

Where artistry and justice meet: New book features court artist's biggest trials

Rochester artist Carol Taylor's new book features almost 40 years of trial sketches

[Steven Webb](#) · CBC News · Posted: Dec 04, 2019 5:00 AM AST | Last Updated: December 4, 2019



Carol Taylor's sketch from the 1984 trial of Premier Richard Hatfield for possession of marijuana. Hatfield is pictured at centre, with defence lawyers Gary Miller, left, and Rod Gillis. (Graham Thompson/CBC)

Carol Taylor never planned to be a court sketch artist.

The Rochester visual artist usually works with tactile things like clay and mundane, everyday objects. But one phone call in the late 1970s gave her a whole new sideline.

"The new manager of ATV called me out of the blue," she said, "and said he had asked

around town if there was anyone who could draw in a court setting and several people told him they thought I could do it."

Taylor said yes, and rearranged her life to do it.

It was a smart move for someone trying to support a career in the arts.

Forty years later, and Taylor has worked as a sketch artist for some of the biggest trials in New Brunswick history.



Taylor has spent nearly 40 years as a sketch artist on some of New Brunswick's biggest criminal trials. (Graham Thompson/CBC)

It's an impressive list, especially the cases in the 1980s.

Taylor was at Premier Richard Hatfield's 1984 trial for possession of marijuana. It was a scandalous case at the time, with the premier accused of having 35 grams of pot in a suitcase that was being loaded onto a plane during a visit by the Queen.

Taylor said the trial led to a pleasant exchange with Hatfield.

"He came over and said that ... I was doing a great job and because he was a collector of art and crafts, he asked for one of the drawings."



Taylor says these folders represent about a quarter of her court sketches over the years. (Graham Thompson/CBC)

But not every encounter with her subjects was so friendly.

Taylor spent three days a week doing sketches for the Allan Legere murder trial. Legere was accused of killing four people after escaping custody in 1989.

Taylor was having trouble getting a good view of Legere at the trial, so she decided to return to court early after lunch break.



Court sketch artist releases book with art of most prominent cases

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Carol Taylor was a sketch artist at some of the most famous criminal trials in the province. She just released a book of sketches she created for newsrooms.

"And he was there," Taylor said. "I didn't expect him to be until the noon hour was over.

"And he looked at me, and it was like eye contact, and he wasn't happy, and I thought, I'm glad he's not out."

Taylor also sat in on the manslaughter trial of the man accused of setting the Saint John jail fire that killed 21 prisoners.





The 1989 trial of six men accused of working to smuggle drugs into New Brunswick. Two pilots who crashed a plane carrying 500 kilograms of cocaine and four men accused of coming to New Brunswick to attempt a prison break were all charged. (Graham Thompson/CBC)

She was also there when four heavily armed drug cartel members were tried for a plot to release two pilots caught bringing 500 kilograms of cocaine into New Brunswick in 1989.

She said security at the hearing was heavy, and she was struck by the amount of gear worn by the police officers.

In recent years, Taylor has sketched Dennis Oland trial in Saint John and the trial of Justin Bourque in Moncton.

Liked the pressure

With Bourque, who killed three Mounties and wounded two others, a guilty plea during a brief court appearance left Taylor wishing she had more time to work on the drawing.

"I put the drawings on the ... seat of the car, with the rain pouring all over, trying to finish them a little more, and someone said, 'Well, you better get in,'" she said. "And there was a cameraman over my shoulder, and one in the front, right."

But Taylor said that kind of pressure is just part of the task at hand.

"It doesn't bother me. I like it."

Over the years, Taylor has experimented with techniques, including trying watercolours, which she said made it too difficult to fix mistakes, and markers, with odour so strong she thought she would pass out.



One of Taylor's favourites from the late 1980s showing the late Wilber MacLeod, standing right centre, a well-known Saint John lawyer. (Graham Thompson/CBC)

Many of her sketches have been collected in a new book called *Capturing Crime*.

Taylor said the idea came about 20 years ago, when she realized how many of the sketches she still had. It was Kathryn McCarroll, then head of the Saint John Arts Centre, who made the suggestion.

"She said, 'You know you've got history there, why don't you have a book made?'"

After several false starts, Taylor got in touch with a small publishing house in Dartmouth that specializes in historical books. She said the publisher was enthusiastic

about the idea.

Each trial in the book includes a synopsis written by history professor Greg Marquis of the University of New Brunswick in Saint John.

The book will be launched at the Saint John Free Public Library on Wednesday, Dec. 4, at 7 p.m.

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