

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR FEBRUARY 23, 2026 CELEBRATES ANNIE MAY JACKSON – CANADA'S FIRST FEMALE POLICE OFFICER

Annie May Jackson was born on September 10, 1878, in Luther Township to Jonathan Jackson and Letitia Church. She was the third of 10 children in a large farming family. In 1909, Jackson travelled west to visit one of her sisters, and in 1910 she settled in Edmonton, Alberta. There, she began working for the Children's Aid Society, gaining experience in social welfare and child protection.

On October 1, 1912, at the age of 33, Annie May Jackson was appointed the first female constable of the Edmonton City Police Department, becoming the first woman in Canada sworn into a police force with full constabulary powers. Her appointment followed a competitive selection process in which she ranked first among 47 applicants. City officials deliberately sought a woman for the role to address social and moral concerns involving women and children - areas that male officers were considered ill-equipped to handle, particularly as Edmonton experienced rapid population growth driven by immigration and economic expansion.



Jackson's responsibilities focused on the protection and guidance of girls and young women. She worked to uphold moral standards, prevent exploitation, and assist vulnerable female immigrants who faced risks such as trafficking or abuse. Her duties also extended to child-welfare investigations, including cases of neglect and family instability. Rather than traditional patrol work, her role emphasized prevention, supervision, and rehabilitation, often described as a "mothering" approach to policing. Reflecting the specialized and gendered nature of her position, Jackson was not issued a full uniform and wore only a silver police badge.

Although few individual cases from her service are well documented, Jackson's work helped establish early protocols for female involvement in policing, particularly in matters related to juveniles and social welfare. Her of service contributed to the gradual integration of women into Canadian law enforcement.

In 1918, Jackson resigned from the police force shortly after marrying William Henry Kelcher. At the time, married women were generally barred from serving as police officers, and her departure reflected prevailing social norms rather than any issue with her performance. The couple had one son, Henry, born in 1919. Kelcher died in 1949.

Annie May Jackson died on October 30, 1959, in Edmonton at the age of 81, after being struck by a vehicle near her home while out for a walk. She is remembered as a pioneer whose service helped open the door for women in policing. Her legacy is commemorated through several honours, including Jackson Heights School, Annie May Jackson Park, and the IODE Annie May Jackson Chapter, chartered in Edmonton in 1970.

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable