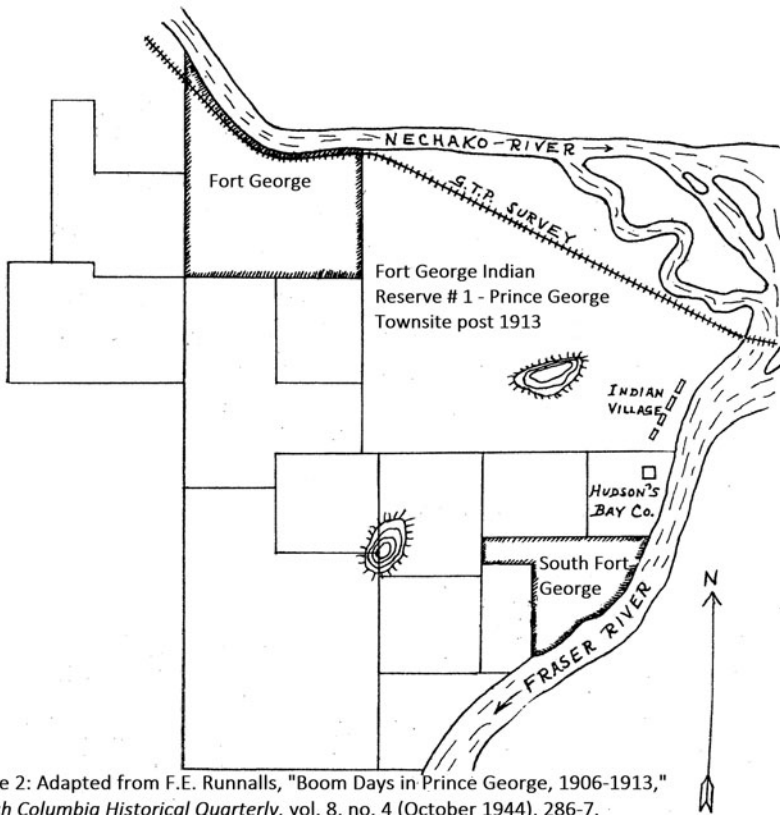


Image 2: Adapted from F.E. Runnalls, "Boom Days in Prince George, 1906-1913," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 4 (October 1944), 286-7.

Figure 2. Map of The Georges, circa 1910.

with the establishment of two white settlement communities less than five kilometers (three miles) apart—South Fort George on the Fraser River and Fort George on the Nechako River—in British Columbia’s northern interior (Figure 2). Voiced in their respective town newspapers, the communities exchanged insults and allegations while staking their respective claims to being the preferred destination for an anticipated wave of white newcomers. This flurry of accusations and fiery rhetoric erupted onto the national stage when the *Toronto Saturday Night Magazine* sided with South Fort George while the Vancouver-based *BC Saturday Sunset* magazine championed Fort George. A nadir was reached when, in early June 1913, Fort George minister, C. Melville Wright, addressed the Presbyterian Church Congress in Toronto, where he alluded to South Fort George as “the very gates of hell.”¹¹ The die

¹¹ “Walked 350 Miles from the Very Gates of Hell,” *Toronto Globe*, June 3, 1913, 4; “Worth Struggle to Defeat Sin at the Gates of Hell,” *Toronto Star*, June 3, 1913, 4; “Lurid Pictures of Northern Interior—Minister from Fort George Creates Sensation at Toronto Gathering—Tells of Weary Trek from the Very Gates of Hell—All Manner of Vice Exists in Smaller Towns, Declares Rev. C.M.

had been cast. And despite the GTP's attempt to distance itself from the accumulated infamy by establishing its community—Prince George—as a separate townsite apart from the original combatants, the confusion sowed by the newsprint war meant that the notoriety proved stubbornly indiscriminate.¹² Ultimately, no one outside of the immediate region felt any reason to distinguish which “George” was vulgar and ill-mannered: they were all the notorious Georges.

It was within this context that Porters' death provided self-identified “genuine” residents with an opportunity to reject the negative misrepresentation of “their” community. Theirs' was a perspective drawing upon two propositions. First, they “knew” that examples of disorder and criminality in the Georges reflected the presence of those who did not belong in a respectable community; non-preferred immigrants, the motley collection of camp followers trailing behind the railroad crews, tin-horn gamblers, con-men, and scarlet women whose failings were rooted in blind-pig liquor joints and lives of sin. Such people could never contribute to a respectable community. And in this telling, it was only through the establishment of rail links to the continent's markets that the Georges would thrive, a goal obliging civilized residents to suffer through a construction phase with its mobile, male culture, serving “as a natural breeding ground for violence.”¹³ In that, the first newspaper account of the homicide confirmed residents' preconceptions with the revelation that, on the night of his death, Harry Porters had been in the company of a stranger—a “halfbreed Indian”—who was engaged on the railroad works.¹⁴ Aligned with these local truths was a second assumption that given the presence of these ill-suited people, a clear-headed and sensible reliance on capital punishment was held-to as an integral element in maintaining law and order. Simply put, and akin to “all” respectable British Columbians, the Georges' good and the great embraced the necessity of exacting the highest price from those who violently thrust aside the measures of decency in a civilized community. And if it was determined that the individual found guilty of this crime was to sacrifice his own life in exchange for that which he had taken, that result would testify to Georges' proper standing, not as a chaotic town in the wilds, but as community that cherished the highest ideals of law, order, and justice.

True to these sentiments, the New Year's eve edition of the *Fort George Herald* that published the first account of Porters' death, also carried a worried editorial centered on the perceived lack of progress in solving “one of the most brutal crimes in the history of province.”¹⁵ While the exaggerated sense of the moment is unsurprising, the hyperbolic editorial recalls Garland's observation that “each capital case begins with an atrocious crime that ignites community

Wright—“An Appeal for Aid in Work of Church in Remote Districts,” *Vancouver Province*, June 3, 1913, 1 and “Fled from the Suburbs of Hades,” *Fort George Herald*, June 14, 1913, 3.

¹² See Jonathan Swainger, “Anxiety at the Gates of Hell: Community Reputation in the Georges, 1908–15,” *BC Studies* 205 (Spring 2020): 57–78 and Swainger, *The Notorious Georges*.

¹³ McLaren, “Males, Migrants, and Murder in British Columbia, 1900–23,” 162.

¹⁴ “Assailant of Harry Porters is Not Yet Apprehended,” *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 1.

¹⁵ “A Terrible Tragedy,” *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 2.

anger and demands retributive response.”¹⁶ In this instance, the unease wondered as to whether the local BCPP detachment was fit for purpose in tracking down Porters’ assailant. While the provincial force could provide ordinary policing, did it possess the grit to manage an extraordinary case? Editor John Daniell was unconvinced.

The Royal Northwest Mounted Police have gained a reputation enviable throughout the whole world, and the prime reason why so few crimes of a nature such as the one that is confronting the police of South Fort George district occur on the prairies is that the man who commits murder there realizes that his chances of escape are nil and that he will be constantly hounded till he is brought down by these human bloodhounds... We must trust that our police will not be content to merely gather the evidence to satisfy the coroner’s jury that the deceased Harry Porters was murdered, but that they will go out and not rest until they have landed the actual murderer safely behind bars.¹⁷

For its part, the BCPP and its mythology did not allow for Daniell’s worries. Indeed, both the force’s annual reports and *Shoulder Strap*, its magazine, championed a celebratory image of constables as ever ready to answer the call of duty, no matter the circumstance.¹⁸ In truth, the situation on the ground prior to World War I was more prosaic. Trained under the watchful eye of an experienced member of the force, clad in their own clothes rather than a uniform, and without a handbook of investigatory fundamentals, constables were to rely on “commonsense” while performing their duties as peacekeepers who diagnosed trouble before it erupted. In this, the BCPP’s culture was typical; few pre-war Canadian police organizations considered their primary role to be that of crime fighters.¹⁹ Fewer still had an articulated training regime beyond

¹⁶ Garland, *Peculiar Institution*, 287.

¹⁷ “A Terrible Tragedy,” *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 2.

¹⁸ *Shoulder Strap* began publication in October 1938 and continued, in reduced form, until 1957. A full run is available at the Northern British Columbia Archives at the University of Northern British Columbia, <https://search.nbca.unbc.ca/index.php/shoulder-strap> (date accessed December 20, 2022). Also see Lynne Stonier-Newman, *Policing a Pioneer Province—The BC Provincial Police, 1858–1950* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1991) and Jonathan Swainger, “Police Culture in British Columbia and ‘Ordinary Duty’ in the Peace River Country, 1910–39,” in *People and Place: Historical Influences on Legal Culture*, eds. Jonathan Swainger and Constance Backhouse (Vancouver: UBC Press), 198–223.

¹⁹ The emergence of “scientific” policing and a crime fighting culture was an inter-war phenomenon; see Greg Marquis, *Policing Canada’s Century: A History of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and University of Toronto Press, 1993), chapter 4. The BCPP did not produce a constable’s investigatory handbook until 1924, see *BC Provincial Police Regulation Constable’s Manual* (Victoria: Charles F. Banfield, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1924). Established in 1930, the training school had fits and starts throughout the decade; see “Training School,” *Report of the Commissioner of Provincial Police for the Year Ended December 31, 1931* (Victoria: Charles F. Banfield, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1931), 12–13. A Criminal Investigation Branch was mooted in 1924 and established piecemeal over the ensuing two years. Its thin ranks were limited to a finger-print registry, cataloguing crime reports,

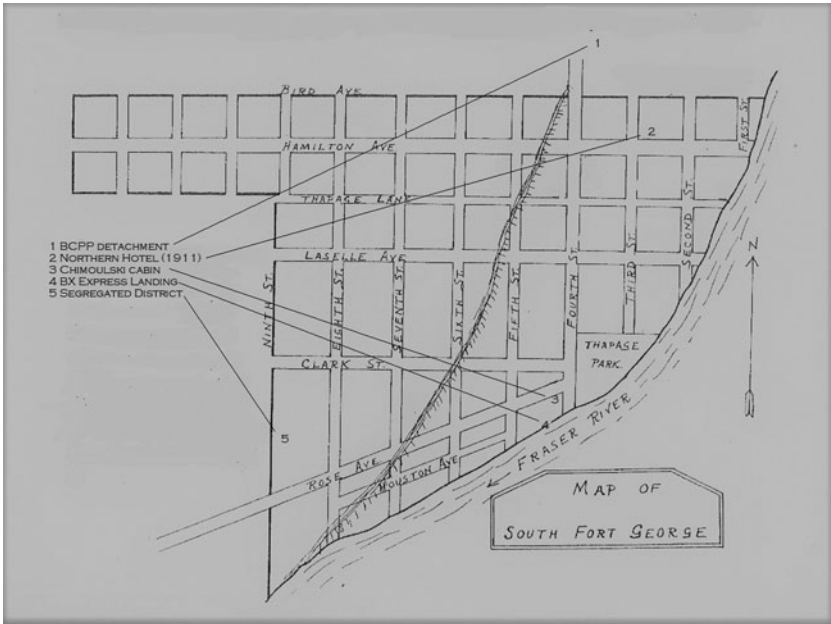


Figure 3. Map of South Fort George, circa 1913/14.

on-the-job tutelage. Daniell's concern remained. Could the local detachment corral a suspect, bring the matter to a court of law, and spare the Georges the ignominy of any further association with an absence of self-control and order.

A much-needed break occurred in the late afternoon of January 2, 1914 when Thomas Chimoulski, a Galician laborer with a parcel of agricultural land (a “pre-emption”) outside of the Georges as well as a cabin in South Fort George, appeared at the local BCPP office (Figure 3).²⁰ Having been absent on a post-Christmas Day deer hunting trip, it was only on his return that Chimoulski learned of Porters' death.²¹ According to Chimoulski, and corroborated by his wife Annie, a fellow Galician and acquaintance named George

and responding to inquiries from other forces. Sub-Inspector F. Cruickshank of Vancouver's Divisional Headquarters oversaw operations at the outset. Uniforms were introduced under “An Act respecting the Provincial Police Force and Provincial Gaols,” c. 57, s. 16, *Statutes of British Columbia*, (1924).

²⁰ The Chimoulski pre-emption was filed on May 28, 1913. See Pre-emption Records, record 1995, BCA, GR 0112, British Columbia Department of Lands, Forests, and Water Resources, vol. 217—Crown land pre-emption register, Fort Fraser, Cariboo Lands Branch, vol. 5.

²¹ Dunwoody, duty log, January 2, 1914, BCA, GR 445, box 17, file 13. Chimoulski's name is rendered with a variety of spellings; the timing of his statement aligns with “Assailant of Harry Porters is not yet Apprehended,” *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 1. Thomas Chimoulski testimony before Mr. Justice Denis Murphy and jury, Re George Onooki, National Archives of Canada [hereinafter NAC], RG 13 C1, vol. 1466 [hereinafter (Onooki, 1914)], trial transcript, 49.

Onooki (aka Jurko Onooki) twice appeared at the Rose Avenue cabin on Christmas Eve. During the initial 9:30 pm visit, Onooki asked for a hammer but was disappointed when the only tool available was a light tack-hammer. After searching around the wood pile for “something that is good,” Onooki stole away on Rose Avenue that, as it left South Fort George, became the Blackwater Road.²² He returned 90 minutes later, splattered in blood and with a convoluted story of brawling with two men. While one had fled, Onooki boasted that he almost killed the second “for this money.” He tossed \$2 on the bed to repay a year-old debt to Thomas.²³ Yet as he scrubbed the blood from his clothes, Onooki also spoke of breaking into a house in the segregated district where, owing to a police raid, the winnings had been left behind when the gamblers and the sporting women were taken into custody. Satisfied with his washing, Onooki warned the Chimoulskis to “keep quiet” before he slipped from the cabin.

While the account provided the first genuine lead on who had killed Porters, it was not an unmixed good. Both Onooki and the Chimoulskis were Galician and, consistent with the attitudes of the day, Slavic immigrants were inscrutable. Still, distinguishing the Chimoulskis from the suspicions heaped upon their fellow newcomers was not beyond reach. First, it was plausible that the couple were exceptions proving the rule that non-preferred immigrants were a poor fit for British Columbia and the nation writ large. The rationale was convenient if obviously self-serving for the police who lacked a credible suspect. Second, Thomas was not a laborer on the GTP. He and Annie were agricultural settlers. This lent the impression that because of their preemption and their efforts at transforming it into a farm, the region’s long-term development was foremost in their minds. Indeed, by coming forward with his statement, Thomas demonstrated that they were the type of sturdy agriculturalists who wanted what was best for the Georges and were unmoved by any fellow feeling for Onooki. Third, because the Chimoulskis were married, Thomas was unlike the coarse foreign-born navvies whose pay packets disappeared on gambling, liquor, and sporting women in the segregated district. Further (and as we will see) that non-Galician residents characterized both of the Chimoulskis as hardworking lent weight to their credibility.²⁴ Indeed, Annie’s paid labor as a housecleaner for local respectable white women would earn plaudits. This combination of racist and gendered rationalizations cemented the Chimoulski’s credibility along with their version of Onooki’s Christmas Eve behavior.

With Thomas’ statement signed and witnessed, the BCPP turned to locating Onooki. Believing he was at Tony Jack’s railway tie operation some 20 kilometers (13 miles) east of South Fort George on the GTP rail corridor along the upper Fraser River, Dunwoody, Thomas Chimoulski, Aldridge, and Constable

²² Thanks to Glenn Thielmann of the University of Northern British Columbia Geography Department for his thoughts in sorting out the historic layout of South Fort George.

²³ Thomas Chimoulski, testimony before Thomas Herne, Onooki, 1913, hearing transcript, 7–8 and testimony before Mr. Justice Denis Murphy (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 32.

²⁴ McLaren makes this point in reference to a suspected murderer’s credibility, but the argument works equally well in sustaining a witnesses’ character. McLaren, “Males, Migrants, and Murder in British Columbia, 1900–23,” 169.

William Nunneley arrived at the camp around 3 am and arrested the 24-year-old Onooki, a man with no alibi.²⁵ Once the suspect was secured in the South Fort George jail, the police retraced their investigation to center on reconstructing Porters' and Onooki's movements prior to their alleged fatal encounter.²⁶ It was a task that brought the police into contact with GTP laborers as well as the local Galician community. Despite marking the festive season with two-fisted drinking, several witnesses confirmed that the two men had been together in the Northern Hotel bar on Christmas Eve where Porters stood drinks and lent money to the penniless Onooki, who had been defended by the deceased as a "good friend of mine." For his part, Onooki later dismissed Porters as "a soft fool" lured to South Fort George's segregated district with promises of a good-time girl.²⁷ The sneer was consistent with Onooki's male bravado of having "licked" Porters and another man while fighting on Christmas Eve. Further, once Onooki was in custody, Dunwoody was reminded that on December 26, perhaps 18 hours after Porters had been battered to death, Edward Flameau—true to the spirit of male drinking sociability—had steered the drunken Onooki away from the chief constable who had warned him not to cause a disturbance on the street.²⁸ Dunwoody had forgotten the unremarkable encounter. Ironically, it was the well-known Flameau who one witness at the inquest had claimed was a half-breed stranger.²⁹

Stipendiary Magistrate Thomas Herne considered the accumulated circumstantial evidence during a preliminary hearing on January 9. Absent any legal representation, Onooki delivered a rambling account of drunken days and nights that echoed McLaren's examination of men and murder in British Columbia: here was a "typical" murder involving "a male (likely drunk) killing an acquaintance, friend, or work mate."³⁰ Representing the Crown while also acting as a court clerk, Chief Constable Dunwoody terminated Onooki's cloudy recollections by refusing to continue his transcription. Remarking that "you will keep me here all day at the rate you are going," Dunwoody brandished the document at the accused with the command "Sign this." After protesting

²⁵ Dunwoody, duty log, BCA GR 445, box 17, file 13. On William Nunneley, see Canadian Expeditionary Force, NAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, box 7387-15, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/list.aspx?RegimentNum=463532&> (dated accessed March 22, 2021).

²⁶ Aldridge, duty log, January 3, 1914 and Dunwoody, duty log, January 3, 1914, BCA, GR 445, box 17, file 13. "Committed for Trial on Murder Charge," *Fort George Herald*, January 14, 1914, 1.

²⁷ On Porters' characterization of Onooki, see Mike Brown, testimony before Thomas Herne (Onooki, 1913), hearing transcript, 5 and testimony before Mr. Justice Denis Murphy (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 16. For the "soft fool" description, see Annie Chimoulski, testimony before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 58.

²⁸ Dunwoody's duty log for December 26, 1913 did not record the interaction with Flameau but confirmed that the chief constable patrolled in South Fort George until midnight. See Dunwoody, duty log, December 1913, BCA, GR 445, box 8, file 7.

²⁹ Captured in the 1911 census, Flameau (30) lived with his wife Harriet (18) and with Antoine Flameau (55). See Canada, *Census for 1911*, British Columbia, District no. 14, Yale-Cariboo, Enumeration Sub-District 8 at <http://automatedgenealogy.com/census11/EnumerationDistrict.jsp?sdid=2834>, lines 37-9 at 6.

³⁰ McLaren, "Males, Migrants, and Murder in British Columbia, 1900-23," 162.

the gruff dismissal, Onooki was returned to custody before being dispatched to Kamloops, in the province's southern interior, in anticipation of the next court of appropriate jurisdiction.³¹ Four months later, *R. v Onooki* was called on the Supreme Court docket at Clinton before Mr. Justice Denis Murphy.³²

The Trial

Despite the delay between the committal and the start of his trial, Onooki appeared without legal representation. Consequently, the court's first task was to choose James Murphy—the judge's younger brother and a lawyer from nearby Ashcroft—to perform the duties of defense counsel.³³ Nothing in the case file suggests anyone looked askance at what amounted to needs-must thinking in naming the younger Murphy to represent Onooki. Given that the verdict in the trial rested with the jury rather than the judge, no one objected to a brother presiding over a murder case in which his sibling held the defendant's brief.³⁴ James Murphy's presence failed to alter the impressions gained at the preliminary hearing. Still, the trial did reveal several puzzles. First, was the question of when and whether Onooki had been wearing a yellow overcoat on Christmas Eve emerged as a point of interest. Specifically, after swearing to his statement and following the police search of the bunkhouse in South Fort George where Onooki had slept, Thomas retrieved the overcoat from a nail beside Onooki's bunk and delivered it to the detachment office. Whether the police had been aware of the coat as a piece of evidence and, if so, how it had been overlooked, was unexplained. Indeed, the coat's relevance along with inconsistencies between Thomas's answers at the preliminary hearing and the trial moved officials in Ottawa to wonder if he had been involved in Porters' death.³⁵ Second, Chief Constable Dunwoody testified that Onooki's story of having scooped-up the cash left behind in a police raid

³¹ See "Statement of the Accused," before Thomas Herne (Onooki, 1913), "Committed for Trial on Murder Charge," *Fort George Herald*, January 14, 1914, 1.

³² Murphy, a product of Lac La Hache in the South Cariboo, was the provincial Supreme Court's first British Columbia-born judge. On Mr. Justice Murphy, see David Verchere, *A Progression of Judges—A History of the Supreme Court of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 144–45 and Sally Creighton, "Mr. Justice Denis Murphy," *UBC Alumni Chronicle*, 1 (Spring 1958): 16–17 and 27.

³³ Murphy later drowned in the Thompson River; see "Making Search for James Murphy," *The Province* (Vancouver), January 25, 1921, 7; "Bloodstained Hat Gives Rise to Grave Fears," *The Sun* (Vancouver), January 25, 1921, 1; "James Murphy of Ashcroft Missing," *The Vernon News*, January 27, 1921, 1; "Body Found in Thompson River," *The Province* (Vancouver), January 28, 1921, 1; and "Was Once Member of Legislature," *Victoria Daily Times*, January 29, 1921, 20.

³⁴ Thanks to John McLaren and Hamar Foster for sharing their thoughts on what a contemporary audience might construe as a conflict of interest.

³⁵ Marginalia in Pierre Coté, Deputy Minister of Justice to Minister of Justice C.J. Doherty, July 10, 1914, 6 and 11; undated note re yellow coat; Memorandum for Mr. Carpenter, July 16, 1914 (Onooki, 1914). See Thomas Chimoulski before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 30–31, 48; Annie Chimoulski before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 54 and 57; Wasy Mauser, before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript 59 and sworn testimony of John Buchesky before Thomas Herne, Stipendiary Magistrate, in (Onooki 1913), 25 and Buchesky before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 64.

was a fabrication. Indeed, the detachment's duty logs revealed that no such Christmas Eve raid occurred.³⁶ At the same time, in questioning Dunwoody, defense counsel Murphy overplayed his hand in attempting to obtain the chief constable's agreement that the Georges were bear-pit communities where the expectations of decent society were acknowledged only in their absence. Having been commanding officer in South Fort George since August 1913, the chief bridled at Murphy's suggestion that the sight of "a man besmeared with blood" and sporting a battered face were common features of everyday life.³⁷ Rather, Dunwoody insisted that the district had been free of "any serious assaults or anything of that nature." Indeed, fighting was no more prevalent than in any community with nearby construction camps. Whether Murphy's attempt spoke to any "knowing" jurors—inclined to the imagined truths of life on the distant white settlement frontier—is uncertain. Nonetheless, it is intriguing that a lawyer born and raised in the interior turned to broad brush caricatures of the Georges in pursuit of a measure of reasonable doubt to benefit his client. In the defense counsel's hands, the region's notoriety was a convenience that could serve a more immediate agenda.

Third, the question of police investigatory competence arose when Mr. Justice Murphy's questioning caused both Constables Aldridge and Thomas Higginbottom to falter in detailing their contributions to the case.³⁸ Following defense counsel Murphy's cross-examination, the judge compelled Aldridge to admit that the footprints at the scene and the boots found among Onooki's effects when he was arrested had not been an "exact" match, despite having sworn to that effect at the preliminary hearing and during direct examination. Rather than comparing measurements of Onooki's boots against those taken after Porters' body had been discovered, the constable had returned to the crime scene (which had become popular spot for curious residents) to "fit" the boots into supposedly undisturbed footprints despite the probability that the original imprints had been altered by varying temperatures, snowfall, and foot-traffic.³⁹ After insisting that Onooki's boots were an "exact" match, Aldridge was compelled to admit that he made allowances to explain a two-and-a-half centimeter (1 inch) discrepancy between the boot and prints.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, Justice Murphy directed jurors to dismiss the entirety of the constable's footprint evidence.

³⁶ Dunwoody before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 73.

³⁷ Dunwoody before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 76.

³⁸ On Thomas Higginbottom, see Canadian Expeditionary Force, at NAC, RG 150, regimental no. 13453, accessible at <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/personnel-records.aspx> (date accessed March 22, 2021).

³⁹ G.C. Aldridge before Thomas Herne, Stipendiary Magistrate (Onooki, 1913), hearing transcript, 18 and Aldridge, before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 83–84 and 88–89.

⁴⁰ The role that the footprint evidence played in the trial recalls the investigation of Peter Lazier's death on December 21, 1883 in Prince Edward County, Ontario. In that instance, dubious footprint evidence stood unchallenged despite failing to adhere to the proscribed investigatory methods for footprint evidence outlined in *A Practical Treatise on the Office and Duties of Coroners in Ontario*. See Robert Sharpe, *The Lazier Murder—Prince Edward County, 1884* (Toronto: Osgoode

Fourth, the fact that Constable Higginbottom testified at Clinton while not having done so at the preliminary hearing also attracted the judge's ire. When asked to explain the circumstances of his absence before Stipendiary Magistrate Herne on January 9, Higginbottom meekly offered that "I guess I was away...I don't know just where I was at the time."⁴¹ Unimpressed, the judge directed "the attention of the authorities in the interior here to the necessity of disclosing every bit of evidence that they have at the preliminary, everything that the Crown has, against a prisoner charged with a crime, and particularly in a murder case; if the man is not there, an adjournment should be obtained until they get it." Attempting to calm troubled waters, Crown prosecutor H.W.R. Moore insisted that the constable "was away at the time." This the judge rejected. "He should have been there; this kind of thing leads to most serious consequences, has led to serious consequences, and will lead to them, to consequences that are highly regrettable."⁴² Higginbottom's duty log indicates that, in truth, he had been on general duty in the police office (next door to the preliminary hearing) and was later collecting trade license fees from local merchants.⁴³ Neither constable had covered himself in glory.

Finally, Judge Murphy's worries about the administration of justice in the province's northern interior did not include his own flawed performance. In charging the jury and outlining its obligation to give the accused the benefit of the doubt, his illustration was maladroit.

If you had a matter to deal with, or to decide upon, which affected you financially in a monetary way, to such a degree as to be of importance to you; or if you had a matter to be decided upon which affected you or your family in any other way to such a degree that it was of great importance to you to decide as to how you should act; and if there were reasons impelling you to take one course of action, and other reasons impelling you not to take that course of action, and if, after having considered the reasons pro and con, you were unable to come to a conclusion at all, and would say to yourselves, "Well, really I don't know what to do," then you have what is called a reasonable doubt.⁴⁴

This motivated either Pierre Coté, the senior clerk who prepared the capital case briefing notes in the Department of Justice or, more likely, the minister, C.J. Doherty, to scribble "incorrect" in the margin.⁴⁵ The judge's charge to the jury then turned to the difference between circumstantial and direct evidence,

Society for Canadian Legal History and the University of Toronto Press, 2011), 30. Aldridge's efforts were a concrete example of Matthew Unger's exploration of how law and weather entwined in British Columbia; see Matthew Unger, "Winter's Topography, Law, and the Colonial Legal Imaginary in British Columbia," *Space and Culture*, 26, no. 4 (2021): 621-2.

⁴¹ Higginbottom, before Mr. Justice Murphy and jury (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 94.

⁴² Mr. Justice Denis Murphy (Onooki, 1914), trial transcript, 94.

⁴³ Higginbottom, duty log, January 9, 1914, BCA, GR 445, box 17, file 13.

⁴⁴ Mr. Justice Murphy, charge to the jury (Onooki, 1914), c. The pagination in the court transcript shifts from numbers to letters on 98 which is numbered and lettered as "c."

⁴⁵ Mr. Justice Murphy, charge to the jury (Onooki, 1914), c and 98.

the latter of which rested on the Chimoulskis' accounts of Onooki's Christmas Eve behavior and statements. To this, Murphy mused that "One would have thought that the Poles (I refer to the two witnesses as Poles; I am not sure that they are, but you will no doubt know to whom I am referring; I am referring to them as Poles because their names are such that one cannot very well pronounce them, and possibly you would not remember them; you will know at any rate that I am referring to the man and his wife who live in the shack near Fort George, and the persons to whom he made contradictory statements)." ⁴⁶ While attributable but not excused as a relic of an era, Murphy's gratuitous racism was troubling in a trial where the accused and several witnesses were Galicians. Having received their instructions, the jury retired at 4:05, called for the exhibits at 4:20, and, at 4:45, concluded their deliberations. Guilty. There was no recommendation to mercy. Sentenced to hang on July 31, 1914, Onooki received the news without a word.

Questions

With the delivery of the jury's verdict and Judge Murphy's pronouncement of sentence, Onooki's fate was left to the well-documented workings of the Canadian administration of capital punishment. ⁴⁷ The era was one in which

⁴⁶ Mr. Justice Murphy, charge to the jury (Onooki, 1914), j-k.

⁴⁷ C. W. Topping, "The Death Penalty in Canada," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 284, Murder and the Penalty of Death (November 1952): 147-57; Kenneth Avio, "Capital Punishment in Canada: A Time-Series Analysis of the Deterrent Hypothesis," *The Canadian Journal of Economics* 12, no. 4 (November 1979): 647-76; Ezzat A. Fattah, "Canada's Successful Experiences with the Abolition of the Death Penalty," *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 25, no. 4 (October 1983): 421-32; Kenneth Avio, "The Quality of Mercy: Exercise of the Royal Prerogative in Canada," *Canadian Public Policy* 13, no. 3 (September 1987): 366-79; Kenneth Avio, "Clemency in Economics and Retributive Models of Punishment," *International Review of Law and Economics* 7 (1987): 79-88; Kenneth Avio, "Capital Punishment in Canada: Statistical Evidence and Constitutional Issues," *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 30, no. 4 (October 1988): 331-49; Neil Boyd, *The Last Dance: Murder in Canada* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, Canada, 1988); Alan Hustak, *They Were Hanged* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1987); Martin Friedland, *The Case of Valentine Shortis: A True Story of Crime and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and University of Toronto Press, 1988); Carolyn Strange, "Wounded Womanhood and Dead Men: Chivalry and the Trials of Clara Ford and Carrie Davies," *Gender Conflicts: News Essays in Women's History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Marianna Valverde, (Toronto: University Of Toronto Press, 1992), 149-88. Tom Mitchell, "Blood with the Taint of Cain: Immigrant Labouring Children, Manitoba Politics and the Execution of Emily Hilda Blake," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 28, no. 4 (Winter 1993/4): 47-71; Carolyn Strange, "The Lottery of Death: Capital Punishment, 1867-1976," *Manitoba Law Journal—Canada's Legal Inheritances* 23, no. 3 (January 1996): 594-619; and Tom Mitchell, *Walk Towards the Gallows: The Tragedy of Hilda Blake, Hanged 1899* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jonathan Swainger, "Advisors in the Crown and the Prerogative of Mercy," *The Canadian Department of Justice and the Completion of Confederation, 1867-78* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 56-78; Carolyn Strange, "The Politics of Punishment: The Death Penalty in Canada, 1867-1976," *University of Manitoba Legal History Project Working Papers Series* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1992); Carolyn Strange, "Stories of Their Lives: The Historian and the Capital Case Files," in *On the Case*, eds. Iacovetta and Mitchinson, 25-48; Scott Gaffield, "Justice Not Done: The Hanging of Elizabeth Workman," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 20 (2005): 171-92; Carolyn Strange, "Determining the Punishment of Sex Criminals in Confederation-Era Canada: A Matter of National Policy," *Canadian Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (December 2018): 541-62; and Carolyn Strange, *The Death*

few Canadians questioned the place of such a practice in the maintenance of a well-ordered society.⁴⁸ While there is no question that class, ethnicity (both of the accused and the victim), and gender influenced jury recommendations concerning the granting of mercy as well as the Governor-General in Council's deliberations as to who was considered a worthy recipient of the Crown's prerogative, individuals sentenced to death between Canadian Confederation in 1867 and the abolition of capital punishment in 1976 had slightly less than a 50–50 chance of having their sentence reduced to life imprisonment.⁴⁹ Yet in offering that percentage, historians Phillips, Girard, and Brown add that “aggregate statistics never explain any particular decision in a particular case.”⁵⁰ Therefore, despite the fact that Onooki, a Galician, had killed “an Englishman,” that the crime had been aggravated, that the key evidence was circumstantial, and that his hastily arranged defense had failed to call any witnesses, Onooki's final fate was not obvious despite Judge Murphy observing that the conviction rested on an abundance of circumstantial evidence in concert with limited direct evidence.⁵¹

With Onooki again in a Kamloops cell, a campaign seeking his deliverance from the death sentence failed to materialize. Only two men of the cloth—Father Francis Lardon, a local Oblate and Methodist Reverend Charles Ladner—contacted the Minister of Justice on Onooki's behalf. And while their letters spoke more of Christian duty than assertions of justice denied, both clergymen nonetheless pointed to the absence of defense witnesses.⁵² Picking up the theme, James Murphy wrote Minister of Justice Doherty in early July, relaying Onooki's claim that individuals at South Fort George could provide exculpatory evidence. Further, and treading a fine line, the lawyer asserted that since Onooki was a “foreigner” and the deceased “a Britisher,” Murphy believed “that had the condemned man not been a foreigner, the jury would not have brought in the verdict of guilty. I do not say that the jury did not do their duty to the best of their ability, but unconsciously they were undoubtedly prejudiced against the condemned man by reason of his being a foreigner, and by reason of the brutality of the murder.”⁵³ Further, while alleging that prejudice had convicted his client, Murphy also added that the Chimoulskis required a more searching enquiry since Thomas

Penalty and Sex Murder in Canadian History (Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2020); Jim Phillips, Philip Girard and R. Blake Brown, *A History of Law in Canada, Volume Two, Law for the New Dominion, 1867–1914* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and University of Toronto Press, 2022), 453–56.

⁴⁸ See Strange, “The Lottery of Death: Capital Punishment, 1867–1976,” 594.

⁴⁹ Phillips, Girard and Brown, *A History of Law in Canada*, 453.

⁵⁰ Phillips, Girard and Brown, *A History of Law in Canada*, 455–56.

⁵¹ Mr. Justice Denis Murphy to Louis Coderre, Honorable Secretary of State, May 13, 1914 (Onooki, 1914).

⁵² Father Larden, Oblate Fathers, Kamloops, BC to the Hon. C.J. Doherty, Minister of Justice, Ottawa, June 29, 1914 and Reverend Charles Ladner to C.J. Doherty, Minister of Justice, July 6, 1914, (Onooki, 1914). On Larden, see “Francis Lardon Turns Missionary,” *The Province* (Vancouver), January 22, 1938, 43. Thanks to Jaimie Fedorak, archivist, of the Kamloops Museum and Archive for lending assistance in researching Father Francis Lardon.

⁵³ James Murphy, Barrister, Solicitor (Ashcroft, BC) to C.J. Doherty, Minister of Justice, Ottawa, July 7, 1914 (Onooki, 1914), 2.

supposedly ran a gambling den. Allegedly, by pointing a finger of blame at Onooki when the investigation was foundering, Chimoulski had been currying favor with the local police. Did these claims warrant investigation before Onooki was irretrievably dispatched?

Ring of desperation, the accusation against the Chimoulskis stumbled at the first gate. There was no evidence suggesting that Thomas or Annie had reason to frame Onooki or been involved in Porters' death. Still, the absence of defense witnesses and Onooki's claim that there were individuals in South Fort George who could exonerate him gave reason to pause, particularly because the defense had been a last-minute affair. Written on July 7 and acknowledged by the Department of Justice eight days later, Murphy's plea on behalf of his former client was not at hand when Pierre Coté prepared a draft memorandum for Minister of Justice Doherty on whether the case deserved the royal prerogative of mercy. Narrating Onooki's two appearances at the Chimoulskis' cabin, the medical findings, and the physical evidence, Coté's report sided with Judge Murphy's conclusion that the jury's verdict was "amply justified."⁵⁴ As the matter then stood, the senior clerk had been unable to find any reason to commute the death sentence.

Still, the absence of witnesses on Onooki's behalf rankled. Four days after Coté completed his draft recommendation that the law should take its course, Deputy Minister of Justice Edmund L. Newcombe received a telegram from George R. Lukes, the Austro-Hungarian consul in Winnipeg. Characterizing James Murphy's defense of Onooki as "poor," Lukes enquired as to a reprieve to allow the gathering of evidence that might exonerate Onooki.⁵⁵ A day later, July 15, 1914, a departmental telegram explained to Lukes that neither the minister nor the Executive could order a reprieve but, if the consul possessed evidence that might warrant such an action, an application could be made under s. 1063 of the *Canadian Criminal Code*, which provided for a period of reprieve to investigate extenuating circumstances potentially affecting the exercise of the royal prerogative.⁵⁶ At the same time, the Department of Justice notified James Murphy of the consul's involvement and the possibility of an application. Almost immediately, Lukes wired Mr. Justice Murphy seeking a reprieve who, in responding to Doherty, was incredulous. Did the minister expect a delay "without any material filed but merely on this telegraphic request? Please rush answer." From Murphy's perspective, the trial had been fair and at the time no one had raised concerns about the absence of defense witnesses.⁵⁷ As a potential solution to Onooki's position and, in particular to

⁵⁴ Pierre Coté, Deputy Minister of Justice to Minister of Justice C.J. Doherty, July 10, 1914 (Onooki, 1914), 12.

⁵⁵ Telegram from George R. Lukes, Austro-Hungarian Consul to Edmund L. Newcombe Deputy Minister of Justice, July 14, 1914 (Onooki, 1914). On Newcombe, see Philip Girard, "Newcombe, Edmund Leslie," http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/newcombe_edmund_leslie_16E.html (date accessed November 22, 2021).

⁵⁶ Minister of Justice C.J. Doherty to George R. Lukes, Austro-Hungarian Consul, Winnipeg, July 15, 1914 (Onooki, 1914) and *Revised Statutes of Canada*, 1906, c. 146, s. 1063, ss 2.

⁵⁷ Mr. Justice D. Murphy, Vancouver to the Hon. C. Doherty, Minister of Justice, Ottawa, July 18, 1914, 4 pm (Onooki, 1914).

the fact that his defense was negligible, s. 1063 of the *Code* was a poor fit. There was no evidence to sustain an application for a reprieve. Indeed, the archival file is silent on whether such an application was initiated, let alone submitted. Rather, on July 16, a Department of Justice memorandum set-out the Onooki case for Silas Carpenter, a well-respected former detective from Montreal and Edmonton who, after a storied career, had retired to Banff, Alberta.⁵⁸ Contacted by Colonel A. Percy Sherwood, Chief of the Dominion Police, Carpenter was directed to interview the individuals identified in the instructions, investigate the Chimoulskis' reputation and character, and press Wasyl Mauser on whether Thomas Chimoulski had worn the yellow overcoat to the bunkhouse before or after Christmas.⁵⁹ Leaving Banff on July 17, Carpenter arrived in South Fort George three days later.

The detective's behavior suggests that additional factors shaped his assignment. Despite the urgency of the task and the finality of events scheduled for July 31, Carpenter did not check-in with the local BCPP office, either as a matter of professional courtesy or for practical assistance. This absence is curious. Had the police investigation and Constables Aldridge and Higginbottom's performances at trial cast such a shadow that Carpenter, whose experiences with the Edmonton police ended, in part, owing to partisanship, led him to wonder if the local constabulary was trustworthy? Whatever the rationale, his first stop on the morning of July 21 was with the local postmaster to collect the addresses of the potential interviewees.⁶⁰ This was a hopeless quest. Although the Georges had street names, in the years straddling the Great War, neither homes nor businesses carried numbered addresses. Residents knew where everything was, and for those who were unaware, directions to the nearest intersection had to suffice. So, while the postmaster provided serviceable instructions to locate Mike Rebka's café, over which Wasyl Mauser operated his bunkhouse, the detective's efforts soon ran aground.⁶¹ Neither of the Rebkas spoke English. This, in turn, obliged Carpenter to seek out an interpreter. And while that did not oblige him to call upon the BCPP detachment, in all likelihood the detective's presence and attempts to interview residents was already common currency owing to a truth shared by small communities and mystery novels: a stranger in town asking questions invariably attracts attention. Two days after Carpenter's arrival, Chief Constable Dunwoody's

⁵⁸ On Sherwood, see Marquis, *Policing Canada's Century*, 61 and Laurent Busseau, "Silas Huntington Carpenter: un détective moderne à Montréal, 1882-1912," *Histoire Québec* 20, no. 3 (2015): 46-48 and S. W. Horrall, "Carpenter, Silas Huntington," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14 (Université Laval/University of Toronto, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/carpenter_silas_huntington_14F.html (date accessed March 30, 2021).

⁵⁹ Memorandum for Mr. Carpenter, July 16, 1914, and Night Lettergram, A.P. Sherwood, Chief Commissioner of Police, to S.H. Carpenter, Commissioner of Police, and a second Night Lettergram, A.P. Sherwood, Chief Commissioner of Police to S.H. Carpenter, nd, (Onooki, 1914).

⁶⁰ Unless otherwise cited, the following is based on S.H. Carpenter, Commissioner of Police to Colonel Sherwood, Chief Commissioner of Police, August 2, 1914 (Onooki, 1914).

⁶¹ The existence of ethnically defined boarding and bunkhouses is a common trait in resource extraction communities; see Forestell, "Bachelors, Boarding-Houses, and Blind-Pigs," 259.

duty log for July 23 revealed that he was assisting the detective in re-investigating the case.⁶²

With Dunwoody's aid, Carpenter located and interviewed eleven individuals, but the results were meager. At best, the statements from Wasyl Mauser, Mike Rebka, Mrs. Mike Rebka, Edward Flameau, Thomas Chimoulski, Andrew Olnk, John Olnk, Mike Sydorak, Tony Rudiak (aka Tony Jack), "Johnny" Pierre Rois (Pierrero), and John Buchesky (aka Bahsky/Nihnicky) merely provided additional context from the days before and after Porters' death. Nothing they said suggested Onooki's innocence. What had begun as a list of exculpatory witnesses proved to be little more than a desperate gamble to escape the noose. Admittedly, the tenor of the times may have worked against Onooki. Gathering war clouds during the July Crisis could have discouraged anyone associated with the Austro-Hungarian empire, from raising their head above the parapet. Was it wise to provide a potential alibi, no matter how thin, to a fellow "foreigner" convicted of murder? Or was it simply that Onooki, who had been drinking steadily since before Christmas had possessed a fractured sense of events that, in the cold light of day revealed, beyond a reasonable doubt, that he had killed Harry Porters?

The detective's second task, that of enquiring into the Chimoulskis' credibility, spoke as much about the gendered, racial, and class identities of those bearing witness as it did about Thomas and Annie. First, Carpenter's investigation revealed a rift within the local Galician community between those with an Austrian background, of whom the Rebkas, Mazurs, and Rudicks belonged, and those of Polish origins, which included the Chimoulskis. This may explain why Tony Rudiak (aka Tony Jack) threatened to shoot Thomas after he gave his January 2, 1914 statement to the police. Rudiak had been bound over on \$1000 bond to keep the peace.⁶³ This schism possibly explains the unfounded stories that the Chimoulskis had received \$500 for their testimonies and that Onooki had seduced Annie, firing Thomas's thirst for retribution. That such tales were making the rounds no doubt fueled the accumulated "truths" that the Galicians, akin to all non-preferred immigrants, were a poor fit for an orderly and law-abiding community. Ultimately, these animosities may speak to Carpenter's decision to limit his questioning of the Galician community to specific "facts" about time and place concerning Porters' death, rather than interpretative queries about the Chimoulski's character.

Therefore, in seeking a measure of Annie Chimoulski, Carpenter turned to "several well-known ladies in the district of South Fort George." This approach to Annie's "betters" was unremarkable and true to class and gendered knowledge that these respectable women possessed an intuitive gaze that was ideal for assessing Chimoulski. Equally, one can imagine the frisson of having the famous detective Silas Carpenter (from Montréal, no less) acknowledge their social standing and their privileged position, by ushering them into the confidence of an urgent investigation. The evidence they provided, if all too brief, is evocative. The women—Jean A. Lazier (Dr. David Lazier's spouse), Jeanne Foster

⁶² Dunwoody, duty log, July 23, 1914, BCA, GR 445, box 17, file 14.

⁶³ Carpenter to Sherwood, August 2, 1914 (Onooki, 1914), 4.

(riverboat Captain Donald A. Foster's spouse), Lillian Turner (spouse of prominent farmer Thomas Turner), and Violet Williamson (spouse of merchant J.O. Williamson)—“emphatically” assured Carpenter that Annie was “respectable, honest, and thoroughly reliable.”⁶⁴ Apparently, and to avoid the appearance of any impropriety or influence since Dr. Lazier had performed the post-mortem, Annie absented herself from duties in the Lazier house during the investigation and preliminary hearing and had since been working in the Foster household. Considered from a distance, it is difficult to overlook Carpenter's rigged method. For these privileged women, it was inconceivable that their judgment was so flawed as to have allowed a disreputable Galician working-class woman into their homes. Of course, Annie was respectable. The process was less an enquiry than a confirmation. A similar dynamic shaped those questions posed to the steady and respectable men of the community in regard to Thomas.

Stipendiary Magistrate Herne thought Chimoulski was “an honest and respectable man,” Dr. Lazier spoke well of both Annie and Thomas, and business owners “in the district with whom they Chimoulskis trade say they pay their bills and look upon them as honest and inoffensive people.” Not only did they hold a parcel of land 16 kilometers (10 miles) from Fort George upon which Thomas had built a house and made other improvements—both measures of male respectability and commitment to the region—but he was “well-spoken” by those who know him and had “no reason to say anything which was not true.” Regarding the allegation that Chimoulski operated a gambling den, neighbor W.F. Manson, a Dominion constable for the “Indian Department,” asserted “that he has never seen anything wrong with the Chimoulskis and considers them to be honest and respectable.” Indeed, Manson added that “he was in the habit of going home frequently at a late hour of night, [and] neither has he ever seen or heard of Chimoulski being under the influence of liquor.” Having catalogued these impressions, Carpenter then interviewed the Chimoulskis. The detective reported that they spoke “English sufficiently well to be understood,” that their small home “was neat and clean, and after talking with them for some little time I was favorably impressed with them. They appeared to be truthful and honest.” Drawing on his own experience and self-perception as someone skilled in reading witnesses and in assessing the impressions of other respectable white people in the community, Carpenter agreed with Manson's assertion that the Chimoulskis were representatives of “a better class of Galicians.” The conclusion sealed Onooki's fate.

⁶⁴ Jean Lazier's name is noted in Dr. David B. Lazier's military record, see Dr. David B. Lazier, see Canadian Expeditionary Force, NAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5479-31, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=522130> (date accessed November 22, 2021); Jeanne Foster's name appears in the Census of Canada, 1921, British Columbia, District 14, sub-district 29 (Quesnel), 1 (entry 32); Lillian Turner's name appears in the Census of Canada, 1921, British Columbia, district 14, sub-district 17 (Prince George), 3 (entry 35); Violet Oliver's first name is noted in the announcement of her engagement to J.O. Williamson, see untitled, *Fort George Herald*, April 13, 1912, 1.

The investigation's findings were wired to Sherwood on July 23. In turn, Minister of Justice Doherty informed Lukes, the Austro-Hungarian consul, that the investigation had failed to undermine the decision already reached by the Governor-General-in-Council.⁶⁵ The death sentence was confirmed on July 28, 1914. Three days later an inquisition concluded that early on the morning of July 31 in the Kamloops jail, George Onooki had been hanged by the neck until dead.⁶⁶

Threads

What then are we to make of Onooki's journey to the gallows? The impressions are several. First, we are offered a lesson in murder. The evidence suggests that George Onooki was neither particularly likable nor sympathetic. When in his cups he tended toward belligerence. And whether he was under the influence or not, money spent on liquor and sporting women ran through his fingers like water. Not only did Onooki's appetites outrun his pocketbook, but his slowness in repaying debts marked him as a risky proposition when he came seeking a loan. For him this meant having to face the unmanly indignity of extending his hand and risking the possibility of refusal. At the same time, Porters either overlooked these tendencies or did not see them in a man he considered a friend. After all, Porters too had been occasionally caught short and was obliged to borrow money to finance a night on the town. The difference between the two was that Porters has \$200 on deposit in Prince George's Bank of Ottawa, suggesting that such debts would be swiftly extinguished.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, while believing that their shared experience of laboring on the GTP line had earned Onooki the price of a couple of drinks on Christmas Eve, Porters failed to realize that the gesture sparked animus. What was a nod to their fellowship had, in the space of a few hours, soured in Onooki's mind, festering into a leering insult questioning his ability to fend for himself, his handling of money, and his standing as a man. While Porters could secure a loan and flash money about, Onooki could take comfort in a self-image of being clever, of being cunning, of being able to dupe a "soft fool" like Porters. The end of the night would reveal that once Porters was lured to a deserted track behind South Fort George's segregated district, it would be Onooki who was prepared to demonstrate that he was the real man. And while it is impossible to know whether he did so with murderous intent, the evidence reveals that after finding himself over the line in violently battering Porters, Onooki spoke proudly of besting the other man. He had "licked-him."

Second, and beginning with the discovery of Porters' body, the local BCPP detachment appeared overmatched. Held up in contrast to an exaggerated

⁶⁵ Carpenter to Sherwood, July 23, 1914, and Minister of Justice C.J. Doherty to George Lukes, Hon. Austrian-Hungarian Consul, Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 24, 1914 (Onooki, 1914).

⁶⁶ "Inquisition" and "Information of Witnesses" before Matthew George Archibald re George Onooki, July 31, 1914 (Onooki, 1914).

⁶⁷ "Assailant of Harry Porters is Not Yet Apprehended," *Fort George Herald*, December 31, 1913, 1.

impression of the RNWMP, the provincial constables were depicted as ill-suited to mount a “serious” criminal investigation. Although unduly harsh, the assessment captured the reality of a non-uniformed provincial force still hewing to the self-image of peacekeepers whose demeanor prevented crime before it occurred and whose on-the-job apprenticeship schooled them in crime detection. This approach appeared increasingly threadbare as expectations for a professional police culture emerged in the early twentieth century. Exposed during the trial as amateurish and poorly disciplined, and then marginalized at the outset of Carpenter’s eleventh-hour reinvestigation, the detachment, and perhaps the provincial force as a whole, were wrong-footed by the inferred expectations of performing as a modern police force. It would be another decade before the BCPP embraced much needed change.⁶⁸

Finally, we are left to wonder if challenging the Georges’ notorious reputation gained any traction among the opinion leaders elsewhere in the province and nation? Did the demand for a speedy and successful prosecution terminating on the gallows convince onlookers that caricatures aside, the northern interior wanted a well-regulated and orderly community along the same lines imagined by residents in the lower mainland and in the provincial capital? Had opinion leaders elsewhere in the nation been convinced by the northern interior’s “betters” that they too subscribed to shared notions of how civilized and respectable people ought to behave. Had they demonstrated their region’s acceptance of the “habits of restraint and self-control.”⁶⁹ Was the prosecution a bell-weather moment in the interior’s embrace of the domesticated masculinity that McLaren had found wanting?⁷⁰ Or was defense counsel James Murphy’s use of a cartoonish image of the Georges—a brutish community marked by alcohol-fueled violence—indicative of an opportunistic contrast that might blunt real and imagined problems closer to home? For inasmuch as the emergent concerns with modernity and the increasingly interventionist state of post-Edwardian Canada might loom large in some minds, at least “we” were spared the everyday chaos and tumult of the Georges. Indeed, the appeal of such a juxtaposition of the nation’s settled regions and the “untamed” wilds proved to be a feature within long-standing Canadian national conversation.⁷¹ Essentially, while the Christmas Eve murder illuminated the ties of racism, gender, class, and notions about crime and punishment that connected the Georges to the rest of the province and beyond, this performative embrace of the dictates of contemporary Canada failed to undermine the imagined character of community life and morals in British Columbia’s northern

⁶⁸ The role of the modernizing provincial state is explored in my *Notorious Georges*.

⁶⁹ Garland, *Peculiar Institution*, 172.

⁷⁰ McLaren, “Males, Migrants, and Murder in British Columbia, 1900–23.”

⁷¹ For one of the best treatments of the Canadian mindset during these years, see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1970. Also see this discourse in action in Dubinsky and Iacovetta, “Murder, Womanly Virtue, and Motherhood,” and Strange, “The Lottery of Death: Capital Punishment, 1867–1976.”

interior. And even when the specifics of George Onooki's fatal encounter with Henry Porters faded from view, a half-remembered "something" persisted, a knowing "truth" about community identity and the notorious Georges.

Jonathan Swainger is a full professor of History at the University of Northern British Columbia <swainger@unbc.ca and swainger@telus.net>.

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