

# 50 Years of Fingerprinting

An anniversary of significance in police circles will be marked next month by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This is a brief history of a science which was introduced into Canadian law enforcement largely through the perseverance and far-sightedness of one man.

By THE EDITOR

FIFTY-SEVEN years ago the world was humming a catchy tune "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis." And there were many meetings in that Missouri city while it was the centre of the 1904 World's Fair. Two of them were to have a profound effect on the future of law enforcement in North America and Canada in particular.

In chronological order they were the convention of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the meeting of two men who attended their gatherings—Detective J. K. Ferrier of New Scotland Yard and Cst. Edward Foster of the Dominion Police.

When Foster returned to Canada some months later he was obsessed by two ideas—there was a need in Canada for an organization of Police Chiefs and the Dominion should adopt the fingerprint system of identification for criminal investigation. He pressed for the establishment of both and the result today is the Chief Constables' Association of Canada and the national fingerprint bureau at RCMP Headquarters, Ottawa. The oldest central bureau in North America and one of the first in the world, the RCMP bureau is this year celebrating 50 years of "business".

It is no exaggeration to say that fingerprinting in Canada and its invaluable contribution of law enforcement in this country owes its beginning solely to Edward Foster—and perhaps a little to chance. Foster, then a constable in the Dominion Police, had been detailed to guard a Canadian display of gold at the World's Fair. Ferrier, the Scotland Yard

man, was assigned a similar mission at the Fair guarding the British Government display of Crown Jewels. The latter was also a fingerprint expert and he had been selected to present a paper on fingerprinting at the meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Chance—or fate—decreed that Foster should attend that meeting and he was fascinated by the possibilities of the relatively new police science.

There are probably two other people who bear some influence on this part of Canada's story of fingerprinting. One was Mrs. M. E. Holland, wife of the editor of the publication "The Detective"; the other was the Commissioner of Police for Canada, Sir Percy Sherwood. Mrs. Holland, a detective in her own right, was attending the St. Louis convention of the IACP with her husband. She too became fascinated with fingerprinting and arranged for Detective Ferrier to tutor her in the science. (In later years Mrs. Holland became an internationally-recognized authority on the subject.) She encouraged Foster to study fingerprinting at the same time, while he and Ferrier were stationed at the Fair, and in fact arranged a meeting for him with the English policeman. Sir Percy Sherwood's influence was less direct, but no less important. Foster's enthusiasm for the new police science was transmitted by correspondence to his Chief and he lent encouragement and support to the study. Later, he pressed for the establishment of a national bureau with zeal and persistence, despite a good deal of opposition and official apathy. When Sir Percy retired some years afterward, Inspector Foster wrote: