

Chapter 12

“Camille Branchaud” – Identity Unknown

During the 1930's there were at least two other hangmen who were regularly hired in some provinces, as sheriffs turned away from the troublesome Arthur Ellis/Alexander Armstrong English. We have noted how Sam Edwards/Smith was active, and we turn now to a hangman calling himself Camille Branchaud, who had a much longer career than Sam Edwards/Smith who died in 1939. Branchaud also outlived John Ellis/Moore, who was the hangman for most of English Canada in the 1940's. While Ellis/Moore was the official hangman in Ontario in the 1940's and was hired by other provinces, Branchaud did attempt to compete with him. For example, we have archival evidence that he advertised his services to the Sheriff of Edmonton in 1944 attempting to get the hanging jobs that Ellis/Moore had in that province.¹

I. BODY COUNT OF ABOUT 100

After Ellis/Moore died in 1950, many jurisdictions like British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan hired Camille Branchaud, the very experienced executioner from Quebec. He also hanged people in Ontario, until a new man, again calling himself John Ellis, acquired a retainer to be the official hangman for Ontario. The last hangings in many provinces outside of Ontario were performed by Camille Branchaud, who would have been quite elderly by then.

¹ January 28th reply from Sheriff to Branchaud as to original letter (missing) from Branchaud offering his services, dated Jan. 25, 1944. Alberta Archives, Sheriffs, GR 2002.0863 Box 1.

After the decapitation of Mrs. Sarao in Montreal on March 29, 1935, Arthur Ellis had another engagement in Quebec on April 5, 1935, but thereafter he was never mentioned as the hangman in subsequent Quebec executions, although he claimed that he still was the hangman for that province for all of 1935, but we doubt his veracity.² Camille Branchaud, giving evidence in 1955 at a special committee on capital punishment stated that he had been an apprentice to Arthur Ellice and was appointed as the official executioner of Quebec on August 1, 1934, replacing Ellice.³ This would have been before the Ellis bungle in 1935, and it may be that Arthur Ellice was allowed to continue hanging people in Quebec for the dates that had already been reserved for him, before he lost the job of “official” executioner. Camille Branchaud probably hanged the remaining 12 people executed in Quebec in the second half of the 1930’s. During the 1940’s while John Bernard Moore was executing around 80 people in various provinces, Branchaud executed 22 people in Quebec and probably another 5 in New Brunswick, bringing his body count to 39. But then in the 1950’s, after the death of Moore, more jurisdictions hired him, although, as noted, we also have another hangman called John Ellis (No.2) who was eventually on a retainer in Ontario.

In the 1950’s, Branchaud probably executed at least 52 people, and the numbers may be higher given the secrecy in the press as to hangings. Branchaud’s body count was at least 91 by the end of the 1950’s. In 1960 he executed Cote in Montreal, which was the last hanging in Quebec, and Cook in Alberta on Nov. 15, 1960, which was the last execution in Alberta. 1960 was the end of Branchaud’s career as hangman, although he would continue to travel to various hangings, only to have the commutation come in at the last minute. He claimed back in 1955 that he had officiated at over 200 executions,⁴ but even if he was counting his apprentice years and

² “Ellis Contradicts Retirement Story,” *Montreal Gazette*, June 8, 1936, at 7.

³ Hansard, 2nd Session, 22 Parliament, Testimony at Joint Committee on Capital and Corporal Punishment, Minutes, May 11, 1955, at 569.

⁴ *Ibid.*

commutations, the number was highly inflated and was more likely 100 or so. Whatever the number, he killed a lot of people.

The day after John Ellis (Moore) died in Toronto, there was a double hanging in Manitoba at Headingly jail, which had previously been postponed due to the illness of Moore. We suspect that this would have been Branchaud’s first execution in the West, and he took a plane, not a train.⁵

Compared to most of the hangmen we have covered, we believe that Branchaud, like Edwards/Smith, was a “good” hangman. We have no evidence of scandal, drunkenness, or frequent bungles. Giving testimony in 1955, he claimed that he had never had any “accidents” compared to his predecessors.⁶ However, given the large number of hangings by Branchaud, and the lack of newspaper coverage on hangings for much of the period in which he was active, we may assume that Branchaud did have some well-hidden bungles. For example, at a double hanging in Toronto, on Dec. 16, 1952, the hangman, from Montreal, “who weighs almost 300 pounds and wore a black beret and black tie” pulled the lever on the men hanging back-to-back and it reportedly took around 50 minutes before death was pronounced.⁷ Nevertheless, the coroner said the double hanging went off without a hitch and was “a good job.”⁸ Another example was Malanik, who was hanged in Manitoba in June of 1952. It turned out that this was the last hanging in Manitoba. The newspapers said nothing about any bungle. Many years later though it was revealed that Malanik had gained weight in prison, and Branchaud had given him too long of a drop and the victim’s jugular vein was severed causing blood to spurt from his neck.⁹

⁵ “Hanged Together,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 9, 1950, at 4.

⁶ *Supra* note 3 at 573.

⁷ “Thought They Were to Die at 8 A.M.” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 16, 1952, at 1 and 3.

⁸ “His Foot Confiscated, Hobbled to Scaffold,” *Calgary Albertan*, Dec. 17, 1952, at 16.

⁹ “Eyewitnesses Give Accounts,” *Regina Leader-Post*, March 28, 1987, at 48; Also see W. E. Morris, *Watch the Rope* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1996).

II. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

From a few randomly selected files in the Alberta Archives, we can learn something about Branchaud's travel arrangements and fees in the 1950's. The Edmonton Sheriff would direct all correspondence and telegrams to Branchaud in care of Leopold Guy Bertrand, Secretary and Special Officer of the Sheriff's Office at the Montreal Court House. We presume Mr. Bertrand was paid some fee from Branchaud to be the agent for him. Apparently, Bertrand was not just the agent for Branchaud, but he also attended hangings, claiming in 1951 that he had personally witnessed 27 hangings in 15 years at the Bordeaux Jail.¹⁰ The identity of Branchaud was never revealed in any of the communications we have looked at in the archival records. Bertrand, the agent in the sheriff's office, died on June 3, 1980, and the age of 68.¹¹ As we will eventually note, we believe that Branchaud died in 1969.

The Alberta files contain considerable telegrams and letters back and forth from the sheriff and Branchaud negotiating a suitable date for a hanging, sometimes before a capital case was even concluded. We presume that this was done so that the judge in a case could then sentence the accused to die on a date that had already been decided upon in terms of the availability of Branchaud.¹²

As for financial matters, Branchaud charged \$200 for each execution plus expenses. He took the train from Montreal and stayed at the King Edward Hotel in Edmonton, before he hanged Gerard on February 10, 1953. The Sheriff of Edmonton, through Bertrand's office, sent Branchaud an advance of several hundred dollars for part of the travel expenses before Branchaud left Montreal. The train fare was \$154.80 return, while berths on the train were about \$40 and meals on the train were \$24.¹³ However,

¹⁰ "1951 Hangman's Lean Year," *Montreal Gazette*, Jan. 1, 1952, at 11.

¹¹ Bertrand, *Montreal Gazette*, June 5, 1980, at 82.

¹² See for example the Gerard File, 1952-53, and the Cardinal File, 1954, Alberta Archives, GR 2002.0863 Box 1.

¹³ Gerard File, 1952-53, *Ibid*.

in January of 1954, Branchaud flew to Edmonton to hang Henry Alfred. The flight cost \$262.45 return, which was considerably more than a train ticket.¹⁴

At the last hanging in Alberta of Robert Cook on November 15, 1960, at the Fort Saskatchewan Jail, Branchaud again flew to Edmonton several days before the hanging, and he stayed at the King Edward Hotel. Branchaud had already been paid various reservation fees because the hanging date had been changed multiple times due to appeals. However, as to the hanging, Branchaud charged his usual \$200 and expenses. Here is the list of expenses and Branchaud’s signature:¹⁵

	November 15th, 1960.
Mr. W.A. Short, Sheriff, Court House, Edmonton, ALTA.	
IN ACCOUNT WITH	
	Camille Branchaud, High Executioner, Province of Quebec.
Re : REGINA vs Robert Raymond Cook.	
Taxi from home to air terminal - Montreal	2.90
Limousine from air terminal to airport - Montreal	1.50
Air transport - Montreal-Edmonton (return)	270.00
Taxi airport to air terminal - Edmonton	50
Hotel in Edmonton during stay	24.00
Meals in Edmonton during stay	28.00
1 only excursion as per reservation	200.00
1 black bonnet (vaseline included)	2.00
1 special rope for execution	8.00
Taxi from hotel to airport - Edmonton	1.50
Limousine from airport to air terminal - Montreal	1.50
Taxi from air terminal to home - Montreal	2.20
Miscellaneous : tips at hotel, with meals, in taxis, etc...	3.00
Sub-total	<u>538.40</u>
Less advance rec'd.	250.00
	<u><u>288.40</u></u>
Payment received November 15th/60	
<i>Camille Branchaud</i> Camille Branchaud	BALANCE

In the very few surviving sheriff’s correspondence files in the B.C. archives we learn that in 1950 Branchaud, in addition to all

¹⁴ Alfred File, 1954, *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Robert Cook file, 1960, *Ibid*.

expenses, charged \$150 for a hanging; \$75 for a commutation, and \$25 for every time a reserved date was changed.¹⁶ However, in April of 1952, Branchaud had a new fee schedule where he charged \$200 for each execution, \$100 if the sentence was commuted, and \$50 when the reserved date was changed by an appeal, or by change of sentence or for any reason.¹⁷

III. DESCRIPTIONS AND JUSTIFICATIONS:

While we do not know his identity, there are numerous clues provided in press reports. The first mention of him was at a hanging in Montreal in June of 1936. Arthur Ellis was still alive and hanging people in New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia, and was getting lots of attention in the press as he touted his supposed body count record and experience, and yet he had clearly lost the job in his own hometown. At the hanging of Marchand on June 5, 1936, the *Montreal Star* noted that “the execution was performed by a new hangman named Branchaud... who conducted the execution without difficulty and left immediately after Marchand was pronounced dead. He is a man of about 45 to 50 years of age, heavy set, weighing about 200 pounds, and about 5 feet 6 inches tall.”¹⁸ According to the *Montreal Gazette*, the hangman was called Joe Branchaud, and he was a former assistant to Arthur Ellis.¹⁹ The *Star* also called him Joe Branchaud when Ellis died in July of 1938.²⁰ However at a hanging in Hull, Quebec, in February, 1937, he was called C.C. Branchaud, and he handed out portions of the rope as souvenirs for those who attended the hanging.²¹

¹⁶ Sheriff Cotton to Attorney General, June 1, 1950. B.C. Archives, GR-2966, A.G. Correspondence, Box 4, File 31, Case 95.5, Hangings 1938-1967.

¹⁷ Letter from Bertrand to Sheriff Cotton, April 5, 1952. *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Marchand Pays Extreme Penalty,” *Montreal Star*, June 5, 1936, at 3.

¹⁹ “Arthur Ellis, Hangman, Retires; His Assistant Assumes Grisly Job,” *Montreal Gazette*, June 7, 1936, at 19.

²⁰ “Hangman Ellis Reported Dying,” *Montreal Star*, July 20, 1938, at 3.

²¹ “Omer Gerard Dies,” *Ottawa Citizen*, Feb. 26, 1937, at 2.

At an execution in New Brunswick in December 1942, he was called Camille Branchard, although this was likely a spelling mistake.²² During the decade of the 1940’s the press was barred from executions in Quebec, and we find no name or descriptions of the hangman. When his jurisdiction was expanded, he was called Camille Branchaud in the press when he hanged Ducharme at Oakalla Prison in B.C.²³ The archival records in Alberta and British Columbia consistently refer to him as Camille Branchaud.

At his first hanging in B.C. in 1950 he was dressed in a dark business suit.²⁴ In 1950 at Simcoe, Ontario, he was described as a 55-year-old Montrealer who says he has hanged some 200 persons in the last 27 years.²⁵ In 1951 at a hanging at the Oakalla Jail in B.C. he was described as “a big, bald-headed, jolly-looking man, dressed in black.”²⁶ At a double hanging in Toronto in 1952 he wore a black beret.²⁷

In BC at a hanging in late 1953, the “plump and placid”²⁸ Branchaud was “wearing a black beret and a dark grey double-breasted suit.”²⁹ The nearby prisoners in their cells hurled a string of insults at Branchaud during the hanging.³⁰

Tom Gould, well known Canadian journalist, after witnessing an execution described the hangman as “obese and ugly.”³¹ A journalist selected to be on the coroner’s jury witnessed the difficult hanging of Vincent at Oakalla prison in B.C. in 1955. Years later he described the hangman. “He appears to be about 60 and he is completely bald, his face pimply. He is short and very fat,

²² *Montreal Gazette*, Dec. 16, 1942, at 19 re hanging at St. Andrews, New Brunswick.

²³ “Ducharme,” *Vancouver Sun*, July 14, 1950, at 1 and 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ McAuliffe, “*Windsor Star*,” Dec. 19, 1950, at 5.

²⁶ “Davidoff Hanged,” *Vancouver Sun*, Dec. 11, 1951, at 1.

²⁷ “His foot confiscated,” *Calgary Albertan*, Dec. 17, 1952, at 16.

²⁸ “Sonny Jones Dies Calmly,” *Vancouver Sun*, Nov. 10, 1953, at 1.

²⁹ “Jones Goes to Gallows,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, Nov. 10, 1953, at 1.

³⁰ “Sonny Jones Quietly Dies,” *Vancouver Province*, Nov. 10, 1953, at 38.

³¹ “Death Penalty,” *Victoria Times Colonist*, Dec. 26, 1959, at 2.

and he wears a grey double-breasted suit with a shiny grey sports shirt buttoned at the neck.”³²

1955 was a big year for Branchaud. Of the 8 people hanged that year, he hanged 7 of them. However, more importantly in terms of his profile, there was a huge amount of press coverage given to him when the Senate-Commons Committee studying capital punishment decided finally to call him as a witness,³³ despite an earlier decision of the Committee to hear him,³⁴ and then not to hear from the hangman.³⁵ It was reported that Branchaud could not understand or speak English and the questions and answers would have to be translated. Furthermore, Branchaud would not meet with the committee in any open forum, but only in a secret location to preserve his anonymity for fear of vengeance on the part of friends or relatives of those whom he had hanged.³⁶ On May 11, 1955, Branchaud gave his testimony at the Rockcliffe barracks of the RCMP. Seven RCMP cars with plain clothes drivers, took the 20 committee members from the Centre Block to Rockcliffe.³⁷

The 300-pound, bald headed hangman wore dark blue glasses at the hearing.³⁸ The *Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia, had a caricature of Branchaud supposedly on the way to give his testimony:³⁹

³² Don Stainsby, “Hanged by the Neck” Vol 9, No. 44, *Weekend Magazine*, Oct. 31, 1959, at

³³ “M.P.’s, Senators to Hear Hangman,” *Windsor Star*, May 4, 1955, at 24.

³⁴ “Hangman to Give Views to Inquiry,” *Calgary Herald*, May 11, 1954, at 1.

³⁵ “Committee Won’t Hear Hangman,” *Montreal Star*, Feb. 15, 1955, at 23.

³⁶ *Supra* note 33.

³⁷ “Hangman Tells Parliamentarians About His Job,” *Ottawa Journal*, May 11, 1955, at 24.

³⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, May 13, 1955, at 12.

³⁹ “Condemned Men Are Most Co-Operative Said the Hangman,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 5, 1955, at 57.



Branchaud was accompanied by Leopold Guy Bertrand, who read out in English Branchaud’s answers to a questionnaire that had been provided to the hangman ahead of the hearings. When it was finally time for Branchaud to answer questions, he claimed that in 95 to 98 per cent of the cases, the neck was broken, and in the few cases of “strangulation” the man was “dead” or “unconscious” in any event by the time the body reached the end of the rope after the trap was pulled. He reviewed some bungling by other hangmen that he had heard about but claimed that he

had never had any accidents. He did admit that one man he hanged had a heart attack on the gallows and was dead before he hanged him anyway. While jurisdictions like Quebec, Manitoba, BC and Alberta (Edmonton and Lethbridge) had centralized the hangings in one place, he criticized the jurisdictions where the hangings involved constructing a scaffold in some regional jail, often involved too many curious witnesses, and Coroner's, Doctors, and Wardens who might be too drunk to do their jobs properly.⁴⁰

Branchaud probably regretted agreeing to appear. Instead of reassuring the committee as to the swiftness of unconsciousness by hanging, many members of the committee were apparently horrified by his testimony as to the length of time before death was pronounced. One member apparently "did not sleep a wink that night after hearing the horrifying details."⁴¹ Supposedly the members of the committee were so shocked and sickened by the testimony that "they came staggering out from their rendezvous with the hangman, gasping and glassy-eyed."⁴² The physical appearance of the hangman did not help. One commentator described him as, "a thoroughly unpleasant looking gentleman. The hangman is squat, close to 300 pounds, and has practically no neck. The hands... are pudgy and powerful. The eyes are expressionless..."⁴³ Another correspondent stated, "He's a pasty white, bald-headed 300 pounds of obesity with dirty fingernails matching his dark blue glasses."⁴⁴ Another report suggested that apart from his appearance, his attitude of taking pride in his "profession" and "art" stunned the committee.⁴⁵ Another journalist suggested that, "Committee members were left with the impression that the hangman is bordering on the sadistic."⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Hansard, *supra* note 3 at 569-583.

⁴¹ "Today in Ottawa," *Windsor Star*, May 13, 1955, at 28.

⁴² "Kiss of Death Given His Job by Hangman," *Waterloo Record*, May 21, 1955, at 4.

⁴³ Stanley Burke, "Bleak Testimony," *Vancouver Sun*, May 14, 1955, at 25.

⁴⁴ Gerald Waring, *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 17, 1955, at 1.

⁴⁵ "Hangman Shocks," *Ottawa Journal*, May 12, 1955, at 22.

⁴⁶ *Supra* note 42.

Surprisingly, given the mass of evidence heard by the committee over several years favoring abolition of capital punishment, the Joint Committee in 1956 recommended that capital punishment should be retained, but that barbaric hanging should be abolished in favor of the electric chair, or the gas chamber, which were supposedly more humane.⁴⁷ This did not happen. While American jurisdictions experimented with the electric chair, the gas chamber, and lethal injection,⁴⁸ Canada remained committed to execution by rope. All of the death penalty methods involve inevitable bungles.⁴⁹ Increasingly there have been many bungles involving lethal injection.⁵⁰

Just after giving his testimony in May, including the assertion that the condemned always were resigned and cooperative, mainly thanks to their religious advisors, Branchaud encountered a man who was not at all cooperative on the gallows at Oakalla Prison on June 14, 1955. When Branchaud entered the cell of Vincent, a carnival barker who was convicted of strangling a 12-year-old girl, Vincent hit the hangman, and Branchaud hit back with the leather strap and finally managed to secure Vincent’s arms behind his back. Vincent continually hurled insults at Branchaud on the short walk to the gallows and when the hangman was about to pinion Vincent’s legs, Vincent spun around and kneed Branchaud in the groin, hurling insults, as the hangman again lashed out with the leather strap. Vincent kneed the hangman again as he reportedly said, “Hit me! Hit me! You big fat pig! That’s what they’ve got for a hangman- a big fat pig for a hangman! You couldn’t get another job, could you? You yellow rotten pig!” Many more insults later, Vincent spat on the hangman before the Warden settled him down

⁴⁷ “Keep Death Penalty but Change Method,” *Montreal Star*, Aug. 22, 1956, at 20; “Parliamentary Committee,” *Windsor Star*, June 20, 1956, at 18.

⁴⁸ Frederick Drimmer, *Until You Are Dead* (New York: Pinnacle Books, 1990); As to electrocution see Richard Moran, *Executioner’s Current* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002).

⁴⁹ See, Austin Sarat, *Gruesome Spectacles: Botched Executions and America’s Death Penalty* (Stanford: Stanford Law Book, 2014).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

enough for the strap to go around the legs, the hood put over the head, and the noose adjusted, and Branchaud pulled the trap.⁵¹

In 1956, Albert Pierrepoint, famous English hangman, organized an International Conference of Executioners meeting in secret at Monte Carlo for a day. There were no press accounts of the meeting, but for one journalist who regularly reported on news from Europe for an American newspaper. Edward Byng asserted that the meeting included the head executioners of England, France, Chile, Spain, and Canada, and the group discussed trying to stem the tide against capital punishment, and work to improve the economic conditions of the executioners who could not make a living on the fees that were paid. It was noted that they all had to have a side-line job. Byng stated, for example, that Branchaud “owns a butchery.”⁵² In another version of the story by Byng, he clarified that Branchaud owned a butcher shop.⁵³ If this information is correct, it might provide a clue as to the identity of Branchaud.

At what turned out to be the last hanging in British Columbia, namely the hanging of Mantha in April 1959, a female reporter for the *Vancouver Province* described the hangman as, “a short man, very fat, with little round eyes like black buttons behind horned rimmed spectacles... and he wore a black beret.”⁵⁴

Finally, Nelles Hamilton of the *Vancouver Sun*, an ardent anti-capital punishment advocate, writing in 1975, contacted the sheriff’s office in Montreal and was informed that Camille Branchaud had died at least three years ago, which would be 1972, and stated that Branchaud had previously had an annual retainer

⁵¹ “Slayer Battles Hangman,” *Vancouver Sun*, June 14, 1955, at 3; “Carnival worker fights hangman on gallows,” *Vancouver Province*, June 14, 1955, at 3. See also a retrospective by Don Stainsby, “On Coroner’s Jury,” *Weekend Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 44, Oct. 31, 1959. See also Earl Anderson, *Hard Place to do Time: The Story of Oakalla Prison 1912-1991* (New Westminster: Hillpointe Publishing, 1993) at 78-79.

⁵² Edward J. Byng, “Hangmen Want Better Pay and Standing,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, July 10, 1956, at 18.

⁵³ Edward J. Byng, “Executioners Meet in Monte Carlo,” *Albuquerque Tribune*, July 12, 1956, at 16.

⁵⁴ “Mantha Dies,” *Vancouver Province*, April 29, 1959, at 7.

from Quebec of \$1,500.⁵⁵ Hamilton wrote a second article in which he repeated the frequent assertion that Branchaud had hanged 200 people. He also stated that it was Madam Branchaud who sewed the black hoods and that all of their children died at birth or in infancy. Hamilton did not say where he got this information. He went on to describe the hangman in a very unpleasant way. “Branchaud is particularly easy to visualize. He had the jowls and general countenance of a Berkshire boar, and a squat body with enormous girth to match. He was also incredibly swift and nimble, dancing off the trapdoor to pull the lever, like Porky Pig doing the gavotte.”⁵⁶

Nelles Hamilton was misinformed as to the approximate death of Branchaud. Archival evidence points to a date of death before May of 1969. Sheriff Cioni of Edmonton had an upcoming execution (not yet commuted) and wrote to L. Bertrand at the Sheriff’s office in Montreal in April 1968 to have Branchaud as executioner, which was the usual procedure in Alberta. The accused was reprieved due to appeals, and a new date was set for January 1969. This date was also changed because of further appeals, and clearly Branchaud was still alive on Oct. 11, 1968, when informed of this. Finally, after the appeals had failed, and a new date was set, Sherriff Cioni wrote to Branchaud through Bertrand seeking to reserve the new date. On May 8, 1969, Bertrand replied by telegram, “Regret to inform you Branchaud passed away. Suggest you contact Attorney General of Ontario in Toronto as they have a qualified replacement who has performed in the past, in that province.”⁵⁷ We can surmise that Branchaud died sometime before the May 8, 1969, telegram and after Oct. 11, 1968, the last communication we have from him in the archives. He likely died in 1969.

There is another angle as to the death of Branchaud. In 1974 New Hampshire restored the death penalty and thus was looking

⁵⁵ Nelles Hamilton, “And thereby hangs a fraud,” *Vancouver Sun*, Oct. 31, 1975, at 1 and 2.

⁵⁶ Nelles Hamilton, “The hangman ran a fine cottage industry,” *Vancouver Sun*, Dec. 13, 1975, at 6.

⁵⁷ *R v. Borg*, Alberta Archives, Sheriffs, Execution files, GR 2002.0863 Box 1.

for a hangman. It was reported that in the last hanging in the state in 1939, the state hired a Canadian hangman. This might have been John Ellis/Moore or Camille Branchaud. The report states that Camille Branchaud was in fact contacted in 1959 for a hanging which did not take place, and now in 1974, seeking to hire Branchaud again, agent Bertrand in Montreal allegedly reported that Camille Branchaud died two years ago. This must be an error if he died in 1969 rather than 1972 as this American report suggests. In any event, Bertrand was quoted as saying “he doesn’t know of anyone else who knows how to hang someone correctly. It is something of an art, you know, and Camille was one of the best, the only real hangman in the country.”⁵⁸ In 1974 Bertrand must have known about John Ellis #2, whom we will deal with in the next chapter, and obviously Bertrand did not have a high opinion of him and did not recommend him for the job.

Aside from his pride in doing a good job, and belief in the legitimacy of capital punishment, we lack the kind of interview material in press reports that might give a better sense of Branchaud’s personality. Instead of this, we have a great deal of prejudice against him based on his looks.

⁵⁸ “3 to 4 Years Needed to Swing Rope,” *The Portsmouth Herald*, April 15, 1974, at 14.