

Watford Guide-Advocate

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WATFORD GIRL MURDERED BY REJECTED LOVER

MISS GERALDINE DURSTAN DIES FROM BULLETS FIRED BY CLARENCE TOPPING

Her Chum, Miss Viola McNaughton, Accidentally Shot Through Breast by Constable When Making Arrest. She is Not Yet Out of Danger.

Clarence Topping Will Be Formally Accused in London Police Court Friday of Killing His Sweetheart.

Not for many years have the people of Watford and vicinity received such a distressing shock as they experienced during the past week, caused by the murder in London of Miss Geraldine Durstan, the 18-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Durstan of Watford, by Clarence Topping, aged 23, a rejected suitor, and the accidental shooting of her chum, Miss Viola McNaughton, the 19 year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert McNaughton, also a resident of town.

The first known of the terrible tragedy was the receipt of a message Friday morning by Mr. McNaughton, stating that his daughter and Geraldine Durstan had both been shot that morning. The parents and other relatives of the victims immediately left for London, together with their pastor, Rev. T. D. Rayner.

The following report of the sad affair, shorn of many surmises, is taken largely from the London Free Press:

History of the Crime
Two girls were wounded, one fatally, in a shooting affray at the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. W. George Cook, 318 York street, early Friday. Geraldine Durstan, 18, of Watford, received two bullets in the abdomen from a gun in the hands of Clarence Topping, 23, her sweetheart, and Viola McNaughton, 19, her chum, was pierced through the chest with a bullet from the revolver of Police Constable Walter Harpur, who was on the scene at the time and whose shot was directed toward the would-be murderer.

Both girls were rushed to Victoria Hospital. The young ladies were given stimulants to overcome the shock as soon as they were admitted to the hospital.

The shooting took place at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Cook, where both girls boarded, soon after 7 o'clock Friday morning. Topping, who had left the house in a fit of jealous rage five hours previously after his suit had been rejected by Miss Durstan, with whom he is said to have kept company for several months, returned as Mr. and Mrs. Cook and the two girls were about to sit down to their morning meal. He said he wanted Miss Durstan to go with him to her home in Watford to talk over the desired match with her parents.

Twice Cook advised Topping to leave the house in peace and to forget his love affair with Miss Durstan. When he refused the first time, Cook phoned for the police and Constable Harpur responded to the summons. Loathe to see Topping placed under arrest, Cook gave him another chance to leave peacefully, but his advice again went unheeded by the persistent wooer.

Several shots rang out in the bedroom occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Cook, where the girls had taken refuge after Topping appeared. The desperate lover had broken through the door and when the police officer rushed in from the kitchen, followed closely by Cook, he saw Topping kneeling over the girl's prostrate form with a smoking revolver in his hand. At the sight of the officer Topping is said to have raised his weapon. Constable Harpur, however, had pulled his gun, and, aiming it at Topping, fired.

Miss McNaughton Appears
Just at that moment Miss McNaughton appeared from behind the bedroom door and the bullet from the officer's revolver is the one that is believed to have entered her chest. Five shots in all are believed to have been fired, one lodging in the wall of the bedroom. It was afterward extracted and held as evidence.

After the shooting, Topping threw the gun on the bed and was placed under arrest without resistance by Constable Harpur. In the meantime reinforcements were summoned from headquarters and he was removed to the Carling street police station. In police court, Magistrate Graydon remanded Topping for a week pending the outcome of the wounds.

Both girls were rushed to Victoria Hospital in the police ambulance. Dr. Homer Black, who had been called, rendered first aid on the way and adrenalin was immediately administered to the heart of Miss McNaughton in the hopes of reviving her from the shock. Stimulants were also given to Miss Durstan and proved beneficial.

Unrequited love and jealousy were the motives for the crime. Though at one time, the girl is said to have shared his affections. Since coming to London last May Miss Durstan is said to have become enamored of another suitor. Topping's solicitations have been repulsed with increasing emphasis and in his desperation he is said to have told the girl that "if you don't marry me, you won't marry anyone else."

An Accident
"He didn't mean to do it," is the statement Miss McNaughton is said by Rev. T. DeCourcy Rayner to have been made by the girl to her mother, who with other members of the family, arrived at Victoria Hospital Friday. The statement referred to the shot she received during the melee.

Rev. Mr. Rayner, pastor of the Congregational Church of Watford, which both Miss McNaughton and Geraldine Durstan, the second victim attended, came by automobile, together with Mr. and Mrs. Robert McNaughton, parents of the former; Mr. and Mrs. Cecil McNaughton, brother and sister-in-law, and Miss Mabel McNaughton, a sister.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Durstan, parents of the second girl, also arrived from Watford.

According to the story Miss McNaughton told her mother at the hospital. Topping entered the bedroom at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Cook, gun in hand. She claims she extended her arm to save her chum and was first shot through the tip of one of her fingers. Topping then emptied two other chambers of his revolver into the body of Miss Durstan. Miss McNaughton said that she was shot by the police constable when she emerged from behind the bedroom door. Topping is said to have thrown his gun on to the bed after completing the purpose of his errand. In all five shots were fired, according to the young lady's story.

The girls were employed at the Holeproof Hosiery Company and had boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Cook since the latter's marriage less than two months ago. Both young ladies had previously been employed at the Strathroy General Hospital, where Miss Durstan first made the acquaintance of Topping. They were to be married before Christmas, according to a statement she is said to have made to Mr. and Mrs. George Topping, of Strathroy, father and mother of the would-be murderer.

Topping has also worked in London for a considerable length of time. He boarded at 149 Bathurst street, and until recently was employed by the William Leff & Co. Lately he has worked as a bricklayer.

He is described as hard working and industrious. Quiet in his habits, he sought advice from no one, but kept his own counsel. He did not return to his boarding house during the night and must have spent the hours of darkness in deep contemplation.

(Continued on Page Five)

WATFORD NOMINATIONS

Reeve, Council, Board of Education and Utilities Member Elected by Acclamation

The first nomination meeting held under the change of date was held in the Music Hall, Monday evening, a fair-sized number of ratepayers being present. Town Clerk W. S. Fuller presided at the nomination meeting and was also elected to preside at the speech-making meeting afterward. The nominations were few, and it looked at one time as if there would not be sufficient names put forward to fill the various offices. There seemed to be little interest taken in the proceedings and during the evening not a single mention was made of the financial statement. Following are the nominations:—

For Reeve
W. G. Connolly by W. H. Shrapnell and J. McKeercher.

W. E. Fitzgerald by W. G. Connolly and C. H. Hollingsworth.

For Councillor
Philip E. Fuller by W. G. Connolly and C. H. Hollingsworth.

John W. Doar by J. Fowler and W. E. Fitzgerald.

Richard Williamson by W. E. Fitzgerald and J. Temple.

Russel McCormick by R. Williamson and J. W. McLaren.

Henry Hollingsworth by J. W. McLaren and R. Williamson.

Frank Lovell by W. E. Fitzgerald and Jacob Temple.

Jacob D. Brown by S. H. Lucas and F. H. Just.

For Board of Education
J. W. McLaren by John McKeercher and W. H. Shrapnell.

W. E. Fitzgerald by C. W. Vail and J. Fowler.

C. W. Vail by W. E. Fitzgerald and Alex D. Elliot by J. McKeercher and A. D. Hone.

Public Utilities Commission
Peter J. Dodds by Ray Morningstar and J. McKeercher.

The Reeve was the first speaker. He thanked the electors for the confidence they had placed in him and had tried his best to do his duty. The change of date of holding the nominations had been placed earlier in order to get away from the holiday season. This year's council was a very agreeable one—if any had made a mistake all had—not a single councillor voting against any resolution. Taxes this year were higher than last year yet it cost \$1,000 less to carry on the affairs of the village. The reason of the increased rate was underestimation last year. The pavement had not yet cost the village one cent, although we received \$840 less from the county this year than last. So far we have received 125% of the good roads county rate and hope to receive the same in future. Have received enough to pay the debentures, and hope next year to receive a larger amount from the county. Speaking of the Soldiers' Memorial he said although the citizens voted on a bylaw to spend \$2000 on this, he thought it would be wise to make haste slowly—the spirit of the people would not change in ten years time and as the \$2000 had to be paid in one year the payment at present would be a burden to the people, and the delaying would not cool the ardor of the ratepayers in this matter. He was trying to get unity of feeling and purpose and felt there was no use rushing into the matter this year. He thanked the ratepayers for their former confidence and asked for their further support.

H. Hollingsworth endorsed what the Reeve had said. He did not spend any money foolishly and was a candidate for re-election.

J. R. McCormick thanked the electors for past support. He had spent \$235 on gravel and repairing sidewalks.

John Doar was not present and P. Fuller was unable to attend on account of illness.

R. Williamson said after listening to the Reeve he thought it would be folly to hold an election. It was easier to criticize than do actual work, and the former should be cut out. He was not a candidate.

Frank Lovell was not a candidate. J. D. Brown thanked his mover and seconder, and said he would not like to interrupt the harmony of the council by being elected. He had no desire to take office again.

W. E. Fitzgerald instead of finding fault with council would suggest the formation of a Board of Trade to

work in conjunction with them. He suggested changing the name of Watford to Androok on account of letters going astray in the mails and advocated the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the village and also the formation of a citizen's band. Regarding a new postoffice he thought the council and citizens should take the matter up with the government. He was not a candidate for Reeve. He said the Board of Education had spent considerable money but most of it could not be helped. He advocated the reducing of the staff of teachers in the public school as there were only 129 pupils attending.

J. W. McLaren said that he had been on the School Board since 1901 and had decided to drop out at the end of the term. He was opposed to the cutting off of one teacher on the public school staff and the doing so would only save about \$700. He did not think it a good move. He thanked electors for past support but had decided to retire.

C. W. Vail had no speech to make. W. L. Millar spoke for the Utilities Commission, said Waterworks had to call on council for \$150 this year but next year he thought it would be self sustaining. The department had now 55 customers. He said a new main would have to be laid along Front street to secure reduction of rates from the fire underwriters. Regarding Hydro it was in a flourishing condition, but urged users to be easy on power Saturday nights as the peak load was recorded from the watts used that night.

This brought the meeting to a close with the result that the present Reeve, council and other officers were elected by acclamation, the only change in the personnel being that Alex Elliot takes the place of J. W. McLaren on the Board of Education.

WATFORD OLD BOYS ORGANIZE IN TORONTO

Reunion Proves a Grand Success and Will be made an Annual Affair

Over 170 Watford old boys and girls gathered at a reunion on Friday at Hunt's Restaurant, Bloor and Yonge streets, Toronto, to pay their respects to Watford in which the greater number of them were born and in which others had spent many years of their lives.

T. G. Mitchell, J. W. McLaren and F. Luckham went from Watford to attend the meeting and speak in glowing terms of the enthusiasm shown by all who attended the meeting, the event in every way far exceeding the expectations of the promoters, in the number attending also in satisfaction at the outcome, all of which speaks favorably for the success of future gatherings. Many people who had not seen each other for years were present at the gathering and all showed great interest.

Mr. A. T. Thom was chairman of the meeting. Apart from expressions of a formal welcome, making special mention of those who had specially come to Toronto from the old town, he made mention of the part Watford had played in the war, and on behalf of those present expressed a desire to pay tribute to those who had paid the supreme sacrifice, as well as greetings and remembrance to those bereft.

The speeches of the evening were largely reminiscent, but that of Mr. W. B. Race, Superintendent of the Institute for the Blind at Brantford, was especially interesting inasmuch as he so well and vividly recalled old days and paid respect to old-time citizens, many of whom have since passed away. Mr. Race told how he went to Watford at the age of 23 to assume the Principalship of Watford High School, and refused a house at \$5 a month rental because he was offered one at \$4, and how he had to have water brought in buckets from the well because of the conviction in the mind of the owner that a pump spoiled the taste of the water, the old-timers nodded to each other and smiled, because those were days of careful spending and strong prejudices. His review of Main street and his tribute to the business men of Watford met hearty applause from his listeners.

Mr. Race was followed by Hon. I. B. Lucas, Rev. Robert Hadow, editor of the Presbyterianian, and Dr. U. M. Stanley of Brantford—men who had spent their youth and young manhood in Watford. It was a reunion of old friends and neighbors—an evening when old men recalled the stirring days of their youth and younger men met old schoolmates for the first time in decades.

It was felt that this should be an annual gathering, and the following officers were appointed to complete the necessary arrangements: Hon. Presidents, Hon. I. B. Lucas and Rev. Robert Hadow; President, A. T. Thom; Vice-President, R. V. Collier; Second Vice-President, James Williamson; Secretary, David White; Treasurer, Arnold Cook. Executive Committee—George McIntosh, Will Thom, Jas. Ramsay, Clarence Cook, David Roche, Sam Mitchell, Dr. H. Clutterbuck.

Appreciation was expressed of the musical numbers, contributed by Frank Hillis, who sang "The Old Pioneer," to the delight of all, and Florence and Neil O'Neil.

The meeting was also of the opinion that the time was now opportune when the citizens of Watford should give due consideration to an Old Boys' Re-Union within the near future, promising that a large delegation would go forward from Toronto. It is the feeling that the success of a re-union would be greatly assured if the larger centres throughout the Dominion would follow in the footsteps of the Toronto citizens by way of the formation of "Old Boys' Committees," with which the local committee in Watford could cooperate.

With over 200 former Watford people in Toronto and thousands of others scattered throughout the Dominion, all anxious to come back to the old town and visit the scenes of their youth, it is almost imperative upon the people in Watford to get together and make preliminary arrangements for an Old Boys and Girls Reunion here some time next year.

BORN

In Brooke, on Nov. 25th, to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Peasley, a son—Charles Frederick.

In Warwick, on Saturday, Nov. 17th, 1923, to Mr. and Mrs. David Logan, a daughter.

In Warwick, on Wednesday, Nov. 14th, to Mr. and Mrs. Stacey Ferguson, a daughter.

MARRIED

At the Methodist parsonage, Warwick, on Saturday, Nov. 17th, by the Rev. R. Johnson, Stella, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Marriot, 6th line of Plympton, to Mr. Myers Sommerville, Sarnia.

DIED

At Detroit, Mich., on Nov. 20th, Nelson T. Chambers, formerly of Watford, in his 37th year.

In Victoria Hospital, London, on Saturday, Nov. 24th, 1923, Geraldine Bessie Durstan, beloved daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Durstan, in her 19th year.

In Watford, on Wednesday, Nov. 28, 1923, F. J. Hughes, in his 80th year.

IN MEMORIAM

In Loving Memory of Catherine Wiley Morris, who passed away 6 years ago today.

We have only one mother to miss. When she has departed from this, So love and revere that mother while here,

Sometime you won't know that dear kiss.

—Annie Kearney, 1923



W. G. CONNOLLY
Elected Reeve of Watford for 1924
By Acclamation.

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