

The Darker Side: A Streetsville Scoundrel

By Andrea Kennedy

“Well, I’m a jailbird now. I might as well stay with the game.”

Frank Rutledge, born in Streetsville in 1869, is far from the typical citizen of the area. Being the middle child of Sgt. Joseph Jabez Rutledge’s five sons, and with his youngest brother being a Constable, one might think Frank to be a law abiding resident in the Village of Streetsville ... but this could not be further from the truth.

Rutledge left school at 13 because he was tired of the classroom and wanted to begin working. He worked at the Toronto Woollen Mills at nearby Barberton as an apprentice for a year, until the company went under in 1882.

In December 1888 Rutledge was thought to have broken into a general store Streetsville. The Streetsville County Constable had become suspicious of Rutledge after his disappearing right after the robbery. He was later arrested in Toronto, tried in Brampton, found guilty, and sentenced to four years in Kingston Penitentiary. After an attempted escape he had seven years added to his sentence. During his time in prison, Rutledge had formed a gang with Pat Sherrin, William Black, and Lewis Laurence. These men were incarcerated for crimes such as burglary and highway robbery. Rutledge had been released early, after serving only four years. By this time he was the leader of the gang. In a mere 18 months Rutledge and crew are alleged to have committed over 60 robberies across Southern Ontario. All but Rutledge had been caught for the robbery at the Hartman & Wilgress Bank, in Clarksburg, Ontario.

In an attempt to capture Rutledge the police had a stakeout around the Rutledge family home in Streetsville. Alas, Rutledge was able to escape capture again and made it out to Red Coule, Colorado, where he was arrested for stealing a bike. This small theft gained him six years in the Colorado State Penitentiary. Here Rutledge met Thomas Jones, of Chicago, and Fred Lee Rice, of Champaign, Illinois. After all three been released they met up in Chicago in early 1900 where, thanks to Jones’ connections and with Chicago being well-known for organized crime, it was easy to buy off police. Using Chicago as a base of operations, the gang then began to plot further robberies.

Outside the Standard Bank in Toronto the gang was approached by Constable Jarrold Ward in the early morning of May 23rd, 1900. Constable Ward was later found tied up in a barn after having been held at gun point! There was evidence of an attempt to break into the bank. Two days later the gang had more success in Aurora, where they robbed the post office as well as J. L. Ross Bank. Their getaway vehicle: a stolen horse and rig from a Toronto hotel. Some of the gang’s things were found by the police at one of Frank’s brother’s houses in Streetsville. Among these things was a train schedule for a train heading to Chicago. The police in Chicago were informed and by June 1st the three men were arrested. After ten months of delays, they were extradited to Canada to face charges. The trial did not begin until the following spring, in May of 1901. By this time the press had begun calling the three The Chicago Gang.

Leaving the Court House at 6:15pm on Tuesday June 4, 1901, newspapers record that “all hell broke loose”. The three men were handcuffed together in a row in the back of the police carriage with Constable William Boyd and Constable Walter Stewart. They were on Gerrard Street when two guns, which were in a hat wrapped in paper, were tossed into the cab of the police carriage. Rutledge and Rice, who both had a free hand, got a hold of the guns. Constable Stewart grabbed

Rutledge, while Constable Boyd lunged after Rice. Rice, on the prompt of Rutledge, shot Constable Boyd. A second shot struck Boyd in the head. The two then pointed their weapons at Constable Stewart who, fearing for his life, immediately surrendered and let the three out of the carriage.

The gang, still attached by handcuffs, ran towards a stopped streetcar near Sword Street. Stewart followed and opened fire. He managed to hit Jones in the right arm and the groin. Every time Rice had moved it wrenched Jones' wounded arm. Dragging Jones along, the gang jumped onto streetcar Number 486. They began wrestling with the motorman, Joseph Black, for the keys. Constable Stewart, Constable Lynman Bogart (who had been driving the police carriage), and Don Jail guards Dick Dodds and James Spanton, caught up and began to beat Rice and Rutledge until they were disarmed. The two guards were from the jail which was not even a kilometre away and had come when they heard the commotion. The streetcar then carried on the short distance to drop everyone off at the jail.

The bones in Jones' arm had shattered all the way along to his elbow. By the time the ordeal was over he was faint with blood loss. Jones was moved to Toronto General Hospital, which then was still at the Simcoe and King Street location, the next morning. By the afternoon Dr. Bingham had amputated his arm at the elbow. The operation was a success but overnight Rice had gone unconscious and died by Thursday morning at 8:10am. Rice had been suffering from consumption, today commonly known as TB, which is believed to be why he did not survive long after the surgery.

On the morning of Wednesday June 6, Rutledge met with his lawyer, T. C. Robinette. In this meeting Rutledge gave the lawyer his personal jewellery along with written instructions for who they were to be given to.

On Thursday June 7, 1901 Rutledge and Rice were sentenced by Judge Macdougall to 21 years for robbery and arraigned for the murder of Constable Boyd. The hearing for the murder was postponed until the following week. The courts were concerned about friends of Rice and Rutledge getting rid of the only witness to Boyd's murder, Constable Stewart. The courts were looking to get Stewart's evidence in as soon as possible, which was why the arraignment was done on this day. Rutledge was shocked at the charge against him for murder, thinking he would have escaped it based on Stewart's witnessing of Rice firing the gun. His face was pale, and he pleaded not guilty. Rice did not enter a plea.

On June 7 Rutledge was heading to dinner with the other inmates. Suddenly he broke away from the line and ran up to the second storey corridor. He leaped over the railing and fell 30 feet to the ground below, fracturing his skull. Although he did not die instantly, he never regained consciousness. Rutledge died not long after, at approximately 4:30pm on June 7, 1901. Dr. Richardson was the attending physician.

At 32 years of age Frank Rutledge was laid to rest at Trinity Anglican Church Cemetery in Streetsville beside his mother and brother. The ceremony was officiated by Reverend J. Hughes-Jones.

Rice was convicted of murder in October of 1901 and was sentenced to death. On July 18, 1902, he was hanged.