

To The Reader

This brochure is an introduction to 15 citizens interred at Brookside Cemetery, each with a connection to the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike.

Through these individuals, the story of the General Strike – the seminal event in Canadian labour history – comes to life.

The persons portrayed are a diverse group. They include strike leaders, left-wing politicians, feminists, activists and ordinary workers. Among them were the two men who were shot on Bloody Saturday – June 21, 1919.

The map of the cemetery, included here, guides visitors to the general location of the tour's graves. All sections in the cemetery are clearly marked. Visiting the gravesites in the order they appear here requires about a two-hour stroll through the cemetery.

All graves are marked and numbered with small cement cones. Some cones are clearly visible, while others have been grown over. Having the grave numbers plus the photos of those gravesites with gravestones or markers will assist in locating each grave. (Note: Three individuals, Fred Dixon, Jessie Kirk and Matilda Russell, do not have any form of marker.)

Please do not lean on the gravestones or disturb any flowers or other commemorative objects.

Guided tours are conducted in the summer months. There is no charge, but pre-registration is required. A minimum of five persons and a maximum of 20 are tour guidelines. Please contact Paul Moist to arrange a tour at paulmoist@gmail.com.

The *Brookside Cemetery Tour* was undertaken as a centenary project in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the General Strike.

The history of Winnipeg workers is important, particularly the history of the General Strike and its aftermath. It helps us understand our origins, and perhaps the path forward for workers today.

Enjoy the *1919 Winnipeg General Strike Brookside Cemetery Tour*.



Crowd tipping streetcar on “Bloody Saturday,” June 21, 1919

INTRODUCTION TO THE WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE

MAY AND JUNE OF 1919 saw the largest General Strike in Canadian history play out over six weeks in Winnipeg. The eyes of the nation were on what was then Canada’s third-largest city, with about 175,000 citizens. With an estimated 35,000 workers and about half of the households in Winnipeg on strike, the city was at a standstill. It is significant that over one-third of those who joined the strike were not members of any union. They struck in support of the city’s trade union movement which had voted overwhelmingly for a General Strike in support of building and metal trades workers. They were fighting for union recognition and industry-wide collective bargaining rights.

The backdrop to the General Strike was multifaceted:

- Wages had declined significantly during the high inflation years of the Great War (1914–1918).
- Unemployment was on the rise in 1919 as thousands of soldiers returned from Europe. Many returning veterans supported the strikers and their aims.



- The pent-up demands of workers were not unique to Winnipeg. It is estimated that one in five workers in North America walked picket lines from 1917–1919. In February 1919, for example, a five-day General Strike of 60,000 workers took place in Seattle, Washington.
- A strike of four Winnipeg civic unions received support from the Trades and Labor Council in the spring of 1918. A smaller-scale General Strike occurred, and the civic workers achieved their goal of union recognition and binding collective agreements. The General Strike was coming to be recognized as a valuable strategy for labour, especially in western Canada.
- The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–1919 caused an estimated 50 million deaths worldwide, including 1,200 in Winnipeg. Here, the crisis underscored the poor housing conditions and lack of basic domestic sanitation in most working-class neighbourhoods.
- Western Canadian trade unionists met in Calgary in March 1919 and adopted an assertive agenda that included demands for a six-hour workday and industrial unionism. This would be achieved through the organization of all workers within the One Big Union (OBU).

All the above conditions combined to create widespread public support for increased trade union rights to achieve a better standard of living for all workers and their families.

The General Strike began on May 15, 1919. Workers were urged to stay home and to keep things peaceful. Information was shared through a daily strike bulletin and by speakers at Victoria Park and other civic parks.

Winnipeg's conservative business leadership felt threatened by the strike. They urged building and metal trades owners to refuse to negotiate until the strike was called off and predicted it would collapse in a week. The strike did not collapse but grew as a peaceful protest over the first four weeks. The city's legal and business community formed the so-called Citizens' Committee of 1000. They claimed their goal was to protect the "established order." It was a secretive group of perhaps 50 businessmen.

The Citizens' Committee claimed that radical labour leaders were using the General Strike to mount a Bolshevik uprising intended to overthrow

the state. They took control of managing the response to the strike and assumed powers usually reserved for elected municipal, provincial and federal government officials. The city's police force was fired, and hundreds of "Special Constables" were sworn in, paid inflated wages and armed with clubs. The federal government amended the Immigration Act to enable the deportation of any citizen not born in Canada who was found guilty of committing sedition against the state.

Strike leaders were arrested on the night of June 16–17, 1919. The provincial government turned over prosecution rights to the Citizens' Committee. City Council banned all parades, marches and open-air gatherings in order to "keep the peace." On June 21st, 1919, despite this order, thousands of returned soldiers lined up on Main Street near City Hall for a silent parade. Men, women, and children gathered to watch. Meanwhile, Mounted Police and members of the military assembled at Portage and Main, near the headquarters of the Citizens' Committee. Before the parade could begin, a streetcar driven by a strike breaker was driven from north Main into the crowd. When men and boys attacked the streetcar and attempted to push it off its tracks, members of the military and Mounties on horseback charged into the crowd. Two workers (the first two individuals on this walking tour) were shot. One died instantly, the other two days later. Hundreds were injured and, once the streets were cleared, the military patrolled the streets of Winnipeg with armoured cars and mounted machine guns. The day would come to be known as Bloody Saturday.

The Central Strike Committee met to consider the situation. Strike leadership had been sidelined. Workers' lines of communication had been broken, and families were suffering after six weeks without pay. If the strike continued, further state violence was certain. They decided to end the strike as of 11 am, June 26, 1919.

The General Strike has been studied and debated for a century. Although it meant significant losses for workers of the day, labour's demands retained widespread public support.



BROOKSIDE CEMETERY

THE CITY OF WINNIPEG was incorporated in 1873. On May 9, 1877, the City purchased 160 acres from Thomas Howard at a cost of \$25 per acre – a \$4,000 outlay – to establish a city cemetery. The site was 3.5 miles from the settled part of Winnipeg and was not much more than a patch of bald prairie. On September 8, 1878, the city’s Cemetery Committee recommended the name Brookside. The first recorded burial was that of an infant identified as “son of George Smith,” who died October 6, 1878.

Brookside was expensive to maintain and hard to reach in the early years. In 1896, responsibility for the cemetery was transferred to the Park Board, which had been formed in 1893. Under the leadership of George Champion, Superintendent of Parks for 26 years, Brookside began to flourish in terms of tree planting and overall beautification. (Champion also led the formation and development of flagship civic amenities such as Assiniboine Park and Kildonan Park.)

In 1929, City Council passed a by-law establishing a perpetual care fund to ensure ongoing maintenance of the cemetery. Around this time, a Sunday morning bus service was started to provide access to the cemetery. At the end of 2018, the now 200-acre cemetery had 130,000 interments. The park-like setting is maintained to a high standard by civic staff, who also care for the Transcona and St. Vital cemeteries.



*Detail from “Mike and Steve: Я знаю/Я не знаю – I know/I do not know” (2019)
by Michael Boss from “REVOLTING!” an exhibition by the Frost Shield Kerfuffle
Collective, The Edge Gallery, Winnipeg, August 2019*

STEVE SZCZERBANOWICZ

— SECTION 80 (0567) —



STEVE SZCZERBANOWICZ died on June 23, 1919, one of two known casualties from the events of Bloody Saturday (June 21, 1919). Not much is known about him.

Mary Jordan's book, *Survival: Labour's Trials and Tribulations in Canada*, states that he was "...from East Selkirk, MB, was shot in both legs, he died in hospital of gangrene..." two days after the events of Bloody Saturday.

In 2015, a *Winnipeg Free Press* article outlined how two Winnipeggers, Derek Black (Vice-President of the Mayworks Festival of Labour) and Mitch Podolak (founder of the Winnipeg Folk Festival) held two fundraising concerts and collected enough money to install a gravestone in Szczербanowicz's previously unmarked grave. The stone was dedicated on June 20, 2015.

The caption on the gravestone reads:

Steve SZCZERBANOWICZ

Died June 23, 1919

Here lies Steve Szczербanowicz, a working class
Ukrainian immigrant who by fate or bad luck
was one of the two unarmed workers who lost
their lives during the Winnipeg General Strike.

He was a victim of the North West Mounted Police
who on "Bloody Saturday," June 21st, 1919, charged
into the crowd firing their pistols. This memorial
also commemorates the many workers who were
injured, arrested or deported during the six-week
strike and its aftermath.

Each spring, Mayworks holds a brief ceremony at the gravesites of Szczербanowicz and Mike Sokolowski.



Detail from Winnipeg General Strike mural by Tom Andrich installed at 436 Main St (2006) destroyed in storm (2012)

MIKE SOKOLOWSKI

— SECTION 45 (450) —



MIKE SOKOLOWSKI died instantly of a gunshot wound on Bloody Saturday, June 21, 1919, on Main Street near City Hall. His was one of two deaths attributed to the events of that fateful day.

DC, Masters in *The Winnipeg General Strike* said:

(The Mounties) rounded City Hall and slowed to a walk at the corner of Market and Main Streets...they drove into the crowd which was surging around a street car beleaguered and on fire in front of the City Hall.....the Mounties fired their second volley and Mike Sokolowski, who stood in front of the Manitoba Hotel, was shot in the heart and killed instantly.

Jack Bumsted's 1994 book, *The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919*, refers

to Sokolowski as a tinsmith who resided at the Balmoral Apartments, 540 Balmoral, and was married with three children. Bumsted cites the *Manitoba Free Press* claim that Sokolowski was one of the more active “missile throwers” in the crowd that day. The Tuesday, June 24th, 1919 newspaper reported that he lived at 552 Henry Avenue; was a native of Galicia; had left a wife and two children there; and then came to Canada, remarried and had three more children.

The *Free Press* also reported that Sokolowski was found to be in possession of a City Health Department constable badge but that he was not an employee and the City did not know how he came to have the badge. Finally, they reported he had worked only intermittently and was receiving assistance from the Associated Charities.

On July 2, 1919, a coroner’s jury concluded that Sokolowski’s death was the “result of a bullet wound through the heart by persons unknown.” Nothing else is known about Sokolowski. He was buried in an unmarked grave until June 20, 2003, when local playwright Danny Schur (*Strike! The Musical and Stand! The Motion Picture*) raised money and, assisted by Brunet Monuments, erected a marker that reads:

Mike SOKOLOWSKI “The Forgotten Immigrant”

Died June 21st, 1919 at the approx age of 40

Killed in the Winnipeg General Strike

The Winnipeg General Strike was one of the watershed events of 20th century Canadian history.

The strike lasted for six weeks but divided the

City along ethnic and class lines for decades

thereafter. While today viewed as a struggle

for better wages and collective bargaining

the strike had an anti-immigrant undercurrent

and culminated in riot and bloodshed.

Bloody Saturday’s dead were dismissed as

enemy aliens and Bolshevik Revolutionaries.

Mayworks Chair Derek Black summed up Sokolowski and the other worker killed during the General Strike, Steve Szczurbanowicz, when he said:

Perhaps in some respects that’s why these guys wound up in unmarked graves – because of their ethnicity. It’s almost as if in some ways they were disposable and didn’t really matter.

JACOB PENNER

— SECTION 26 (0296) —



BORN IN RUSSIA IN 1880, Jacob Penner immigrated to Canada in 1904. A lifelong socialist and member of the Communist Party of Canada, he served on Winnipeg City Council between 1934 and 1962.

He was not a major figure during the General Strike, but he was a participant and served on the Defense Committee which succeeded the General Strike Committee. Its principal role was to raise money to defend the jailed strike leaders, and they succeeded in raising \$60,000 (about \$800,000 in 2019 dollars). He was a member of the Bakery Workers Union in 1919 and was on strike for the full six weeks of the General Strike.

Penner served on City Council for almost three consecutive decades, except when he was incarcerated in the Second World War. He regularly topped the polls in Ward 3, in Winnipeg's North End. The consistent election of left-wing politicians since 1919 was a major legacy of the General Strike.

Upon election in 1934, Penner promptly left his \$25/week co-op job and assumed full-time duties as an elected alderman (a part-time job that paid \$30/month). His record of service to the poor and marginalized in the North End was exemplary. He stood up for organized labour and for all workers, regularly introducing motions on the floor of Council, such as:

- 1934: Condemning sweat shop conditions in the packing house industry
- 1935: Calling for a federal Unemployment Insurance system
- 1935: Calling for restoration of the 10% civic wage rollback of 1933
- 1943: Calling for Old Age Pension and National Medicare
- 1944: Calling for a National Housing Act
- 1952: Calling for expansion of Public Hydro
- 1957: Calling for a public natural gas system
- 1959: Calling for a North End hospital



Penner's electoral success was part of the political legacy of 1919. The left did not have a majority on Council during his years there, but they had a strong, steady, progressive voice.

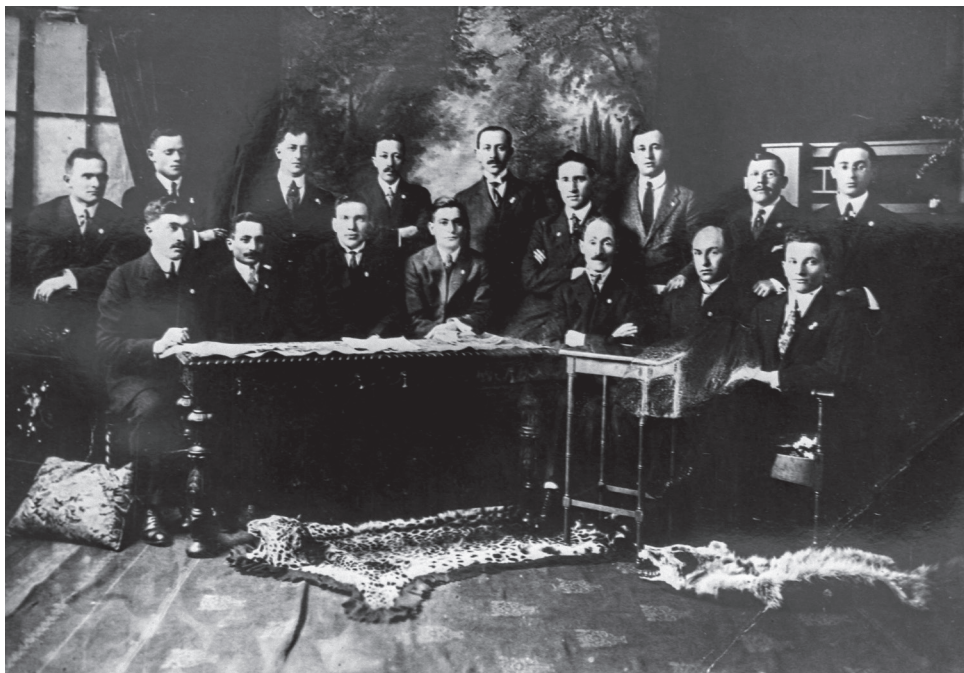
Author Stefan Epp-Koop cites a 1934 decision by Penner to remain seated while City Council stood to honour the memory of a recently deceased department head. He said, "If a working man meets his death on the City's streets in an accident we do not rise. Does this council not think it is worthwhile to respect the memory of working people?"

His son, Norman Penner wrote *Winnipeg 1919, a Definitive History of the General Strike*. Another son, Roland, served as Attorney General in the Howard Pawley NDP government (1981–1988) and as Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Manitoba.

The inscription on his gravestone includes the phrase, "*For he had a glowing dream*" taken from the chorus of *The Commonwealth of Toil*.

*But we have a glowing dream of how fair this world would seem
when each man can live his life secure and free when the earth is
owned by labor and there's joy and peace for all in the Commonwealth
of toil that is to be.*

Jacob Penner, standing fourth from left, with Liberty Temple Executive Committee, Winnipeg, 1917





Jacob and Rose Penner

RACHEL (ROSE) PENNER

— SECTION 26 (0296) —



RACHEL (ROSE) SHAPACK was born in Odessa, Russia, in 1885. She was a candy factory worker in Odessa.

In 1905, she participated in the Russian General Strike of that year, joining thousands of workers who went to the Odessa Docks to express solidarity with the Potemkin sailors.

During this period of her life she was referred to as a “fiery, radical Jewish factory girl.”

She immigrated to Winnipeg in 1907 and met Jacob Penner at a 1908 public lecture by noted anarchist Emma Goldman (“Red Emma”) sponsored by the Winnipeg Radical Society.

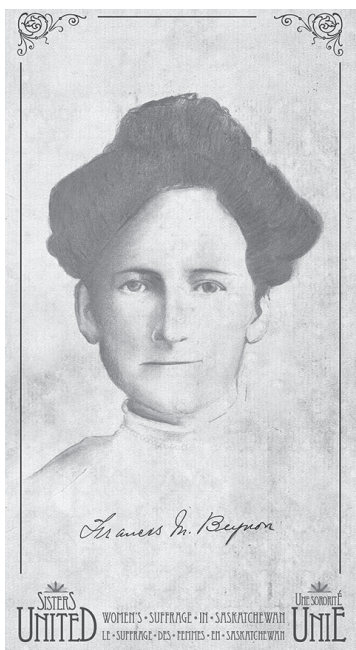
They united in a “form of marriage” in 1912, and were officially wed in a ceremony presided over by General Strike leader, Rev William Ivens, on January 9, 1930.

Rose was active in the Winnipeg Jewish Dramatic Club and was a member of the Winnipeg Federenko Defense Committee. In 1940, she ran unsuccessfully for school trustee in Ward 3.

She was a lifelong socialist. She died in 1970 at age 85 years. The inscription under her name on her gravestone reads, “She shared his glowing dream.”

FRANCES MARION BEYNON

— SECTION 24 (2066) —



FRANCES (later spelled **Francis**) **MARION BEYNON** was not a participant in the General Strike.

She was a journalist, author, feminist, pacifist and social justice activist. She lived in Winnipeg from 1908 to 1917 and was a key player in the suffragist movement that saw Manitoba become the first province to extend the vote to some women in 1916.

As an executive member of the Political Equality League in 1916, Beynon was one of eight women invited to sit on the floor of the Manitoba Legislature when the bill was passed on January 28, 1916.

The important role women played in the General Strike has not been adequately recounted. Beynon was but one of many dynamic women in Winnipeg who questioned the established order.

She rests at Brookside and her very active life and pursuit of equality demonstrated the spirit of progressive women whose activism made the General Strike possible.

Born in Streetsville, Ontario, in 1884, her family moved to Manitoba in the 1890s. She became a teacher and taught in rural areas for a number of years. In 1908, she moved to Winnipeg to work in the advertising department of the T Eaton Co. By 1912, she was the first full-time

Women's Editor of the *Grain Grower's Guide*.

Beyond her active role in the suffragist movement, she and her sister, Lillian (a *Free Press* writer) were staunch activists for women's journalism, demanding equal recognition and respect for women writers. She was a single, working woman – very much the exception in the second decade of the 20th century.

The Beynon sisters, both full-time working journalists, were barred from membership in the Canadian Press Club, which prompted them to start their own organization – the Canadian Women's Press Club (CWPC).

The 1985 play, *The Fighting Days*, by Wendy Lill profiles Frances Beynon and the tensions that emerged amongst suffragists when it came to issues of immigration, racism and compulsory conscription.

Beynon's strong, progressive streak shines through in the play:

*Prairie women have been trapped too long inside the home, lonely
and dependent from the day they wed till the day they die.*

*Oh I am thankful to be living in these fighting days, when there are
so many things waiting to be done...when Humanity is seething and
boiling and stirring....*

*But how can you ever be free by killing people or being afraid that
someone's going to kill you?*

*The real issue is whether militarism shall grow and prosper or whether
it shall decline and fail. We, as women, in our first chance to use our
franchise, are being asked to vote for war! To vote for sending more sons
and husbands away to fight and be killed. Let's use our vote to say
No to war!*

Her disagreements with Nellie McLung and others, including her editor, cost her dearly. She lost her job and left Winnipeg to join her sister in New York where she remained until returning to Winnipeg in 1951.

Her 1918 novel, *Aleta Day*, is recognized as an important feminist and pacifist text from this critical period.

Frances Beynon's activism and progressive beliefs were part of Winnipeg at this most critical period in the city's history. She died in Winnipeg on October 5, 1951.



EDITH HANCOX

— SECTION D6 (0745) —



EDITH ELIZA GALES ANGELL was born in Wiltshire, England, in 1875. The daughter of a blacksmith, she immigrated to Canada sometime prior to 1903.

She married William John Hancox in Winnipeg on March 26, 1913. Between 1919 and 1928 Hancox was visible at all Winnipeg protest meetings. She spoke at Victoria Park in June 1919 – the only woman to do so during the General Strike.

She was a feminist and a socialist, and a strong voice on behalf of women and the unemployed in general.

In 1920, she worked actively for the release of the jailed strike leaders. She ran unsuccessfully for the Winnipeg School Board in 1919 and Winnipeg City Council's Ward Two in 1923, losing to labour leader Thomas Flye.

She was a member of the Women's Labor League and the Labor Church during the period of the General Strike.

While working as a clerk for the Canadian Pacific Railway she became active in the One Big Union (OBU) and served as secretary of its General Worker's Unit.

In November 1921, she was elected secretary of the newly created Winnipeg Central Council of the Unemployed (WCCU).

She withdrew from OBU activism in 1922 and became a member of the Communist Party, which had formed the Manitoba Association of Unemployed (MAU).

Historian David Thompson has described Hancox as "a socialist feminist of national significance in the 1920s."

Her public advocacy included many actions:

- She made repeated calls for increased sex education in public schools.
- While serving for a short period on the Mayor's Special Joint Committee on Unemployment, she successfully lobbied for the end of the civic practice of sending boys ages 11 to 16 years to work in private wood camps to offset unemployment to their families.
- In 1924, she successfully represented Russian immigrant Minnie Klames, a mother of six whose husband had abandoned the family. Klames was denied city relief because she had not lived in Winnipeg for six months.
- She opposed the civic policy requiring married women without children to undergo medical exams to determine their fitness for work.
- She exposed the sordid conditions in the immigration hall where male relief recipients were forced to live.
- In 1928, Hancox attacked a reporter who wrote of a growing number of men becoming "dependent" on unemployment relief. Hancox thundered in response, "Single unemployed men! It is much more to your credit, according to this well-fed Boss Agent, for you to suffer cold, misery, starvation, pain, even death, than to live to expect any unemployment relief. Your only hope is to organize."
- She was a strong voice on behalf of domestic workers (she herself had been sent out to domestic service as a teen). She drew attention to their poverty wages and the sexual harassment many experienced from their male employers.

Hancox died in Winnipeg on June 3, 1954, aged 79 years.



THOMAS FLYE

— SECTION D3 (0325) —



A NATIVE OF DOWLAIS, WALES, Thomas Flye was a blacksmith and steeplejack. He immigrated to Canada in 1910.

Flye worked as a foreman at Dominion Bridge Steelworks before moving to the CPR shops. He was a union activist and delegate to the Trades and Labor Council.

When the General Strike began in mid-May, 1919, a 300-person General Strike Committee was formed with representatives from every union local affiliated with the Trades and Labor Council. From this group a 15-person Central Strike Committee was elected, and Flye served on this body, indicating his high stature within the city's labour movement.

Flye testified before the Robson Commission that was called in late 1919 to investigate the causes of the General Strike. He told the

Commission that, in 1918, he was earning “sixty-eight cents an hour and had to watch his children go hungry because he could not afford to feed them properly.”

He was first elected to Winnipeg City Council in 1921, assumed office in 1922, and served continuously until 1943. He was often referred to as the “Mayor of Weston” because he resided in the area at 1554 Ross Ave.

In the 1923 civic election, in Ward 2, he defeated noted activists Helen Armstrong and Edith Hancox. All had labour roots, but different political affiliations. Flye had been a member of the Independent Labor Party, but became an Independent and always enjoyed strong support from workers.

His funeral service was held on December 4, 1943, and was conducted by the Reverend Stanley Knowles (who served Winnipeg North residents as their CCF/NDP MP for 38 years between 1942 and 1986). His eulogy, as reported in the *Free Press*, included the following:

“Mr. Flye’s conduct as a public representative was the kind that helps to strengthen faith in democracy.

Alderman Flye was a labor man at all times. He brought to light the conditions of his constituents. He expressed their views and he helped to give labor in Winnipeg a determination to voice its aspirations through its own representatives. Born in the same year as the late JS Woodsworth, these two men were close friends. They shared their convictions in common.”

The General Strike was a large defeat for the workers of the day, but their leaders enjoyed widespread support before, during and after the General Strike, including at the ballot box. Thomas Flye is but one of those respected leaders who enjoyed electoral support after the strike.



FRED DIXON

— SECTION D3 (0325) —



FREDERICK JOHN DIXON was born in Englefield, England, on January 20, 1881. He immigrated to Canada in 1903, settling in Winnipeg.

At various times in his life he was a gardener, draftsman, engraver, farm labourer, construction worker, journalist, and insurance salesman. He was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly as an Independent Labor candidate in 1914.

Fred Dixon never belonged to a union. He was not a delegate to the Labor Council nor a member of the Central Strike Committee. Yet his impact upon public affairs, including the Winnipeg General Strike, cannot be understated.

Dixon was both respected and on occasion reviled, particularly over the position he took regarding compulsory conscription for the Great War. He argued for “no conscription of manpower without conscription of wealth.”

He was arrested in June 1919 and charged with seditious libel. He opted to defend himself in court.

He quoted Shakespeare, Lincoln, Oscar Wilde, Socrates, Lloyd George, Burns, Erskine and the Bible. Dixon’s remarks make for remarkable reading and speak to both the depth and eloquence of this most impressive man.

Dixon’s “Address to the Jury” was published by the Defence Committee and sold to raise funds to offset the legal expenses of the Strike leaders. He was acquitted by a 12-person jury.

In his 50 short years, Dixon made a powerful impact on Manitoba politics.

He wrote a regular column for Winnipeg’s labour newspaper, *The Voice*.

He helped found the Winnipeg Chapter of the Single Tax League, which stood for public utilities and social justice for all citizens.

He was an active member of the Manitoba Health League and the Political Equality League. He met his future wife, activist Winona Flett, in this latter group, where he fought alongside women for their right to vote.

He helped expose the fraud and corruption associated with the construction of the Manitoba Legislature which led to the resignation of Premier Rodmond Roblin.

He founded and, for a time, led the Dominion Labor Party, but broke from the group in 1920 when some members voiced criticisms of labour and the General Strike.

That year he emerged as leader of the 11-member labour caucus in the 47-seat Manitoba Legislature.

During the strike he regularly spoke to crowds including one gathering of 10,000 workers in Victoria Park on June 8, 1919.

Following the arrest of William Ivens, editor of the *Strike Bulletin*, JS Woodsworth and Fred Dixon took on this task and subsequently had charges laid against them.

Dixon’s “Address to the Jury” was a forceful and articulate defense of labour and free speech:

It is easy to stand for free speech for those who think as we do...but the acid test of our faith in democracy is that we insist on free speech for those whose ideas are contrary to our own.

Justice decrees that those who do the work of the world should enjoy the wealth they produce and that there should be an end to all the privileges by which the few exploit the many.

I said it was no revolution – that we could get what we wanted by the ballot.

.... It is better that some should suffer temporary inconvenience than that many should suffer permanent injustice.

Ideas are more powerful than bullets.

One might as well tell the full-grown man to resolve himself in to a boy again and to be 'seen and not heard' as tell labor it cannot have a voice in the management of industry through collective bargaining.

Grass will grow, the river will reach the sea, the boy will become a man, and labor will come into its own.

On that same day, the still-serving MLA rose in the Manitoba Legislature and challenged the private lawyers who prosecuted the strike leaders.

He demanded to know under whose authority they were acting. The Attorney-General admitted assigning them to act as Crown Attorney, but stated they had been retained by the federal Minister of Justice. The federal government paid for the prosecution.

It was clear to all that the full force of the state had crushed the strike in the streets in June 1919.

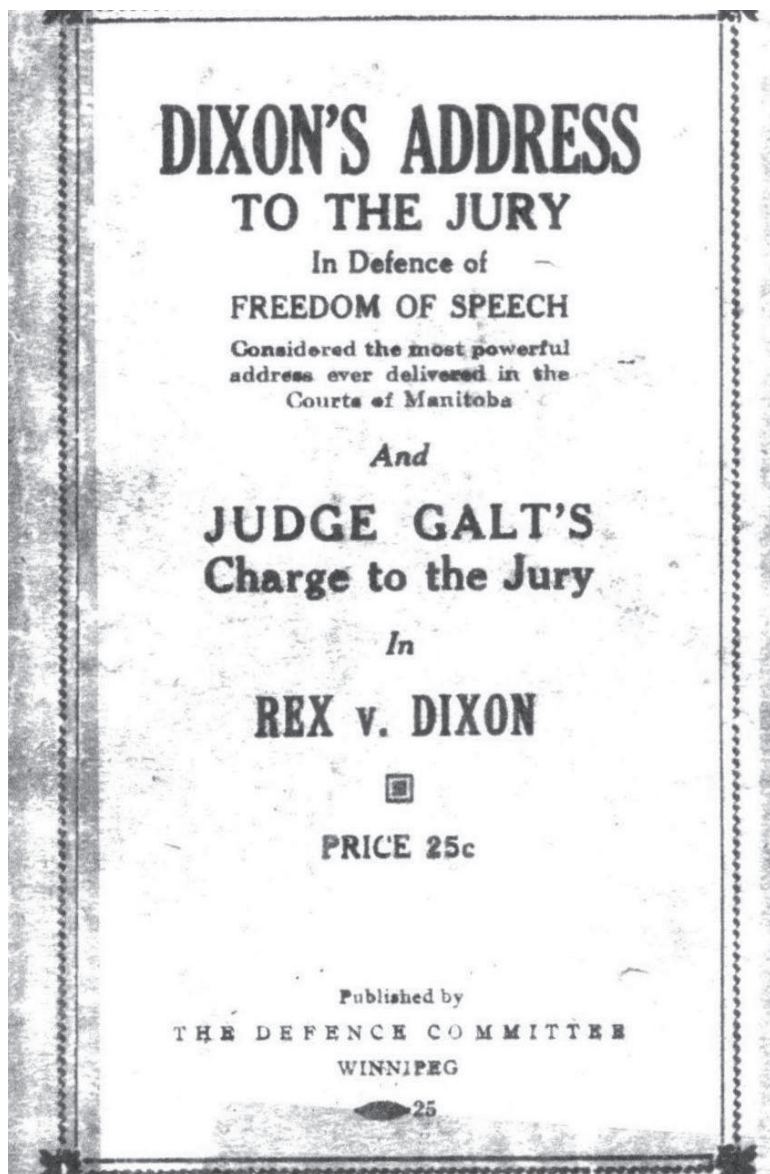
Fred Dixon knew much personal tragedy in his life. He lost a brother and a nephew in the Great War. A son, James Dixon, died in 1920 at two years of age. His wife, Winona (Flett) Dixon, died in May 1922, after they had been married only seven years. In 1924, his daughter Doris, aged seven years, died.

Dixon retired from public office in 1923. The cancer he had first contracted as a boy resurfaced. He died on March 18, 1931.

The Winnipeg Evening Tribune said:

In the death of Mr. Dixon Manitoba loses one of her most spectacular public men, a fearless fighter for the underdog and the hero of one of the most famous trials that ever took place in Canada.

His funeral service was conducted by JS Woodsworth, who made the 36-hour trek from Ottawa via rail. He gave his eulogy twice that day, once inside the Fort Rouge Labor hall, and again to the overflow crowd outside.





WINONA (FLETT) DIXON

— SECTION D2 (1166) —



WINONA FLETT WAS BORN in Brant County, Ontario, January 10, 1884. Along with her sister Lynn she was a high-profile women's movement activist. Both were members of the Canadian Women's Press Club.

In 1912 they joined the Political Equality League, the organization that supported Liberal and Labour candidates.

Lynn Flett summed up their philosophical underpinnings this way:

"The women's struggle is linked with labor's; both fight economic bondage, but women have the additional burden of male domination."

Winona Flett took an active role in the women's suffrage movement alongside Nellie McLung, Lillian and Frances Beynon, Katherine Queen and many others. She was assigned leadership responsibility for the petition drive that resulted in 38,584 signatures. In January 1916, legislation was adopted granting some women the right to vote – the first jurisdiction in Canada to do so.

Winona Dixon, as an executive member of the Political Equality League, was one of eight women invited to sit on the floor of the legislature when the voting bill was adopted on January 28, 1916.

She was also active in JS Woodsworth's People's Forum – weekly educational events open to all and held in the North End of the city.

Her public lectures included "The Role of Women in Industrial Society" and "The Challenge of the Franchise." She was well-versed in political theory, art, history and literature.

Through the Political Equality League she met MLA Fred Dixon. They married in 1914 and had three children, two of whom died as young children.

She was an active supporter of the General Strike and the high-profile role Fred Dixon took on when he took over responsibility for *The Strike Bulletin* publication after the incarceration of William Ivens.

She attended her husband's strike trial daily. She contracted pneumonia in spring 1922 and died in her home at 411 Rosedale Avenue (Fort Garry) on May 16, 1922.

The *Manitoba Free Press* noted her passing and commented on her activism:

She took an active part in the woman (sic) suffrage movement and was well versed in industrial conditions, especially as they affected women. She was a gifted speaker and was keenly enthusiastic in support of the principles she advocated.

Another *Free Press* article said "...her name is written among those who have made history here."



JOHN QUEEN

— SECTION D2 (1413) —



BORN IN DUMFERLINE, Scotland, John Queen arrived in Winnipeg in the summer of 1906. He was 24 years of age.

A cooper – or barrel maker – by trade, he found work immediately and became active in the Coopers Union and became a delegate to the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council.

He was fired over a dispute with his employer when he refused to exploit new immigrant workers by paying them less than the regular starting rate.

He worked as a bread truck driver, an insurance salesman, a business agent for the labour paper, *The Voice*, a car salesman, an alderman, a Member of the Legislative Assembly and Mayor of Winnipeg.

Queen was a large, jovial man who was comfortable with both labourers and the business elite of the city.

He was a life long socialist, at various times a member of the Social

Democratic Party of Canada (SDP) and the Independent Labor Party. He was a founding member and the first provincial leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

He considered militants like RB Russell, Jacob Penner and George Armstrong (all members of the radical Socialist Party of Canada) to be friends, but he did not share their politics.

Twice in bids for mayor, Queen ran against Penner, resulting in a split of the left vote. This enabled business leaders to retain their lock on the office of mayor.

Queen and Penner were co-founders of the Winnipeg Socialist Sunday School for children.

In 1915, Queen was one of the few members of the SDP who owned property which, at that time, was a requirement to run for civic office. He was elected as one of two labour aldermen, a position he held until 1921. This began a successful political career, which included seven years as mayor and 21 consecutive years of service as an MLA beginning in 1920. His political philosophy was clear in this speech in the legislature:

“The capitalist system is the prime cause of international friction and war...while we produce the wealth of the world, the workers continue to live in poverty. It is power we want.”

Author Stefan Epp-Koop called Queen, “one of the pre-eminent Manitoban labour politicians in the first half of the twentieth century.” Doug Smith, in *Let Us Rise!* put Queen in the same class as JS Woodsworth and Fred Dixon as the most successful of the labour politicians of the 1920s.

During the period of the General Strike, Queen was the only citizen who served on both union and city council committees. Prior to the strike, Queen, notwithstanding his role as an alderman, continued to be a prominent member of the city’s very active labour movement.

He chaired the famous Walker Theatre meeting held December 22, 1918. In a May 1919 Labor Council debate, he said that the building and metal trades’ strikes had to be won, “to make Winnipeg safe for democracy.”

He served as a member of the Central Strike Committee. At City Hall, during the strike, he chaired the Council’s Food Committee. He attended the May 15, 1919, City Hall meeting convened by mayor Charles Gray with labour and business representatives which saw an agreement

reached to extend delivery of milk and bread in Winnipeg as an essential service.

Throughout the period of the General Strike he clashed regularly with mayor Gray. On June 17, 1919, he and his Council colleague, AA Heaps, were arrested and charged with sedition.

When his lawyer withdrew, Queen opted to present his own defense and was ultimately sentenced to one year in jail. He was nevertheless easily re-elected in the November 1919 municipal election.

After his conviction, he and fellow jailed leaders, George Armstrong and William Ivens, were elected to the Manitoba Legislature and became part of the 11-member labour caucus.

In the summer of 1919, while out on bail, he spoke about the strike to a crowd of 5,000 in the Queen's Park legislative grounds in Toronto.

Queen was elected Mayor of Winnipeg in 1934 and served until 1936 and then from 1938 to 1941. It would be another 57 years until another labour-endorsed mayoral candidate – Glen Murray – would win office.

Queen's first act in his first term as Mayor was to increase social assistance rates by 10 percent.

He was responsible for council motions that recognized the Winnipeg Police union in fall 1919. He also gained council support to create the August civic holiday.

He was a commanding presence in both labour and political circles for over three decades.

His daughter, Gloria Queen-Hughes, was Winnipeg's first female candidate for mayor in 1966. Speaking about her father, she said, "John Queen would rather be defeated on principle than elected on compromise."

His gravestone contains his name, his date of birth and death, and a single word, "Socialist."



KATHERINE (ROSS) QUEEN

— SECTION D2 (1413) —



KATHERINE ROSS WAS BORN in Rosshire, Scotland in 1885 and immigrated to Canada in 1907.

She met and married John Queen in 1908. She was a feminist, socialist and activist throughout her adult life. The engraving on her gravestone calls her, “a lover of humanity who sought a world freed from poverty and war.”

Her husband, John Queen, served as an Alderman, Mayor and MLA. They had five children.

During the Great War she fought for a minimum wage law for women. She was a member of the Women’s Labor League and a prominent member of the suffrage movement.

She fought conscription in 1917, an unpopular position but one she embraced fully. In August 1917, she and Helen Armstrong attended a pro-conscription women's meeting held at the Central Congregational Church. The press reported that Queen addressed the gathering, saying: "Three of my brothers are dead, and my brother of eighteen years is called to the colors....The men who make war have not suffered. You never touch the people who make war. While you women have a chance to end war you never take it."

Her causes included lobbying for birth control clinics and equal rights for women. After the war she became president of the Labour Women's Group (LWG) of Greater Winnipeg, a fundraising arm for labour-endorsed candidates.

She also helped found a mothers' allowance auxiliary of the LWG, whose goal was to raise money for widows with children and women living in poverty.

She taught Sunday school at a Weston Labor church. When her husband was jailed as a strike leader in 1919, she passed time with RB Russell's wife, whose husband also was in jail. They lived across the street from one another in Weston.

Her daughter, Gloria Queen-Hughes, spoke of her mother's advice during the period of her father's incarceration:

"We were as proud as hell of him, thanks to my mother. She said, 'Don't forget, your father is in jail not because he committed a crime, but because he is a political prisoner. Be proud of it.' And we are."

Gloria Queen-Hughes was elected as a Winnipeg school trustee from 1933 to 1940. She was the first woman to run for mayor of Winnipeg in 1966.

Katherine Queen lived a full and active life. She suffered from a heart condition, and died somewhat suddenly after suffering a fall and being hospitalized on September 10, 1934. She was 49 years of age. At her request, a red flag was draped over her casket.

MATILDA RUSSELL

— SECTION D2 (0533) —



THE WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE began peacefully on May 15, 1919. The Central Strike Committee urged all workers to stay home, to go about their business and to remain peaceful.

Various scuffles occurred anyway, and on June 5, 1919, there were several arrests. One of these incidents occurred at a downtown department store. It involved the Retail Clerks' Union and its supporters, who were trying to dissuade some workers from reporting to work in the store. Seven people were arrested and charged with intimidation. One of these was 34-year-old Matilda Russell (no relation to RB Russell). The activists were referred to by some commentators as, "the belligerent women of the Retail Clerks' Union."

Russell resided at 1803 Bannatyne Avenue in the Brooklands area. She was of Scottish heritage and was married to William Russell, a clerk employed at Eaton's. Beyond this not much is known about her. She died in Winnipeg on December 13, 1926, at 41 years of age.

The role of women in the General Strike has not been adequately studied or reported on. Mary Horodyski, of the University of Manitoba, once said:

These women have been forgotten and ignored not because of the lack of sources, but because of the patriarchal ideology that has dominated history.

The General Strike was very much about the pursuit of a living wage. Women had ample reason to support this goal.

The University Women's Club in 1918 suggested \$10 per week as a "living wage." Most women in retail work, factories and other services did not earn this wage.

On the morning of the General Strike, Eaton's department store

bribed its largely female workforce with a \$4 per week wage hike – a huge increase for this period.

The Women's Labor League, led by Helen Armstrong, and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) offered direct support to women including lodgings and a food kitchen.

The day after Matilda Russell's arrest, Armstrong and two other women, Ida Kraatz and Margaret Steinhauer, along with eight men were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct arising out of an incident on Main Street near City Hall.

Matilda Russell belongs to the group Mary Horodyski spoke of:

All these women should be remembered in the histories of the strike.



Eaton's delivery wagons transporting women strikebreakers to work at the store during the strike.

GERTRUDE PUTTEE

— SECTION D2 (2100) —



Gertrude Puttee was Vice-President of the Women's Labor League in Winnipeg in 1917 while Helen Armstrong served as President. The Women's Labor League first emerged in Chicago. Broadly speaking, it was a women's organization with a feminist agenda, one that included equal pay for equal work, the eight-hour day, and a living wage for all women.

In 1918, Manitoba brought in a minimum wage law for working women. This followed a campaign led by activists including Helen Armstrong, May Pitblado and Gertrude Puttee.

As an executive member of the Political Equality League, Puttee was one of eight women invited to sit on the floor of the legislature when the new law was passed on January 28, 1916.

The Winnipeg chapter saw its mandate as support for existing women's unions, and solidarity with unorganized women workers. They applied for and were granted membership in the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council, and were allotted three delegate credentials.

This placed women activists in the center of the city's labour movement and undoubtedly led to the tremendous support that women extended to all participants in the General Strike.

Armstrong, speaking at the March 1919 Calgary Convention, outlined the role of the League as "picket line work and raising funds for boys and girls."

During the General Strike, the League established a food kitchen that operated initially at the Strathcona Hotel on Main St. They served up to 1,500 meals a day, primarily to women and children, but all workers were welcomed. After the strike, the League petitioned for justice for the jailed leaders and raised money for their defense.

Craig Heron, in the *Workers Revolt in Canada 1917–1925*, captures the essence of this increased activism by women, action critical to the effective staging of a massive General Strike in Winnipeg, when he speaks of

Women's Labor Leagues and Women's Independent Labor Parties, saying:

Female activists used this separate space provided for them, along with the greater public receptiveness to gender equality that had flowed from the granting of voting rights to women during the war, to push for a wider social and political role.

Not a lot of detail is recorded on the life of Gertrude Puttee. She was the wife of Arthur Puttee, Canada's first Independent Labor Member of Parliament (MP) and editor of *The Voice*, from 1897 to 1918. She died in Winnipeg on August 22, 1952, at 83 years of age.

Members of the Women's Labor League preparing relief bundles for the families of Nova Scotia coal miners on strike, circa 1925



JESSIE KIRK

— SECTION D2 (2198) —



A SCHOOL TEACHER, Jessie Kirk lost her job due to her labour activities, but it is not known if these activities occurred during the period of the General Strike.

She ran unsuccessfully as a labour candidate for the Winnipeg School Board in 1919. She was the first woman elected to Winnipeg City Council and served two one-year terms in 1921 and 1922.

It was common during this period to see some individuals serving as both civic aldermen and provincial MLAs. Neither job paid a full-time salary and most incumbents held outside jobs in addition to their public office.

Kirk planned to run under the Dominion Labor Party banner in the July 1920 provincial election. However, an internal debate was held and it was agreed that the ten men charged during the General Strike would run as a slate. Kirk agreed to step down and said:

As much as I would like to see a labour woman in the provincial house, if labor's cause would be better served by running the men incarcerated, I am perfectly willing to withdraw as a candidate.

She withdrew and three incarcerated leaders – William Ivens, John Queen and George Armstrong – were elected. Fred Dixon, an incumbent MLA who was acquitted in the strike trials, was elected with the greatest number of votes in Winnipeg. Labor attained nearly 25 percent of the seats in the 1920 election.

Kirk emerges in the news in a June 1923 article which reports on the cancellation of a planned debate between Jessie Kirk – on behalf of the Moderation League – and a church representative who called for prohibition. The prohibition participant fell ill and no one came forward to face Kirk.

In 1934, she made an unsuccessful bid for civic office. She served for 12 years – nine of these as chair – on the Civic Charities Endorsement Bureau.

In the mid-1930s, she emerged as spokesperson for the Home and Property Owners Association, regularly offering public commentary, including opposing a new pension plan for teachers.

In November 1941, the *Free Press* profiled aldermanic candidates including Jessie Kirk and Stanley Knowles in Ward Two. Kirk was profiled as a former member of Council, and a former board member of the Winnipeg General Hospital. Her bid was not successful.

An activist and politician, Jessie Kirk is yet another example of progressive women active in Winnipeg during and after the General Strike. She died in Winnipeg on December 2, 1965, at 88 years of age.



The Winnipeg Evening Tribune, December 6, 1920

JAMES MALCOLM CARRUTHERS

— SECTION D2 (2219) —



JAMES CARRUTHERS WAS BORN in Quebec in 1872 and he arrived in Winnipeg in 1900. In 1904, he and a partner founded the Crescent Creamery Company – one of Winnipeg’s oldest and largest creameries, employing over 300 workers.

Carruthers was a leading businessman in the city. He attended a pivotal meeting between labour and business leaders convened by Mayor Charles Gray at City Hall May 15, 1919.

The meeting was called to deal with the issue of the cancellation of milk and bread deliveries. Out of this meeting emerged an agreement for workers delivering milk and bread to be issued cards indicating they were not strike breakers. The well-known cards read, “Permitted By Authority of the Strike Committee.”

Norman Penner, in *Winnipeg 1919 – The Strikers’ Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike*, said on this point:

It was at this meeting that the cards were first discussed, and at the instigation of the Manager of the Crescent Creamery Co., Mr. JM Carruthers, it was decided that the general public and strikers would know that these employees were not scabbing, but discharging a very necessary duty at the request and with the sanction of their fellow workers.

Following this meeting the cards generated tremendous controversy. The most vocal leaders of the business community argued they proved Labour was attempting to take over governmental authority in Winnipeg.

During the trials of the strike leaders, Carruthers denied that the cards were, in fact, his own idea. His actual role is not clear. What is known is that the Citizens’ Committee used the cards to argue that a

Bolshevik uprising of sorts was occurring in Winnipeg.

History has refuted this rhetoric, but this was well after the strike. Tom Mitchell and Reinhold Kramer in the 2010 book, *When the State Trembled*, took a different position on this question of the origins of the cards.

What is clear is that a consensus of all present emerged at the May 15 meeting. Through *Strike Bulletin No. 5*, May 22, 1919, the Central Strike Committee explained that the cards were intended to protect workers who undertook agreed-upon essential services.

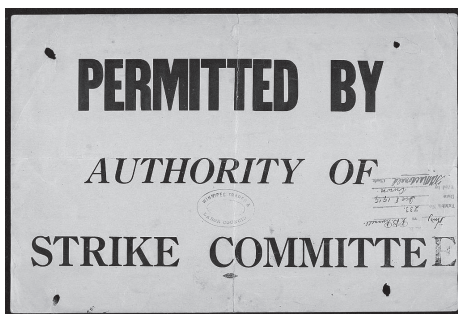
Trades and Labor Council President James Winning clarified the cards and their wording in his testimony before the Robson Commission. He testified that he and Bob Russell attended the City Hall meeting at 5 pm on day one of the strike, as quoted in the *Free Press*. He said:

In order to get the cards printed, the witness (Winning), Mr. Russell and Mr. Veitch (Harry Veitch of the Typographical Union) went up to the printing establishment of the latter's and set up the type themselves. The printers on strike would not work even for the strike committee. They made up the wording as they set it up and when finished they printed the cards themselves....

"The wording of those cards was purely accident," said Mr. Winning, "and there was certainly no ulterior motive behind either the cards or the wording."

Commissioner Robson found Winning a very credible witness. The cards were a practical solution to a practical problem.

Carruthers retired in 1933 and died in Winnipeg on February 4, 1947.



AFTERMATH OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

THE GENERAL STRIKE ENDED with the building and metal trades workers not achieving their collective bargaining goals.

A total of 11 strike leaders faced charges. Two were acquitted, charges against one were dropped and the remaining eight received sentences between six months and two years. Nonetheless, the leaders retained widespread public support and a number of them enjoyed long and distinguished political careers.

Many workers lost their jobs. Although the One Big Union (OBU) project continued, it never truly succeeded in Western Canada. By 1956, the last OBU units were merged into affiliates of the new Canadian Labour Congress.

A Royal Commission (The Robson Commission) was struck by the provincial government in the days after the General Strike. The final report was sent to the government in November 1919, but it was not released publicly until March 1920, after the trials of the strike leaders.

The report rejected the notion that the General Strike stood for a Bolshevik uprising intent on overthrowing the state. Commissioner Robson found that the Strike was the result of "...the high cost of living, inadequate wages, (and wartime) profiteering."

In the decades since the strike, history has agreed with this view.

For the workers of the day, the Strike resulted in a difficult setback. The full force of the state was brought to bear upon them.

Journalist and historian, James H Gray, wrote in his classic work *The Winter Years* (Macmillan of Canada, 1966):

No strike so big and comprehensive ever happened before in Canada and it has never been equaled since. It set trade unionism back twenty-five years....



The ultimate significance of the General Strike lies within its size, scope and duration. The grievances of workers were real and struck a chord beyond the trade union movement itself. Collective bargaining rights were viewed by a large portion of the population as an appropriate vehicle for a better life for working families. The General Strike also contributed to widespread support for better housing, health care and sanitation services; support which did not end with the strike itself.

The courage, resolve and ultimate legacy of the 1919 strikers is captured in the words on a plaque that was unveiled in the Manitoba legislature in June 1994, on the 75th anniversary of the General Strike:

THE 1919 WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE

On May 15, 1919, some 30,000 workers in the City of Winnipeg went on strike in support of Building and



Demonstration in support of the strike leaders on trial, Labour Day, September 1919

Metal Trades workers, who had walked out seeking union recognition, collective bargaining, higher wages and a shorter work week.

The Winnipeg General Strike was widely reported throughout North America and the British Empire, and was a watershed event in Canadian labour history. The General Strike concluded at 11:00 am on June 26, 1919.

In the years since the strike the Province of Manitoba has enacted legislation which recognizes workers' rights to participate in free collective bargaining, to organize and to healthy and safe workplaces.

This plaque commemorates the 75th anniversary of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, a landmark in Canadian history.

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IMAGE CREDITS

Cover – Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote 1684

Brookside Map – City of Winnipeg

Bloody Saturday Streetcar Monument – Courtesy: Noam Gonick

The Winnipeg 1919 Marquee – Photo: Lindsay Reid, Courtesy: Tom Monteyne

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Brookside Cemetery – City of Winnipeg

Steve Szczurbanowicz – Photo: Michael Boss

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Frances Marion Beynon – *Sisters United: Women's Suffrage in Saskatchewan* exhibition at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre, University of Saskatchewan, October 2016

Edith Hancox – From the private collection of Edith Danna, Courtesy: David Thompson

Thomas Flye – *Program: Winnipeg Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition*, August 1934

Fred Dixon – Archives of Manitoba

Dixon's Address – Photo: Paul Moist

Winona (Flett) Dixon – *Winnipeg Tribune*, October 4, 1914

John Queen – Archives of Manitoba

Katherine (Ross) Queen – Portrait by J. Shelsy, 1935. From the private collection of Joy (Queen-Hughes) Hodgkinson and John Hodgkinson

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Aftermath of the General Strike – Library and Archives Canada, Mary Jordon Collection

MANITOBA'S UNIONS



A CENTURY OF SOLIDARITY

The 1919 *Winnipeg General Strike – Brookside Cemetery Tour* was researched and written by Paul Moist as a centenary project to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike.

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