

# Verdict Accidental Death, Shortill Case

Coroner's Jury Decided That Late Frank I. Shortill Came to Death by Electric Current, His Body Coming in Contact With Electric Motor—15 Witnesses Heard in Long Hearing—P. J. Hughes, K. C. Represents Widow—Dr. J. M. Cameron, Acting Coroner.

A coroner's jury brought in a verdict of accidental death at the inquest last night into the death of Frank I. Shortill, North Devon ice dealer, which occurred on Sunday afternoon in the cellar of his home. The inquest was held in the Orange Hall at Nashwaaksis, with Dr. J. M. Cameron, the acting coroner in the absence from the city of Dr. Charles MacKay. Fifteen witnesses were heard and considerable evidence was taken, the jury not bringing in its verdict until after midnight. The jury deliberated almost half an hour.

The full verdict rendered by P. S. Watson foreman of the jury, and read by Dr. Cameron was "that Frank I. Shortill came to his death on July 14, between 1 p.m. and 2.45 p.m., Daylight Saving Time, in the pump house of his residence by electric current, his body coming in contact with an electric motor."

Constable David Evans represented the R.C.M.P. at the inquest, P. J. Hughes, K. C., appeared on behalf of Mrs. Shortill, and he carefully questioned the witnesses. There is a possibility that a damage action against the Maritime Electric Co. Ltd. is pending, although Mr. Hughes would not commit himself on this point last night. Negligence against the company may be charged.

A fairly large number attended the inquest. The jury was composed of the following: P. S. Watson, foreman; Gerald Ashfield, Maurice Tait, John W. Chase, Ralph Davidson, W. Bruce Dayton and Edward Harrison.

Constable Evans  
Constable David Evans was the first witness called. P. J. Hughes announced that he was appearing for the widow, Mrs. Frank I. Shortill. Constable Evans testified that the body had been viewed and identified.

Dr. J. Gilbert Turner  
Dr. J. Gilbert Turner was called. He testified of seeing the body at 2.45 on Sunday (D.S.T.). Mr. Shortill was dead when witness saw him. He said there was a blueness of the face and a linear depression on the right fore-

Judging from marks on the body witness believed the deceased came to his death through shock from contact from an electric wire. It has been over a year since witness saw the deceased professionally. Mr. Shortill had not been in perfect health when he saw him last, although he was not in poor health either.

Questioned by Mr. Hughes witness said the floor was damp. He explained that rigor mortis sets in quicker on a hot day than on a cold day. Rigor mortis would set in under three hours witness believed under the circumstances. Witness described the burns on the body of the late Mr. Shortill. The leg injury he would attribute to contact with a foreign body. The dead man might have been burned on the neck by the loose wire after he fell. Witness had no experience of 120 volts causing death. Witness from what he saw, was satisfied that death was due to electric shock.

Mr. Shortill had been treated for ulcers of the stomach and heart trouble, said witness in response to a question from a member of the jury. Witness could not believe death to have been caused by a heart attack.

## Percy Banks

Percy Banks was next called. He told of seeing deceased before the death. He saw him around 11 o'clock and again about one o'clock (D.S.T.). He saw body before it was moved. He didn't touch the body. Witness saw him alone at one o'clock and dead at two o'clock. The pump motor was not running when witness saw him dead. The switch was on at the time. Witness described the position of Mr. Shortill's body. The dead man's back was towards the door. The electric light was dropped down and was about two feet from above the dead man's head. It was suspended about four feet from the ceiling. Witness didn't notice any marks on the dead Mr. Shortill's body.

When witness saw Mr. Shortill alive he was standing near his car in the yard. There were several standing in the yard when witness ran over to the Shortill home to see what was wrong. Witness said Walter Harrison had hauled the switch off in the cellar.

## Saw Blue Smoke

Around Mr. Shortill's leg was a blue smoke, said the witness. It was a few inches above his knee. Witness saw no burns. After seeing the smoke the

witness asked someone to haul the switch. The smoke then disappeared, declared the witness.

## J. W. Harrison

J. W. Harrison testified of seeing the deceased on July 14. Witness saw him about 2.15 (D.S.T.). Mr. Shortill was lying over the pump when witness saw him. The dead man's right leg was lying over the motor.

Witness said the right ankle was bent. Witness attempted to move the ankle. He received a shock up to his shoulder when he touched the body. He also noticed a blue flame and smoke. After the switch was turned there was no flame. Witness described the pump and the cellar. Witness was not familiar with the pump. There was no light on in the cellar. He felt that "the arm was coming off at the shoulder" when he grasped Mr. Shortill's leg. Witness saw smoke around the engine.

Witness said that he had turned the switch on several times after the body was removed and there had been spurts of blue flame on every occasion from the motor. There was moist soil on the floor of the cellar.

## Miss Aileen Burns

Miss Aileen Burns, who has been nursing Mrs. Shortill, who is ill, had driven to 10.30 Mass in the morning. Witness was the first to see Mr. Shortill. That was at 2.30 (D.S.T.). She did not touch the body. She called but there was no answer from Mr. Shortill. The dead man was lying on his face with his feet towards the door. She did not go in the pump room. Mr. Shortill seemed in very good health and very good spirits all morning. Witness said deceased had not complained of sickness. Witness had been attending Mrs. Shortill who has been in ill-health. She saw no flame at the time when she saw the body.

## Leo Hayes

Leo Hayes, town constable, testified next. He saw the body of deceased at 2.30 (D.S.T.). It was in the cellar of the Shortill home. He gave a description of where the body was lying when he saw it. He had seen two pipes. The body was lying face downwards. The right leg was lying near the motor but not in contact. The floor was concrete and earth.

## George Jamer

George Jamer Jr., told of being called to the Shortill home, a next door resident. He first saw deceased between 2.20 and 2.45 (D.S.T.). Witness had been called by Miss Burns. He saw a wire lying near the body. He then went out and pulled the switch. Witness told his sister to call the doctor and coroner. The motor was not on at the time. The deceased had been in good health.

Witness was present when Mr. Harrison got the violent shock. Witness had touched the dead man above the knee and had received no shock.

## Lee Machum

The next witness was Lee Machum. By trade he is an electrician. He had done electric work at the Shortill home.

Witness didn't install the motor and pump originally although he had worked on it. He understood that at times it was necessary to kick the belt to get the motor going. On Saturday evening the deceased had asked witness to look after some sockets for him, as there was a slight tingle from them. Witness had not been working on the motor. "You could get a shock off the sockets," said the witness, "when turning them on."

The current is supplied by the Maritime Electric Co. Ltd., said the witness. Before dark on Sunday night witness had gone up to the house and switched on the lights.

"Would defective wiring endanger a person in the pump room?" asked the coroner. Witness answered that it might. High voltage might cause danger.

## J. M. Swan

J. M. Swan who was next called, said his occupation was automobile mechanic. He had worked on the Shortill motor, turning down the commutator and putting in a net set of brakes. Mr. Shortill had been complaining for several months of his motor. The motor was operated successfully on Saturday afternoon, the day before Mr. Shortill's death.

On Sunday the automatic switch was broken off, said the witness. He

had looked at the motor pumper on Sunday afternoon.

## Frederick Clements

Frederick Clements was called. He is a near neighbour of the late Mr. Shortill. He had seen deceased in his car at nine o'clock on Sunday morning. Also he had seen the body on Sunday afternoon. His description of the position of Mr. Shortill's body coincided with the other witnesses. There was no switch on when witness saw the body. The cellar of the Shortill home seemed to be damp.

Witness had helped Mr. Harrison carry the body from the cellar. He was stiff. Wires were tangled in his body.

## R. V. Olive

R. V. Olive, the next witness, who is an electrician of the Maritime Electric Co. Ltd., said his company supplied the current to Mr. Shortill's house. There had been one complaint from the vicinity of the Shortill home, for blown fuses. Examination by the trouble man showed that lightning had entered the house and broke down insulation on electric fixtures in the upstairs part of the house, causing fuses at the main entrance to blow. The trouble man had tested other lines and found voltage to be normal. The transformer supplying current to the Shortill house also supplied current to the home of the complainant in the same locality, Mr. Christianson.

Since Mr. Shortill's death the Maritime Electric Co. Ltd. had examined the transformer in question. The particular transformer had been in place for about five years. Twenty one homes are supplied by the transformer. The ordinary voltage supplied is 115 and 220. Voltage to Mr. Shortill's house was 115 volts.

There is no system of inspection in Fredericton that witness knew of, save that of his own company which inspects the entrance to houses.

Witness told of what would happen if anything happened to a transformer. Under certain unusual circumstances anything from 115 to 2300 volts might result.

Witness thought that lightning had struck the transformer. Questioned by Mr. Hughes the witness said that it was the custom to ground wires from the transformer, for protection

purposes. Witness said that in some cases heavy currents might go into a home and out again without causing harm. If a ground is furnished, however, by some person coming in contact, it might take that person's life. Increased current, in secondary wires, is a danger to the householder.

Witness said that the transformer had been removed at his instruction, after he had found the voltage too high going into the houses.

## F. E. Meating

F. E. Meating, night trouble man for the Maritime Electric Co. Ltd., told of working in the Shortill home a week before Mr. Shortill's death. He had repaired a secondary wire of 220 volts. He could give no information of investigation the Shortill death.

## T. B. Owens

T. B. Owens, manman for the Maritime Electric Co. Ltd., said he had changed the transformer on July 14 at 3.30 o'clock in the afternoon. He had not examined the transformer after it was removed.

## Arthur Allen

Arthur Allen, groundsman of the Maritime Electric Co., had assisted in removing the transformer in question. He had assisted in getting the test but did not know the result.

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