Donald W. Patterson and Donald E. Patterson

In front of you, you should see the graves of Donald W. Patterson and Donald Edward Patterson, a father and son who both played a role in Grande Prairie's legal system.

Donald W. Patterson was born in Huron County, Ontario, on March 20th, 1888, one of ten children born to his parents, Donald and Eliza. Thanks to a memoir he wrote while recovering from a heart attack in 1956, we know a good deal about his life.

We know, for instance, that he graduated high school at age 16 and was ready to start training to become a teacher at what was known as a Normal School. But the age cut-off for these schools in Ontario was 18. So, he went west to study at a Normal School in Regina, a city of about 3,000 people at the time. After completing his training, his first teaching job was at the Long Creek School, near the town of Rouleau, in May 1905. Rouleau, Saskatchewan, as you might know, is now best known for being shot as the fictional town of Dog River in the TV show *Corner Gas*.

In December 1905, Patterson packed up and went deeper into the West, travelling by train into the new province of Alberta. His travels stopped at Nanton, a small town about halfway between Calgary and Lethbridge, where he started teaching at the Alberta School. Remember, at this point, he was still 17! Western Canada was starved for teachers, so it wasn't hard for him to find work, even at such a young age.

In Nanton, he witnessed the effects of the historically terrible winter of 1906-1907, which devastated many inexperienced settlers in Western Canada. Thanks to an early snowfall, there wasn't enough feed for farmers to sustain their cattle over the winter. Patterson described the starvation of local cows in his memoir: "It seems peculiar that not many died in the cold weather. But in April when the weather got warm they died by the thousands. Some drifted on to the school section opposite the school where I was teaching. They were thin and gaunt, every bone and rib showed. They ran up against the fence and lay down and died. I could have walked a mile up that fence just stepping from one carcass to the next, not touching the ground."

In 1909, even though he had just spent his late adolescence moving all around the country, Donald started feeling like he needed a bigger change.

Teaching had been working out alright, but what he had *really* always wanted to be was a lawyer. He started out by travelling to Lethbridge and asking different lawyers if he could work for them as a student. He was eventually accepted by John J. Cameron, who he later described as a "smooth-talking, prepossessing man." Cameron couldn't afford to pay Donald a salary but promised he would when business was better. Donald thus started earning his keep through carpentry work. All the while, he studied law, hoping to take the first-year law exam. In April 1910, Donald gave Cameron the $50 needed to apply for the Law Society, which was necessary to be considered a law student and to eventually take the exam. Donald spent all year studying the necessary textbooks on his own while running errands for Cameron and still working as a carpenter. He sent in his application to take the exam in April 1911 but never received a response. When he called the agency, he was told that his $50 had never been received. It turned out that Mr. Cameron was an alcoholic and had either forgotten about the money or pocketed it. Donald was told that Cameron moved to Vancouver shortly after this incident, where he lived a destitute life and soon passed away. In his absence, Patterson started working for Cameron's partner, R.A. Smith. Unfortunately, Smith also turned out to be a drinker and would sporadically disappear from the office on week-long benders. So, Patterson found work at a more stable law firm, Johnstone and Ritchie, where he was faced with long days and a massive volume of work, but he earned a decent salary and was able to continue his studies. In 1914, he received his Bachelor's of Law from the University of Alberta. Incidentally, in the same year, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, and the nations of Europe soon descended into a state of total war. Like many Canadian men who came of age in the early 20th century, Donald Patterson's life would be interrupted by the outbreak of this war—World War I.

At the time Donald enlisted, the government wasn't conscripting soldiers, so his decision to go fight was entirely voluntary. "It had never occurred to me that civilized people would go to war to kill each other," Patterson later wrote. "Such a thought had never occurred to me and now after all my struggle to become a barrister, was I to throw it all away? My mother's early teaching that war was silly had made an impression. It was a hard decision to make. But I am very glad that I enlisted and had the chance of serving in the army." In July 1915, he left Johnstone and Ritchie for Kingston, Ontario, where he trained at a non-commissioned officer's school. He then returned to Lethbridge, where he joined the 39th Battery Canadian Field Artillery.

Taking a train to Halifax in February 1916, the soldiers made their way to England, where they would train some more before crossing the English Channel and proceeding toward the absolutely apocalyptic battlefields of France and Belgium. Patterson fought for a few days at Ypres under heavy machine gun fire, then moved on to participate in the battle of the Somme, which had been raging for a couple of months at that point. Patterson writes, "The Germans had been pushed back perhaps about eight miles. This eight miles was covered with the litter of war. We rode up part way, then got in a trench that led up to the guns. There were corpses all around. One had been buried at the edge of the trench, and the dead arm hung down, and as the troops passed they shook the hand and had some remark like, 'Goodbye, old chap!'"

Some of the bodies that Donald happened upon were treated less respectfully: "As an example of how good people get callous," Patterson wrote, "one of our boys saw a ring on the finger of a corpse. He tried to get it off, but it stuck, so he just twisted the finger until it broke and he got the ring off."

Eventually, Donald travelled north from the Somme, at one point sleeping overnight in a pig pen when there wasn't adequate shelter to be found. He helped in the preparations for the battle of Vimy Ridge but was shot in the neck three days before the battle commenced. Donald spent some time recuperating in England before returning to France in August 1917, where he rejoined the 39th Battery, whose members from Lethbridge were mostly either wounded, sick or dead. The Battery slowly made their way to Passchendaele, where Patterson fought for 28 days, getting very little sleep. He later called the battle "perhaps the greatest defeat ever suffered by the British Army." Eventually, the Canadians were withdrawn after the arrival of American troops, and Patterson went to Boulogne for more training. While the other members of his battery would go back out for a major offensive in which many Canadians died, Patterson once again returned to England to train to be a commissioned officer. Happily, though, before he could put his training to good use, the war ended.

While on his voyage back to Lethbridge, Donald met a lawyer named D.L. Macphee in Calgary, who was working in Grande Prairie at the time. Macphee offered to Donald that the two enter a partnership, and Donald accepted. He came to Grande Prairie, where he was quickly a great success. He was elected mayor in 1921, and he married Rose Devlin in 1923, with whom he had three children: Rhoda, Dorothy, and Donald Edward. He was working as a lawyer as late as 1969,

shortly before his death in October 1971. He was also active in the political sphere and ran as an Independent in the provincial election of 1944, but he was defeated in a Social Credit Party sweep of the Peace Country. Outside his legal and political career, he was a member of the Canadian Legion, the Rotary Club, and the Freemasons, becoming a Master Mason in 1929.

Donald's son, Donald E. Patterson, followed his father's footsteps into the legal profession. He was admitted to the bar in 1963 and became a judge in 1976. At this time, Grande Prairie was truly becoming a city, and the attendant issues of city life followed. Cases of violent robbery and murder were common. Patterson also bore witness to Grande Prairie's growing narcotics trade and took a hardline stance on charges of drug trafficking.

Not only did the influx of cocaine into the city fill up Patterson's docket with such charges, many users turned to more serious crimes to support their addiction. This seemed to be the case for one perp named Scott Lee Boiselle, who was captured after a string of robberies. On August 25th, 1991, Boiselle and an accomplice ordered a pizza to an industrial area of Grande Prairie. When the pizza man got there, they robbed him of $325, threatening him with some pistols they had stolen from a local home. On September 5th, the two men entered the Alberta Treasury Branch in Hythe, where they again used their guns to their advantage. They yelled and waved their pistols around in the air, compelling the tellers to hand over $8000 in cash. They didn't get away with it, though, and Boiselle came in front of Patterson in October 1991. He and his accomplice were both sentenced to six years in prison. Hospital tests of Boiselle revealed that he was addicted to cocaine; it may have been that the two were looking for an easy way to score. Patterson said at Boiselle's trial he often saw people in court who committed crimes without good reason and who turned out to be cocaine addicts.

Not all of his cases were cocaine-related, of course. One involved a Grande Prairie taxi driver who had picked up three drunk men and driven them to Sexsmith. The men then asked to be taken to the county industrial park. Finally, the group wanted to go back to Grande Prairie, to a hotel downtown. By the time they arrived at the hotel, one of the men had passed out and wet himself in the back of the cab. For whatever reason, his friends didn't help him out and simply left him there. At this point, the taxi driver was so fed up with the group's drunken antics that he drove the unconscious man out of the city, pulled him out of the cab, and beat him with a club. Then, he took off the man's shirt and used it to tie him to a

tree. The man was found about 5 hours later, still tied to the tree, having been unable to free himself. Patterson sentenced Jeffery to four months in jail plus a year of probation, explaining that he thought the crime was out of character for Jeffery but that other people should be warned against doing something similar. This was in line with Patterson's general philosophy when it came to sentencing: while he was skeptical about the rehabilitative use of prison, Patterson always thought that it was important to set an example of lawbreakers. As it turns out, prison might have indeed done the opposite of rehabilitating Jeffery, because he ended up reoffending a few months after his term of probation was up. He had robbed a pizza deliveryman in Grande Prairie and a bank in Hythe with his accomplice, Scott Lee Boiselle, and was sentenced to six years in prison.

Donald Edward Patterson had one child with his wife Hazel—a daughter named Lorena—and two stepchildren named Richard and Linea. He passed away in 2002.

T. W. Lawlor

Thomas Wilson Lawlor was born in the town of Killarney, Manitoba, in 1890. He studied at the University of Manitoba, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1914.

He then moved west to study law at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton. Unfortunately, like D. W. Patterson, his career plans were disrupted by the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, and he shipped off to fight in World War I before he could get a law degree.

While less information is available to us regarding Lawlor's war experience than Patterson's, we know that he joined the 196th University Battalion, which was based in Winnipeg, and which recruited at universities throughout Western Canada, including the U of A. He first served in France with the Canadian Machine Gun Corps; then, he went to Egypt, where he served with the Royal Air Force.

Lawlor survived the war, and in 1919, he came back to Edmonton and started hitting the books again. He earned his law degree in 1920 and set up a practice in Spirit River. In 1924, he closed up shop and came here, to Grande Prairie, and set up another practice with a man named J.H. Sissons as his partner. Around 1930, Lawlor was appointed as a crown attorney, which meant he

prosecuted cases as an agent of Alberta's attorney general and as a representative of the Canadian government. He saw many, many cases in this role, which he held until 1958—almost three decades!

Many of the cases Lawlor prosecuted were petty minor, like an unreturned horse or a small scuffle after an insult… but things weren't always so docile.

It turns out that the calmness of tiny little Grande Prairie and the surrounding countryside could be punctuated by shocking acts of violence. Even well into the 20th century, the area could feel a bit like the Wild West. Maybe it was something about the distance from civilization—or the distance from law enforcement—but on the prairie, disagreements could quickly turn bloody.

Take for instance Andrew Rasi, who on October 25th, 1935 flew into a rage at his brother John as the two walked down a country road. Andrew chased John down with a pitchfork and hit him across the temple with it, but John managed to wrest the weapon free and plant it in the ground. You might think that the passions would cool down at that point, but Andrew pulled his weapon back out of the soil and kept on attacking until his brother was unconscious. Even after John had passed out, Andrew kept stabbing his limp body. John woke up alone in the middle of the night. As he limped toward the lights of his home in the distance, he was discovered by a passerby who took him to Grande Prairie Hospital, where it was discovered that he had been punctured through his left lung. Lawlor prosecuted Andrew, and he likely didn't have to break much of a sweat making his case, since there was a living witness covered in pitchfork wounds. It's hard to say what provoked Andrew, but the judge apparently thought that he had cooled down and wasn't likely to reoffend, as he was only sentenced to two months of hard labour at Fort Saskatchewan.

Another case involved a similar flash of violence on a lonesome country road. On November 25th, 1955, a *Grande Prairie Herald-Tribune* article announced that "The spectators' section of the Grande Prairie court room was crowded as the story unfolded of the clash in the bush between four Moolyk brothers and the Dika brothers and their helpers, Sunday afternoon April 17 in a melee in which the twelve men were alleged to have battled with shot guns, caterpillars [i.e. tractors], clubs, an iron rod and chunks of dirt." Thomas Lawlor prosecuted Steven Moolyk, accused of discharging a firearm with attempt to wound.

This is how the brawl broke out. Jerry Dika had been in an agreement with the Moolyk patriarch through which he was granted access to a timber berth about 25 miles southwest of Spirit River, but after allegedly failing to pay his dues, Jerry was forbidden from using the berth. One Sunday afternoon, Jerry, who later claimed that he *had* paid his dues, took his brothers and some other men to the berth to pick up some lumber. The Dika group brought three trucks and a caterpillar tractor for the journey. On the way back, though, they ran into four Moolyk brothers riding their own tractor with their father.

This is how Jerry Dika would recount the following events in court.

He said that the Moolyks stopped and told the Dikas to take the lumber off their truck. Two of the Moolyk brothers were armed with clubs, the other two with iron bars. Their father hung back in the distance. Jerry Dika began to chase down Steven Moolyk, who ran away. When Jerry turned around, Mike Moolyk swung at Jerry with an iron bar, and from a distance, Steven fired his shotgun.

Amidst all this chaos, Pete Moolyk returned to the tractor and started driving it towards the Dikas. Jerry Dika, who had made his way back to his group, took a rifle out from one of their trucks and shot it into the ground, trying to scare off his assailants. While the Moolyks yelled at the Dika group and cussed them out, the Dikas tried driving around them but were blocked as the Moolyks started lying logs down across their path and tearing up the road in front of them. At this point, two of the Dikas' helpers, William Burake and Gus Draeger, simply walked away and hiked to the Spirit River RCMP detachment, where they reported the altercation. In the commotion, Burake had apparently been hit by a shotgun pellet, which tore through his boot and injured his ankle.

The Moolyks and their lawyer, J.M. Lazerenko, went to great lengths in their defence of Steven. While claiming that the Dikas had known they were trespassing and were looking for trouble, Lazerenko argued at length that Burake was a phony who had only pretended to be shot in the heel. Presented with Burake's damaged boot, he told Burake, "I suggest to you you made those marks with an awl." Gus Draeger, who had been walking with Burake, told the court that he had witnessed Burake take off his boot and take the pellet out. "He could have put the pellet in the shoe while you were not watching him," said Lazerenko. When the Moolyk brothers went up for questioning, they produced a boot that they had shot with a shotgun to show that the holes on Burake's boot weren't consistent with shotgun pellet holes.

Judge N.V. Buchanan didn't have much patience for the defense throughout the trial and wrapped up by stating that "The evidence is overwhelming that the accused did pick up the shotgun and that he advanced with the shotgun toward the Dika group. Having in mind the evidence as to the appearance of the accused immediately after the shot was heard and the fact that the discharge was in the direction of people, and accepting the evidence William Burake was hit from the discharge, the circumstances are conclusive." But he also admitted that the Dikas could as easily have been charged. "Because this appears to have been a feud where both sides were of the same mind," he said, "I am disposed to take a more lenient view. Six months in Fort Saskatchewan jail."

In 1939, Thomas Wilson Lawlor was elected mayor of Grande Prairie. He was too old to have the commencement of another World War interrupt his career, but his tenure as mayor was greatly affected by the war effort, which involved the establishment of a basic training military base and an American Army base in Grande Prairie (the Americans used the Northwest Staging Route through Canada to deliver planes to Russia.) He still prosecuted cases as mayor though, including one where a man was charged with making statements that broke rule 39a of the Defense of Canada Regulations. In September 1940, six witnesses testified that Halvor Frantzen, a Norwegian immigrant and oil well mechanic, had expressed the sentiment that it was England's fault Germany had invaded Norway and that he hoped Germany would destroy England. Although he argued in court that he had been drunk and didn't know why he said what he did, Frantzen was sentenced to nine months of hard labour for this indiscretion, which is seven more months than Andrew Rasi got for almost killing his brother with a pitchfork. The Defense of Canada Regulations were emergency measures implemented in 1939 after the country entered WWII. While 39a, which prohibited statements "intended or likely to cause disaffection to the King," applied equally to all citizens, the fact that Frantzen was a foreigner with a German-sounding last name might've well been an important factor in his sentencing at a time when the lives of so-called "enemy aliens" were closely monitored and regulated by the Canadian government.

Thomas Lawlor resigned as crown attorney in 1958 due to poor health. He passed away not long after, in 1959.

Lewis O'Brien and Gurth O'Brien

Dr. Lewis O'Brien, born near Toronto in 1868, was a prominent member of Grande Prairie's early community. As you might know, the O'Brien Provincial Park south of town is named after him! After returning from World War I, where he served in tent hospitals with the Canadian Army Medical Corps, O'Brien came with his wife, Alice, to the Peace Country, where he started working out of a small log hospital in Grande Prairie. He later ran as an Independent candidate in Alberta's general election of 1940 and won a seat in Grande Prairie, serving until 1944.

Dr. O'Brien was involved in a criminal case that the *Daily Herald* called "the most sensational case to be heard in the Peace River area." This was only 13 years after the trial of Dan Lough, who was accused of murdering six people in cold blood!

Our story begins in 1905, when a man named Gilbert Blake left England for Western Canada. In Canada, he helped build railroads until the First World War brought him back overseas. He survived the war, and in 1919, he came back as a captain with his wife, Edith Helen Blake. The couple set up a homestead in the Bad Heart region. A decade later, Gilbert's brother, Owen Blake, also came to the region; he failed to set up his own homestead, but from 1930 to 1932 he spent a lot of time living at his brother's place. And they all lived together comfortably—until Gilbert came down with a mysterious illness.

In July 1931, Gilbert started suffering from episodes of nausea and vomiting, which he originally figured were due to hard labour under the hot sun. But the situation became more concerning when his wife, Edith, started having similar episodes. Soon, the couple's symptoms started getting more intense and frequent, and eventually, both Edith and Gilbert lost their appetites, and their hands and feet began to swell up terribly. Strangely, Owen and the family's servant were both fine, while the captain and his wife only got worse. Edith's condition eventually got so bad that she needed help to eat and stand up, and she had to be hospitalized on two different occasions. Both times, any recovery she had made in the hospital was soon wiped out by renewed attacks of nausea upon returning home.

Dr. O'Brien, their physician, suggested a process of elimination that would rule out different possible sources one by one. To make sure it wasn't the water that was making them sick, they sent their well water out to get tested. It was found to be impure, so they started boiling water from the Smoky River instead. But it didn't seem to make a difference: they kept vomiting all the time! The possibility

of arsenic poisoning was also brought up, so they tested their cutlery and got a new set. The couple also threw out a bag of oats because their porridge had been tasting funny.

Perhaps the mention of poisoning led Edith to look upon her healthy houseguests with more suspicion. Maybe she began to feel apprehensive towards her brother-in-law, Owen. One day, she saw him enter the house with a couple of small bottles. Examining his toiletries later, she couldn't see the bottles anywhere. She searched his room and eventually found one of the bottles in his coat pocket. She drew a sample from the bottle and sent out its contents for testing.

If you look again at the gravestone, you'll see the name Gurth on one of the small plaques. Gurth O'Brien was Dr. O'Brien's son. In the summer of 1932, he was working as a forest ranger in the Bad Heart region in between medical school terms. Gurth knew the Blakes through his father and spent some time at their place over the summer. In August, shortly after Mrs. Blake had discovered the bottle, Gurth stayed overnight at her house. He left after breakfast, and when he set up camp and started to prepare a meal a few hours later, he realized he didn't have much of an appetite. He was then overcome by horrible nausea and had fits of violent vomiting which went on for hours. When he went home and told his father what had happened, Dr. O'Brien realised that poisoning was the most likely explanation. At once, he travelled to the Blake place and told Gilbert to send out everyone who had been staying with him and his wife. That meant Owen, as well as a hired hand and a theological student who had been boarding with them. Owen didn't question his brother and moved to Sexsmith, where he opened up a butcher shop with money Gilbert had given him.

In early 1933, Owen was charged with forging a cheque and was sentenced to two months imprisonment at Fort Saskatchewan jail. While he was at the police headquarters in Edmonton, he was approached by Corporal T.W. Simons of the RCMP, who had known Gilbert in the army and had met Owen ten years prior. Simons mentioned that Owen was under suspicion of poisoning his brother and sister-in-law, and Owen admitted that he had, in fact, poisoned them. Months later, Simons met with Owen again in the Fort Saskatchewan jail. This time, Owen produced a written statement for Simons. In it, he claimed that he took arsenic for a heart condition and would put it into the family's milk. He said that he had bought the arsenic at the Sexsmith drug store and the Grande Prairie Rexall. Workers from

both locations later testified that Owen's name appeared nowhere in the records which they normally kept for the sale of poisons.

At the trial, J.H. McClung conducted the prosecution with the help of Thomas Wilson Lawlor. The prosecution suggested that Owen had attempted to kill his brother and sister-in-law in anticipation of inheritance. Gilbert had left everything to his niece, but the contents of the will had been kept secret. McClung argued that Owen clearly would have kept poisoning his brother and his sister-in-law until they died had he not been told to leave.

Eventually, Gilbert Blake was called up to give testimony. He said that he and Owen had been on good terms and that Owen had no way of profiting from his or his wife's death. He clarified that he hadn't brought the charges against Owen and had, in fact, tried to procure the best defense possible for him. He admitted that his brother was a man of below average intelligence.

Dr. O'Brien and his son also testified, Dr. O'Brien describing how he had narrowed the source of the illness down to arsenic and Gurth retelling the story of his mystery sickness after eating at the Blakes' place. D.W. Patterson also testified. He had drawn up Gilbert Blake's will, and he testified that he had only shared its contents with the police.

Another doctor came up to the stand, Dr. J.A. Kelso. He testified that samples of Mr. and Mrs. Blakes' hair had been sent to the University of Alberta to be tested for arsenic. He explained that there is normally a small amount of arsenic present in human hair: 2.2 parts per million in head hair and 2.5 parts per million in pubic hair. The head hair of Gilbert Blake was tested at 32.5 parts per million and his pubic hair at 87.5 parts per million. Another sample taken in April 1933, months after everyone had been sent out, came back at only 6.3 parts per million. The liquid that Mrs. Blake found in Owen's pocket also came back positive for arsenic.

After all the evidence and witness testimony had been heard, Justice Ewing announced his decision (Owen had elected to be tried without a jury). "I am bound to say that I have some doubt as to whether he intended to kill Captain Blake by administering the poison irregularly over such a long period… I am utterly uncapable to fathom the mind of the accused, but there is that reasonable doubt, and I therefore acquit him of the attempted murder charge but find him guilty of inflicting grievous bodily harm." Owen Blake was sentenced to four years imprisonment at Prince Albert penitentiary with the stipulation that he be placed

under medical observation, as his mental health was in question. Indeed, Owen was a survivor of polio, which would have put him at higher risk of psychiatric disorders. Owen's life after this incident remains obscure.

Russell Melvin Stewart and Joan Stewart

One night in the summer of 1976, Russell Melvin Stewart and his daughter Joan were attacked by a stranger.

Late in the night on Friday, August 27th, a woman named Emily Alstad stepped outside into the cool summer air. Emily had been staying in Grande Prairie with her children in an RV parked outside her parents' place. Earlier in the evening, she had dealt with a fire, and throughout the night she kept going back outside to make sure it had gone out. At 11:00 PM, she heard a man yelling on the third floor of the nearby Richmond Apartments. At 11:43 PM, she heard a loud noise and thought a car had backfired. She quickly realized it had really been a gunshot.

Then, a woman yelled out from her car, "I think I've been shot." Alstad would later say that she thought she was dreaming but felt like she should "go through the motions anyway." She went over to the woman's car and helped her hide her four-year-old son under the front seat. They drove to the nearby apartment where Alstad's parents lived. Once the police had come, the injured woman, whose name was Joan Stewart, called her dad and asked him to come to watch over her son while she went to the hospital. So, her father, Russell Melvin Stewart, drove over, passing the police—who had not yet set up a barricade. He parked his car in front of the apartment. Since Russell was a bit deaf, he couldn't hear the policemen shouting at him to stay in his vehicle. Alstad watched him get out of the car, and within a few seconds, she witnessed him "just [fall], like a doll." He had been shot in the back of the neck. "I knew he was dead," Alstad later said. "I didn't even see his face."

The sniper kept shooting indiscriminately, hitting random cars and the walls of nearby buildings. One bullet went through the room of Minnie Unger, buried not far from Russell and Joan, who luckily wasn't home at the time. Then, the shooter went down to the main floor and kept shooting from the foyer. At one point, he entered the ground-floor apartment of a woman named Heldred Hoy. The man,

who Hoy later said seemed very drunk, told Hoy that he wanted to “get even” and that he had one shot left. The shooter fled to the back of the building, hopping a fence into another house. He noticed a 19-year-old named John Hinks in the back lane behind the apartments, who along with another man, Lance Auger, had ignored police warnings to stay back, crossed the barricades, and darted towards the apartment block. The shooter shot Hinks in the stomach.

A nearby police officer, Constable Urquhart, had heard gunshots but had no communication with the officers on the scene. He came to the house of a man named D.W. Shyiak at the back of the apartments and borrowed Shyiak’s rifle. He saw somebody enter Shyiak’s backyard over the fence, and he thought he heard the person say, “The coppers won’t take me alive.” He yelled at the man to stop, then fired at him with the rifle, missing. He pulled out his service revolver and shot, missing again. He fired another shot with his revolver, and this time it hit. The sniper died not long after he was taken to the hospital.

The shooter turned out to be a man named Rosaire Armand Holmes, only 27 years old. 40 minutes before Joan Stewart was shot, Holmes had gotten into a heated argument with his girlfriend, Gail Schmelzel. Eventually, she just packed up her things and left. As she was leaving, he yelled at her “The first shot is for you and the second is for me,” and shot at her, missing. She was able to run away, but he didn’t stop firing, and eventually, he hit Joan Stewart. Joan and John Hinks survived the shooting. Russell Melvin Stewart, however, did not make it. He was 69 years old.

The coroner’s jury concluded that the domestic dispute and Holmes’ excessive drinking had led to the shooting. A barely legible, error-filled note was found in his room. It read, “This is goodbye. Didn’t know anything other or way… goodbye… didn’t know any other way.” The note was signed “Ross.” Luckily, this was an isolated incident, and afterwards, mass shootings would remain unheard of in Grande Prairie.

Joseph and Stanley Snyder

This is the final stop on the tour, and the longest story. Joseph and Stanley Snyder were involved in one of the grisliest crimes to ever occur on Peace Country soil. Here’s the story of that crime.

On June 19th, 1918, at four o'clock in the morning, a man burst into the Grande Prairie detachment of the Alberta Provincial Police. The man, Dan Lough, told Constable Allen that there was trouble at the farm of his neighbour, Joseph Snyder. Dan had woken up in the middle of the night and stepped outside for some fresh air. From the Snyder place, he heard a high-pitched voice call for help multiple times. Then, a gruff lower voice said something like "I'll help you," or "I'll fix you."

He then heard a scream, a gurgling noise, and moans of agony which were suddenly cut off short. He was brave enough to go over and check out the scene, where he found the Snyder shack on fire. He immediately fled, rode his horse into town, went straight to the police, and told Constable Allen what he had seen.

So, Lough and Constable Allen traveled to the Snyder farm. There, they found the shack still aflame. As it continued to burn, Allen began his investigation. He noticed some blood by the door of the shack, then followed the dark red trail to a bloodstained log nearby. Beside the log, Allen found two pieces of timber covered in blood and human hair.

Eventually, the fire died out, and the shack itself could be investigated. At this point, the roof had collapsed, and the shack was just a pile of refuse, but upon closer examination, the charred remains of a human body were visible under the mess. As the roof was removed, another body was revealed on the other side of the shack. The corpses would be identified as Joseph Snyder and his adult nephew, Stanley. Beside Joseph's blackened hand lay a revolver. Police thus initially assumed that it was a murder-suicide. But that theory would be thrown into disarray by the discovery of another crime scene a few days later.

Within a day or two of the discovery at the Snyder farm, a man named Alexander Peebles saw some horses belonging to his neighbour, Ignace Patan, roaming around in his wheat fields. He returned the horses to the vicinity of Patan's place. A few days later, he again saw the horses on his property and once again returned them. The next morning, they were back, lying down in his crops. This time, when he came to Patan's place, he called out and was met with silence. He decided to go further than Patan's fence and approach the house itself. He examined the scene. In the yard, there stood a wagon that appeared to be packed for a trip. Supplies were scattered around the yard, like people had been in the middle of packing up the wagon but had suddenly stopped. The front door was

guarded by a dog, and Sandy dared not approach it. But the terrible smell that permeated the scene was enough to tell him that something wasn't right.

His brother Delbert was travelling to Grande Prairie that day, so Sandy told him to report the matter to the police. Later that evening, three policemen visited Sandy and asked him to take them to the Patan house. Scaring off Patan's dog with a few gunshots, the men approached the door. One officer opened it up with a skeleton key, whereupon the group was immediately overcome by the smell of rot. Walking into the bedroom, they lifted up a tarp on the bed, revealing two decomposing corpses.

They kept investigating the scene, and eventually, they found another body in the small storehouse. A fourth body was discovered in the wagon. An inquest was called, and locals were brought in to help identify the bodies.The corpses on the bed were identified as fur trappers Ignace Patan and John Wuwand, the body in the wagon as fellow trapper Charles Zimner, and the body in the storehouse as Frank Parzykhowsky, a Ruthenian minister. Patan had been cut across the throat in three different places. The other three men had been shot in the head. The revolver found at the Snyder place turned out to have belonged to Patan, and a set of his keys were also found at the Snyders, which heavily suggested that the same killer or killers had been responsible for the murders at both households. Evidence also suggested that the murders had been committed on two successive nights, since the party at Patan's had been on July 18th, and Dan Lough had heard the murder at the Snyder house on the morning of the 20th.

Now, what motive could someone have had for such a terrible act? Well, it turns out that Patan, Wuwand, and Zimner had had quite a bit of money on them, and it also turns out that this was more or less common knowledge in Grande Prairie. The three men were trappers and were preparing to travel out to Fort Saskatchewan for the season. They had withdrawn large amounts of cash from the local bank in preparation for their trip, and Zimner had just sold his land to Dan Lough, the man who had reported the fire at the Snyder place.

It seems like the men were having a party to celebrate their departure, and Parzychowski was there to see them off. Bottles of painkiller and a drink containing wood alcohol were found at the scene. Wood alcohol, as you might know, isn't the same as ethanol, the type of alcohol that gets people drunk. It's another name for *methanol*, a molecule that happens to be highly hostile to human life and which people would probably only consider drinking in the prohibition era.

Even small doses of methanol can cause you to go into a stupor, which probably made it easier for the killer to murder all four men without being overpowered.

But anyway, it seemed likely that these men had been killed by someone who knew they were carrying a lot of cash. Joseph Snyder was also rumoured to have come into a good deal of money recently. So, at least the police had a probable motive to go off of.

But unfortunately, the Albertan police force at this time was a bit ineffective. Since 1874, law enforcement in the Prairies had been overseen by the Royal North West Mounted Police, but this force struggled to keep up with their workload during WWI, as many young men who would've been on the force were off in Europe, and much of the force's resources had been diverted to monitoring "enemy aliens" (immigrants from enemy countries like Germany) and patrolling the border for hostile American Germans that might have been (it was thought) plotting an attack on the British Empire. The force was stretched thin, so the federal government decided to temporarily pull the Mounties out of the Prairies. A provincial police force, the Alberta Provincial Police or APP, was assembled to take over law enforcement, but it ran into the same problem of finding good officers when most of the would-be hires were off in Europe. So, the men sent out to Grande Prairie, along with being somewhat inexperienced, were not exactly top-shelf applicants, and their immediate reaction to the murders was pretty sloppy. After all, they more were used to hunting down moonshiners than murderers.

Since Grande Prairie was so isolated, it would've been pretty simple to establish checkpoints on the paths out of the city and question anybody leaving town, but this wasn't done. Furthermore, the two crime scenes were left unsecured for days, so anybody curious could go and wander around, or potentially tamper with evidence. The police did conduct interviews, but the investigation stalled.

Townspeople started getting frustrated with the lack of results. On July 16th, 1918, an angry editorial appeared in the *Grande Prairie Daily Herald*. It read as follows.

"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....

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 the 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."

This was more or less an open suggestion for vigilante law enforcement. A lot of locals probably felt equally frustrated. 226 women signed a petition to the Attorney General of Alberta, pleading to him that "immediate steps be taken toward the proper and adequate policing of the Grande Prairie District and Northern Alberta." On the 23rd of July, the Attorney General announced a $1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the murderer (or murderers).

People were paranoid, and rumours flew as to the perpetrator's identity. Locals locked their doors at night and kept guns at their bedside. Suspicions were often directed at immigrants from Central or Eastern Europe, who Anglo-Canadians often lumped together under the label "foreigners." During the war, animosity towards immigrants from these regions was common, as they were associated with the "Hun" enemy. But prejudices spread farther than Europe: Locals also nervously talked about an "oriental" who was seen travelling through the forest and a Mexican drifter who had spent some time in town recently.

On July 26th, the Chief Detective for the Attorney General's department, J.D. Nicholson, was sent to Grande Prairie to investigate the case. Nicholson had joined the Royal North West Mounted police in 1885 and retired in 1911 to become Chief Detective. He had helped organize the APP and became Assistant Superintendent of the force after its creation. The Superintendent himself was a man named Albert McDonnell, and he and Nicholson did not get along well, leading Nicholson to resign from the position. But upon arriving in Grande Prairie, who did Nicholson find waiting for him but McDonnell, who had been put in

charge of the investigation of the murders. McDonnell did not warm up to Nicholson: “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,” Nicholson later explained.

Nicholson briefly returned to Edmonton, and when he came back to Grande Prairie in mid-November, he found the town ravaged by the Spanish Flu. Unfortunately, a number of people of interest who could’ve given relevant information towards solving the crime perished. For instance, Dan Lough’s wife, Anna, had died. A conversation she had had with a man named F.A. Baxter soon after the murders led Nicholson to believe that Anna’s story might contradict her husband’s. But this would just be a loose end that could never be tied up.

The police force was in shambles, too. Constable Ross perished shortly after Nicholson’s return to town, Constable Allen was on leave in Spirit River with the flu, and two other officers were left bedridden by the virus. Nicholson would need to start investigating on his own. He had some help, though, in the form of undercover agents.

Throughout his investigation, like many Anglo locals, Nicholson assumed that the killer was probably a foreigner and that other foreigners could give useful information about the crime. Nicholson thought that members of the foreign community knew more about the killings than they were letting on. He thus hired three undercover agents to ingratiate themselves to local immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. One foreigner who drew Nicholson’s attention was a farmer named John Kapalka, who was a suspect in a recent incident where someone from the Kapalka farm had fired off eight shots at their neighbour, who was trying to get Kapalka’s cattle out of his field. Kapalka told William Elock, one of Nicholson’s men, that the Snyder/Patan murders were committed by no stranger. One of the men working on Kapalka’s farm, Harry Lukosky, told Elock that one of the men who had committed the murders was still in the area. Elock was convinced that Lukosky was referring to himself and had taken part in the crime. As Nicholson found out, Lukosky was a World War I veteran who was discharged due to mental health issues and diagnosed with Manic Depressive Insanity. Nicholson began to suspect that mental illness may have driven him to commit the murders. Lukosky moved to New York, though, and the loose end never got tied up. If these men did know anything, they weren’t willing to talk, even with the cash reward.

The investigation seemed to be bearing little fruit. In April 1920, a dramatic letter condemning the police effort was published in the *Edmonton Journal*.

"Six law-abiding, respectable, hard-working citizens, living in the vicinity of Grande Prairie, were on the 18th and 19th of June, 1918, brutally murdered. The murderers are of the cold-blooded, callous, dastardly type. These fiends, with blood-sucking proclivities, committed the most atrocious crimes that have ever been perpetuated in the American continent. The citizens of this country were shocked. The citizens of the American continent were shocked. Civilization was shocked… 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 properly handled." The letter was signed "A DISGUSTED CITIZEN."

The individual who penned this letter turned out to be none other than Grande Prairie police officer Patrick Sullivan, a man who admitted to being "erratic" and often intoxicated. After admitting to writing the letter, he was fired, but Sullivan continued to stir up trouble. He had attained a degree of local fame after going undercover to solve a murder case, gaining the trust of a woman named Henrietta Dougherty and obtaining a confession that she had killed her husband. His sudden popularity meant people were inclined to listen when he claimed to know who killed the six men at the Patan and Snyder farms. He said that local banker F. R. Beckham was one of the "master criminal minds" behind the killings. This really irked Nicholson, who claimed that Beckham had done nothing except "assist the police in every way possible."

But for all his certainty that Sullivan was wrong, Nicholson himself wasn't making any satisfactory progress on the case. The attorney general's office raised the reward to $5,000, but it didn't do much good. Most of the people Nicholson talked to just repeated a popular story that was floating around town: the murders had been planned by F.R. Beckham and carried out by Dan Lough.

After three weeks, the $5,000 reward had failed to attract any informants. Perhaps out of frustration, Nicholson decided to charge Dan Lough with the murders. The investigation had gone as far as it could and Dan Lough seemed the most likely suspect. Remember, Lough was the man who had reported the fire at the Snyder place. When he had entered the police office that morning, he was soaked in water up to the waist, perhaps from washing off blood. Also, the only tracks found at the Snyder Place were Lough's, and it was known that he had met the Snyders on the night of the party at Patan's place to help tend to one of their

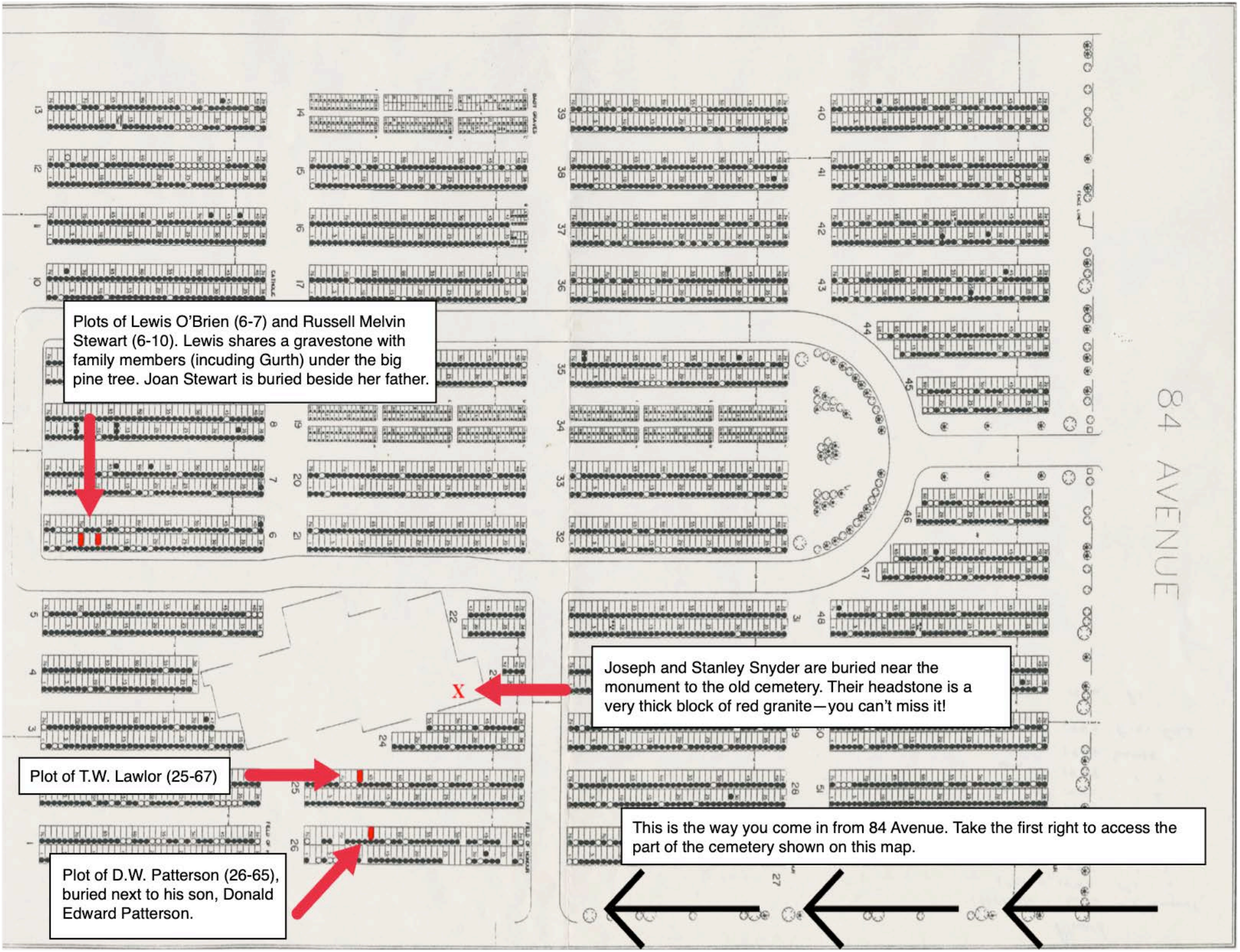
horses. Nicholson's theory was that when Lough was at the Snyder's, he told them that he was going to Patan's party; after killing the men at the party for their money, Lough must have known that he had to also kill the Snyders so he wouldn't be a suspect.

Dan Lough was thus arrested and charged with the murders of Joseph and Stanley Snyder. While he awaited his trial, his children were put into the care of a Children's Centre in Edmonton. Their mother had died and their father was accused of mass murder. You would hope that the evidence against Lough was strong enough to merit putting his kids in this position. But Nicholson himself admitted that there wasn't any evidence proving that Lough was guilty. He merely thought that the people of Grande Prairie were owed some kind of trial, and that the circumstantial evidence was strong enough to put in front of a jury.

The accusation might have been accurate, but it was based entirely on circumstantial evidence and a gut feeling. Lough's lawyer argued that the Patan's gun and keys being found at Snyder's shack, the gun beside Joseph Snyder's hand, suggested that Joseph Snyder had killed the four men, his nephew and himself. After an hour of deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. Lough was let go and ended up returning to his home state of Illinois with his children soon after.

Just two months after Dan Lough's trial, Nicholson charged Richard Knechtel with the murders. Knechtel is buried nearby in this cemetery with his wife, Rose. Before Rose Knechtel was a Knechtel, though, she was Rose Parzychowski, Frank Parzykowski's wife. Nicholson found it suspicious that Richard and Rose married each other just half a year after Frank's murder. Rose had also found hidden gold at the crime scene that the police hadn't uncovered in their search. Nicholson also heard that Knechtel had complained about Patan to a neighbour and had said that he would someday "fix him." Nicholson again wasn't able to produce evidence, however, and the case was dismissed by the judge.

Knechtel was the last arrest ever made for the 1918 murders. The investigation had come up completely dry, and the killer left no conclusive evidence behind at either scene. Plenty of people seemed like they could've been involved, but absolutely nothing could be proven. Locals learned to accept the fact that whoever was responsible for the crime, they could still be out there.


Plots of Lewis O'Brien (6-7) and Russell Melvin Stewart (6-10). Lewis shares a gravestone with family members (incuding Gurth) under the big pine tree. Joan Stewart is buried beside her father.
Joseph and Stanley Snyder are buried near the monument to the old cemetery. Their headstone is a very thick block of red granite—you can't miss it!
X
Plot of T.W. Lawlor (25-67)
Plot of D.W. Patterson (26-65), buried next to his son, Donald Edward Patterson.
This is the way you come in from 84 Avenue. Take the first right to access the part of the cemetery shown on this map.
84 AVENUE