

Man charged with homicide, dismemberment of woman in May ended three other lives, all of them Indigenous, police say

Suspect now accused serial killer

CHRIS KITCHING – Winnipeg Free Press

WINNIPEG police have charged an alleged serial killer with the murders of three more Indigenous women — whose bodies have not been found — after he was arrested and charged in a homicide and dismemberment last May.

Jeremy Anthony Michael Skibicki, 35, is now charged with four counts of first-degree murder, including the suspected killing of a woman police have been unable to identify.

“I don’t know if (Indigenous women) were specifically being targeted, but clearly, the victims in this were all Indigenous women,” Winnipeg Police Service Chief Danny Smyth told a news conference Thursday.

Police identified Morgan Beatrice Harris, 39, and Mercedes Myran, 26, as two of the three additional victims.

Skibicki is also accused of murdering 24-year-old Rebecca Contois, who was identified in May.

Police have no evidence of any further victims, said Smyth.

He called the slayings “senseless and tragic” while offering condolences to the victims’ families and telling the public there is no present danger to the community involving this case.

“It’s always unsettling when there’s any type of serial killing,” he said, adding this case is “unsettling because it does involve Indigenous women.”

Describing it as a “painful day” for Winnipeg, Mayor Scott Gillingham said he felt a mix of anger and sorrow.

“These women were members of our community. They’re someone’s daughter, someone’s sister, someone’s mother, someone’s friend,” he told the news conference at police headquarters.

“We must never become numb to the horrors of the news we’re hearing today because every homicide represents a life.”

Detectives believe the unidentified woman was the first to be killed — on or about March 15 — based on a timeline they put together and tracking of Skibicki’s “actions,” said major crimes Insp. Shawn Pike.

To help identify the victim, police released pictures of a reversible Baby Phat-label jacket with a fur-lined hood that is similar to one she is believed to have worn, hoping someone recognizes it.

“It’s important for every single person in this room and beyond to appreciate somewhere out there there’s a family and a community that are missing a loved one and truly deserve to know what happened,” said Pike.

Police believe the woman is in her mid-20s and has an average build.

Harris is believed to have been killed on or about May 1, and Myran on or about May 4.

Both were living in Winnipeg and are from Long Plain First Nation, about 90 kilometres west of the city.

Police previously issued a missing persons alert for Harris, stating she was last seen May 1 near Main Street and Henry Avenue.

In September, Bear Clan Patrol circulated a picture of Myran, stating she had been missing since March and was last seen in the North End.

Police laid the new charges against Skibicki Thursday at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, where he was already being held.

He was previously charged in the killing of Contois, whose partial remains were found in a garbage bin near an apartment building on Edison Avenue, just east of Henderson Highway, on May 16.

He has been in custody since his arrest two days after the discovery.

Police said at a May 19 news conference detectives had not ruled out the possibility of more victims.

Additional remains belonging to Contois, a member of O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi (Crane River) First Nation who lived in Winnipeg, were found during a search of the Brady Road landfill June 14.

As officers continue to look for three other victims' remains, they do not foresee another landfill search, Smyth said.

Police wouldn't disclose any connections between Skibicki and the victims, nor comment on whether the women were killed at the same location. And they wouldn't say if any other locations have been or will be searched, nor would they comment on a possible motive.

"Investigation-wise, we believe there are, quite honestly, things very similar to Rebecca Contois, but our investigators are still working through parts of the file," said Pike, noting DNA has assisted investigators.

Since Contois' remains were found, homicide detectives have worked with specialized units, including missing persons and forensics, to identify more victims, said Smyth.

He said detectives had enough evidence to recommend first-degree murder charges even though three victims' bodies haven't been found and one of the woman is, as yet, unidentified.

Smyth wouldn't say if an internal process will take place to find out if a suspect could have been identified and arrested sooner.

Pike said Skibicki was arrested "as soon as we were aware of what was going on."

A charge of first-degree murder is laid in killings that are allegedly planned and deliberate.

Skibicki's lawyer, Leonard Tailleux, said his client will plead not guilty to all the charges.

The case is scheduled to appear in the Court of King's Bench in Winnipeg on Friday.

A review of Skibicki's social media accounts in May revealed posts on far-right politics, including references to the white genocide conspiracy theory and antisemitic content.

Court documents reviewed by the *Free Press* in May show that Skibicki's ex-wife was granted a three-year protection order against him Sept. 4, 2019.

Gillingham noted three additional victims brings the total number of homicides in Winnipeg to an "unacceptable" 50 in 2022.

Winnipeg set a new annual record when a 45th homicide occurred last month.

More work is necessary to protect Indigenous people and make Winnipeg safer, the mayor said.

At the Legislative Building, NDP justice critic Nahanni Fontaine spoke through tears with Point Douglas MLA Bernadette Smith at her side for support.

Fontaine met with Harris's family Thursday morning.

"What we learned today is why we ask people, why we ask governments, why we ask politicians of every stripe to protect Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited," she said. "There are consequences and there are deadly consequences when we don't prioritize the protection of Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited.

She noted she is grateful for the work of detectives leading to a suspect being charged.

"Our women, our little girls, our two-spirited are not garbage," said Fontaine. "We are not disposable. We are sacred and we're loved by our families."

Anyone with information about the investigation, including the jacket, is asked to call the homicide unit at 204986-6508 or Crime Stoppers at 204-7868477 (TIPS).

— with files from Danielle DaSilva