

Chapter 9

“Sam Edwards” – Samuel Smith

During the three decades that Arthur Ellis served as the main Canadian hangman, it was reported that occasionally he had an assistant with him helping in some way with an execution. For example, in December 1910, an assistant called “George Graham” was with Ellis in Perth, Ontario.¹ An unnamed assistant was also with Ellis in a Montreal hanging in December 1912.² While Ellis was away on a trip to England, a novice hangman by the name of “John Brady,” claiming to be an assistant to Ellis, hanged a man in Montreal on May 21, 1915. The execution was badly bungled as the rope slid up to the back of the head, and the victim’s hands were also not tied properly.³ Witnesses watched in horror as the man spent several minutes consciously trying to free himself as he slowly choked to death. There was also another unnamed assistant with Ellis in June 1922 at a Quebec hanging.⁴

In some cases where there was a direct conflict in the dates of two executions, apparently an assistant to Ellis performed the hanging in one place, while Ellis was the executioner in another place. For example, this occurred on February 19, 1926, where there was a hanging in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, and in Montreal on the same day.⁵

We have a picture of Arthur Ellis with an assistant hangman leaving on the train after a hanging in Valleyfield, Quebec, on March 23, 1928:

¹ *Montreal Star* (14 December 1910) at 17; *Montreal Gazette* (15 December 1910) at 15; *Winnipeg Tribune* (23 December 1910) at 15.

² *Montreal Gazette* (21 December 1912) at 9.

³ “Hanging was a Gruesome Spectacle,” *Calgary Herald* (21 May 1915) at 1; “DiLena Hanged,” *Montreal Star* (21 May 1915) at 3.

⁴ *Montreal Gazette* (17 June 1922) at 5.

⁵ “Kooting Will Pay Penalty,” *Winnipeg Free Press Bulletin* (18 February 1926) at 1; “Two Murders,” *Ottawa Journal* (19 February 1926) at 1 and 2.



From *New York Daily News*, March 25, 1928, at 37.

The assistant standing behind Ellis and holding the hangman's bag was supposedly named "Scott."⁶ From the picture, it is hard to judge the age of the assistant, but he looks somewhat younger and is a burly man in contrast to the thin Ellis.

In 1934, Frank Wood, said to be 33 years of age, currently unemployed, a former assistant to hangman Ellis, a former member of the R.C.M.P., and a former jail guard, was arrested in Toronto with four other men in an alleged scheme to kidnap the president of Canada Packers, and hold him ransom for \$100,000.⁷ The men were subsequently acquitted due to lack of evidence.⁸ Frank Wood was described as being five feet, ten inches tall and

⁶ *Calgary Albertan* (23 March 1928) at 8.

⁷ "Toronto Police Took No Chance," *Ottawa Citizen* (2 August 1934) at 7; "Kidnap Suspects Not Allowed Bail," *Montreal Gazette* (2 August 1934) at 3.

⁸ "Evidence Lacking," *North Bay Nugget* (26 September 1934) at 1.

well-dressed with neatly brushed, coal-black hair.⁹ He seems too young to be the assistant shown in the 1928 picture. However, perhaps the assistant in the picture is “Sam Edwards,” who would advance from being an assistant to Ellis to become a rival hangman to Arthur Ellis in the decade of the 1930s?

I. HANGING CAREER:

When a conflict of hanging dates occurred on May 15, 1931, Arthur Ellis was the executioner in Sherbrooke, Quebec, while a man calling himself “Sam Edwards,” supposedly a deputy for Ellis, was the hangman in Welland, Ontario.¹⁰ On December 30, 1931, Ellis was hanging two men at the Oakalla prison in B.C., while Edwards was again hanging someone in Welland, Ontario.¹¹ However, if Sam Edwards was at one time an assistant to Ellis, he soon became the rival hangman throughout the decade of the 1930s, as sheriffs increasingly disfavored the drunken, scandal-ridden, and often bungling Arthur Ellis, and hired Sam Edwards instead, while Camille Branchaud often replaced Ellis as the executioner in Quebec.

Edwards claimed that his first hanging in Canada was in 1930.¹² There were 11 hangings in Canada in 1930 and ten of them were performed by Arthur Ellis. The only one with a different hangman was the execution of Emmett Sloane in Sydney, Nova Scotia on May 20. This hanging was badly bungled and the hangman, calling himself “Arthur Rioux” from Montreal, was told to leave town as quickly as possible.¹³ While Canadian newspapers mentioned executioner Rioux,¹⁴ American newspapers claimed the

⁹ “Toronto’s ‘Snatch’ Racket,” *Sault Star* (3 August 1934) at 1 and 7.

¹⁰ *Toronto Star* (15 May 1931) at 1 and 2.

¹¹ “Kozub Smiled,” *Toronto Star* (30 December 1931) at 5.

¹² “Hanging is most Humane Way, says Edwards,” *Regina Leader-Post* (16 December 1935) at 11.

¹³ Ron MacDonald, “The Hanging of Emmett Sloane,” *Cape Breton Post* (24 August 2015).

¹⁴ For example: *Ottawa Citizen* (20 May 1930) at 15; *Edmonton Journal* (20 May 1930) at 2; *Victoria Times* (20 May 1930) at 1.

executioner was Holmes.¹⁵ Even if the 1930 hanging was bungled, “Rioux” was hired again the following year in Sydney, Nova Scotia, in April 1931. One account called him “Paul Rioux.”¹⁶ Thereafter, we hear nothing more about any hangman calling himself Rioux. Furthermore, Sam Edwards, as we will note, had a reputation for being a very reliable hangman, not a bungler like Holmes. So, which hanging in Canada in 1930 involved Edwards? We suspect that Edwards may have been an assistant to Ellis in 1930 during a Hamilton execution at which Ellis fainted during the process, as later asserted by a reporter for the *Toronto Star*.¹⁷

In 1931, we have reports that it was Edwards from Toronto who was the hangman in five cases, and it may be that he was the hangman in another three cases when newspaper reports did not mention the identity of the hangman. During the 1930s, it was common for newspaper reporters to be denied access to hangings and often reports of executions were only a few paragraphs long. In 1932, Edwards was listed as the hangman in five cases in Ontario and three in Manitoba. We now know from archival evidence that he was the hangman for all cases in Manitoba from 1930 until at least 1938.¹⁸

In 1933, there were 18 hangings in Canada, and Ellis reportedly hanged eight, while Edwards hanged the other ten. Of the 10 hangings in 1934, there were two hangings in Manitoba, but none in Ontario, so it was not a good year for Edwards. In 1935, Edwards was the hangman in five cases, and he may have been the executioner in another two cases. In 1936, Edwards hanged four, while Camille Branchaud was increasingly displacing Arthur Ellis in Quebec and the Maritimes. In 1937, Edwards was the hangman in two cases in Ontario. In 1938, the year of Arthur Ellis’s death, Edwards hanged three in Ontario, one in Manitoba, and one in British Columbia. By this time, Edwards had been the

¹⁵ For example: *Indianapolis Star* (20 May 1930) at 17; *Buffalo News* (20 May 1930) at 2; *Sioux City Journal* (20 May 1930) at 1.

¹⁶ “Beckett Will Hang Tomorrow,” *Halifax Mail* (29 April 1931) at 13. Other papers mention “Arthur Rioux.” See, *Hamilton Spectator* (30 April 1931) at 1; *Niagara Falls Review* at 5; *Windsor Star* at 18.

¹⁷ “Mystery Man to Act as Deputy for Ellis,” *Toronto Star* (14 May 1931) at 1 and 2 [Mystery Man].

¹⁸ Sherrieff of Winnipeg to Sheriff Wallace (16 September 1938). Archives of Alberta, Sheriffs Capital Cases, GR 2002.0863 Box 1.

hangman for Ontario and Manitoba since 1931, but now was also the hangman for Saskatchewan¹⁹ and B.C.²⁰ In 1939, he hanged two people in Winnipeg, one in Regina, and one in Toronto before he died.

Sam Edwards did not survive much longer than Arthur Ellis. The last clear reference we have is a hanging by Edwards at Oakalla Prison in B.C. in June 1939.²¹

At the next hanging in Canada on October 4, 1939, in Toronto, a new man, whose identity was kept secret, performed his first hanging, because Sam Edwards had died about a month before.²² The new man was “John Ellis” who would be the hangman for most provinces in the 1940s, but for Quebec where Camille Branchaud was on retainer.

Thus, from the reports that we do have, before his death in 1939, Sam Edwards was the hangman in at least 44 cases in the 1930s and was likely the hangman in several other cases. The number of hangings will not reflect the actual workload of a hangman, since he may well have travelled to various locations and then was sent home after the sentence was commuted at the last minute. Archival evidence, as we will note below, seems to indicate that sheriffs in various jurisdictions viewed Edwards as a dependable hangman. One may even conclude that he was a better hangman than Radclive or Ellis, and certainly better than the bungling Holmes. However, given the lack of newspaper coverage in this period, we suspect that Edwards had a few carefully hidden bungs. For example, while nothing was said about it in the press at the time, several years later it was reported that Peter Piniak, hanged by Edwards in Manitoba on September 1, 1933, was decapitated.²³

¹⁹ “Heipel Goes Calmly,” *Regina Leader-Post* (26 April 1939) at 11.

²⁰ “Ontario Man to Hang Macchione,” *Vancouver Sun* (14 October 1938) at 15; “Ferne Slayer Executed,” *Vancouver Sun* (26 October 1938) at 7.

²¹ “Negro Hanged,” *Vancouver Province* (16 June 1939) at 14; “Slayer Dies,” *Vancouver Sun* (16 June 1939) at 5.

²² “Petrukowich Hangs at Don,” *Toronto Star* (4 October 1939) at 3.

²³ “Twice Victims Lose Heads at Hanging,” *Toronto Star* (2 April 1935) at 33.

II. DESCRIPTIONS AND INTERVIEWS:

The first hanging clearly identified with him was the hanging of Kovak in Welland, Ontario, on May 15, 1931, the same date as Arthur Ellis was hanging Vincent in Sherbrooke, Quebec. A *Toronto Star* reporter discovered where the new hangman was lodging at a hotel the day before the hanging and interviewed him. At first, the hangman denied that he was a hangman at all, or that he had ever assisted Ellis or officiated at a previous hanging. The reporter noted his physical appearance:

Mr. X... is the physical opposite of the wiry Arthur Ellis. Phlegmatic, heavy set, erect, past middle age and florid of countenance, he typifies the army sergeant major. His hair is graying and quite thin. His wrists showed portions of massive, tattooed patterns.²⁴

As in the cases of Radcliffe, Ellis, and Holmes, we must take everything that Sam Edwards said about himself as potentially untruthful, given the likelihood that Edwards, like the others, had a grandiose, narcissistic presentation of himself. The *Toronto Star* story included the following:

Mr. X said he had lived and was well known in Toronto... Native of England... he entered his country's service as a boy of 14 and since has served as soldier, policeman, secret service man, jailer, turnkey, hangman, and Ontario provincial police officer. His career took him to the tropics and the Far East, but for the past 20 years he has resided in Canada. He is married and has a family- "Some grown up, some not."²⁵

As to his experience as a hangman, Mr. X asserted that he had hanged many people in India, Burma and China in penal colonies. As the discussion moved to the role of hangman, Mr. X stated that he would gladly hang his own sister if she was found guilty of murder, and implied that he would like to be the official hangman if Arthur Ellis retired. He considered the role to be "an honest living." The next day, after successfully hanging Kovacs, Mr. X gave his name to the *Star* reporter as Sam Edwards.²⁶

At a hanging in London, Ontario, in 1932, Edwards, described as "slightly stooped and broad shouldered" ate at a restaurant and

²⁴ Mystery Man, *supra* note 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "Constable Slayer is Hanged at Welland by New Executioner," *Toronto Star* (15 May 1931) at 23.

when informed that he was the hangman, the proprietor of the restaurant smashed up the hangman’s dishes after Edwards left the place, although he stated that he was in favor of capital punishment.²⁷

In 1947, Archie Davie, an old police reporter for the *Ottawa Citizen*, reported on meeting Edwards at a double hanging in Ontario in 1933:

“I turned to face a pleasant looking man of about 50, with thinning silvery hair and sparkling eyes... He had a slight English accent, and his voice and manner were cultured... He made it clear from the outset that he did not enjoy sending people through the trap but admitted he felt the punishment was a just one for the crime of murder. After relating a number of incidents about the behaviour of condemned men in their last moments he got up and said, ‘but I suppose someone has to do this job.’ He thereupon swallowed three fingers of gin...”²⁸

In December 1933, at a hanging in Windsor, where the victim dropped nine feet, the press reported Edwards as a “fairly heavy-set fellow of just below middling height... with a florid complexion. His clothing is tattered and worn.”²⁹ Hangman Edwards apparently told reporters that he wished hangings were public events like in the old days, so that “hangings would be an object lesson to the public at large.”³⁰ He took the opportunity of denying that his name was John Smith, as had been reported, but rather insisted that he was Sam Edwards. As we will note below, we now know that his identity was Samuel John Smith, and thus we have another example of his lack of truthfulness.

Edwards was frequently referred to as being a “burly hangman.”³¹ At a double hanging in St. Thomas, Ontario, in 1935, Edwards was said to be:

...quite self possessed and affable... on his last appearance in London he was accompanied by his wife, but this time no woman appeared with him in St. Thomas. His history as a hangman is said to have begun among native troops in India. Later he came to Canada, worked in Ontario as an O.T.A. [Ontario Temperance Act] enforcement officer,

²⁷ “The Hangman,” *Windsor Star* (23 April 1932) at 7.

²⁸ Joe Finn, “Behind Headlines #13,” *Ottawa Citizen* (6 February 1947) at 3.

²⁹ “Beyak Smiles as he goes to Death,” *Windsor Star* (6 December 1933) at 3 and 11.

³⁰ *Ibid* at 3.

³¹ For example, “Vermilyea Pens Letter,” *Montreal Gazette* (2 May 1935) at 1.

and finally settled into his present post... It is claimed that Hangman Edwards beguiles the time in Toronto as a bailiff and constable in small matters...³²

The lawyer for a man who had just been acquitted of murder in a Toronto courtroom introduced his client to Sam Edwards standing in the hallway, “who might have been his hangman had he been convicted.”³³ “Sorry, Sam,” said the lawyer as he marched his client away.³⁴

One of the most high-profile executions by Edwards involved the hanging of a woman in Woodstock, Ontario in December 1935. Apparently, given her considerable weight, Edwards only dropped her 32 inches, and only her lower limbs disappeared beneath the scaffold.³⁵ The hanging was “successful” in contrast to the recent beheading of a woman in Montreal by hangman Ellis. Before the hanging, Edwards gave an interview to American and Canadian journalists who described him as being a big man, 59 years old, who boasted of having hanged 900 persons, including 40 in one morning.³⁶ He claimed that hanging was the most humane form of capital punishment, and he had been trained in the hanging profession in England by a professor of mathematics.³⁷ He had come to Canada in 1908 but had only started hanging here in 1930. While not known for his own veracity, Arthur Ellis, who favoured the electric chair, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Toronto Star* stating, “It is obvious to me that both Mr. Edwards statements are incorrect, and that it ill-becomes him to indulge in boasting on such a subject.”³⁸

³² “Father and Son Both Die,” *Windsor Star* (27 June 1935) at 5.

³³ “Lilac Bush Murders Still a Mystery,” *Brantford Expositor* (17 January 1936) at 10.

³⁴ “Introduced to Hangman,” *Ottawa Citizen* (17 January 1936) at 19.

³⁵ *Edmonton Bulletin* (20 December 1935) at 3; *Regina Leader-Post* at 6.

³⁶ “Hanging is Best,” *Edmonton Journal* (17 December 1935) at 7; “Hanging is Most Humane Says Edwards,” *Regina Leader-Post* (16 December 1935) at 11; “Widow Hanged,” *Washington Herald* (17 December 1935) at 3; “Hangman for 900,” *Minneapolis Journal* (29 December 1935) at 2.

³⁷ “Gallows Ready,” *Birmingham News* (16 December 1935) at 2.

³⁸ Arthur Ellis, “Capital Punishment,” *Toronto Star Weekly* (11 January 1936) at 52.

After Ellis died, Sam Edwards was now hired as hangman in British Columbia. At least this time he refused to be interviewed or engage in conversation with journalists. He was described as “of middle age, stockily build with the appearance of a prosperous businessman.”³⁹

There was a 1972 article about the police chief of Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, who had been a police officer for 45 years, and he allegedly recalled attending the hanging of a man in January 1938 in Sudbury. For what it is worth, he stated, “The hangman was six-foot six and weighed 480 pounds. He carried a suitcase and during the preparations for the hanging, the hangman had taken three bottles of rye from the suitcase and ‘put them away.’ As soon as the hanging was over, this man was dead sober.”⁴⁰ Well, the height and weight in this recollection seems preposterous compared to previous accounts, but the drinking part may have a ring of truth, even if the bottle count was ridiculous.

III. HIS IDENTITY AS SAM SMITH:

So, who was Sam Edwards? I have discovered his identity by reviewing a few sheriffs’ correspondence files that have survived in the Alberta Archives.⁴¹ After Arthur Ellis died in 1938, Sheriff Wallace in Edmonton, wrote to other sheriffs in other provinces requesting information as to hiring a new hangman. The Sheriff in Winnipeg replied that all hangings were centralized at the Headingley jail, and since 1930, he had never hired Arthur Ellis but had hired Sam Edwards instead. The Sheriff noted that he had no regrets in making this choice as, “Edwards has never failed me, having always fulfilled the duties required of him in a most satisfactory manner.”⁴² Later in the archival file, the Sheriff in Regina wrote that he found the services of Edwards to be “entirely

³⁹ “New Hangman Strong, Silent,” *Vancouver Province* (22 October 1938) at 1.

⁴⁰ “Rough in tough John,” *North Bay Nugget* (14 January 1972) at 6.

⁴¹ Sheriffs, GR2002.0863 Box 1; Sheriffs: Capital Cases, GR20002.0863 Box 1 [Sheriffs].

⁴² Sherriff of Winnipeg to Sheriff Wallace (16 September 1938) Archives of Alberta, Sheriffs Capital Cases, GR 2002.0863 Box 1.

satisfactory and I have no hesitation in recommending him for similar work in other parts of the Dominion.”⁴³

Sheriff Wallace was also informed that in Ontario, Edward’s fee was \$100 plus expenses, and if there was a postponement or commutation, his fee was \$50.⁴⁴ In Saskatchewan, his fee schedule was different, in that if he left Toronto before a commutation or reprieve, he would get \$100, but if he had not left Toronto, he would get nothing.⁴⁵

The sheriffs noted that the way to contact Sam Edwards was through contacting Sheriff Cane in Toronto, who acted as an agent for the hangman. Sheriff Wallace in Edmonton did so and started to communicate with Sam Edwards, even though there were no pending executions in Edmonton. In 1939, Sheriff Wallace wrote to Edwards as to the possibility of an upcoming capital sentence. We have a sample of Edwards’ handwriting in reply:⁴⁶

⁴³ Sherriff of Regina to Sheriff Wallace (8 May 1939). *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Edwards to Wallace (4 October 1938) confirming earlier pay terms in Sherriff Cane to Wallace letter of 29 September, 1938.

⁴⁵ Sheriffs, *supra* note 41.

⁴⁶ (20 May 1939) *Ibid.*

May 20th

Room 113
City Hall
Toronto Ont

K. R. Wallace
Court House
Edmonton. Alt

Dear Sir

I am very sorry that you have been waiting for an answer to your letter of May 2nd 1939 which I received on May 20th it was no fault of anybody's I was away in the Maritime Province and I did not get your letter until Saturday morning May 20th I sent a Telegram soon as I got your letter I have no engagement for August. but I expected to have one in Toronto. so if there is a conviction there Please wire me immediately

yours truly

Sam. Edwards

The letter that Sheriff Cane wrote earlier on September 17, 1938, to Sheriff Wallace in Edmonton revealed the identity of Sam Edwards:⁴⁷

In regard to executions in such cases, we have for some years employed one, Sam Smith, who lives at Long Branch, Ontario, at 373 Beta Avenue, or whom you can address in care of this office, using a plain envelop and without any designation as to him, other than by name and care of this office, or care of 373 Beta Ave. This man has been efficient and capable and is dependable I believe. I hardly need warn you of the necessity of putting your correspondence in envelops that will not indicate either the nature of the man's occupation or the party from whom the correspondence comes.

⁴⁷ Sherriff Cane, County of York, to Sheriff Wallace (17 September 1938), *ibid.*

In September 1939, Sheriff Wallace again wrote to Sam Edwards about a possible upcoming case, and Sheriff Cane in Toronto wrote back to inform Wallace that Edwards had died in the latter part of August 1939.⁴⁸

We now know that Sam Edwards was Sam Smith, but there are so many records of people named Sam Smith that our path in reconstructing any biography would be speculative, but for the important clue that he most recently lived at 373 Beta Avenue in Long Branch, a community in the greater Toronto area. Sheriff Cane should have said 373 Beta Street rather than Avenue.

There was no obituary in the newspaper, but based on the address, we have the death certificate.⁴⁹ It may be full of false information depending on the knowledge and veracity of the informant, which in this case was his recently married new wife. The medical certificate of death states that Samuel Smith, living at 373 Beta Street, died of a heart attack on September 1, 1939, and his heart disease was partly caused by obesity. The personal information on the certificate provided by his wife, Mrs. Dorothy M. Stillwell Smith, includes the following: -Born in England on Dec. 12, 1888, age 50 at death. -Father: James Smith. -Mother: Ann White. -Occupation: a guard employed by the provincial government for the last three years. -Lived in Toronto for the last 8 years and in Canada for 31 years.

Again, only by virtue of the address, we have found a marriage certificate for Sam Smith and his new wife, Dorothy, dated November 9, 1937,⁵⁰ less than two years before he died. We immediately see that we cannot rely on the information given as to our hangman. On the marriage affidavit, he stated his name as Samuel John Smith, a steam fitter, 51 years old (so born in 1886 or thereabouts), a widower living at 373 Beta Street, born in London, England. His father was listed as Elisha Smith and his mother as Elizabeth Wright. The information as to the new wife was that Dorothy May Bone, who was a 43-year-old widow born in Surrey, England. Her father was said to be Harry Stillwell, and her mother was Alice Louise Parrott.

⁴⁸ Sheriff Cane to Sheriff Wallace (25 September 1939).

⁴⁹ *Ontario Deaths*, 1869-1950.

⁵⁰ *Ontario Marriages*, 1826-1940.

It was easy to trace Dorothy May Bone Stillwell. Her biography is not necessary to review, other than to note that she really was a widow. Her husband Herbert Bone died on August 31, 1937, at the age of 48 of a cerebral haemorrhage.⁵¹ Barely more than two months later, she married the hangman. We are not sure about her history thereafter. It may be that she went back to calling herself Dorothy May Bone and died in Christchurch Dorset in 1975.⁵²

Tracing Samuel Smith was a different matter, given the numerous people by that name and the different information given as to his birth and his parents. We find no record for the death of any previous wife, so one wonders if he really was a widower, and why was the occupation given as steam fitter? If we go back to the interview of 1935 in St. Thomas, we note that Edwards/Smith was supposedly an Ontario Temperance Act officer for a time and then more recently a “bailiff and constable in small matters.”⁵³ There are newspaper articles in the early 1920s that mention Sam Smith as an employee of the province in the enforcement of prohibition legislation. For example, he is mentioned at a trial involving a liquor raid.⁵⁴ Sam Smith apparently resigned from the job because “things were too crooked for me” as he accused fellow officers and superiors of being drunk.⁵⁵ At a legislative hearing in 1922, he was described as an ex-officer accusing the department responsible for the O.T.A. of hiring thugs and criminals.⁵⁶ The Chief Inspector of the enforcement branch sprang from his seat and called Smith a liar.⁵⁷

We also have some references in 1923 and 1926 to a Sam Smith as a constable in the Toronto police force.⁵⁸ We cannot say

⁵¹ *Ontario Deaths*, 1869-1950.

⁵² England and Wales, *National Probate Calendar*, 1858-1995.

⁵³ “Father and Son Both Die,” *Windsor Star* (27 June 1935) at 5.

⁵⁴ “Says Corley Told Him,” *Toronto Star* (28 June 1921) at 3.

⁵⁵ “States Things Were Too Crooked,” *Kingston Standard* (25 May 1922); “Says O.T.A. Operator Victim of Frame-Up,” *Toronto Star* (26 May 1922), at 3; “Former Operative Accuses Ayeairst,” *St. Catherines Standard* (26 May 1922) at 3.

⁵⁶ “Lennox Charges,” *Toronto Star* (19 April 1922) at 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ “Clings to Stolen Car,” *Toronto Star* (19 October 1923) at 3; “Policeman’s Picnic,” *Toronto Star* (5 August 1926) at 26.

positively that this man is our hangman, because census records indicate several police officers by this name, none of whom seem to be our hangman.⁵⁹ Next, we have some references to a Sam Smith as a deputy sheriff or bailiff in Toronto. For example, in a February 1931 case that involved huge crowds trying to get into the courtroom, Sam Smith was said to be a veteran at controlling the crowds trying to get in.⁶⁰ This implies that he was a deputy sheriff or bailiff at the time that he was also starting his hangman career. Another reference in February 1931 dealt with evicting tenants in the middle of winter.⁶¹ In March 1931, he was mentioned as part of the guard at the sheriff's office.⁶²

In an article in May 1931, he was referred to as Deputy Sheriff Smith, who instructed the jury in open court at the end of the trial that their cheques for jury service would be mailed to them.⁶³ Here we have the distinct possibility that this deputy sheriff sitting at the trial was the very man who would later hang the accused. Indeed, we subsequently have discovered that at the hanging of Brokenshire in September 1931, the local press in Toronto called the new hangman by his real name, Sam Smith.⁶⁴ Given the sensitivity of working in the same courtroom in which the person was sentenced to death and then being the hangman for that person, we believe Sam Smith lost his job as an employee in the sheriff's department and ended up as a guard in the jail, as implied in his death certificate.

We doubt that his new wife knew that he was the hangman, given the instructions to Sheriff Wallace in Edmonton not to reveal anything on the envelopes sent to him at his home address. That he was a guard in the jail was also confirmed in one of Frank Jones's popular columns on true crime written in 1991, dealing with the hanging of a woman in 1935. Jones wrote:

⁵⁹ *Canadian Census of 1921 and 1931 for Toronto*.

⁶⁰ "Crowds Mills Court," *Toronto Star* (4 February 1931) at 27.

⁶¹ "Evicting Tenants," *Orangeville Sun* (19 February 1931) at 4.

⁶² "Six Toronto Brokers Surrender Freedom," *Toronto Star* (19 March 1931) at 10.

⁶³ "Brokenshire Guilty," *Toronto Star* (14 May 1931).

⁶⁴ "Brokenshire For First Time Prays in Death's Shadow," *Toronto Star* (21 September 1931) at 19.

Chris Clark, 87 when I spoke to her, has memories as fresh as yesterday of the events following the arrest of Lizzie by her husband, Constable John Clark. Mrs. Clark worked several relief shifts guarding Lizzie in the death cell as a prison matron, and the hangman, a prison guard from Toronto who used the name Sam Edwards, stayed with her and her husband several days while he prepared the equipment. He didn't seem at all upset at the prospect of hanging a woman, she said.⁶⁵

One possibility among the numerous Sam Smith records involves a Sam Smith who listed his profession as sheriff in the Canadian Census of 1931. This Sam Smith was enumerated as age 47, born about 1884 in England, living at 118 Macdonell Ave., Toronto, in a little three-room house that he rented. He stated that he immigrated here in 1910 and was naturalized in 1915. His wife, May Smith, aged 36, was born in England and immigrated in 1919. There were no children listed as living with them. Could this be the Sam Smith, who would be in the early stage of being the rival hangman to Ellis? Can anything that he said to the enumerator be trusted?

Perhaps “Sam Smith,” like “Sam Edwards,” is an alias for the original identity of the man? In the death certificate, he was said to be born near the end of 1888. In the marriage certificate, his date of birth was stated to be around 1886. In the census of 1931, assuming we have the right guy, he was allegedly born around 1884. In the Woodstock interview near the end of 1935, he was said to be 59 years of age, so born around 1876. The trail grows cold in trying to find wife May Smith or anything as to her death. As to Sam Smith, the death certificate lists his father as James Smith and his mother as Ann White. The marriage certificate says his father was Elisha Smith and his mother was Elizabeth Wright. We have hundreds of people called Sam Smith or Samuel Smith or Samual John Smith born in England for the various possible birth years, and also for names of the various parents mentioned in the records.

We believe Sam Edwards was a “good” hangman in terms of competence. However, he may well have had the same personality traits as the “bad” hangman Holmes.

⁶⁵ Frank Jones, “Lizzie, You’ll Kill No More,” *The Toronto Star* (26 May 1991) at 38.

