

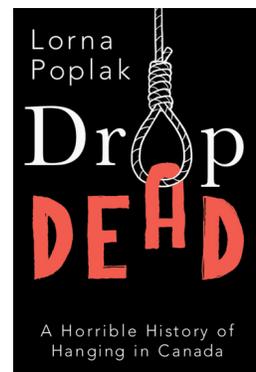
Meet Lorna Poplak

From KALS Connect May 2023 Newsletter

THE HISTORY OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CANADA

KALS is delighted to have the author of "Drop Dead: A Horrible History of Hanging in Canada" as a presenter. How did we connect with you?

In late February, I received an email from [Program Committee and Board Member] Lynda Sampson inviting me to do a presentation for KALS. My work had been recommended by a fellow Torontonionian, who has also delivered ZOOM classes to your group. I was absolutely delighted to accept!

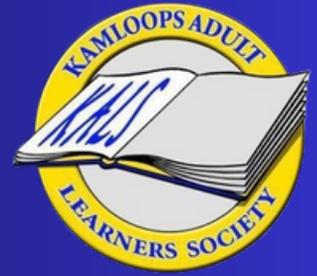


I was surprised to learn from your course description that the death penalty in Canada was not abolished until 1976. Were there many hangings from the post- World War 11 period onward?

According to the official records, 704 individuals were executed in the 109-year period between Confederation and abolition. The rate of hangings was still high from 1946 onward, with 128 individuals meeting their end at the end of a rope.

This was despite the fact that Conservative PM John Diefenbaker commuted 52 of 66 death sentences during his term of office between 1957 and 1963, and no hangings took place after the Liberals assumed control of the government in 1963. The last woman executed was Marguerite Pitre in Montreal in 1953. And in 1962, Arthur Lucas and Ronald Turpin were hanged back-to-back at Toronto's notorious Don Jail, going down in history as the last men to be executed in Canada.





According to your book, Kamloops has the dubious distinction of being home to the “youngest individual ever convicted of murder (and hanged) in post-Confederation Canada.” Can those who register in your Zoom course expect to hear more about this local connection?

The individual in question was 15-year-old Archie McLean, the youngest member of the Kamloops Outlaws [also known as the McLean Gang] 4 Métis youths who spread terror in the Fort Kamloops area in the late 1870s.

One of the themes of my presentation is the treatment of minority groups, including immigrants and Indigenous people, during Canada’s 109-year experiment with the death penalty. The case of the Kamloops Outlaws is a poignant illustration of this point, and I certainly plan to bring it to the notice of attendees.

What is one thing you hope KALS students take away from your presentation?

As mentioned earlier in this interview, the death penalty was abolished in 1976. But the issue never seems to go away: In a 2022 poll, Research Co found that 51% of Canadians were in favour of reinstating the death penalty, with 37% against, and 12% undecided.

As my presentation will show, however, too much can go wrong, including wrongful convictions and bungled executions. The bottom line is that even though murder is an odious crime that must be appropriately punished, the death penalty should never be reinstated.

