



## It's Our History, Our Country

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### A Coffin For A Man Named Coffin



Feb. 10, 1956

Wilbert Coffin, 41, (1915 - 1956) was a Canadian prospector who was convicted of murder and executed in Canada.

Montreal journalist, editor, author and politician Jacques Hébert raised doubt in Coffin's guilt in his book *J'accuse les assassins de Coffin*, which was published in 1963.

The book led to a royal commission which upheld the conviction. On July 15, 1953, the remains of Eugene Lindsey were found in the Gaspé region of Quebec a month after his disappearance. The body had been torn apart by bears.

On July 23, 1953, the bodies of Lindsey's 17-year-old son Richard and 20-year-old Frederick Claar were also found, four kilometers away. The three men had last been seen going into the woods to hunt. Coffin was accused of ambushing the three men and stealing more than \$600 (about \$5,000 today).

Coffin denied committing the murders, but admitting to stealing some of the mens' luggage. Coffin was the last person to see the murdered men alive and convicted of murder. Coffin had been seen with the youngest of the three Americans at a gas station. He had purchased a pump to repair the pickup truck the Americans were driving.

The case proved to be complicated without an eye witness; the prosecution had to rely heavily on circumstantial evidence. After much deliberation, the jury found

Coffin guilty of murdering one of the hunters. The mandatory sentence was death by hanging.

The sentence was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. There, a majority of justices affirmed the judgments of the lower courts. Coffin was again found guilty, and returned to Bordeaux Jail in Montreal to await his execution.

He was refused his final wish of marrying Marion Petric, his partner and mother of his 8-year-old son James.

Coffin went through seven reprieves after his conviction where he was denied clemency by the Quebec Court of Appeals, the Canadian Supreme Court and the Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent's cabinet.

Finally, on Feb. 10, 1956, a death flag flew and a chime sounded seven times announcing that Coffin was about to die. At 12:01 a.m. the living Coffin felt the long noose of death.

Many were upset by the ruling. They believed Wilbert Coffin to be innocent that his conviction relied solely on circumstantial evidence. Senator Jacques Hébert, a journalist at the time, was cited for contempt of court for his subsequent articles on the case.

The argument against the death penalty eventually won Canadians over and the practice was abolished in 1976. Sadly, this came too late for Coffin.

Coffin, the 708th person to be executed in Canada, was placed in a coffin and might be at peace in Canadian ground. Was coffin innocent like he stated? Guilty or innocent, this is an event in Canada and reported in a place we call *It's Our History, Our Country*.

<http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/en/timePortals/milestones/70mile.asp>

[http://www.injusticebusters.com/2003/Coffin\\_Wilbert.htm](http://www.injusticebusters.com/2003/Coffin_Wilbert.htm)

[http://www.mysteriesofcanada.com/Quebec/coffin\\_sits\\_up\\_in\\_his\\_coffin.htm](http://www.mysteriesofcanada.com/Quebec/coffin_sits_up_in_his_coffin.htm)