

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR JUNE 22, 2026 CELEBRATES THE MURDER AT THE STATION

In the late 19th century, July 12 was one of the most anticipated days of the year across Wellington County. Marked by Orangemen's parades, speeches, and community gatherings, it brought people together from surrounding townships, especially in Arthur, a hub of Orange Order activity. With the arrival of the railway in 1871, the celebration grew even larger, drawing visitors by train and filling local streets and businesses with activity.

These were spirited events - part celebration, part social occasion. By the 1870s, the day often unfolded with parades winding through the village, punctuated by stops and speeches, and accompanied by no small amount of drinking.

But on July 12, 1872, the day took a tragic turn.

As evening approached, a group of Orangemen - described as "a little worse for wear" after a day of celebrations - travelled by wagon past the Arthur railway station. At the same time, an evening train from Orangeville had arrived, and a small crowd gathered on the platform. Amid the noise and movement, an argument broke out involving William Ludlow, one of the celebrants.

The confrontation appears to have begun earlier, when Ludlow was accidentally struck by a piece of firewood tossed by railway workers as they refuelled the locomotive. What followed was a heated exchange of words that escalated as the evening wore on.

Then, as the train began to pull away, three gunshots rang out.

One of the bullets struck David Hunter, a young carpenter travelling through the area. He had not come to Arthur for the celebrations and had no connection to the dispute. Like others nearby, he had simply paused to see what the noise was about. Within minutes, he was dead.

The incident shocked the community. Authorities quickly launched an investigation, leading to the arrest of William Ludlow and James Moore. A coroner's inquiry heard from numerous witnesses, some of whom claimed to have seen Ludlow fire the shots. Yet even in those early accounts, details varied.

By the time the case reached trial months later, the uncertainty had deepened. Witnesses disagreed on critical points - where the shots were fired from, who had fired them, and even how many people may have been involved. Testimony suggested multiple possibilities: that Ludlow was responsible, that Moore had fired the weapon, or even that another individual was involved entirely.

In the end, the jury found William Ludlow not guilty after a brief deliberation. Charges against James Moore were later dropped. No weapon was definitively linked to either man, and no clear motive was established. The case closed without resolution.

More than 150 years later, the question remains unanswered: who fired the fatal shots at the Arthur station that night? The truth slipped away that night, just like the train that left the station...

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable, using information from a column written by Stephen Thorning in the Wellington Advertiser.