

1 BLOOD

Tuesday, March 31, 1914

Charles Millard told his wife Clara that he'd be away for a night or two and then left his house in Vancouver's West End to catch the night ferry to Victoria. The forty-one-year-old chief ticket agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway was to meet the S.S. *Makura*, a passenger/cargo ship inbound from Australia.

The Millards did not have children, but like many households in Vancouver, they had a live-in Chinese houseboy. Kong Yew Chung, known as Yew Kong at school and Jack everywhere else, had joined them in 1910, after his father Yick Kong had scraped together the \$500 Head Tax to bring him out from China. Jack stayed with his father in Mission until he was thirteen, and then he went to live with the Millards in July 1911. When he wasn't chopping wood, stoking and cleaning the furnace, cleaning house, cooking and serving meals, and washing dishes, he attended Lord Roberts Elementary School. Charles Millard told Yick Kong that because Jack was a student, he would try to have the exorbitant Head Tax refunded.

The Millards had married in 1906 and moved into their house on Pendrell Street in the West End. When the *Vancouver Elite Directory* was published two years later, eighty-six percent of the city's finest had a West End address. But in the years just before World War I, middle-class people began to move in, industry crept closer, and apartment buildings started to obstruct the view. The wealthy fled the West End for the curving boulevards and huge properties of Shaughnessy Heights, leaving their cast-off homes to become apartments and rooming houses. By



Lord Roberts Elementary in Vancouver's West End. *Eve Lazarus photo, 2017*

1914, out of the almost 2,500 people who made the Social Register that year, less than half lived in the West End.

Charles called the house at 9:00 the following evening to tell Clara that he'd be home soon, but there was no

answer. When he returned home less than two hours later, Clara still wasn't home, and Jack had gone to bed. Charles went into the breakfast room, sat down, and took off his boots. He noticed that the table had been set for two and that a portion of the carpet had been scrubbed and was still damp. He was careful not to step in it. Charles phoned Clara's mother, Rachel Olmstead, in North Vancouver to see if Clara was there. She wasn't, but Charles supposed she must have gone to stay with one of her sisters, which she often did when he was away. He went to bed.

When Charles questioned Jack the next morning, the boy said that Mrs Millard had left the house around 10:30 the previous morning, but she hadn't said where she was going. She told him to stay home from school and clean, he said. Charles wasn't happy about that, but it didn't surprise him. His wife, he told people, was a "demon for cleaning." Jack asked Charles to write him a note excusing him from school, which he did.

Jack went about his duties and prepared breakfast for Charles, who then went to work. He phoned his in-laws trying to find Clara and was surprised to discover that no one had heard from her. Charles became increasingly worried. Just ten days earlier, their house had been burgled

and hundreds of dollars worth of jewellery, some cash, and Clara's savings bank book had been stolen. The burglar had not been caught.

Charles came back to the house and was surprised to find that Jack had not gone to school but was down in the basement tending to a roaring fire in the furnace. Jack told him it was to heat the water to wash clothes, and Charles could see that there were already a number of things hanging on the line, including the rug from the dining room, a tablecloth, two door mats, and some towels. Jack said he hadn't gone to school because he had washed his new trousers and didn't want to wear his old ones.

Charles was bothered by the way that Jack was following him around as he moved about the house and sent him off to school in his old trousers. He then called Clara's brother Bud Olmstead to come over and help search the house to see if they could find something that would explain her whereabouts. The two men started in the attic. Aside from Jack's room in the front, there were two other rooms used as storage and a small door at the top of the staircase that led to an unfinished crawl space under the eaves. In the crawl space, they found a purple plume from Clara's hat and a veil that she normally wore when she went out, both hidden under a ledge in the eaves.

Charles called police. Detectives Albert Tisdale and James Ellice arrived at the house a little after 3:00 p.m. They questioned Charles and then went door-to-door questioning the neighbours. There were no signs of a struggle inside—at least nothing seemed out of place. Margaret Wallace, whose house looked out onto the back of the Millards', told police that she'd been working in her kitchen the morning prior and noticed a lot of smoke emanating from the chimney. Later, she told them, she saw Jack walking down the alley toward English Bay with a parcel tucked under his arm.

The detectives came back inside and looked around the breakfast

room and at the wet stains on the carpet. When Detective Tisdale lifted up the carpet he found thick felt paper, which was also wet and stained. Jack was summoned, and he told the officers that he thought Clara had spilled cocoa or coffee and had tried to clean it up. The detectives thought it looked more like blood. They called their boss, Inspector John Jackson.

Jackson and Deputy Chief William McRae arrived at the house a little before 8:00 p.m. After questioning Charles and his brother-in-law, Jackson stayed to question Jack while McRae did a more thorough search of the unfinished section of the attic. There he found a pair of gloves, a coat, a skirt rolled around a hat, shoes, and a silver purse with the initials C. M.

McRae asked Charles how Jack got along with Clara. Charles told him that he was a model houseboy until recently when he started going to Chinatown on weekends and sometimes stayed away until the early hours of the morning. Charles also told him that Jack was a good student with impressive study habits, but lately, he and Clara had not been getting on very well. Clara had complained to her husband that Jack was indifferent to her and that when she reprimanded him, as she had on several occasions, Jack would sometimes act disrespectfully. “I would say, ‘If you want to talk to Jack don’t talk to him excitably, don’t hit him.’ At times she told me that she was afraid of Jack and that he was sassy. I never found anything wrong, though. Of course, I understood him.”¹

At this point, McRae wasn’t sure if they were dealing with a missing person, a kidnapping, or a murder. While he didn’t suspect Jack of having anything to do with the woman’s disappearance, he thought that Jack knew something about it and could be protecting someone

1 Quotes are taken from the inquest held on April 4, 1914.

else. McRae told Charles that they would take Jack to the police station for questioning and that they would return early the next morning to do a thorough search of the house and the garden. Jack asked to put on a pair of pants that were hanging in his room, but when McRae saw they were still wet at the knees, he refused to let him, and seeing a stain on one of Jack's slippers, asked him to remove those as well.

When Jack arrived at the police substation, Inspector Jackson searched him and pulled out a savings bank book from his pants pocket. Checking their records, the officer noted that it was the same numbered book that Charles Millard reported stolen on March 21. McRae and Jackson were convinced that Jack knew more about the disappearance of his mistress than he was saying. In fact, Jack was saying nothing. He spoke and understood English well, but he appeared frightened as the policemen hurled questions at him from behind the iron grating on the door of the stone cell. He looked like he hadn't slept for several nights; his eyes had dark circles under them.

Jack had reason to be afraid. The city had a social order carved out along strict class and race lines. Vancouver was overwhelmingly white, run mostly by Scots, and marked by pockets of people of colour, mostly in the East End. The city's Chinese population could not vote or hold office and were barred from working in professions such as law and medicine. They could enter Canada only by first paying a hefty Head Tax. Jack would also have been well apprised of the riots that took place in Vancouver just seven years earlier when the Asiatic Exclusion League led as many as 5,000 whites on a rampage through the Chinese community, bashing heads and smashing windows. Chinatown was viewed by outsiders as a place of immorality and sin, where gambling and prostitution thrived and where white women were corrupted by drugs. The Chinese were vilified for their non-Christian beliefs and customs, a supposed lack of hygiene, and a predilection for drugs and

criminality. Yet this racist revulsion didn't stop white families from hiring them, mostly because the Chinese worked harder and for less money than their white counterparts. For the Chinese, there was little choice.

McRae decided it was time to put the uncooperative Chinese houseboy through "the third degree," a method of interrogation that was defended in the *Vancouver Sun*, which wrote: "Any method which can be used to extract the truth from the inscrutable Oriental is justifiable." Inspector Jackson read Jack his rights and then questioned him without a lawyer or guardian present. Jack stood with his face turned away from them. Frustrated by Jack's lack of cooperation, McRae yelled at him: "You little whippet. I just feel like throwing you in the inlet. A boy who had been treated as well as you have by Mr and Mrs Millard—to speak to her as you have done, and not to help find those responsible for her disappearance." Jackson told Jack that they were losing time and that he must tell them everything he knew. "You ought to have your block knocked off," Jackson said.²

When Jackson returned to the Millard house early the next morning, police officers had already dug up the garden and the yard and searched through the garbage cans. They found several small bones in the furnace ashes. McRae ordered two bloodhounds from the New Westminster penitentiary. When they arrived, the dogs were taken inside and went straight to the breakfast room to sniff at the stained piece of carpet. As the dog handler explained to Jackson, the bloodhound's sense of smell was a thousand times stronger than his. Clara Millard's scent had created a kind of smell photograph in the dogs' brains, and the hounds wouldn't stop until they found her.

Clara's stockings and shoes were brought to the dogs, and they sniffed

² As reported in *The World*, May 19, 1914.

at a chair and then at the base of the chimney. Jackson found a small buckskin bag lodged in the space behind the chimney containing two brooches and a velvet purse with \$3.60. A watch and four rings were found wrapped in a piece of school drawing paper which had a maple leaf, figures, and the initials Y.K. (for Yew Kong) printed at the bottom. Charles confirmed that several of the items had been reported stolen in the robbery of March 21.

The dogs took off down the wooden stairs to the basement. The hounds sniffed at an axe, at the furnace, and around the washtubs. After a couple of trips up and down the stairs, the dogs returned to the furnace and sat down.

McRae and Jackson turned their attention to the furnace. It was built so that water could be heated through coils in the firebox. A brick clean-out vent extended to the floor. McRae noticed a sticky material on the side of the furnace. He told Jackson it looked like marrow. Jackson opened the door to the furnace, shook the ashes out of the grate, took everything out, and placed it in a box. After a few minutes, he dug out what looked like pieces of charred bone and bits of steel corset busks, buckles, and garters.

McRae examined the floor in the basement and found cuts in the concrete that looked recent; he thought they'd probably been made by the axe, which, like the floor, looked exceptionally clean. Jackson started to dig around the soot at the base of the chimney; using a long stick, he was able to dislodge a parcel that contained a large portion of a human skull with flesh still attached and what looked like a thigh bone wrapped up in newspaper. By this time, no one doubted that the remains would turn out to be the missing Clara Millard. McRae told an officer to bring Dr Charles McKee, the city's bacteriologist, as well as John F.C.B. Vance, the city analyst, to provide a "chemical analysis of the stuff in the house."

Vance was then a twenty-nine-year-old scientist who worked for

the city's health department. His job consisted mostly of analyzing milk for butterfat content, searching for bacteria in food sold commercially, and checking that the city's water supply was safe for human consumption. Vance's knowledge of crime was limited to what he read in newspapers and magazines, occasional visits to the police court in the course of his work, and conversations with police as they came and went from the building.



J.F.C.B. Vance. *Courtesy of the Vance family*

Vance arrived with a black suitcase that contained a magnifying glass, flashlight, test tubes, envelopes, and other tools. He took scrapings of the stains and smears from the stairs, the concrete floor in the basement—especially from around the furnace door—and from the baseboards in the breakfast room. He cut out pieces of the baseboard and had these and the other stained items sent to his lab for further analysis.

Back in his lab, Vance laid out two claw-set diamond rings, the axe, a carving knife, a piece from Jack's slipper, the piece of stained carpet, wood from the stairs, a flour bin that had been found on the stairs, and some of the baseboard from the stair landing. Vance knew that even if the carpet had been immediately immersed in water and washed with soap, it would be difficult to eradicate every trace of blood.

The first step was to confirm that the stain was blood, and this required several tests. Vance began by putting each item into cold water.

He would test for haemin crystals, then he would test by tincture of guaiacum, and after that, he would apply the ammonia and the nitric acid tests, which would eliminate any stains that weren't blood. Once the presence of blood was confirmed, Dr McKee would test for human protein to prove without a doubt that the blood was human.

What remained of Clara Millard was transported to the police station and into the care of Dr George Curtis, who attempted to reassemble the incinerated remains into a human frame. Police were no longer looking for a missing person; they were hunting a killer.

Charles Millard asked to be allowed to see Jack, and while that was unusual, McRae decided to let him. Confronted with Clara's stolen bank book, the boy admitted that he was behind the theft on March 21. When the men asked him why he'd done this, he told them that he was angry with the way Mrs Millard had treated him. "During that day, I had a lot of work, and then about night time Mrs Millard was not pleased with the work and she made me angry, and so I went to the room and took these things and hid them away." He had planned to return everything the next day, he said, but when he found out that the Millards had called the police, he believed he'd be sent to jail, so he said nothing.

After hours and hours of relentless questioning, Jack Kong told Charles how his wife had died.

The morning after Charles left for Victoria, Jack got up a little after 6:00 and went down to the basement. He lit the furnace to heat the water then went back to his room in the attic to study. Around 8:00, he went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast for Clara Millard. He laid one place at the breakfast table, then he made toast, oatmeal porridge, and coffee.

The previous day, workers had been at the house replacing the wallpaper in the bedroom, so Clara had slept downstairs. Still dressed

in a kimono, she entered the breakfast room and took the seat where her husband normally sat. Jack stopped dusting in the hall to serve her the porridge. They hadn't spoken up to this point, as they only talked to each other when it was unavoidable.

She looked at the porridge. "Oh, Jack, Jack! The very morning Mr Millard is away, you make this porridge, and you know I don't like it," she told him.

Jack told her that he was anxious to get to school on time, and if he made new porridge he'd be late. "I tried to persuade her to take it," Jack later recalled. "She said 'I tell you to take it away. I do not like it. Make the other kind for me.' I said: 'I guess you will have to take it.' She said: 'I do not want you to disobey me.' I said, 'No, my time is limited. I do not see that I have time.' She insisted on me doing it. I thought there wasn't time for me to make the other porridge, and I disobeyed her."

Jack braced himself for his mistress's displeasure. Mr Millard understood his desire to do well in school, but Mrs Millard was "very cranky" about anything that took him away from his domestic chores. Jack thought of her as "very nervous at times," and when she got angry she spoke rapidly and sometimes threw things at him or hit him with a broom.

This particular morning, Clara was furious. She grabbed the carving knife with the white bone handle from the drawer in the buffet and, recalled Jack at his trial, she lunged at him, shouting that she would cut his ear off if he didn't do what she said. She chased him into the kitchen. Jack picked up a chair and pushed it into her shoulder. This only made her angrier, and as she raised the knife Jack hit her with the chair. The edge of the seat caught her on the side of the head and she fell down. Blood flowed from the cut.

"As soon as she fell, I put down the chair to see if I could help her. I put water on her forehead and her mouth. I also tried to stop the

bleeding. I called her and she did not answer,” Jack said later. “I waited there for a long time to feel if she was breathing again, but no breathing. I know that she must be dead. Then I sat down on the stairs to think.”

Jack sat on the landing for about forty-five minutes trying to figure out what to do. He didn’t call for help, he said, because he was sure that she was dead, and he was just as sure that Charles Millard would kill him when he returned from Victoria. He decided that since she was already dead, the best chance he had to survive was to get rid of the body and pretend that he didn’t know anything about her disappearance.

Clara and Jack were of similar size—about five feet in height and weighing a little over 100 pounds (forty-five kg). Jack put his hands under Clara’s arms and hoisted her body onto his back. Placing her arms over his shoulders, he held her with his left hand as he made his way to the stairwell landing. There was no rail on the steep wooden stairs that led down to the basement, so Jack took her in his arms and carried her the rest of the way. Her feet dragged on the steps.

He lay her down on the basement floor, then took off her wedding ring and a smaller opal ring and hid both in a space between the chimney and the wall. Later he said, “I thought she was already dead and I did not want those rings to be burned. I thought I might as well save them and not burn them and spoil any more things.”

A fire was still burning in the furnace. Jack added a few pieces of wood to the flames and, taking the axe, chopped off her arms and legs and started to feed body parts into the furnace. He wrapped up the skull and the larger bones that wouldn’t burn in a copy of the *Daily Province* and put them in the ashcan until he could dispose of them later. After he had burned most of the body, he put on fresh wood to take away the odour. Then he packed some bloody towels and clothes in a box, walked down the road, and threw them into the water at English Bay.

The gory details of the murder, reported in the local papers, combined

THE DAILY PROVINCE

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 1914—28 PAGES.

NEW YORK CIRCULATION 7 FEBRUARY 1914

CABLE NEWS
Yokohama—Eased Pasha Banished—Page 2

Family Got Out BARELY
of Burning Home in Their Nightclothes—Fire

Jack Kong's Case Now In Hands of Jury
Verdict Is Expected at Late Hour This Afternoon

Boy's Tale of Killing Is Denied by Medical Expert.

L. F. Curtis Declares Blow to Chair Would Not Have Brought Blood Flow.

Mrs. Millard Still Alive When Kong Cut Up the Body?

Witness Declares She Is If Chinaman's Story Is True.

The sketch artist's impression of Jack Kong on trial for murder. Daily Province, May 21, 1914.



JACK KONG.

A sketch artist's impression of 16-year-old Jack Kong on trial for murder. Daily Province, May 21, 1914.

with news of the impending arrival of the *Komagata Maru* and its 376 mostly Sikh passengers, inflamed anti-Asian panic across the province. For days, headlines such as “Boatload of Hindus on Its Way” fought for space alongside “Chinese Boy Kills White Woman and Burns Body,” and “Not Dead When Dissected.” These stories titillated and terrified citizens who were now afraid that they’d be overrun by Asians or murdered by their own Chinese houseboys.

The effect on Vancouver’s Chinese population was immediate. Chinese men were stopped on the street and beaten. The St. Francis Hotel on Seymour Street publicly fired every Chinese man on staff and dozens of Chinese boys were dismissed from their employment in hotels, restaurants, and private homes. The Trades and Labour Congress tried to have all Asians banned from working in hotels.

One newspaper speculated that Jack was a member of a secret organization of Chinese engaged in teaching anarchism and communism, while others demanded immediate segregation in the schools. “A Chinaman’s face as a rule is as expressive as a steam radiator. No one can tell by looking at him what is passing in his mind,” reported the *Vancouver Sun*. “This awful tragedy should teach the school board that their first duty is to segregate the Orientals from white children in all the schools.”

Council suggested that the city not award contracts to suppliers who employed Asians, clearly having forgotten the general strike by the Chinese after the anti-Asian riots of 1907, which effectively shut down mills and many of the city’s restaurants and bars, as well as leaving wealthy householders to fend for themselves.

On May 18, people were lined up outside the courtroom for two hours before the start of Jack’s trial. When the doors opened, the crowd consisted of a mix of Shaughnessy Heights matrons, West End women, and Chinese, Japanese, and Indo-Canadians. The crowd crushed and

jostled their way up the steps to the court to get seats. As the *World* reported: “Women young and old with the lust of sensationalism in their eyes and lunches in their hands were there prepared to make a picnic of the afternoon.” Once all the seats were taken, the doors were closed on the dense crowd that still waited outside, hoping to squeeze past the police guards.

Jack was brought up from the police cells and seated alongside a constable. Dressed in short grey pants, a collar, and tie, he looked even younger than the sixteen-year-old he was. He gazed around the crowded room.

The trial ran for four days and heard from a slew of witnesses including Charles Millard, the Millards’ neighbour Margaret Wallace, John F.C.B. Vance, and Jack himself. The lawyer representing Jack was Alex Henderson, a King’s Counsel and savvy politician who had served as Attorney General.³ While the details of the trial were grisly enough, and his admission to the earlier robbery made Jack look bad, the prosecution were leaving nothing to chance. Prosecutor J.K. Kennedy was gunning for the death penalty.

Kennedy argued that Jack had stabbed Clara Millard and was using the chair as a cover-up story. Henderson counter-argued that his client had no motive for murder. Jack, he said, was truly afraid that the woman would cut off his ear or worse, and when Mr Millard found out what happened, Jack feared he would kill him. It was only natural, Henderson said, that Jack would want to cover up the evidence of his crime, in this case, by carrying the body to the basement and burning a large portion of it in the furnace. “That was a fatal inspiration,” he told the jury. “For, gentlemen, had he not destroyed those traces, had

3 Ten years later, he would be embroiled in the sensational Janet Smith murder that also involved a Chinese houseboy—although this time he would represent the interests of the Scottish community.

he left the body in the breakfast room and called for help, would he now be on trial for murder or for manslaughter?”

Dr George Curtis told the court that he believed that Clara was still alive when she was dismembered. He was basing this, he said, on evidence that Jack had given that there was a “smattering of blood” when he started to cut up the body. Later, under cross-examination, he admitted that a small amount of blood could still seep out of a body after it was dead, but the headlines were already written and it was likely that all the jury would remember was that the woman may have been alive when Jack started to hack her up. Then jurors were shown various exhibits, including the axe, the charred skull, and some bones with flesh still attached. Police had to lock the courtroom doors during lunch time to keep the curious spectators from handling the exhibits and taking souvenirs.

Jack’s father Yick Kong added drama to the trial when he chose to take the traditional Chinese Fire Oath in which details of the witnesses’ testimony are written on a piece of parchment and then set on fire. As the paper burns, the witness swears to tell the truth on pain of disgracing his ancestors.

When the trial wrapped up, the jury was given three choices: guilty of murder, guilty of manslaughter, or not guilty.

In spite of the graphic and sensational details of the trial, the anti-Asian sentiment of the time, the inflammatory headlines in the media, and the public’s desire for a lynching, the jury deliberated for more than seven hours and found Jack guilty of manslaughter. In sentencing Jack, the judge told him that even though the jury found him guilty of manslaughter, he believed Jack should have been convicted of murder and received the death penalty. “After having considered the evidence, I cannot find any extenuating circumstances in the case which should lead me to impose a lesser penalty. On the contrary, I

find that your crime was characterized by almost unparalleled cunning and ferocity. The sentence of the court is that you be confined in the penitentiary for the term of your natural life.”

By then, however, the sensational murder case had been eclipsed by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia, two days earlier. Charles Millard retired from the CPR in 1938 and lived the rest of his life at the Terminal City Club on West Hastings. Yick Kong died in 1919 aged forty-two. Jack, according to Paul Yee’s book *Saltwater City*, served only eight years of his life sentence (archival documents do not reveal why his sentence was shortened) and returned to China in 1922. As for J.F.C.B. Vance—the city analyst’s career would never be the same again.