

# MEDIA FYI

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**DC WWTF Excavation Findings – Interview with Walker Graham**  
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**CBC**

CBC 5:10 P.M. SPECIAL REPORT

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WHITEHORSE: (Dave White) A week after Halloween workers in Dawson City have made a grisly discovery. They were digging at the site of the community's new sewage treatment plant when they found human remains. Now they're not fresh. The bodies likely date from the turn of the last century. Government archeologists are in Dawson now trying to piece the stories together. Graham Walker already knows the story. He's a keen student of the history in Dawson City. We've reached him there.

White: Now let's get a bit of background here. I mean, what's going on in Dawson right now because it sounds like a pretty crazy story when you here it from down here in Whitehorse?

Walker: Yes, well, basically there was some hangings that occurred in Dawson in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - late 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century and they were buried just along the slough, which is the old river, that was Fort Hershmer(sp). Well, they filled that in and now they're building the sewage plant, which you do know about, and they were just extending it just a wee bit and then they came across some bodies there and so they may have accidentally found the lime pit which I've been looking for for the 2.5 years.

White: Tell me about your interest in it. Give me a bit more background I guess. I mean, -

Walker: Well, I was reading an article and I came across a gentleman, Mr. George O'Brien, who was hung in 1901. Well, I didn't know anything about the hangings in Dawson. So I started going to the museum here in Dawson just to find out a wee bit more and I find out that there was ten of them. There was actually two more up in Herschel Island and one actually in Whitehorse too. So I started doing more digging and trying to find out more information about them and found out who everybody was and from there it just started to snowball. You know, like I guess got the bug and I was looking here in Dawson in the museum and I went down to the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse and I ended up doing a little course in ...?... when I was there. Went into the library archives there just to find out more and I started finding more information, especially about George O'Brien, who basically killed three gentlemen on Christmas Day in 1899 but then the story started going on but he was also arrested the year before, worked on the wood pile until the summer of 1899. So found out he was also in prison in Britain so I went further back there and found out he was in Dartmoor and he was there because he shot a policeman in the back and one thing led to another and I traced him right back to when he was in Birmingham. So just one thing led to another. Then found out more about some more of the others, especially like the Fornier(sp) and the LaBelle(sp). Between the three of them those are worst murderers in the Yukon history and just found out more about them.

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White: So basically when you say ten, like the RCMP hung ten people in the Yukon in a couple of locations, is that right?

Walker: Basically they were all hung in Fort Hershmer and various places within there. What they used to do was they used to hang a black flag up 15 minutes before the execution. The bells used to go when the prisoner was executed. Then the black flag stayed up there for another 15 minutes afterwards. From the reports that I've seen they used to bury them at night so that way there'd be no scavengers come around for souvenirs. They used to be buried with lime so that way the body would be dissolved. So I was always curious to find out exactly what would be left of them.

White: And that's the issue that we're being faced with now because obviously the graves were unmarked and the Northwest Mounted Police didn't let people know where they were I guess.

Walker: No they didn't. There was a detailed review by Ed and Star Jones, you know, like I used their information that they actually got from when they were doing it and they pointed out that it was lost history. Well, that's a nice little mystery and I like mysteries as well as history. So I started digging more just to see if I could find out exactly where they were and I know that these guys who were hung were buried in the lime pit but there's also another six graves there too. There's actually 12 people buried in Fort Hershmer.

White: Wow! And now at the moment we're speaking in the afternoon on Friday here and they've only uncovered the two graves. Do you expect them to uncover more bodies?

Walker: They should. If it's the lime pit proper they should actually find six people.

White: Right. Wow! It's so freaky.

Walker: No, it's very interesting. That's just one thing about history, you know, like it's so interesting you don't know what happened and as there was lots of time, to actually find them again is fascinating.

White: Now the fact that they're finding this, not a total surprise to you right? I mean, you believed that this lime pit was somewhere around there, is that right?

Walker: That's right. I knew it was somewhere along the slough but I didn't know exactly where. I was speaking to Greg Hare last year about it and we were going to be doing some exploration but it didn't work out and I did voice - I did believe that they were there somewhere but like no proof. You know we just didn't know. So to actually find them it's absolutely great.

White: Now what do you think should happen to the bodies? What do you think should happen to the sewage treatment plant?

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Walker: Well, that's more of a political question on that one and I'll let their people decide that. But I know that's been put on hold until this has been resolved. What I would like to see with the bodies is actually they stay in Fort Hershmer but go to where the old buildings are there just now. But like I know people higher up than I am will decide that later.

White: You know we've been talking about this but for people that don't know can you locate the site for us in Dawson? Can you tell us which part of town we're talking about?

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Walker: It's basically just off Fifth Avenue, just right where the old sewage plant is - the building going on just before it, and it's on the left hand side of the building.

White: Hmm. Well I guess it's a mystery solved for history buffs like yourself in Dawson is it not?

Walker: Well, yes, the history is solved as where they were but the fun begins in trying to identify who they are now and see which body belongs who. So it's only just starting now.

White: The bodies, are they - have you seen them? I mean, are they in bad shape based -?

Walker: I've only seen pictures and all I've seen is basically some of the skulls. There's been one skull in particular I've actually seen. So, you know, like I love to basically get in there but there's some problems with where they are for safety because there's quite a nasty overhang there because like they were digging so I don't think the ground's that frozen yet. So probably would be advisable to get that safe before we start going there but to actually go in there with the archeologists would be absolutely brilliant, like a dream come true.

White: Well, I certainly appreciate you taking some time out to shed some light on this story and I have a feeling we'll be speaking again in the near future as they find more things.

Walker: I'm sure they are going to find more things. And it's going to be interesting to find what artifacts and everything that's there. You know like this is basically like your old fashioned CSI for sure.

White: Absolutely. Thanks very much for your time today.