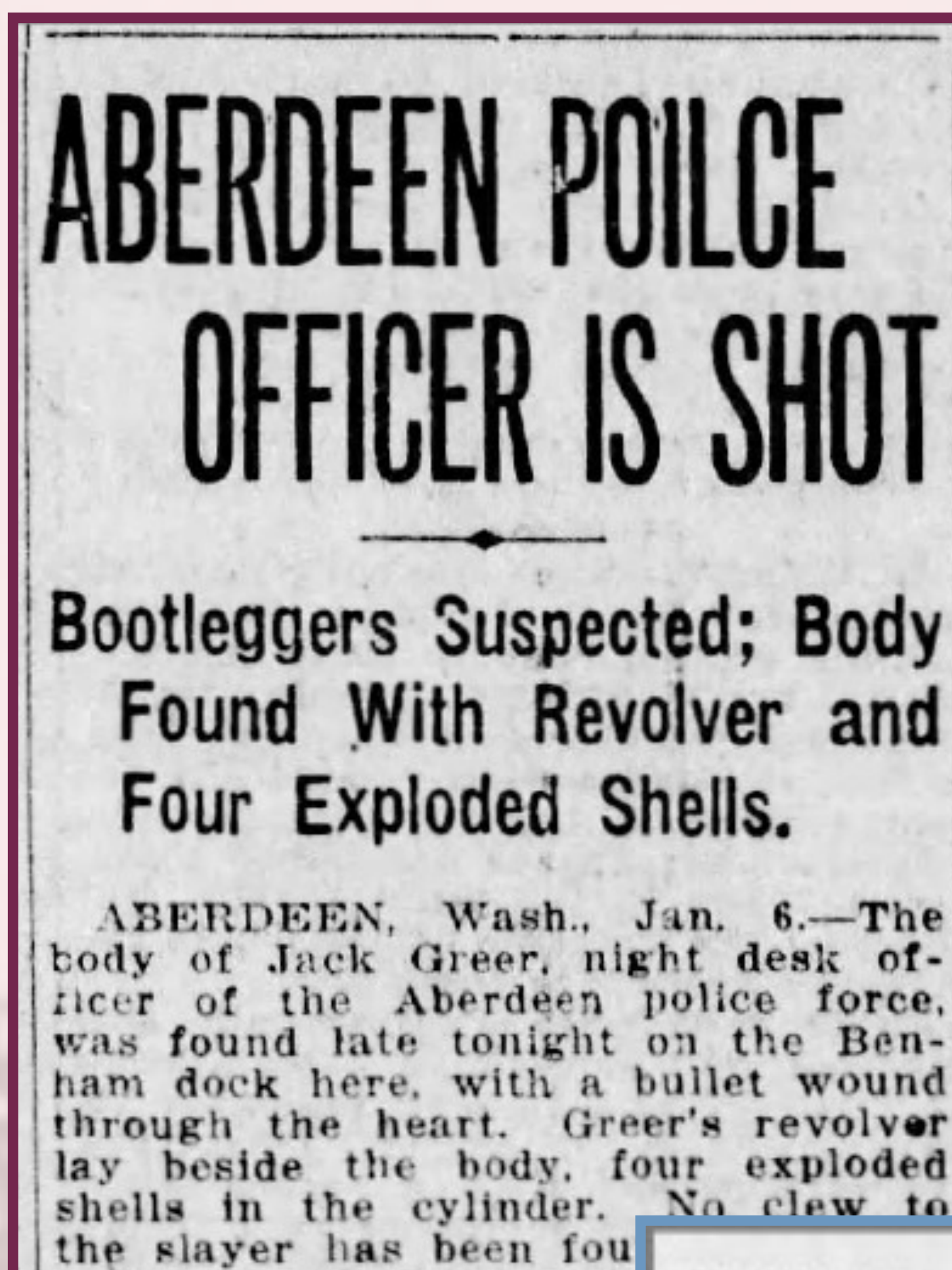


MURDER AND MAYHEM

Langley was a much smaller town, but still had its share of crime and tragedy.



(Above) Langley residents would have been aware of the dangers of Prohibition, both nearby and across the border. *The Vancouver Sun*, January 7, 1920.

(Right) *The Vancouver Daily World*, August 19, 1922.



Langley wasn't immune to the crimes and tragedies that afflicted other places. When the United States prohibited the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcohol in 1920, it led to a surge in organized crime. Canadian provinces had enacted some Prohibition laws during the later years of the First World War, but most were dropped in the early 1920s, including BC in 1921. Langley's place along the border made it susceptible to smuggling and it was "known as a nest of bootleggers and illicit whiskey runners." In August 1922, a raid led to eight arrests, including that of J.S. Donnelly of the Half Way House hotel in Langley Prairie, and H. J. Swift, the owner of the poultry ranch near the border where the raid took place, and the "chief man engaged in the whiskey".

"One woman whose place was visited [during the raid] showed an unusual desire to help the officers. She not only pointed out the place in the bush where her husband was at work, but...later on brought him to the police auto and requested that he be taken away."

-The Vancouver Daily World, 19 Aug. 1922

Sometimes misunderstood mental illness played a role in local tragedies. In 1922, John Penman, 19 year-old Murrayville resident, was arrested while breaking into Plewe's Drug Store. Penman was taken to the local jail at approximately 4am. By 5am, the jail was on fire and Penman perished; an inquest determined the prisoner had set the blaze himself. A bucket brigade saved the neighbouring municipal hall. Penman had been kicked in the head by a horse years before, and a silver plate had been placed in his skull. It was noted that he had behaved strangely since that time. His life might have been spared if the arresting constable had told the jail warden, Mr. Winchester, of his arrival, as Winchester was supposed to be present if there was a prisoner, but Penman was left completely alone in the building. The Penmans were still mourning the loss of their son when John Penman Sr. survived being struck by lightning only four months later. Coincidentally, this fire at the Murrayville jail destroyed the beer seized from J. S. Donnelly in the raid mentioned above.



The Vancouver Daily World, April 21, 1922.



John Andrew Bodaly, ca. 1925.

Some came to their ends during the decade through logging-related accidents, including 60 year-old Peter Johnston who was killed near Murrayville in 1924 by a falling tree being logged nearby. Logger Angus Grunwall, age 22, of Sperling, died in Chilliwack when part of a cedar fell on top of him in 1927. Veteran Henry Bradshaw, 35, was head camp-cook near Cultus Lake in 1928 when his neck was crushed in a boxcar door, killing him instantly; this was a second loss for his parents, Magistrate and Mrs. H. Bradshaw, who had lost another son during the First World War.

Other Langley veterans were killed. In 1920, Aldergrove's Hector Jackson died after being hit by a car while cycling over the Cambie Street Bridge. In 1924, Langley's Albert Witcherley was murdered along with his wife in their Port Coquitlam home. Despite several theories, it was discovered that a patient on a day-pass from the Essondale Hospital nearby had committed the murders.

In March 1929, returned soldier and dairyman John Bodaly was at the Glen Valley Wharf's milk stand when neighbouring farmer Egnot Proniuk arrived. The men had quarreled previously; on this occasion, Bodaly allegedly grabbed Proniuk, a small man 30 years his senior, and Proniuk stabbed him. Nurse Sarah Cartwright and Dr. Marr attended to Bodaly, who was then placed on a passing CNR train to take him to hospital in New Westminster. Bodaly died before the train was through Surrey. Proniuk claimed self-defense and was later acquitted.