

Mounties Deduce Murder from Single Bobbing Clue

On a chill July day at the turn of the Century, Constable A. J. Cudlip standing on the bank of the Yukon saw bobbing in midstream what he later described as a "nondescript blob."

Constable Cudlip was part of the Mounted Police detachment which preserved peace in the gold rush — two superintendents, eight inspectors, two assistant surgeons and 254 men.

To Cudlip a bobbing blob was more than that. There had been five murders in the Territory in the previous year, so he wired his suspicions to Dawson City, thirty miles downstream.

Cudlip and his colleagues were anticipating Sherlock Holmes by several years.

Inspector D. M. Howard and Corporal Piper responded in a canoe, paddling up from Dawson against the current. When they got there, the blob was gone. So they turned around and paddled back downstream, keeping an eye on the banks and back water coves. They found the blob. It turned out to be the black-haired head of an almost naked man. He was wearing a single boot and his trousers were trailing from his ankle. Probing with a willow wand Inspector Howard found a hole that went clear through his head. He deduced foul play. In the trousers pocket he found three keys and a metal tag on a ring. The tag bore the inscription, "Bouthilette, E. Broughton, Beauce, P.Q."

Howard sent a wire to the town of Broughton, in the County of Beauce, in the Province of Quebec, 3,000 miles away. Back came a reply. Leon Bouthilette had left Beauce a month before headed for the Yukon gold fields. He had sent one letter home and in it had announced his intention of going down the river (the Yukon flows north) with two new friends, Guy Beaudoin and Alphonse Constantin.

The Inspector checked around and found that Bouthilette and his companions had bought a boat at Whitehorse. They were accompanied by two other gents known as LaForest and La doceur. The boat bore the identification number, 3744.

The boat and the five men had been sighted at the junction of the Yukon and Stewart Rivers. But it had never made it to Dawson City. The Mounties searched the side streams and found the craft abandoned at Circle City, Alaska. On the last day in July, Constable Graham found Guy Beaudoin dead on a sand bar, his head blasted by a shotgun shell.

Constable J. H. Burns slipped into Dawson City in plain clothes and began snooping around. He found that two bad actors named Victor Fournier and Ed Labelle had gone to Whitehorse in June. They had been using fictitious names.

On August 8 Fournier was spotted in Dawson and arrested. He was identified by the boat seller in Whitehorse as one of the five men who'd gone north, though the boat seller wasn't sure if he was "LaForest or La doceur." It didn't matter. Meanwhile, Detective Welsh went to Skagway across the border in the U.S. where he picked up the trail of Labelle. He followed him to Wadsworth, Nevada, where he took him in custody with the help of the local police. Labelle confessed that he and Fournier had murdered the other three men for \$140 and a gold watch.

Fournier and Labelle were hanged on January 20, less than six months after Constable Cudlip had noticed the object bobbing in the stream. Constantin's body was found two years later, but by that time Fournier and Labelle were corpses themselves and part of the legend that the Royal Northwest Mounted Police always get their man.



"He deduced foul play..."