

# Murder for a Homestead

Charlie Daw and Jacob Smith met an unfortunate end at the hands of greed

Who could have guessed that homesteading would turn so murderous? Walter Gordon seemed like a non-troublesome sort. He was quiet and described by those he worked for in the Whitewater district as a good worker. The trouble began in 1899 when he returned to the area after a trip to Mexico over the winter. He approached Charlie Daw and offered to buy his land, claiming that he had made a partnership with a man in Mexico who owned a gold mine and he was expecting a sudden influx of cash.

Now, the problem wasn't that Charlie didn't want to sell his quarter section. He had contracted pneumonia recently and had failed to recover.

Doctors were suggesting that he return to England, and he was tying up his affairs in Manitoba. He was anxious to start his journey back to England, thus agreed to Gordon's offer.

Gordon moved onto the farm while awaiting the payment to go through. Charlie Daw hired Jacob Smith, a powerfully-built 45 year old, to run the farm while he was ill. He moved onto the farm with his pet dog.

Finally Gordon claimed that the money had arrived and he and Charlie Daw set out for Boissevain with a horse and buggy to finalize the Bill of Sale. Perhaps they quarreled about the price? Perhaps Walter Gordon admitted that his story about having shares in a gold mine was a lie? Either way, the result was that Gordon pulled out a revolver and shot and killed the Englishman. He took the body home and dumped it down an un-used well.

Jacob Smith had spent the day in Deloraine, and was late in returning to the farm that night. It wasn't until the next morning that he noticed Charlie Daw's absence and confronted Gordon about whether or not there had been any foul play. An argument ensued and as Smith turned to run into the house he was shot in the back and killed. He was also dumped down the well.

The next day, Smith's dog noticed

**The next day...his dog noticed the absence of his owner and raised an alarm**

the absence of his owner and raised an alarm. Gordon silenced it too, with another gunshot, and added his third corpse to the well in three days. Walter took over Daw's farm, explaining to those who asked that Daw had left for England and Smith had been released. This satisfied most neighbours, as they were busy with the harvest and it wasn't uncommon for farmers and workhands to come and go.

But a close friend of Daw's – Tom Wilson – knew from the way Gordon talked about his friend that something wasn't quite right. He consulted with a police inspector in Brandon, who promised to look into the case. Thus spooked, Gordon fled the farm he had so recently

killed for. It wasn't until a Canadian-made buggy with a bullet hole in the canopy and blood on the floor was found in North Dakota that suspicion was thrown on Gordon. The farm was searched and the bod-

ies discovered. Thus he was charged with the murder of Charlie Daw and Jacob Smith. But tracking him down prove to be quite a challenge and would take 21 months.

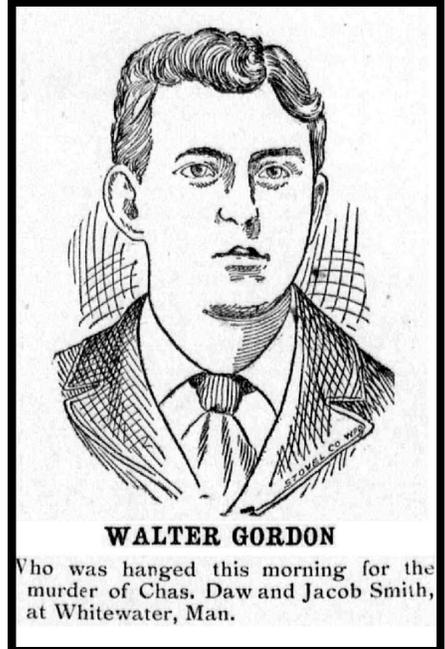
Rumours reached Boissevain that he had been spotted in Saskatchewan, Mexico and Brazil. A year after the murders, Gordon enlisted in the US Army under an assumed name. By this time, though, his photo had been printed in Eastern Canada and Chicago newspapers. One of his fellow soldiers recognized him from the paper and confronted him about his past wrongs. Gordon deserted and fled to British Columbia where he enlisted in the Canadian army. News from southern Africa and the beginning of the Boer War made him hopeful that if he threw his lot in with the Canadian army, he would be sent overseas. He very nearly got his wish as on Christmas Day in 1901 his troop was ordered to Halifax to prepare for deployment. He was in line, ready to mount the gangplank to the ship that would carry him away from his past when a Halifax detective spotted him. He was returned to Boissevain where he

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▲ Jacob Smith died at the hands of Walter Gordon in 1899.

▼ Walter Gordon's likeness was printed in papers across the country. He evaded capture for over a year.



**WALTER GORDON**

Who was hanged this morning for the murder of Chas. Daw and Jacob Smith, at Whitewater, Man.

made a full confession. The following trial in Brandon concluded with a guilty verdict and he was hanged June 20<sup>th</sup> 1902.

**Sources:**

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