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**THE WINDSOR SLASHER:
HOMOSEXUALITY AS A CHANGING DISCOURSE
IN MEDIA, POLICE, AND LEGAL RECORDS
IN WINDSOR, ONTARIO, 1945-1946**

BY

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**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR**

2004

**THE WINDSOR SLASHER: HOMOSEXUALITY AS A CHANGING DISCOURSE IN
MEDIA, POLICE, AND LEGAL RECORDS IN WINDSOR, ONTARIO, 1945 – 1946.**

By
Melanie E. Namespetra

**A Major Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Through the Department of History
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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ABSTRACT

The paper broadly discusses the representations and the changing discourses of Toronto, Ontario in 1945 and then. Through a critical analysis of historical records including the Windsor Daily Star, the Windsor Police Department records, and the Ontario Archives, the author examines the ways in which the police, media, and legal records shaped the understanding of U.S. homosexuality in the 1940s.

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ABSTRACT

This paper directly focuses on homosexuality and its changing discourses in Windsor, Ontario in 1945 and 1946. Through a critical analysis of three primary sources including the *Windsor Daily Star*, the Windsor Police Departmental records, and the trial transcript *Rex versus Ronald George Sears* [1946], this paper attempts to show how the press, police, and legal authorities treated male homosexuality in this immediate postwar period.

For my Great Uncle Wright Jay Reynolds

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PROLOGUE

The sentence of this court upon you, Ronald George Sears, is that you are to be taken from here from whence you came and there to be kept in close confinement until Tuesday, the third day of December, 1946; upon that day that you be taken to the place of execution and there hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may God have mercy upon your soul.¹

In fewer than ten minutes on 3 December 1946, a Windsor, Ontario man was sentenced to hang for the August 1945 murder of Sergeant Hugh Blackwood Price. This was the first of two charges for murder and of three for attempted murder that were yet to be tried. Two long summers of panic ended in this city where random men had been attacked and stabbed late at night around Government Park – today known to residents as Dieppe Park. These stabbings first occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and stories of the European front continued to dominate media attention; the first attempted stabbing received little attention in the *Windsor Daily Star*, the community's prime news source at the time. By the time the first murder took place, the *Star* made the connection to the last stabbing and began publishing headline stories about the crimes. By the end of the summer of 1945, and in a period of less than ten days, one man was in critical condition and three others were dead. The second murder of 16 August 1945 was a brutal beating in a downtown garage. It was originally attributed to the slasher, but was later disregarded by police as connected because different motives and methods became clear. The murders stopped, the search for a suspect was put on hold, and the *Star* printed stories of other local happenings.

Summer 1946 brought further unexpected violence and stabbings; it seemed that the killer from the previous summer had returned. The police resurrected the case when a

¹ Honourable Mr. Justice Wells, His Majesty, "The King Vs. Ronald Georges Sears," *The Supreme Court of Ontario*, September 1946: 524.

similar stabbing was reported on 24 June 1946. Much more space was allotted for the story in the *Star* as panic heightened again throughout the city. A reward of one thousand dollars, offered by the *Star* the previous summer, was doubled by the city in efforts to capture this serial attacker. City Council declared all police officers on twelve hour, around-the-clock shifts. Police did not have any concrete leads at this time that would help them to solve this case. The suspect, dubbed the Windsor “slasher” by media for his compulsive slashing of victims’ clothes and bodies, was arrested on 6 July 1946 on a report of suspicion by the suspect’s sister-in-law. Eighteen-year-old Ronald George Sears was taken into custody and shortly afterward made four separate, yet different, confessions to Windsor Police detectives.

Following detention by police, Sears confessed to murdering two men and attempting to murder three others. He claimed in each case that the men stabbed were sexual perverts and suspected homosexuals. With only his confession and one eyewitness account, his trial date was set for 11 September 1946, and at the opening of trial Sears denied all charges against him. Hesitantly the judge deemed his confession admissible, and the trial proceeded with a jury. Despite two months of trial, only circumstantial evidence, and expert witnesses and testimonies, the jury rendered the guilty verdict in less than two hours. Immediately following their decision, the judge sentenced Sears to be executed within months.

While Sears awaited his death sentence, the Ontario Court of Appeals decided that his confession should not have been deemed admissible and granted him another trial; this time he was charged solely on one count of attempted murder for which they

had sufficient evidence to charge him.² By February 1947 Sears' original verdict was overturned; he was retried and sentenced to a mere twelve years in prison. He later died in an institution.³

² "Rex. Vs Sears," Ontario Court of Appeal, Henderson, Roach and Hogg JJ.A. *Criminal Reports Canada*, Vol. 5: 11.

³ Inspector Dave Rossell, "The Windsor Slasher," *Windsor Police Headquarters Booklet*. (Windsor: Windsor Police Department Publication, 1997): 32.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Following the Second World War in Canada, government officials at all levels sought a return to the prewar culture in Canada; this 'return to normalcy'¹ was intended to restore the prewar, patriarchal, power relations between men and women, families and places of employment; there was no room for so-called abnormal individuals.

Government and media offered visions of returning soldiers eager to participate in the burgeoning economy and domestic wives and women, ready to return to the prewar realm of domesticity; a postwar economic boom characterized the period. Homosexuality did not fit the 'normal' or 'natural' order of things as heterosexuality did and was proscribed by these authorities. In many ways homosexuality was beginning to be viewed according to a medical model as a pathology that needed treatment much as criminals needed punishment.² However, homosexuality also continued to be treated as an actual legal offense, a crime rather than an illness. The Windsor 'slasher' case illustrates how public discourses about homosexuality, illness, and abnormality combined with existing legal

¹ Ohio State Senator, Warren G. Harding, originally coined the phrase 'return to normalcy' in his United States Republican Presidential Candidate campaign platform (1920 Federal Election). "Harding's campaign promised a return to "normalcy," rejecting the activism of Theodore Roosevelt and the idealism of Woodrow Wilson." Historians when referring to the end of World War II North America also commonly use the phrase. This information is cited from, "The Presidential Election of 1920." <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/nfhtml/nfexpe.html>. Accessed 4 April 2004.

²F. Allan Hanson, "Where Have All the Abnormal People Gone?" *The Humanist* Vol.60 No.2 (March/April 2000), 30. For a socio-historical discussion on homosexuality as a medical pathology during this period see Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne, 1995), and Warren J Blumenfeld and Diane Raymond, *Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988). For a discussion on the changing sexual definitions leading up to this medical belief in the United States see Estelle B. Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960." In *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 199-225.

codes to produce a criminal case enveloped by this changing discourse, a complex cultural status for homosexuality in the postwar years.

According to historian Mary Louise Adams, heterosexuality was the medium by which normality was measured following the war.³ She claims in her monograph *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* that,

The increasing influence of psychoanalytic theories in the postwar period also meant that heterosexuality was not simply a means of organizing relationships between women and men; rather, it came to be seen as essential to the expression of 'maturity,' and it determined one's ability to make claims on normality, that most important of postwar social classifications.⁴

As Adams notes, psychiatrists gained much power and legitimization at the beginning of World War II as they were chosen by the national political authorities to screen and decide who would fight for the nation, deeming potential candidates for the armed services as either 'fit' or 'unfit' based on their knowledge of psychoanalytical theory. Historian Estelle Freedman also argues that psychiatry was possibly used to enforce the return of prewar gender relations; therefore, political leaders through the media emphasized sex crime's deviancy and abnormality.⁵ Furthermore, psychiatry created the dichotomy between the 'normal' and 'abnormal' through its theories on sexuality and homosexuality in the immediate postwar years. The same political authorities felt that psychiatrists held the knowledge to prescribe heterosexuality as normal. Most adolescents were indoctrinated in the lessons of heterosexuality at home, in the press, at school, and in practically every other aspect of their lives. Adults tailored their lifestyles

³ Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), Introduction.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵ Estelle B. Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath," In *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 208 – 209.

to fit with heterosexual behaviours, even if they knew that was not their sexual preference. They did this at both work and home to avoid public persecution about their choice of sexual partner. Those who did not submit to the medical, societal, and cultural pressures to conform to normative behaviours were quite likely to face discrimination and negative responses from those around them.

Three major factors contributed to public awareness of male homosexuality in the immediate postwar period: a recurrence of a sex crimes panic, cold war discourses that tied communism with homosexuality, and the Kinsey reports on human sexuality. The first factor, the recurrence following the war of a sex crime panic across North America, has been studied by historian Estelle B. Freedman especially in her article, “‘Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960.” She argues that there were two main sex crimes panics in North America in this period, with the first occurring ca.1937-1940, and the second ca.1949-1955.⁶ Freedman suggests that these panics were a direct result of sensational newspaper reporting on a series of sexually motivated and violent child murders in the United States.⁷ The national press took the opportunity to print the stories in detail, a subject not previously published, and Freedman contends that this created a public awareness of sex crimes, forcing the government to respond to societal pressures.⁸

Examples of this sensational media reporting demonstrate how these articles initiated a series of sex crimes panics across North America. For instance, Freedman cites a 1950 *Collier's* magazine series entitled, “Terror in Our Cities,” that summarized St. Louis’s newspaper headlines, including:

⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁷ Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires,” 205.

⁸ Ibid.

KINDERGARTEN GIRL ACCOSTED BY MAN – CLERK ACCUSED OF MOLESTING 2 GIRLS IN MOVIE – MAN ACCUSED BY 8-YEAR-OLD BOY OF MOLESTING HIM IN THEATER – 6-YEAR-OLD GIRL AT ASHLAND SCHOOL MOLESTED – LABORER ARRESTED FOR RAPE OF 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL – FINED FOR MOLESTING 2 BOYS, AGED 8 AND 10 – ARRESTED ON SUSPICION OF MOLESTING 4-YEAR-OLD GIRL – YOUTH WHO MOLESTED BOY 4, IS FINED \$500 – 9 CHARGES AGAINST MOLESTER OF GIRLS.⁹

She clarifies that the number of sex crimes did not actually increase but that public awareness of these crimes did proliferate.

Other media across North America also suggested that homosexual men were possible murderers or ‘destroyers of society.’ Gerard Sullivan in his article “Political Opportunism and the Harassment of Homosexuals in Florida, 1952-1965,” demonstrates in Florida for example that two men were arrested in these immediate postwar years for murdering a homosexual man. They claimed that the latter had made advances at them and as a result they beat him and threw him into the bay where he drowned. In yet another case, also in Florida, a homosexual bartender was murdered in his own home by a guest from his bar.¹⁰ The response by police in this area to these incidents was to round up the homosexuals and close down their bars in order to curb homosexual deviancy. Further, gay spaces were monitored constantly by police to avoid any further incidents.

The first sex crime panic had led some American state governments to create ‘criminal sexual psychopath’ laws by the 1930’s. Between 1935 and 1939 five separate states passed ‘sex psychopath’ laws including California, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio.¹¹ Freedman contends that three main constituencies participated in the creation of the sex crimes panic, including the media, citizens’ groups, and law

⁹ Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires,” 206. Capital letters her emphasis.

¹⁰ Gerard Sullivan, “Political Opportunism and the Harassment of Homosexuals in Florida, 1952-1965,” *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol.37 No.4 (1999), 61.

¹¹ Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires,” 207.

enforcement agencies, and they also worked together to pressure their politicians to solve the problems that together they had fabricated.¹² These laws were a product of the state governments, and punishments ranged from psychiatric evaluations to prison sentences for indeterminate periods or castration. Psychiatrists mostly disagreed with the laws and punishments and instead argued that without evidence of a true increase in sex crimes no new laws should be created to deal with sex deviates. Psychiatrists called for offenders to be treated through hospital care, psychiatric counseling and evaluations,¹³ but their views did not prevail.

At the same time, Mary Louise Adams contends that Canadians faced similar circumstances regarding sex crimes although the public awareness campaigns began here a decade later in the 1940's. She claims that news articles of sex crimes "slipped into discussions of perversion and sex variance, rarely making a distinction between criminal and non-criminal behaviours."¹⁴ Therefore, even consensual homosexual behaviours were criminalized in the press. Furthermore, she maintains that in Canada three consecutive federal government initiatives worked to solve this media-produced sex crimes scare, including 1948 Criminal Code amendments to the section on 'habitual criminals,' a 1952 Senate Committee concerned with Salacious and Indecent Literature, and the 1954 Royal Commission on the criminal law relating to criminal sexual psychopaths.¹⁵ Again, she suggests that all of these initiatives were undertaken in the

¹² Ibid., 205.

¹³ Ibid., 207.

¹⁴ Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 121.

¹⁵ Ibid., 122.

absence of any 'appreciable' increased rate in sex offender statistics¹⁶ but that an emphasis was put on the public danger these sex deviants posed to society.

In Canada, national 'criminal sexual psychopath' legislation was not passed until 1948.¹⁷ Unlike the American state laws, the Canadian Criminal Code was amended to include Section 661, entitled 'criminal sexual psychopaths,' in which a psychopath was defined very specifically as

[a] person who, by a course of misconduct in sexual matters, has shown lack of power to control his sexual impulses and who as a result is likely to attack or otherwise inflict injury, pain or other evil on any person.¹⁸

The section entitled 'habitual criminals,' under which all sex criminals were charged until 1948, was changed to add the new section on psychopaths. Also under this amendment a new punishment was added that allowed convicted sexual offenders to be sentenced to preventative detention for an indeterminate period of time. After three years of imprisonment, the prisoner faced psychiatric evaluations every three years until deemed safe to re-enter the public realm. This amendment clearly emphasized the fear of sex deviants as a supposedly increasing danger in the public realm. Since sex crimes were not actually increasing, this fear must have been based on media accounts and the pressure from Canadian citizens' groups and legal authorities.

Canadian historian Gary Kinsman shows in his *Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* that in 1953 the 'criminal sexual psychopath' law was again amended to criminalize homosexual men and their behaviours. 'Buggery' and 'gross indecency' were added to the list of offences and any homosexual activity discovered by police and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 183.

¹⁸ J.C. McRuer, Gustave Desrochers, Helen Kinnear, *Report of the Royal Commission on The Criminal Law Relating to Criminal Sexual Psychopaths* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1958), 8.

resulting in a conviction could allow for trial under the 'psychopath' law.¹⁹ He further argues that this intensified the focus on sexual danger in the public realm because the law then covered both violent and non-violent and consensual and non-consensual acts. He notes that thus the criminal sexual psychopath process now legitimized the regulation of gay men's lives.²⁰ More specifically, he argues that the law was generally harsher when used against homosexual offenders even if violence was not present or the act in question was consensual.²¹ In fact, he maintains that violent heterosexual acts such as the rape of a woman by a man were considered more "normal" crimes and thus less likely to be punished under the criminal sexual psychopath law.²² Estelle Freedman also stresses this point in the American context when she claims,

As long as he did not mutilate or murder his victim, the rapist might be considered almost normal and certainly more 'natural' than men who committed less violent, and even consensual, sexual acts such as sodomy and pedophilia. Accordingly, men diagnosed as psychopaths were more likely to be accused of pedophilia and homosexuality than of rape or murder.²³

As Freedman contends, sexual psychopath laws were centrally concerned with male sexuality in which only sex with women was considered normal; sex with other men and children was criminal and thus punishable.²⁴ Thus, the inclusion of acts such as 'buggery' and 'gross indecency' in the 'sexual psychopath' laws targeted homosexual men.

Mary Louise Adams also notes that only men were charged in Canada under this law and that it was implemented without any actual increase in the sex crimes statistics.²⁵

¹⁹ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 184.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires," 213.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 123.

She further claims that the public overwhelmingly supported the change as was evidenced in the Toronto dailies,²⁶ but as was the case in the United States, the psychiatrists in Canada were against the implementation of such a law and punishments. The press frequently called these offenders 'sex maniacs,' 'monsters,' or 'freaks of nature,' and as Adams states, the media constantly reiterated that these men were "considered to be on a slippery slope of degeneracy that could eventually lead them to murder."²⁷ Therefore the punishment of indeterminate sentencing in a penitentiary was not considered harsh as the purpose was maintaining safety in the public realm. It was, as Adams argues, a period wherein "social conformity reflected a need for social stability and security."²⁸ National security in this era thus was considered to require policing for sexually abnormal persons, and also for any person vulnerable to 'character weaknesses' that would inevitably lead to blackmail from the supposed communist enemies both within and outside of the state.

The second major contributing factor to a public awareness of male homosexuality was related to the cold war discourses on communism emerging from the United States and tied into McCarthyism. McCarthyism, named after Senator Joseph McCarthy in the United States, began as early as 1945 when the U.S. Chamber of Commerce conducted an anticommunist campaign to rid the nation of subversive communists and spies, a campaign that often conflated communists and homosexuals.²⁹ Through close connections with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) also conducted a campaign against

²⁶ Ibid., 122.

²⁷ Ibid., 122-123.

²⁸ Ibid., 121.

²⁹ Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 60.

socialists, communists, and homosexuals in the civil service, playing on fears about state security in the cold war era. Homosexuals were targeted beginning in the civil service because they were considered weak, effeminate, and thus especially vulnerable to Soviet blackmail. Although these RCMP investigations did not actually occur in Canada until the 1950's, the discourses promoted by McCarthyism were widespread and printed in the Canadian press immediately following the war.³⁰ Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse maintain in their monograph, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957*, that following the war the state along with the media played an integral role in regulating and influencing popular ideologies by "...influencing public opinion to move towards the new conservative Cold War consensus – and in publicly excoriating as disloyal and unpatriotic those who sought to contest this direction."³¹

Regarding the criminalization of homosexuality, the threat against lesbians and gay men was very real in the McCarthy era. Barry Adam contends in his monograph *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* that,

[o]n the face of it there was no real reason homosexuality should have been mixed into the anticommunist furor... but in McCarthyism as in other reactionary ideologies, psycho-symbolic connections between gender and power assigned a place to homosexuality.³²

He further argues that for those in power, homosexuals or effeminate men signified the opposite of the ideal masculine man, and thus were portrayed as enemies of the state.³³

Hence, communism was not directly tied to homosexuality except that homosexuals were

³⁰ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 173.

³¹ Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1994), 14.

³² Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62.

persecuted because they were seen as weak and effeminate, and thus as likely to cave in to pressure from Soviet spies and blackmailers.

Likewise, Kinsman demonstrates in his *The Regulation of Desire* that in Canada by 1946 a security panel was established to transfer civil servants suspected of being 'vulnerable' to subversion to less sensitive posts. Beginning in 1948 and for a decade following he claims that homosexuals – previous to this time only accused of potentially being communists and spies – were now seen as vulnerable to blackmail because they were inherently weak in character and therefore had something to hide.³⁴ Lastly, he contends that hundreds of homosexuals in the civil service in the 1950s and 1960s lost their jobs. As an example he shows that the External Affairs Department in Ottawa and its embassies around the world were regarded as “a notorious cess-pool of homosexuals and perverts in the 1950s.”³⁵ Therefore, there was a perceived link between communism, homosexuality, and crime that resulted in internal government policies although it did not appear publicly until after 1950 in Canada unless citizens made the connection on their own or read it in the American press.

Kinsman further argues that public and political reactions to the new communist threat did not appear in Canada until the late 1950's.³⁶ This is because the state sanctioned purges of the civil service and RCMP surveillance of homosexuals, and politically left groups were not well known publicly until after 1950. Mary Louise Adams further argues that national discourses on communism varied in severity by region, ethnic group, race, age, and class groups, but were “nevertheless, put into

³⁴ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 172.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 173.

circulation ...by magazines such as *Chatelaine* or *Maclean's*" also after 1950.³⁷ These magazines, other media outlets such as local newspapers and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) after 1950³⁸ tended to follow closely the discourses set by the federal government's newly fabricated ideology that connected homosexuality, communism and crime, especially as an ideological threat against the nation.

The third major factor contributing to a public awareness of male homosexuality in the postwar period was the publication in 1948 of American sociologist Alfred Kinsey's incomparable study entitled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Adams claims that even mentioning sex in the public realm up until Kinsey's work was published "continued to elicit strong reactions of disapproval by some people."³⁹ After publication she maintains that the public reacted favourably with most criticisms resting on Kinsey's method of study. In this entirely unique scientific project for the time, Kinsey interviewed 5300 men of different social classes, ages, religions and regions in the United States on the different kinds of sexual experiences, including homosexual acts, premarital and extramarital sex, oral and anal sex, and also masturbation. Adams contends "...in a period when North Americans were enamoured of scientists and experts of all kinds, and were concerned about wartime changes in sexual mores, Kinsey's timing was perfect."⁴⁰ The inaugural printing of his first volume sold 200,000 copies in the first six months.⁴¹ Popular Canadian magazines such as *Saturday Night* and *Canadian Forum*

³⁷ Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Adams explains that this date is for broadcast television, especially in urban areas such as Toronto in Canada. Windsor, Ontario first received radio signals in 1932 but the CBC did not make it to the area until 1950 with radio and CBC television followed shortly after in 1952 according to Neil Morrison in his *Garden Gateway to Canada: One Hundred Years of Windsor and Essex County, 1854-1954* (Toronto: Ryerson Press), 1954.

³⁹ Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 35.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

were largely positive and suggested that the research held serious implications for the future of sexual study.⁴² Lastly, Adams argues that before Kinsey's publication of this and his subsequent volume in 1953, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, public discussions of sexuality focused on issues such as birth control, divorce rates, sexual crimes, and venereal disease. However, after Kinsey's books were widely disseminated, public discussions of sexuality also included homosexuality and its apparent commonness.⁴³ Lastly, she states that Kinsey's largest achievement was the way that he packaged the sexual information and circulated it, thus making sex a "more acceptable topic of conversation."⁴⁴

Taken together, the sex crimes panics, cold war fears of homosexuality, and the Kinsey reports generated a new public consciousness of homosexuality. This consciousness was clearly distrustful and hostile against sex crimes and sexual criminals. Kinsman contends that the postwar media focus on violent sexual crimes led to a moral panic on the issues and questions arising from the fact that anyone regardless of sex or age could be attacked.⁴⁵ Then, less than a decade later, Canadian governmental authorities issued a Royal Commission to study the effectiveness of the 'criminal sexual psychopath' law. This public consciousness led in 1954 to a Royal Commission on Criminal Sexual Psychopaths and whether or not they represented a danger in the public realm.

In 1954 the Canadian federal government, following the lead of many individual American states, established a Royal Commission on 'criminal sexual psychopaths.'

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 183-184.

Headed by the Honourable J.C. McRuer, the Commission aimed to study whether the “...criminal law of Canada relating to criminal sexual psychopaths should be amended in any respect and, if so, in what manner and to what extent.”⁴⁶ Immediately the Commission stated that the aforementioned terms of reference did not allow for a complete study of sexual offenders and their offences, although three studies, from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Law (England), from the State of California (United States), and from the State of Michigan (United States), were referenced.⁴⁷ Instead, the Commission held eighteen public sittings, including one for each provincial capital city as well as Montreal, Vancouver, and Ottawa. Fifty-two briefs were filed by individuals and organizations, many letters were sent in providing recommendations, and more than one hundred witnesses spoke at public hearings. Confidential sittings were held with groups and individuals such as inmates and homosexual men who would not want to be exposed in public.⁴⁸ The Commission did not report on any findings received from any of these private groups; they only report their suggestions from Commission researchers and legal, medical, and psychiatric authorities.

The McRuer Commission on Criminal Sexual Psychopaths recommended several amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code. Most importantly, they recommended that Section 661 C.C., previously entitled ‘criminal sexual psychopaths,’ be replaced with ‘dangerous sexual offender,’ although the language of the paragraph following the title changes insignificantly to read,

“Dangerous sexual offender...” means a person who, by his conduct in sexual matters, has shown a failure to control his sexual impulses and who is likely to

⁴⁶ J.C. McRuer, *Report of the Royal Commission*, 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

cause injury, pain, or other evil to any person through failure in the future to control his sexual impulses.⁴⁹

This differs little from the previous definition of 'criminal sexual psychopath.'

Subsequent recommendations also make very slight changes such as preserving the notion of preventative detention but possibly changing the process for hearings.⁵⁰ These recommendations, especially indeterminate periods of detention, seem quite draconian today, but because they were submitted to the Commission by legal, medical and governmental authorities, they were obviously deemed acceptable by this same group in 1958 when the final report was released. There is no evidence of the public reaction to the Commission's final report, but it must be noted that there was open opposition during the Commission's proceedings.

Three clear examples of opposition are voiced within the final report of the Commission. Jim Egan, an openly homosexual homophile rights activist from Toronto felt that the Commission did not include enough representation from the gay minority to have even published a section entitled 'homosexuals' because their voice was not included; rather it was medical and legal authorities speaking of homosexuals as a "constant problem" that was included.⁵¹ Further, a Reverend Francis Howard Kelly suggested to the Commission that homosexual activities in private needed to be decriminalized and he was met with a response that his suggestion did not fall within the scope of the Commission, and he was therefore dismissed.⁵² Lastly, Axel Otto Olsen told the Commission that the problem of homosexual men was not increasing as expert witnesses to the Commission suggested, but that the media had created a sex crimes scare

⁴⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 127-130.

⁵¹ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 190-191.

⁵² Ibid.

that resulted in public panic about homosexuality.⁵³ Again, Olsen was dismissed and like the former men in opposition, he and his ideas were completely rejected.

The Commission responded to this opposition in the portion of their final report entitled 'homosexuals':

In the view of some, homosexual intercourse should not be a crime at all unless there is a wide disparity in the ages of the participants. The weight of opinion expressed before us was against this view. It is arguable that, if two adult males mutually wish to seek their sexual gratification by contact with one another, logically such an act is no more criminal in nature than is heterosexual intercourse between two consenting adults. The argument is that a homosexual act between two adult males is an offence only against sensibilities and customs. We are not called upon to decide whether a homosexual act between adults should be a criminal offence or not; but, with respect, we think there are profound problems raised by homosexuality.⁵⁴

Through this quotation it is clear that, while the Commission felt that homosexuality should remain an offence, they had heard the arguments for decriminalization.

Attempting to state that homosexuality was not within the scope of their Commission was an easy way to avoid facing the protests from groups and individuals such as Egan.

At the same time, it is clear that a significant change had taken place. The authorities themselves were continuing to enforce the dominant discourses as set out by the federal government immediately following the war. On the other hand, homophile rights activists were surfacing and beginning – although unsuccessfully – to pressure for homosexual rights.

Homosexual rights were not truly recognized in Canada until 1967 when Justice Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau attempted to introduce legislation to decriminalize homosexual acts performed in private and between two consenting adults. After a petition collection of close to nine thousand names supporting Trudeau's bill, but also

⁵³ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁴ McRuer, *Royal Commission*, 27.

with the expression of much public opposition, on 14 May 1969 the bill passed in Parliament by a vote of 149 to 55, and became law by August of the year.⁵⁵ Twenty-one years after the initial 'criminal sexual psychopath' law was implemented, homosexuals were now only persecuted and arrested on charges of public sexual acts.

This paper directly focuses on homosexuality and its changing discourses in Windsor, Ontario, in 1945 and 1946. Through a critical analysis of three sets of primary documents from the case of the Windsor 'slasher,' including the *Windsor Daily Star*, the Windsor Police Departmental Records, and the Ontario Supreme Court transcript *Rex Versus Ronald George Sears [1946]*, I intend to show how male homosexuality was treated by the press, police, and legal authorities in this immediate postwar period. Thus, of the three factors producing a public discourse on male homosexuality, it is the first – the media's creation of a sex crimes panic – that is most directly pertinent to this study. Both McCarthyism and the Kinsey Reports appeared too late to affect the Windsor 'slasher' case. Press coverage of the 'slasher' case, however, could be considered a local example of the media production of discourses on homosexuality and its connection to crime. Knowing that a sex crimes panic was taking place in Canada during this period, I contend that the *Windsor Daily Star* helped promote this panic locally by concentrating stories on sex deviancy and male homosexuals resulting from the Windsor 'slasher' homicides. On the other hand, I maintain that the police and court do not focus on male homosexuality because of the restrictions in procedure that had to be followed and because they truthfully did not have evidence to charge the accused with anything other than murder.

⁵⁵ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 276.

Overall, homosexuality was specifically targeted in these years and across the continent as criminal. My conclusion will discuss the multiple discourses in the three different arenas and will speculate on why these differences existed and how they competed with one another. I will show that that the larger issue surrounding the case of the Windsor 'slasher' is about how the discourses in the media are only part of the bigger, yet harsh, changing discourse in North America surrounding homosexuality while at the same time, the trial was a separate arena with its own discourse.

CHAPTER TWO

The *Windsor Daily Star*: The Response of Media to Homicide and Homosexuality

As early as August 1945, the correspondents to the *Windsor Daily Star* began publishing stories of stabbing attacks, some fatal, taking place down by the local waterfront. The daily accounts of the Windsor 'slasher' homicides as written in the *Windsor Daily Star* suggest that writers connected the serial attacks on men first with a homicidal maniac and later with 'sexual perverts' and 'deviants.' "Sexual perversion" in the terminology of the immediate post-World War II period was synonymous many times with male homosexuality. This chapter examines the contents of the *Star* relating to the series of attacks on men known as the case of the Windsor 'slasher' over a period of two summers in 1945 and 1946. Ultimately, the response of journalists at the *Star* to the attacks was in line with contemporary discourse across the continent about increasing sex crimes, and this media source continually made a connection between the crimes and male homosexuality.

Newspaper reports of both sexual deviancy and homicide cases in 1945 and 1946 appeared quite frequently in the *Windsor Daily Star*. This public source of information was mostly conservative in political thought under the direction of *Star* President Hugh Graybiel.¹ Written only in English, this paper served as the primary news information source in the region. Recorded subscriptions for the *Windsor Daily Star* in this period were 61,630 in paid circulation with 38,938 in Greater Windsor circulation.² It is difficult beyond these numbers to know exactly how many readers of the *Star* there really were as many likely shared the paper with friends and families, and others likely bought

¹ Herb Colling, *Ninety-Nine Days: The Ford Strike in Windsor, Ontario, 1945* (Toronto: NC Press Limited, 1995), 170.

them at local newsstands. There were other less significant sources of information including radio and television. CKOK broadcast news beginning in 1932, known today to residents as CKLW, but records for this station are very difficult to locate and are not available for the period in question. The Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) network did not begin broadcasting in Windsor until 1950.³

The *Star* did not have a separate section for crimes and trials as many of the newspapers in the United States had at this time. Estelle B. Freedman examines the creation of new index categories in such papers as the *New York Times* and other large city press outlets because of a perceived 'sex-crime wave' that was hitting the United States.⁴ She shows that newspapers across the nation had such an increased number of articles to publish under this column that its development was necessary. This development suggests a growing societal panic associating this 'sex-crime wave' with homosexuality, and it received frequent press across the United States during the postwar years. It does not appear that this specific press development happened in Windsor by 1946.

Regular stories in these years in the *Star* focused on the war reparations and continuous resettlement of Europe following the Second World War. Features on lives of local men killed in battle are also quite common. Locally a massive tornado destroyed the city from the airport to Tecumseh Road in the summer of 1945, and the Ford Strike also began dominating media attention at the same time. Articles describe the attitudes

² *Windsor Daily Star*, 5 October 1946, 1.

³ Neil Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada: One Hundred Years of Windsor and Essex County, 1854-1954* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1954), 310.

⁴ Estelle B. Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960." In *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History* ed., Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 199.

and beliefs of politicians nationally and internationally, demonstrating fears of Soviet socialism and its possible impact on especially western European and North American countries. Especially in the *Windsor Daily Star* union activity in local and national factories ignited worries that socialism was already beginning to invade this hemisphere.

In 1945 the *Star*, following the changing national discourses, directly linked sexual deviancy and the 'slasher' homicides. On 18 August the *Star* published an article that claimed, "A homicidal maniac is believed to be at large, and police believe that the man they are hunting for in connection with the two riverfront stabbings is a sexual pervert. As a result the city parks will be watched closely for such characters."⁵ Thus, police had initiated a close watch of the city parks to prevent further murders and to curb sexual deviancy. This publication might well have generated fear in readers about going to public parks. Therefore, the 'slasher' case as written about in the *Star* began creating fear in the city as well as bringing attention to sex crimes.

Fears of homosexuality and sexual deviancy and connections with homicide were commonly articulated in the *Star*. In early 1945 little was published that connected sexual deviancy with homicide, but immediately following the first stabbing and two murders in the summer, such links appeared frequently. For example, W. L. Clark wrote in his editorial "Perverts a Menace," a response to the stabbings and deaths that suggested by Clark that Windsor was being terrorized by a sexual pervert and maniac.⁶ He made the link between sexuality and murder when he claims that Windsor should

...gather all its sex perverts to end violent crime in the city so that people could feel at ease because these perverts are a menace to everyone. One suspect is under arrest but others are at large. With so many persons being slashed Windsor will have another couple murders on the sheet before long.

⁵ "Police Hours Increased: Spur Effort to Solve Murders," *Windsor Daily Star*, 18 August 1945, 1-2.

⁶ W. L. Clark, "Perverts a Menace," *Windsor Daily Star*, 8 July 1946, 2.

To save human life it would be advisable to round up all the perverts and hold them for observation.⁷

Sources do not reveal if this was the common belief of many citizens in Windsor at the time. At the same time this quote from the *Star* describes contemporary feelings that were quite conservative. Homosexuality was under attack in postwar North America as further demonstrated by a 1949 *Newsweek* article entitled "Queer People" that named homosexuals as "murderers."⁸ Barry Adam claims that this was "echoing a consistent media theme identifying homosexuals as destroyers of society."⁹ As 'destroyers of society,' they were both actual murderers and killers of the image of the masculine man. Publications such as these also aided in creating a sex panic that extended across the continent in the immediate postwar years.

By 1946 there was a much more pronounced public outcry in the *Windsor Daily Star* connecting homosexuality and sexual perverts with deviancy. In fact, a citizens' group comprised of five local women's groups, Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches, the YM-YWCA, the Windsor Police Association and the *Windsor Daily Star* called for a group of citizens to police the parks for men of these "types."¹⁰ They worked to set up a team of City Parks Department employees who would be sworn in as special constables and empowered to arrest the men who committed sex crimes or molested children in the local parks.¹¹ This is significant as it is likely a direct result of the case of the Windsor 'slasher' and all the media attention that it raised regarding 'sex perverts' in the parks. In

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 62.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Militant Drive Starts Here Against Sex Crimes – Parks Employes Will Be Constables: Hanrahan, The Star and Police Praised For Their Efforts," *Windsor Daily Star*, 29 July 1946, 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

addition, this media attention connected the parks with this form of social deviancy and laid the foundation for a group response within the city against deviants.

After this group was formed, articles and editorials comment on the special constables and the public reaction to this policing of parks. One editorial article by an unknown author, for example, correlated sex crimes and murder in the city, claiming that,

The men arrested and convicted [in the parks] must be required to undergo observation and treatment, and they should not be released until they can be pronounced safe. If this is not done the law will only be jailing and releasing potential killers, a policy of evasion which has not worked out anywhere it has been tried.¹²

Again, this is likely a direct response to the 'slasher' case. This correlation between sexual deviancy and murder in the parks was not apparent in the *Star* until the postwar period.¹³ Furthermore, this demonstrates that the discourses surrounding the criminalization of male homosexuals and their activities were transmitted to the public through the *Star* and other media outlets. Also, the impact these stories and editorials had was to create a panic in the city so great that citizens' groups responded by helping police solve the problems concerning sexual deviancy and homosexuals within the city limits.

This quotation also directs residents' attention to the fact that these so-called molesters, or possibly homosexual men, were potential killers. Many scholars have studied this period and suggest that the press frequently called men charged for murder 'perverts,' 'sex deviants,' or 'molesters' regardless of the sex or age of the victim. Many articles studying this connection note that even in cases where there were murdered

¹² "Sex Crimes Drive," *Windsor Daily Star*, 30 July 1946, Editorial Page.

¹³ For further information on this see Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialects of Discovery, Toronto, 1890-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* Vol.5 No.4 (1994), 207-242. Maynard contends in this article that the historical development of "indecency" was connected to the growth of the City of Toronto. Other scholars such as Barry D. Adam claim the roots of homosexual persecution began much earlier and that they change with the cultures and politics of acceptance in different places and at different times.

young females in these years, it was hypothesized by newspaper columnists that the attackers were likely homosexual men.¹⁴ Regardless, this quote is yet another connection made in the *Star* to the wider continental discourses on sexual deviancy in this period.

The media fostered the creation of public panic during the 'slasher' case again when after the second murder in 1945 a pencil scribbling in the restroom in the Windsor-Detroit International Tunnel border crossing claimed "Civilian – Sergeant – Sergeant – Girl Next."¹⁵ This discovery and its subsequent publication in the *Star* contributed to an increasing panic throughout the city. The suggestion that a woman or girl was likely the next target of the 'slasher' supported the fear that this person would not stop killing. Again, it was suggested in the same *Star* article that only a sexual deviant could commit such sexually brutal crimes. The crimes were described as sexually brutal in the *Star* immediately following the murder of Frank Scigelski, when the writers claimed his trousers and buttocks had been slashed extensively and the stab wounds were deep enough into his heart to kill.¹⁶ In the first two murders police found the victims lying in sexual positions with their trousers slashed to pieces. Additionally, the *Star* stated that Scigelski was stabbed in the back seven times, and some of his history was uncovered by police that could shed light on his presence at the waterfront the night of his death.¹⁷ Hence, by printing the graphic details in writing and in photographs of the bodies of the victims, the *Star* also insinuated that the murderer was likely a homosexual man regardless of the sex of the next victim.

¹⁴ Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires," 211.

¹⁵ "Police Nab Murder Suspects – Jail is Crowded After Manhunt: Believe Headway is Being Made in Solution of the Three Slayings," *Windsor Daily Star*, 20 August 1945, 1.

¹⁶ "No Closer to Solution of Murder: Police Get No Clues in Fatal Stabbing," *Windsor Daily Star*, 10 August 1945, 2.

¹⁷ "Several Suspects Sought in the Slaying of Frank Scigelski: Arrest is Soon Expected By Police – Funeral of Stabbing Victim is Held," *Windsor Daily Star*, 11 August 1945, 5.

Immediately following this second murder, an article published on 18 August 1945 describes the need for increased police hours as police recognized the increase in sex crimes in the city and “will be paying special attention to these crimes.”¹⁸ The article mentions that a man arrested the evening before on vagrancy charges has had his charges increased to gross indecency. This suggests that the *Star* and police made a connection between the solving of the murders and increased sex crimes. At this point the *Star* claims,

A homicidal maniac is believed to be at large, and police believe that the man they are hunting for in connection with the two riverfront stabbings is a sexual pervert. As a result, the city parks will be watched closely for such characters.¹⁹

Therefore the direct connection was made by the *Star* with regard to these ‘slasher’ homicides and homosexual men. In fact, the statement that the parks would be watched ‘closely for such characters,’ suggests the connection between gay men and public spaces within the city that police knew about and likely policed regularly for homosexual activity. The *Star* journalist also claimed that, because the stabbings took place at riverfront parks, the man they were looking for was “... of the moron type frequently found loafing around the parks.”²⁰ Although this does not explicitly state that police were searching for a homosexual man, in this period homosexual men were known to ‘cruise’ local parks after dark and search out potential mates there.²¹

Most historians of sexuality in North America who study the 1940’s recognize this common connection between male homosexuality and public spaces. In Toronto,

¹⁸ “Police Hours Increased – Spurr Effort to Solve Murders,” *Windsor Daily Star*, 18 August 1945, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 59.

there were also parks, bars, and hotels identified as gay public spaces.²² Many places in the United States, including Lafayette Park in Washington D.C., had well known gay spaces, where police watched closely and arrested anyone suspicious. These arrests began in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and lasted until the end of the cold war.²³ These gay public spaces were developing across the continent, and they tended to be areas that the police and public associated with ‘deviants,’ ‘homosexuals,’ and ‘molesters.’ In Windsor, the *Star* refers thus to the waterfront parks as this place, and as the investigation of the ‘slasher’ case developed, police may have looked to boarding houses as well.

During this period in Windsor many men were in transition after the war and thus rooming in boarding houses. The *Star* suggested that the victims of the ‘slasher’ and possibly the perpetrator “resided in these quarters.”²⁴ The police stressed through these media accounts for any ‘untoward incidents which came to the attention of boarding room residents’ to be reported to police.²⁵ Thus the *Star* connected boarding houses and sexual deviancy in men; women did not usually reside in this period in boarding homes. Although no results came from this connection, it is important to note that because the *Star* recognized these houses as possibly dangerous, or as housing deviants, perverts and molesters, police did continue surveillance around these places for criminal activity, including homosexuality, throughout their investigation of the ‘slasher’ case.

²² Steven Maynard, “Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialects of Discovery, Toronto, 1890-1930.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* Vol.5, No.2 (1994), 207-242.

²³ Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, Chapter 2.

²⁴ “Police Nab Murder Suspects – Jail is crowded After Manhunt; Believe Headway is Being Made In Solution of Three Slayings,” *Windsor Daily Star*, 20 August 1945, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Fear and rumours spread throughout the city, and published in the *Star*, made headlines proclaiming during the course of the police investigation that two female children had been raped and murdered in Jackson Park and Amherstburg Township respectively. Further, more writing was located in the restroom at the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel; claiming to be written by the Slasher, it stated that he was a returned American soldier who would not stop killing. An article published 20 August 1945 is a call to citizens by Windsor Police Chief Claude Renaud to remain calm and to ignore rumours of other murders and attempted homicides taking place within the city. He argued, “these crimes have brought about a situation this city has never before encountered – citizens are aroused like never before – unfounded rumours, high tension.”²⁶ The media obviously helped to perpetuate the rumours through their publication on the front page of the *Star*, whereas the Police Chief is not quoted until page three. The *Star* clearly did participate in the creation of a sex crimes panic based on the stresses facing the police and residents after the recent stabbings and murders.

The *Star* published an editorial entitled, “This Fiend Must Be Caught,” on the same day.

The nature of the crimes perpetrated leaves no doubt that mere senseless blood – lust is the sole motive. Experts in psychology and criminal investigation give it as their considered opinion that the murders are the work of someone with a perverted mind, of a type that makes its appearance not infrequently and terrifies a community until captured.²⁷

Further this author claims, “the police will find this person among the riff raff that congregate in certain undesirable sections of the community,” and that the “Star will cheerfully give the reward to someone that can get the sadistic menace which has plunged

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “This Fiend Must Be Caught,” *Windsor Daily Star*, 20 August 1945, 4.

a whole population into something approaching panic.”²⁸ This response illustrates that the *Star* associated homosexuality with certain areas of the city such as parks and certain other unnamed locations. This is the last article published by the *Star* regarding the murders in 1945, as the homicides promptly ended, and other pressing issues such as the Ford Strike took over the media coverage and police force attention. By initially stating that “lust is the sole motive” for the murders, the author clearly suggested that this murderer was a homosexual man since only men had been killed by the ‘slasher.’ The writer then clearly attributed these murders to a homosexual man who lusted for his victims and was psychotic enough to kill them for pure passion.

This evidence does not tell how citizens responded to newspaper reports. The *Star* claimed that rumours about impending murders extended throughout the city limits and into Essex County. The police search of vehicles after the murders extended into Kent County as far as Chatham, Ontario, eighty kilometers away, implying that this investigation was quite large and probably involved many people. Therefore, it also demonstrates how concerned and anxious police were to solve the murders. At the same time, because the *Star* is an Anglophone source of media, it is hard to judge whether new Canadians were aware of the case. Many central, western and eastern European immigrants settled in Windsor and Essex County immediately following the Second World War, and it is unlikely they were aware of the case as they may not, in many situations have been able to read or understand English well.²⁹ Coverage by the *Star* was quite brief - one month in 1945, and two weeks in 1946 – not including the trial treatment. Therefore, the police warnings to people in boarding houses and parks may

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada*, 320-321.

have instigated conversation and caution in those places and made the soldiers more aware while they stayed in the city.

The *Star* also represented women in this story, exacerbating their fears with lurid stories and grave warnings. Although the murders were represented as concerning only homosexual men, the media still factored women in to the mass panic in the city. Specifically, when women were mentioned in the *Star* in connection to this case, such as in the threat scrawled in the Tunnel washroom and the Parks Department Committee as established by women to fight sexual deviancy in the city, they were featured prominently as active citizens within the community and received much news coverage.³⁰ When it came to reporting the panic in the city, the paper claimed that most women were afraid and were the ones making the 'bothersome' calls to police. The women were said to be concerned about their husbands and children, however, not themselves. This demonstrates that the media contributed to the fear these women faced, as well as portraying them as fearful for their community.

Even the amount of coverage this story received in the media illustrates the impact that this case had on the city. After the first two murders in 1945, the search for a suspect continued to make headline news each day. Not just the front page but also several other pages of the *Star* were covered in stories of the 'slasher' throughout the active police investigation. The large bulletins in the *Star* advertising rewards for information on the case show the way the authorities reacted to a killer by enlisting aid of

³⁰ The following articles demonstrate that there truly was a panic about sex crimes in the City of Windsor while at the same time as a serial attacker was terrorizing the city at night. "Militant Drive Starts Here Against Sex Crimes – Parks Employees Will Be Constables: Hanrahan, The Star and Police Praised For Their Efforts," *Windsor Daily Star*, 29 July 1946, 5, "Sex Crimes Drive," *Windsor Daily Star*, 30 July 1946, Editorial Page, "Parks Here Are Safe, Committee Told – Educational Campaign Decided on Sex Crime War," *Windsor Daily Star*, 31 July 1946, 3, 6.

citizens to solve the case. This large amount of coverage, mostly front-page news, strongly suggests a connection to the sex crimes panics Freedman studies in the United States at the same time.

Full news coverage of the arrest, trial, and conviction of the accused man believed to be the 'slasher' was published throughout the summers of 1945 and 1946. By July 1946 the supposed 'slasher' was under arrest and Windsor residents wanted to ensure that the streets, parks, and boarding houses would be safe once again for men, women and children. Consequently, the drive to monitor the parks was enforced and community groups expressed the intent to ensure that such crimes could never happen again in the confines of this city. Thus, the *Star* acted as a mediator between the police, sex crimes, and the public responses to them. In this case, a media-created sex crimes panic did take place and was escalated to new heights through the media coverage of the Windsor 'slasher' case.

In summary, newspaper coverage on crime increased following the Second World War with several American papers such as the *New York Times* developing new index categories especially covering sex crimes because of a perceived social threat associated with sex crimes and homosexuality. In Windsor, the *Windsor Daily Star* connected male homosexuality with crime especially after the three murders and a stabbing occurring near the waterfront parks in 1945. Connections between gay public spaces and crime, such as the waterfront parks and boarding houses, helped escalate fears that these murders were part of a larger sex crimes wave taking place on the continent.

The *Star* stimulated fears of residents regarding sexual deviancy and male homosexuality. Editorials and a letter to the editor support the dominant discourses of

the period in claiming that 'sexual deviants' and 'perverts' should be 'rounded up' and 'held for observation' in order to avoid more violent crimes in the city.³¹ Further, several groups of citizens responded to this supposed sex crimes wave by lobbying the local authorities to have several parks employees deputized to arrest suspicious men in the parks for sex crimes.

Lastly, the media aided in the creation of public panic and outcry against 'sexual deviancy' and crime by publishing stories and allegations that the 'slasher' homicides were both committed by and on homosexuals. Until these stories appeared, there is no evidence that residents were truly concerned about sex crimes. The panic that resulted hypothesized the next victim could be anyone, including women, men, or children. Thus, the response of the community can be attributed at least partially to the articles published in the *Star*. The repercussions of this led to the arrest by Windsor Police of Ronald George Sears.

Ronald Sears was arrested 6 July 1946 because his sister-in-law responded to a picture published in the *Star* of a knife utilized in the last 'slasher' attack. The police investigation did not end, nor did *Star* coverage on the case at this point. Instead, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, police widened their investigation to ensure that Sears was the man they would convict on charges of murder. Windsor Police detectives now held their suspect, the 'slasher,' after two summers of searching.

³¹ Clark, "Perverts a Menace," 2.

CHAPTER THREE

Policing the 'Slasher': Homosexuality and Crime in Windsor

This chapter examines the criminalization of male homosexuality through an analysis of police records. The police investigation of the Windsor 'slasher' case began in late summer of 1945 and at this time they did not seem to link gay men with the 'slasher' crimes. Several obvious leads were presented to police during the early part of their investigation, but it was not until the arrest of Ronald George Sears that police made the definite correlation between male homosexuals and the attacks. Thus, in this chapter I suggest that although male homosexuality was linked with the 'slasher' assaults by the *Windsor Daily Star*, the police likely did not make this connection until after the arrest and confession of their suspect in the summer of 1946. This cannot be known for sure as I am lacking some of the police records that might have indicated otherwise. This I argue was likely the case because the Windsor Police Department did not have a homicide unit (the *Star* claimed the city had not seen such an outbreak in crime for twenty-five years); and established protocols and regulations did not really yield to a focus on a specific type of person such as a sexual deviant or homosexual man.

As an archival source, the police records of the Windsor "Slasher" case illustrate an entirely new dimension of this case that created a panic in the City of Windsor throughout the summers of 1945 and 1946. These documents highlight the inside story of the police investigation from the very beginning of the stabbings until the preparation for trial proceedings. These police officers and their secretaries recorded this information for police use only, hoping that eventually they would have enough information and solid leads to both capture and bring this gruesome murderer to trial.

The Windsor Police Force under the direction of Police Chief Claude Renaud was not prepared for a serial murder case of this magnitude when the 'slasher' case initially began. The fact that police did not assign regular homicide men to the case because they did not have a related or active department illustrates the virtual absence of this type of crime in the city at or before this time. Further, detectives were not specifically trained in solving homicides as they are today. The only reference made in these primary sources about a homicide detective was the media article detailing a warning from a Detroit, Michigan, homicide detective.¹ Although Detroit homicide investigators had dealt with cases like this in the past, it was new to Windsor, and the police in charge of the case were labeled 'acting' detectives. These police officers recorded and organized this information, and the files are written from their perspective. The files, however, were created after the initial investigation and may not contain everything the police recorded.

Additionally, these police files are likely missing many of their original documents. For example, there are no hand written police notes that might indicate a preliminary speculation about either the victims or perpetrator possibly being connected with, or themselves being, homosexual or homophobic. It is impossible to tell how many records are missing; my analysis is therefore based on the remaining documents in the files.²

These records are separated into nine separate files with one for each of three victims, two for the first attempted stabbing victim George Mannie, two for the first

¹ "Feels Two Killings Are By Same Man – Head of Detroit Police Squad Tells of Experiences in Similar Crimes," *Windsor Daily Star* 18 August 1945, 3.

² By the early 1970's the Windsor Police Force decided to purge their archives of the old case files owing to lack of space. Fortunately this case was not included in the destruction of records as it tells the story that the Annual Reports do not – the story of serial murder, arrest, and what the City of Windsor's last conviction leading to a sentence of execution was. These police files tell another side of the case not readily available in the media account or legal transcript.

murder victim Frank Scigelski, one for the suspect Ronald George Sears, and the last containing information collected from the investigation. This is significant as they do not connect information from one stabbing with another as the media did before it had concrete facts on the case. These files are organized separately so that in trial they could be considered a separate count of either attempted murder or murder. This approach strengthened the police and prosecution's case because it clearly arranged only the information deemed relevant to the case against Sears as important to file.

Each individual file on the victims and perpetrator is organized as it would have been presented to the prosecutor for trial. At the beginning of every victim's file is a table of contents that lists the evidence, and the witnesses interviewed by police. These evidence lists are rarely more than witnesses' statements and in the cases of the attempted murders, the weapons utilized, clothes worn by both the victim and accused on the date of stabbing, and statements made by the accused about the individual stabbing. For example, the "list of exhibits" available for the charge of attempted murder of Joseph Gelenscer includes the medical report of the doctor who saw Gelenscer and confirmed that he was stabbed on said night, a butcher's knife, signed confession of the accused, the accused's blue suit, the victim's clothes, and a sketch of the crime scene as remembered by the victim and recorded by the police.³ The remaining four case files have similar evidence but are organized separately for each individual stabbing.

The witness lists are also quite intriguing as they list more police officers who handled each crime scene than they do concrete witnesses to the stabbing events. In fact, there were no witnesses to any of these events except for the three men who survived

³ Windsor Police Case File #1, "List of Exhibits," 4.

their stabbings. The other listed witnesses were specifically character witnesses and those sharing information about Sears' behaviour or statements before his arrest.

Although the lists were comprised solely of men, with the exception of Sears's sister-in-law, this does not suggest that a gender bias in the selection of witnesses was the norm in court trials.⁴ This case lacked any credible witnesses, and therefore it was most likely by coincidence that the most credible witnesses in this case of limited evidence were of professions that were still male-dominated such as physicians, psychiatrists, and police officers. Overall, these lists are important indicators from these records of the people who would be the key witnesses in the trial of Ronald Sears.

The records point to some parts of the investigation that led nowhere. For example, some records demonstrate the apparent concern that the perpetrator of these crimes may not have been a local. Many of the citizens' concerns point to newspaper articles from across Canada and the United States that were facing similar cases of serial stabbings and homicide. Correspondence between other police departments is readily available, especially between the Windsor Police Department and the Toronto Police as well as Redwood City Police in California. Detroit City Police in Michigan, as the city which borders Windsor, also provided information available in this file. Lastly, probably in response to the tunnel washroom message of 20 August 1945, claiming the 'slasher' had performed American military service, the United States Army sent telegrams stating

⁴ Following the 'return to normalcy,' or the return to the prewar culture, Canadian society reverted to the patriarchal model of society that existed previous to World War II. Women were supposed to remain in the domestic sphere and for the most part care and raise families. Thus, many women did not attend university and gain the education that men of authority had. For more information on this in the American context see, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988) and for Canadian context see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-1960," *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History 4th Edition*. Ed., Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason, and Adele Perry (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2002), 313-334.

that none of their soldiers had the name of a suspect that the Windsor Police arrested. These were all solid leads that were followed up on and taken seriously by local police.

In another example the police made a connection between boarding houses and murder. Specifically a *Star* article from 24 September 1945 entitled, "Roomer Held in Stabbing," connected a Toronto man with the stabbing of another boarder in a Toronto boarding home. The article was sent in anonymously, but police did follow up on this lead to see the whereabouts of the accused quite quickly. Correspondence with the Toronto Police Department cleared up this lead immediately as they were able to establish the whereabouts of the accused quite quickly. At this point, police were looking for direct links among the three incidents, including similar motives and methods of killing. A forensic profile of the killer was not in the forefront of the case, and the *Star* had yet to publish much of its information connecting the stabbings with homosexuality. Thus, it is understandable that police would follow up on such a solid lead; it was probably not a connection to homosexuality and a rooming house but rather a connection between the motive and method.

In the files for the first summer of attacks were some pieces of evidence that pointed to a link between the crimes and homosexuality, but the police records do not demonstrate that they took this evidence seriously. For example, the first victim who was murdered on 8 August 1945, Frank Scigelski, was identified as a suspected homosexual early on in this case as his file in the 'slasher' records contains a previous arrest record citing him for gross indecency.⁵ Police knew that this victim held a previous sex-related

⁵ Gary Kinsman claims that previous to the 1954 revisions to the Canadian Criminal Code, "gross indecency" was only used to prosecute male homosexual offences, especially oral sex. For further information see Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books Ltd., 1996), 169. Also note the Report of Detective J.J. Mahoney to John Burns, Esq.,

record and on the night of his murder "...had committed acts of gross indecency with boys of the age of 15 years." Thus, it is clear that this connection between homosexuality and homicide was available to police immediately after Scigelski was murdered.

Two weeks later police interviewed an informant who claimed that all the victims were homosexuals and that the murderer most likely was as well. In the most extensive file, entitled, "Information Re: Murders," police kept records of 210 leads written or called in to police. Among them is an interview with a woman named Margo Hind on 23 August 1945. Margo Hind, who had previously left a message for the detectives claiming that she had information, connects sexual perversion with these homicides. This is less than a week after the *Star* claimed the police were hunting for a 'sexual pervert.' The closeness in time suggests that police were in fact linking the crime to homosexuality in some way. Yet, the result of the interaction with Hind suggests otherwise.

In the interview Hind asserted that "the victims of the murders were perverts, or sex men."⁶ She continued by claiming that the Ambassador Hotel in Windsor was a gathering place for "this type of person."⁷ This connection between homosexuality and the 'slasher' crimes is therefore apparent in Hind's testimony. She contended that homosexual activity was well known in the Ambassador Hotel and insinuated that police should probably be looking for their murderer there. She later stated that one of the men there felt that "this [murder] could be one of jealousy," suggesting that the murderer "might have been in love with the victim or enraged because he was not taken."⁸

Inspector of Detectives, Windsor Police Department," 18 December 1945, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 2.

⁶ "Interview by Windsor Police with Margo Hind 23 August 1945," File #2 "RE: Information on Murders." *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Therefore it is apparent at least one citizen within this community did connect these outside of the media realm and felt that police should have been trying to do the same.

At the same time, police did not seem to take this discussion with Hind seriously, as they state at the end of the report that “She [Hind] is rather an interesting person and seems to know a lot about this kind of person, and we have been thinking that she may be one herself... She had on a suit of pyjamis [sic] and [was] not dressed in girls’ dresses. Her nails are painted.”⁹ Because the police did not feel that this was a trustworthy woman, as demonstrated in their report, they apparently did not follow up on this lead. There is no evidence to suggest that they pursued Hind’s reference to the hotel in this or any further file for this case. Hind was judged by police on her appearance and was likened to homosexuals because she did not dress as respectable women of this period should. Hind’s statement was one of only a few responses made by women, and she was definitely the only witness who clearly confronted the possible connection between male homosexuality and the attacks.

Hind’s account also identifies homosexuality with a certain location within the city. As confirmed in the media accounts, police knew that specific locations including city parks and boarding homes were already perceived as gay public spaces. The fact that the media did not associate the local hotels, or particularly the Ambassador Hotel, with male homosexual activity means that it may not have been as widely known that gay men patronized these establishments. On the other hand, it could have been that the police did know and did not feel that leads in this direction were important to their investigation.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

The most telling clue that police received in this case was a letter sent months later in March 1946 to police headquarters by the supposed 'slasher.' The letter hints that the victims did have a common link and police should find out what the link was.

Dear Sirs, This is a challenge to you. "T" will strike again in the near future. I cannot disclose this to you of course. My avenge [sic] on these people are great. Nothing shall stand in my way. I will use only the knife on my supposed enemies. I'm not a returned soldier. This is no prank. THE SLASHER.¹⁰

The key was that police detectives needed to identify a connection between male homosexuality and the crimes in order to identify their perpetrator, although this link could only be made after the arrest of Sears and his confessions to police revealing the connection. Whether the police took this letter seriously is not known, yet it is possible that they did because it was dusted for fingerprints and none were found. The letter was not admitted later in the trial as evidence and it is not clear that they ever connected it to Sears. Thus, for many months after the 1945 summer stabbing and murders, the police found little to go on and did not, according to their records, take seriously the few available hints of a link between the crimes and homosexuality. And they took this approach despite the proclamations from the *Windsor Daily Star* about sex perverts.

Finally, however, in the summer of 1946, after the stabbing of Alexander Voligny on June 24, police began to gain a new understanding of the motive. The information gathered in the questioning of Voligny clarified to police a connection between homosexuality and murder in this case, replicating the evidence about Scigelski. Specifically, the victim admitted to being homosexual to police and stated the following in his own defense about the night he was stabbed:

¹⁰ Letter Written to the Windsor Police by the Windsor Slasher, 22 March 1946, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1.

He started to monkey around with me, he pulled my penis out, then he took his out and we both started playing with one another. Then we lay down on a slope underneath a tree. He untied the back of my braces, then the front. I untied my shorts. We were lying on our backs. Then he pushed me over and wanted me to lay on my face and he wanted to put it up my back side, but I did not go for that. He coaxed me to turn over and as I was on my side he pushed me over and stabbed me twice in the back.¹¹

It seemed that the perpetrator was playing a game with his victims and was possibly homosexual as well. He stabbed them all in the back when these men least expected it. Police could still have believed that the murderer was a homophobe but Voligny's statement now suggested he could also have been a homosexual man. Police reports do not specifically state either of these as motives, but we can read this possibility through the questioning and interview process where all surviving victims, and then Sears, were asked similar questions by the police about their whereabouts in the parks and any sexual preference.

The lead that broke this case for the Windsor Police was connected to a photograph published in the *Windsor Daily Star*. Police published a picture of a detective holding the knife found in the back of one of the stabbing victims. This picture led Dorothy Sears, the killer's sister-in-law, to report him to police. On 6 July 1946, Sears was taken into custody, then arrested for the murders and attempted murders attributed to the 'slasher.'

Sears stated to police in his confessions that he also connected homosexuality with these homicides and attempted murders. As noted in the letter sent to police from the supposed 'slasher' a year earlier, Sears reiterated in his initial contact with police that these homosexual perverts ruined his life. In fact, all of the confessions made by Sears

¹¹ "Case Report by Anderson and Brand, Dets. To J.P. Campbell, Inspector of Detectives, Windsor Police Department," 23 June 1946, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1.

were supposedly voluntary, but they are written in the exact same form of questioning as the previous example of the police questioning of Mannie. This coincidence suggests that the police transcribed his confessions. The confessions utilized for this paper are typed and not signed.

Sears's confessions are quite different in content. In both his first and second confessions taken at 6:45 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. on 6 July 1946 respectively Sears denies having stabbed anyone. In fact, he claims that he had gone to the movie theatre and after stopping for a newspaper at a local store, he walked straight home. The third confession taken at 10:45 p.m. on the same night is quite different. In this Sears states that after he left the movie theatre he walked down to Government Park and was sitting alone when a man approached him and was soliciting sexual favours from him. He then claims to have pretended to go along with him and when the man, Alexander Voligny, was not looking at him, he stabbed him in the back with a knife. The last confession taken at 11:15 p.m. is almost exactly the same except that the victim was Joseph Gelenscer and Sears stabbed him with an ice pick.¹²

In Sears' confession to police about his fourth victim, Voligny, he was asked about their presence in the park, and replied, contradicting Voligny, that everything that took place was instigated by the victim. Sears claimed that he then fought off his advances and eventually stabbed Voligny with intent to kill because the latter would not

¹² Windsor Police File #4, "Statement of Ronald George Sears Taken at 6:45 P.M.," 6 July 1946, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1-2; Windsor Police File #4, "Statement of Ronald George Sears Taken at 7:15 P.M.," 6 July 1946, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1-2; Windsor Police File #4, "Statement of Ronald George Sears Taken at 10:15 P.M.," *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1-3; Windsor Police File #4, "Statement of Ronald George Sears Taken at 11:15 P.M.," *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1-2.

leave him alone.¹³ If this confession was made and signed by Sears – there are no existing copies of the signed testimonies in the police records – then police had a very strong case against Sears for prosecution. Thus, police had a murder case focusing on homosexuality but very little evidence beyond the confessions as tangible evidence against Sears.

After the confession of Sears, police then re-interviewed the 1945 stabbing victim, George Mannie, who was the first victim of the ‘slasher’ and the third to be recognized as such. Contained within his file is the original statement of 24 July 1945 made by the victim before the police connected this stabbing with the case. This statement included only the fact that he was stabbed by an unknown assailant when partially drunk down at Government Park one night. No direct questions about either his or his assailant’s sexual preference were asked. However, the line of argument that police executed during questioning was quite different the following summer. Most significantly, all of the remaining police files on each of the victims question their sexual preferences and the police thus propose this as the reason these men were targeted by the ‘slasher.’

By summer 1946, and two days following the arrest of Sears, the re-questioning of Mannie took on a completely different perspective – they asked whether he had homosexual thoughts or relations with his attacker. It was clear that this connection between murder and homosexuality was now made by police as demonstrated in the following questions asked by police to Mannie:

Q: Did you tell this fellow you had sucked other boys off?

A: No.

¹³ Windsor Police File #4, “Statement of Ronald George Sears Taken at 11:15 P.M.,” 6 July 1946, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 2.

Q: Did you want to suck this fellow off?

A: No.

Q: Did anything happen between you and he?

A: Nothing with respect to sucking anyone off.

Q: Did you start to take your pants down?

A: No.

Q: Did this man stab you in the back?

A: Someone stabbed me in the back.¹⁴

Apparently the police began to re-question the three surviving victims along these lines as they had now received the confessions of Sears and had gathered enough evidence to claim that Sears's motive was homophobic – these men were trying to get him to perform sexual deeds on them and Sears was disgusted enough by this to kill. Police began building their case around this theory.

It must be noted that the Windsor Police Department had very little concrete evidence in this case. When looking at each case file for individual victims, there is nothing of material form that could have been used to implicate Ronald George Sears as the perpetrator in these actual and attempted homicides. For instance, when the letter from the 'slasher' was initially sent into police headquarters it was dusted for fingerprints as were the weapons that remained inserted in the backs of most victims. Not one of these tangible items held evidence of the identity of the 'slasher.' Fingerprints taken from the letter sent to police and from the weapons recovered, are not included in the case files or extant records.

Similarly, a handwriting sample was not procured from Sears or compared to the letter sent to police. Had Sears written the letter, police might then have had evidence of his guilt in connection to these murders. Instead the letter was dismissed, or forgotten, and no writing sample was taken as far as the police files indicate.

¹⁴ "Voluntary Statement of George Thomas Mannie," 24 July 1946. Windsor Police File #8, "George Mannie," *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 2.

Blood tests were performed on all of Sears' clothing that he was said to have worn on the nights in question. All of these tests, including those done on weapons, Sears's rain coat, suit jacket, and trousers, proved that only a small spot was present on a jacket but it could not be proved whether the blood on the coat was human.¹⁵ The forensic tests for evidence such as fingerprinting and blood in the 1940's were still quite archaic compared to the current computerized and advanced laboratory settings. At the same time, though, police in this case did not collect any materials until 6 July 1946 or the day Sears was arrested, probably not by choice but because they did not have a suspect until then. Thus, any clear evidence of blood, especially from the previous summer, would not have been available regardless of the extent of the search.

Lastly, Sears was admitted to two line-ups during the police investigation on the 'slasher.' Because he fit the general description of the assailant and had previously been in contact with police, he was an accessible participant for these. Neither Mannie nor Voligny picked Sears out of the random line-ups set up by police for their attempted stabbings.

This lack of evidence is substantial because police needed to find a way to arrest and help convict Ronald George Sears based on the circumstantial evidence they had. By the time that this case went to trial on 11 September 1946, police still had no solid tangible evidence with which to convict. Sears was tried and convicted on what were supposed to be his own words, but even in court, questions arose as to whether or not the

¹⁵ "Memorandum – Attorney General's Department, Ontario. Re: List of Articles Submitted by Acting Detective Brand," File #3: "Alexander Voligny," 6 July 1946, *Windsor Police Departmental Records*, 1.

statements admitted to evidence were his own.¹⁶ Sears denied these confessions as they were used in court as evidence against him.

In summation, it is clear in the leads that police followed up, they were not specifically looking for a link with homosexuality in this case. In fact, until they arrested Ronald George Sears and he confessed that these victims were making unwanted homosexual advances at him, police did not – at least in the files available for this study – make a correlation between male homosexuality and the ‘slasher’ murders. It is unclear altogether whether police made the connection between male homosexuality and their victims before 1946, as the records themselves do not provide evidence to show whether police made the link suggested in the March 1946 letter, or that they followed up on the letter afterwards at all. What remains clear is that after arresting Sears and collecting four separate confessions from him, police connected homosexuality with the slasher’s victims. They re-questioned all surviving victims in a manner oriented at pinpointing each man’s sexual preference and reasons for frequenting the riverfront park at such early morning hours on their respective nights of assault. After police questioning of Sears, and re-questioning of the victims, it was clear that they had discovered the common link between the victims – they were all homosexual.

Instead, police followed the proper protocol for murder investigations and did not actually stray. This was likely because they had little experience in investigating homicides. Furthermore, until they actually received Sears’s confessions, they had little reason to follow up on leads and claims that the victims were bound together by homosexuality as a common link. Despite the media’s focus on homosexuality, and one

¹⁶ Questioning as to whether Sears truly made the statements was considered first in the trial so that the judge could decide on the admissibility of the statements as evidence. See *Rex. Vs. Ronald George Sears [1946]*, 33-70.

witness who suggested that the attacks were linked to it, the records do not indicate that the police investigation was affected by these suggestions. They did pursue many other leads more fully and thus did not connect the case with homosexuality until 1946.

Also, the Windsor Police lacked any concrete evidence that would help them solve this case. They had a file of over two hundred leads from concerned citizens, but they did not have any form of tangible evidence such as fingerprints, or even a credible witness, that might have helped them solve the case sooner. Instead, they continually followed possible leads given to them by residents and only one of these was about homosexuality. Margo Hind, a local resident, suggested to police that the victims and killer in this case were probable homosexuals. She was dismissed as unreliable by police because they thought that she was possibly a deviant herself – as evidenced by her appearance and noted in the police files. Therefore, because of the lack of a homicide division, hard evidence, or credible witnesses, police did not focus on homosexuality the way that the *Star* did.

Ronald George Sears was formally charged for unlawfully murdering Hugh Blackwood Price on the 17 August 1945 contrary to Section 259 of the Canadian Criminal Code¹⁷ based on the evidence police collected. Sears was only tried on this one murder because the police felt they held sufficient evidence on the Price murder to effectively prosecute Sears so that he would receive the harshest sentence possible. The police claimed that Sears had confessed, and they presented his signed testimony at the trial that commenced on 11 September 1946.

¹⁷ Rex. Vs. Ronald George Sears, *The Supreme Court of Ontario* [1946], 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rex Versus Sears: The Absence of Homosexuality as an Issue in Trial

The trial of Ronald George Sears for the murder of Hugh Blackwood Price began on 11 September 1946. Immediately upon opening both the judge and prosecutor challenged the men of the jury to forget everything they had read in the *Windsor Daily Star* throughout the course of the police investigation on this case. They also clarified what the media could and could not print respecting the rights of the defendant to a fair trial, therefore immediately dismissing any links the jurors might have made with the wider homosexual discourses. Further, homosexuality was mentioned only a few times within the course of trial when the lawyers or judge were explaining the actual events that took place in order to verify Sears's confessions made to police. Most importantly, the defense council proposed use of the 'homosexual advance defence,' which justified violence towards homosexuals, and had Judge Wells allowed this theory homosexuality could have played a much larger role in the courtroom than it did. Instead, and unlike in the media with its direct focus on the changing discourse of homosexuality, the other times that homosexuality was raised in the courtroom prove that it was raised in a context only to prove that Sears committed murder and not manslaughter as based on the facts. As in the preceding chapter, the trial lawyers and judge followed specific protocol that did not allow room for the media-created discourses on homosexuality to prevail but instead focused solely on tangible evidence as it directly related to the case of the Windsor 'slasher.'

Rex Versus Ronald George Sears [1946] is the original trial transcript from the Windsor 'slasher' case and is located today at Windsor Police Headquarters. The case

records that remain today were rescued from the original purges of police files; the transcript was in the police files on the 'slasher' case. Unlike the public media accounts of the 'slasher' case or the private police investigation files, this transcript could not be published publicly. Although the *Windsor Daily Star* publicized the trial, by law it could not print certain pieces of evidence as the judge reiterated. These pieces were Sears's confessions.

The court transcript was printed only in English and it is a direct recording of the events in the courtroom as they transpired. The media reports of the trial indicate the jurors included farming men and one local businessman, but their names are not available in either the transcript or the *Star*. Thus, race and ethnicity are not available for these jurymen. Also, it is not clear in the primary documents used for this study whether or not the jury was sequestered.

Unlike in the media accounts published in the *Windsor Daily Star*, there was no apparent effort made in court to portray Sears as a homosexual pervert. Instead, Clark as defense council concentrated immediately upon opening of court by asking the police officers on the stand whether they held knowledge of the victim as a homosexual.¹ More specifically, Clark attempted to characterize Price as a known homosexual pervert when cross-examining the first witness, Detective J. Hill. He pressed the issue when he asked,

Q: Did the deceased have a police record as a homosexual pervert?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: He had a police reputation as a pervert?

A: No, not that I know of.

Q: Do you know about his general reputation?

A: The general reputation, yes.²

¹ In the Supreme Court of Ontario, *His Majesty Vs. Ronald George Sears [1946]*, 3.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

Clark was trying to insinuate that the victims were all likely homosexuals. After this, the subject of homosexuality is completely abandoned. This questioning was significant because Hill was the first witness to testify, and therefore Clark was possibly trying to make homosexuality a central theme in the trial. He might have been attempting to suggest that Sears, even if they found him guilty, had been somewhat justified in his act of murder. As mentioned in the chapter on media, homosexuality was considered enough of a social threat and threat to masculinity that Sears might have been viewed as having had a legitimate excuse if he had killed for this reason.

Therefore, it seemed clear that Major Clark was attempting to use a 'homosexual advance defense' to justify Sears's act of murder on Price. Santo De Pasquale, an Australian lawyer, has argued that, although scholars have only recently identified the defense, it is a "provocation doctrine replete with heterosexist cultural judgments."³ He defines it as a defense by men who claim they were provoked by unwanted homosexual advances and thus respond with violence.⁴ In the cases De Pasquale cites, the violence used by the men charged was murder.⁵ The cases cited are from the immediate post-World War II era in England where the defense was most often dismissed by judges, though accepted rarely by a few.⁶ Clark also seemed in his defense of Sears to be leaning

³ Santo De Pasquale, "Provocation and the Homosexual Advance Defence: The Deployment of culture as a Defence Strategy," *Melbourne University Law Review* 26, April 2002, 111. For further academic theory and historical cases that attempted to use this 'Homosexual Advance Defence' see Adrian Howe, "Homosexual Advances in Law: Murderous Excuse, Pluralized Ignorance and the Privilege of Unknowing" in Ed. Carl Stychin and Didi Herman *Sexuality and the Legal Arena* (2000), 84; Graeme Coss, "Lethal Violence By Men – A Reply," *Criminal Law Journal* Vol.20 (1996), 116; Robert Mison, "Homophobia in Manslaughter: The Homosexual Advance as Insufficient Provocation," *California Law Review* 80 (1992), 133; and Joshua Dressler, "When 'Heterosexual' Men Kill 'Homosexual' Men: Reflections on Provocation Law, Sexual Advances and the 'Reasonable Man' Standard," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 85 (1995), 726.

⁴ De Pasquale, "Provocation and the Homosexual Advance Defence," 111.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 114.

towards using this defense strategy but was unsuccessful because both Justice Wells and Awrey objected, claiming that the case was about murder and not about homosexuality.

Awrey also touched on homosexuality in his cross-examination of Sears but only to learn and confirm that Sears had made his confession to police. Specifically, Awrey asked Sears why he had admitted in his confession that murder victim Price, while at Government Park with him, had sat on a bench and proceeded to hold a 'dirty' conversation with him. Sears replied that he did not remember making any statements to police.⁷ Homosexuality was clearly an issue in this instance, but it seems that Awrey utilized this example only to clarify whether Sears had in fact made this confession to police. By repeating the statement to Sears, Awrey was likely trying to get a reaction from the accused. If Sears had made these confessions, he might have responded to the suggestion that he had been provoked by a homosexual, or that he had participated with Price in homosexual activities. Thus, Awrey's point was to demonstrate that Sears had confessed to murder; it was not about homosexuality. In the end, though, Sears reasserted that he did not remember making any statements to police.

It is also possible, however, that Awrey might have been trying to pursue the idea that Sears was a homosexual and that the conversation and presumed homosexual actions that followed had been completely consensual. If Awrey had been able to get Sears to confirm this, it could have had a significant effect on the trial. The jurors might have reacted to the fact that Sears was a homosexual.

The fact that Sears did not admit to making any confessions to police is very significant. By denying that he remembered making any confessions to police Sears completely jeopardized the prosecution's case because the confessions were their

⁷ *Rex Vs. Ronald George Sears [1946]: 465.*

strongest piece of tangible evidence. If he had been able to cast reasonable doubt on whether he had truly made the confessions, then Sears would not likely have been convicted for Price's murder.

Homosexuality was not mentioned again until Justice Wells discussed the victims in his charge to the jury and did reinforce dominant national discourses on sexuality. He repeated parts of Sears's confession on the Price murder to the jury and after reading the sexual (or homosexual) component of the testimony he claims,

Did these depraved and horrible suggestions – perverted suggestions, I think is the best description, were they sufficient to cause what later took place, a stabbing in the heat of passion?⁸

Therefore, Wells not only claimed that the victims were homosexuals but also shared his negative opinions on homosexuality with the court. He reinforced the dominant national discourses on sexuality in claiming that the suggestions were 'disgusting' and thus not normal. He was also reminding the jurors of their duty "...stand[ing] between the community on one side and the prisoner who [was] charged with a very serious crime," on the other.⁹

Although Wells felt that the victims were homosexuals, he asked whether they deserved to die for that reason. After reading the confession he stated, "Apparently, there is no suggestion that Price at any time used violence. They were going along quite agreeably."¹⁰ Therefore, Wells suggests that, although he did not agree with homosexuality, he did not feel that Price should have been murdered if he had not actually used violence. This was also likely the reason also that the 'homosexual advance defence' would not have succeeded in his courtroom.

⁸ Ibid., 518-519.

⁹ Ibid, 488.

¹⁰ Ibid, 518-519.

Justice Wells continued on the topic of homosexuality when addressing the jurors about their option of finding Sears guilty on a charge of manslaughter. He claimed,

My own view is that he planned to kill him when he realized that he was a sex pervert. He did not do it in the heat of passion; he planned it as they went along. The question of whether you can reasonably find that the stabbing which resulted after he persuaded Price to roll over on his stomach was... an act in sudden passion is yours to decide. For me it does not appear so.¹¹

Clearly, the judge refers to homosexuality, but not for any other reason than to make the jury aware that the charge should remain murder. It is obvious that Wells believed the confession made by Sears and was telling the jury that it should be used as viable evidence against him in their final decision. Wells wanted Sears found guilty of murder as charged, and he made this very transparent for the jurors. Because Sears had named his victims as homosexuals, homosexuality was part of the confessions to police that helped establish Sears's guilt. But Wells' statement was matter-of-fact and related to the murder charge. It lacked the rhetorical charge of the *Star* writings.

It is clear through these examples that legal authorities discussed homosexuality as a cause for the attacks, but they did not necessarily try to make Sears appear to be a homosexual. Instead Awrey and Wells continually mentioned that Sears was in the places that homosexuals were known to frequent and that Sears was likely there with a premeditated plan to murder homosexuals after they made sexual suggestions to him. They did not try to make him look like a pervert, but rather a criminal.

The investigation by Windsor Police held significant evidence that all four other victims of the 'slasher' were homosexuals, but this evidence was deemed inadmissible to this case in order to guarantee a fair trial. As demonstrated in the chapter on the police

¹¹ Ibid, 519.

investigation, a significant amount of information was collected, especially through verbal testimonies, demonstrating that the other victims of the 'slasher' were suspected homosexuals and sexual deviants. Because Hugh Blackwood Price was not included in the police list of suspected homosexuals, and the police never investigated the claims of his suspected homosexual behaviour while in the army, no connection could be made, nor could conclusions be drawn about his sexual preference. In the end, the evidence collected by police on the other victims regarding their homosexuality could not have been included unless their individual cases had been filed with separate and different charges.

Ultimately, Ronald George Sears's trial for murder lasted for six and a half days and proceeded on only one piece of tangible evidence – his confession about the Price murder. Sears's original confession to police, on which he was being tried, claimed that Price was a homosexual. Had Sears admitted in trial that he had confessed and signed the confession, it would have worked against him. But instead, he remained adamant throughout the trial that he did not remember giving police the confession. Both Sears and his lawyer did not refer to the confession at all in trial because Sears would have committed perjury for claiming that he did not remember his confession and, more importantly, he would have been admitting his own guilt. Sears might have admitted to remembering giving police his confession had he been able to use the 'homosexual advance defence.' However, because that legal tactic was dismissed entirely, it is very possible that Major Clark told Sears not to admit making the confession to police at all, therefore ensuring that his guilt remained in question.

Prosecutor Awrey wanted the subject of homosexuality and sexual deviancy to stay out of the trial and he was the main objector to Clark's original attempt to use the 'homosexual advance defence.' The previous example in which Awrey discussed homosexuality was likely used to prove that Sears made his confession to police, but not to address homosexuality as a subject alone. This suggests that Awrey felt the trial could proceed on the evidence of murder he held against Sears. Although much of his evidence was circumstantial, Awrey knew that if the 'homosexual advance defence' was permitted, he might not be able to convince the jurors to dismiss their personal feelings toward homosexuals when they deliberated. Therefore, Awrey probably chose to prosecute Sears on the Price murder, instead of the other stabbing cases, because murder could not be directly linked with homosexuality. Thus Sears could be tried on evidence that would make a somewhat stronger case against him.

Obviously, homosexuality and sexual deviancy were more pronounced in media accounts and police files than in the legal transcript on this case. Throughout the trial the prosecution objected to this defense's 'homosexual advance defence' tactic. At the same time, Clark knew the defence would likely have been successful if he had been able to portray the victims as homosexual deviants and Sears as a nice, young man who had been unlawfully provoked by homosexual advances. Instead, when the judge dismissed using the 'homosexual advance defence,' Clark had Sears deny making the confessions entirely. The 'homosexual advance defence' was most threatening to the court as it might have been accepted as a legitimate reason for murder by the jurors. Instead, because the 'homosexual advance defence' was dismissed, the jurors were left to decide the case on the remaining circumstantial evidence and Sears's confessions. The

transcript shows that homosexuality was thus abandoned as a justified reason for committing murder, consequently proving that it was solely the media and its role in Windsor that shaped the discourses surrounding homosexuality in this period.

The court transcript helps demonstrate through two separate incidents the impact the media had on shaping this case. First, immediately upon the opening of trial, Justice Wells instructed the members of the jury to ignore everything they read or heard about in the newspaper coverage on this case, as the assumed guilt of Sears was evident in that source of information.¹² He clearly asked them to “try to wipe that from your mind,”¹³ demonstrating the influence he assumed the media had had on this case. In addition, the jurors likely understood that there were connections made in the *Star* between homosexuality and the crimes. Therefore, if they had been homophobic, it might have influenced their ultimate decision regardless of the evidence presented in trial. Because the case received so much coverage, these men likely did have to clear their minds to ensure that they held Sears innocent until proven guilty.

The defense counsel, Major J.H. Clark, asked the judge whether the media could print the contents of Sears’s confessions. Major Clark felt that the publishing of the contents was against the law and the judge said the media could not print them.¹⁴ If the contents had been published, then Clark would have had a much harder time convincing the public, as well as the judge and jury, that Sears was innocent on the said charge of murder. Further, if Sears had been found not guilty, he would never have escaped the damage that the confessions might have caused for him with the public. The references

¹² Ibid., 2. It should be noted that the judge only mentions the newspaper as media and does not refer to the local radio station at all.

¹³ Ibid., 2-3

¹⁴ Ibid., 47.

to homosexuality made in the confessions, for example, would not have been acceptable in this period of time. Conversely, it is possible that the public and jury would have been more sympathetic to Sears as the confessions stated that he was fending off homosexual advances when he stabbed his victims. This might have made the confessions more acceptable to print. Justice Wells decided, when considering the admissibility of evidence, to ask the media not to publish the contents of Sears' confessions. This is the only aspect of the trial that was not to be published in the *Star*. This suggests that as much as the trial was closed to the public, readers still received most but not all of the information and happenings through the local media, not long after the fact.

Secondly, E.C. Awrey, the prosecutor, also asked the jury to ignore the media accounts immediately upon his opening statement. He stated that he supported his Lordship and hoped that the jury also respected this, and that the judge would further instruct them on the law throughout the trial. He then proceeded with the charge against Sears.¹⁵ Again, he reinforced the need for Sears to receive a fair trial.

Therefore, it is evident that the media did play a large role before the trial started. It was necessary for the judge and prosecutor to address the media as an issue as the jurors had likely already formulated assumptions about Sears' guilt. Throughout the trial the media also played the role of mediator between the public and the trial by publishing daily accounts of the proceedings in detail and covering every theme from homosexuality and sexual deviancy to murder.

In review, use of the 'homosexual advance defence' by the defense council could have changed the ultimate outcome of this trial. Because Clark was denied his power to use this legal tool by Wells, he had Sears altogether deny making the

¹⁵ Ibid.,3.

confessions to police that were the only concrete evidence that the prosecution held. If Clark had been allowed to pursue this line of defense, homosexuality as an issue might have played a much larger role in the trial and might have solidified the larger, changing discourse as seen in the media by justifying violence towards homosexuals. Instead, because Wells dismissed the use of the defense tactic, Sears was tried solely on the remaining evidence as collected by police in their investigation.

After the dismissal of the 'homosexual advance defence,' the legal authorities in this trial only mentioned homosexuality when it was relevant for following established legal procedures. Court protocols allowed the Judge and lawyers to address facts relevant to establishing Sears's guilt or innocence. Therefore, although homosexuality was meagerly discussed throughout the trial it was solely to ascertain whether Sears had made the confessions to police and to clarify the verity in the statements he made surrounding them to police. The changing discourses surrounding homosexuality that were so prevalent in the *Star*, were not allowed to enter the courtroom.

The media played a very large role in the way the trial played out. Both the judge and prosecutor made a point at the opening of trial to ask the jury to clear their minds of the speculations made and read in the *Star* throughout the police investigation. Justice Wells also clarified for the media reporters what they could and could not print in their daily accounts of the proceedings in order for Sears to face as fair a trial as possible. Lastly, Clark did not want the newspapers to publish the contents of Sears's confessions as it would have led to public presumptions about his guilt, and Judge Wells ordered that reporters could not publish contents of the confessions at all.

Sears was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang.¹⁶ Wells ensured that Sears received the harshest punishment possible and set the date for execution less than two months from sentencing, leaving little room for appeals. Sears did appeal the original trial and the Ontario Supreme Court overturned the guilty verdict and execution sentence. He was shortly thereafter retried on a different case of attempted murder and sentenced to twelve years in prison. It is not clear whether Sears lived his sentence term out as the only information available claims that he later died in an institution.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Rex Vs. Ronald George Sears [1946]*, 524, and "Sears Guilty; To Hang – Extra – December 3 Is Execution Date Set By Judge," *Windsor Daily Star [Final Edition]*, 18 September 1946, 1.

¹⁷ Inspector Dave Rossell, "The Windsor Slasher," *Windsor Justice Facility: Police Headquarters Grand Opening 1999* (Windsor: Windsor Police Publication, 1999), 32.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Public discourses on homosexuality were changing following the Second World War in Canada. Unlike in the United States, the media were just beginning to publish stories connecting homosexuals with both psychological illness and crime. Since the beginning of the war, psychologists had increasingly gained authority in diagnosing homosexuality as an illness and could classify potential soldiers as either 'fit' or 'unfit' due to their sexual preference. Following the war, psychiatry was also used to re-enforce prewar gender relations, and therefore through the media, homosexuality was discussed as deviant and abnormal. Both discourses continued to be discussed in the *Windsor Daily Star* during the summers of 1945 and 1946, but they were not discussed in the police investigation or trial for several reasons.

The *Star* began in the summer of 1945 to publish stories and editorials that attacked sex crimes in the city. The case of the Windsor 'slasher' added to this media-created sex crimes panic that was developing because the victims were rumoured to be homosexuals. Thus, references were made about the city parks and gay spaces that connected male homosexuals with sexual crime, and which also were the same places where these 'slasher' attacks took place. Although it is not clear how influential this news source was for Windsor residents, it is clear from the remaining records in the Windsor Police Department on the "slasher" that it had little effect on their investigation.

Windsor police did not focus on homosexuality in their investigation of the 'slasher' case. In fact, it is clear from the remaining police records that they did not necessarily believe the rumours published in the *Star* regarding increased sex crimes

within the city. This is most likely because in 1945 the media-created sex crimes panic had not developed in Canada as it had in the United States. The sex crimes panic in Canada did not actually gain momentum in the press until 1950. Therefore, the *Star* likely had little power to influence the police investigation thoroughly in this earlier period.

At the same time, the Windsor Police Department did not have an established homicide unit in 1945 and 1946 and the detectives that were assigned to the case were not trained or specialized in solving murders. Because of this they had to follow established protocols for solving murder cases. Unlike larger cities such as Detroit, Michigan, or Toronto, Ontario, where large homicide units existed and police were more likely familiar with solving cases related to homosexuality, Windsor police would not likely have related these serial attacks to homosexuals or homophobes as either victims or perpetrators.

It must also be noted that during 1945 several other large events occurred in Windsor that preoccupied the Windsor Police Department. The ninety-nine day Ford Strike of 1945 commenced at the end of August 1945, immediately following the Price murder. The strike lasted until December, and the detectives assigned to the picket lines were the same detectives assigned to the Windsor 'slasher' case. Therefore, it is clear that detectives had other pressing reasons to set aside the 'slasher' case, not only because they had no concrete leads, and the murders had stopped completely as the Ford Strike began, but also because the police force was stretched thin in manpower due to other local happenings. It was not until the arrest of Ronald George Sears that police acknowledged that homosexuality played a part in this case.

Homosexuality as a discourse also entered the arena of the court and trial of Ronald George Sears but not in the sense that it did in the media. Rather than a major focus on sex crimes, the defense attempted to introduce the 'homosexual advance defence' based on provocation that allowed questioning in this case to focus on male homosexuality in the city and in this case on the victims rather than the accused. Had this been allowed in the courtroom, it would have justified violence towards homosexuals and would have clearly fit with the larger, changing national discourse. Because it was dismissed, the trial was based only on the relevant facts that would find Sears guilty of murder. Therefore, the only time that the judge allowed homosexuality to be discussed was when the lawyers attempted to establish the truth in Sears's previous confessions to police.

At the same time, legal procedural safeguards kept this discourse from becoming an issue throughout the trial. In fact, it was clear that Judge Wells refused to let homosexuality in this case influence the minds of the jurors. By openly asking jurors to dismiss what they had read previous to the trial in the *Star* about Sears's claim that he had killed his victims because they were homosexuals, Wells acknowledged the power that the media source possibly had on the minds of individual residents. He refused to let homosexuality become an issue, but rather guided the trial by following proper procedures.

In the end, it is clear that the *Windsor Daily Star* probably followed the lead of larger American newspapers by creating an increasing sex crimes panic in the City of Windsor beginning in the summer of 1945 and lasting throughout 1946. It is very likely that the powerful influence of the popular media in Detroit, Michigan, may have

triggered an earlier creation of this panic – before the rest of the Canadian media – because of its close proximity to Windsor, and because the two cities shared an international border and associated news.

The Windsor ‘slasher’ case itself was likely the leading reason the *Star* created a sex crimes panic earlier than most other Canadian cities. Because the murders happened in areas that were recognized as gay public spaces in the city, including the waterfront parks at night, the *Star* writers connected these attacks with homosexuality before the police did. They also speculated that the case involved homosexuals because of the popular, yet changing national discourses, that correlated homosexuality with deviancy, mental illness, and crime, all of which fit this case and came out publicly during its investigation. In conclusion, the *Star* was providing the public with the news and stories relevant to their local position within the context of the changing nation and world at that given point in time. It is then clear that they registered the changing discourses surrounding homosexuality before the police or the court in the case of the Windsor ‘slasher.’

APPENDIX

Timeline of Important Events in the Windsor 'Slasher' Case

- S** 24 July 1945 George Mannie stabbed on riverbank at Sandwich Street and California Avenue.
- M** 8 August 1945 Body of Frank Scigelski found in high weeds of the grassy area at Sandwich Street and Caron Avenue. He was stabbed six times in his back.
- M** 16 August 1945 Body of William Davies found in the G. Tate Easton Garage where he was employed as a night watchman. He was bludgeoned to death by a blunt object.
- M** 18 August 1945 Body of Sergeant Hugh Blackwood Price found close to the same high weeds as Frank Scigelski. He was stabbed fourteen times, three in the front and eleven in the back.
- 18 August 1945 The Windsor Daily Star offers a reward of \$1000.00 for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or person(s) responsible for the 'slasher' attacks.
- 20 August 1945 Message found scrawled on the Detroit-Windsor International Tunnel men's washroom wall stating: "I'm the Slasher. I have stood and talked to cops at the scene of my last killing before this. I killed a German in a camp for that I was dishonorably discharged from the United States Army. I'll kill until I'm ready to stop. I can never be caught - to all cops." On another part of the door was the message: "I am Slasher Evans - they will never get me." And on another part of the door was written: "Civilian-Sergeant-Sergeant-Girl next."
- 22 March 1946 Letter received by Windsor police and signed by the "Slasher."
- S** 24 June 1946 Alexander Voligny stabbed one time in his back but survived attack.
- S** 6 July 1946 Joseph Gelenscer stabbed one time in the back but survived attack.
- 6 July 1946 Ronald George Sears arrested by Windsor Police in his home and charged with the unlawful murder of Hugh Blackwood Price on or about the 17th day of August 1945 contrary to Section 259 of the Canadian Criminal Code..
- 24 July 1946 Preliminary hearing for Ronald George Sears begins and lasts two days.
- 11 September 1946 Sears's trial in the Supreme Court of Ontario begins.
- 18 September 1946 Sears found guilty by jury and sentenced to execution (hanging).

S: indicates stabbing M: indicates murder

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