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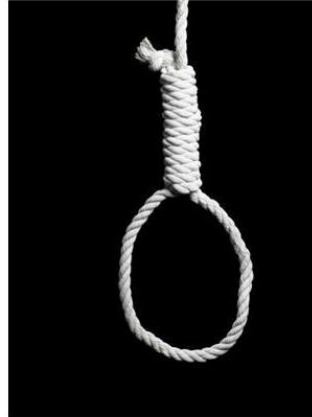
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Capital punishment in Canada

By Ronald Wolf
Jul 14, 2010

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Canada had its share of hanging those who were guilty and those who were innocent. Before DNA came about, there were plenty innocent who danced with the rope of death. Right or wrong, that's the way it was done.

It was on this day in 1976 that capital punishment was done with for the most part. Read the article of the week and you'll find out a short history of capital punishment in Canada.

The only method used in Canada for capital punishment was hanging. On July 14, 1976 Canada eliminated the death penalty for murder. A total of 1,481 people were sentenced to death, with 710 executed. Of those executed, 697 were men and 13 were women. The last execution in Canada was on December 11, 1962 at Toronto's Don Jail.

These executions weren't done with machines. Someone had to do the calculations of weight and size of the guilty so that they wouldn't strangle to death or be decapitated.

John Radclive was Canada's first professional executioner, placed on the federal payroll as a hangman by a Dominion order-in-council in 1892, on the recommendation of the justice minister Sir John Thompson. Radclive had trained under British hangman William Marwood. He shown hanged at least 69 people in Canada, although his life total was probably much higher. At his death, the Toronto Telegram said he had 150 executions. He died of alcohol-related illness in Toronto on February 26, 1911, at the age of 55.

The Crime Writers of Canada present annual literary awards called The Arthur Ellis Awards named after this pseudonym. Ellis is prominently featured in the 2009 documentary Hangman's Graveyard.

In 1961, legislation was introduced to reclassify murder into capital or non-capital offences. A capital murder involved a planned or deliberate murder, murder during violent crimes, or the murder of a police officer or prison guard. Only capital murder carried the sentence of death. In 1967, Bill C-168 was passed creating a five-year moratorium on the use of the death penalty, except for murders of police and corrections officers. On July 14, 1976, Bill C-84 was passed by a narrow margin of 130:124 in a free vote, resulting in the de jure abolition of the death penalty, except for certain offences under the National Defence Act. These were removed in 1998.

First-degree murder, which before abolition was the offence of capital murder, now carries a mandatory life sentence without eligibility for parole until the person has served 25 years of the sentence.

Canada banned the death penalty because of fears about wrongful convictions, concerns about the state taking the lives of individuals, and uncertainty about the death penalty's role as a deterrent for crime. The last two people executed in Canada were Ronald Turpin, 29, and Arthur Lucas, 54, convicted in separate murders, at 12:02 a.m. on December 11, 1962 at the Don Jail in Toronto.

The last woman to be hanged in Canada was Marguerite Pitre on January 9, 1953, for her part in the Albert Guay affair.

While hanging was a relatively humane method of execution under ideal conditions with an expert executioner, mistakes could happen. Condemned prisoners were decapitated by accident at Headingley Jail in Manitoba and Bordeaux Jail in Montreal, and a prisoner at the Don Jail in Toronto hit the floor of the room below and was strangled by the hangman.

Some Canadian jails such as those in Toronto, Ont., Headingley, MB. and Fort Saskatchewan, AB. had permanent indoor execution facilities, but more typically offenders were hanged on a scaffold built for the occasion in the jail yard.

At least in theory, hangings were supposed to take place in private after the 1870s. However, small county jails, which saw a hanging perhaps every few decades, were not always able to organize a fully private execution, and members of what MP Agnes Macphail described as the 'morbid public' came to see something of the spectacle.

Even when nothing was visible except a jail official posting an official notice saying the execution had taken place, large crowds still gathered at the time of a scheduled hanging.

Should capital punishment be reinstated in Canada? The answer is foggy at best. We all have our own answers for this question. One thing is certainly clear; innocent and guilty people were executed in a place called Canada.

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1 Rule of a flat stomach:



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1 weird old tip.