

PRISON MUSEUM POST

*The Official Newsletter of the Historic Burlington County Prison Museum Association
Incorporated in 1966*

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THE MUSEUM IS OPEN AUDIO TOUR NOW AVAILABLE IN SPANISH

The Museum has reopened after six months of extensive repairs, including installation of a new cedar shake roof, gutters and downspouts, and pointing of the building's stone exterior and rear Exercise Yard walls. Inside the building, the graffiti has been preserved and the floors painted. Visitors are finding their way back and enjoying self-guided tours, guided tours, our great audio tour and the ever-popular escape game.

We are happy to report that the audio tour is now available in Spanish. We will spend the next several months marketing the tour not only to Spanish speakers but also to students of Spanish and English as a second language. If you have any marketing ideas, shoot us an email.

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS BUILDING?



In this issue we will tell you the stories of two very different female inmates in the Burlington County Jail. One was a psychotic murderer and the other was a successful local businesswoman who owned this building in Mount Holly.

PMA MEETING – WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21 at 7 PM – AT PMA OFFICE IN MUSEUM

THE BUCKET OF BLOOD

The pictured building, the Mill Street Hotel located on Mill Street in Mount Holly, was also affectionately known as the Bucket of Blood. Many a town in early America had a Bucket of Blood, which is a roughly furnished bar where the patrons, mostly of the masculine variety, would get drunk and engage in lively fist fights. The most famous one in the U.S. is probably the Bucket of Blood Saloon in Virginia City, Nevada. Operated continuously since 1876, the bar is located on the site of The Boston Saloon, which burned in the Great Fire that destroyed Virginia City in 1875. The Boston Saloon is notable because it was one of the first very successful black-owned saloons. The owner, William Brown, was from Boston, hence the name.

The original Bucket of Blood was a pub in Cornwall, England that was established in the 1300s and has been in operation in one form or another ever since. It got its name when someone went to get some water from the pub's well and pulled up a bucket of the blood of a customs officer who had been murdered and dumped in the well. An alternate, though less exciting, explanation is that the water was sometimes red due to run-off from a local tin mine.

The Mill Street Hotel's history is less violent, but equally interesting. The original tavern was built shortly after the raceway was constructed in Mount Holly in 1723. (Raceways were structures built to carry water to and from water wheels that powered mills in the 18th and 19th centuries.) The tavern serviced the men who worked in the mills in Mount Holly. They apparently had a pretty good time there, as is indicated by an entry in the 1743 journal of local Quaker killjoy John Woolman:

About the Time called Christmas, I observed many People from the Country, and some dwellers in Town, who spent their time in drinking and vain Sports, tending to corrupt one another; on which account I was much troubled. At one House, in particular, there was much Disorder, and I believed it a Duty incumbent on me to go and speak with the Master of that House. I considered that I was young, and that several elderly Friends in town had the opportunity to see these things, but though I would gladly have been excused, yet I did not feel my Mind clear...(the innkeeper) took it kindly, and afterward showed more regard to me than before.

Woolman was still raining on everybody's parade 20 years later when a magician was booked to entertain the patrons in the Hotel. The proprietor, who must have been a remarkably patient man, allowed Woolman to stand at the door and advise each person entering that

“assembling to see Tricks or Slight of Hand, and bestowing their money to support Men, who, in that capacity, were of no Use to the World, was contrary to the Nature of the Christian Religion”. *Woolman’s Journal, 1763.*

By 1755 the place was called Three Tuns Tavern, probably for the three large arched vaults in the basement in which were placed large casks of liquor. A “tun” was a unit of measurement. One tun equaled four “hogsheads” (or barrels), with about 63 gallons to a barrel. Colonial inns were classified by the amount of liquor they had - so it looks like the tavern on Mill Street, with three tuns, was relatively substantial.

PROHIBITION CLOSES THE BUCKET OF BLOOD

The tavern operated continuously for 200 years, from 1723 up until exactly 100 years ago, in 1924. At that time, the owner was Clara Parker, whose late husband, Fred Parker, had owned and operated the place for many years. Mr. Parker had done extensive renovations to the building, which to that point had been largely unchanged from its original form.

The life of Mrs. Parker, and every other tavern owner in the country, changed drastically in 1920 when the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which banned the manufacture, transportation and sale of liquor, went into effect with the passage of the Volstead Act. Despite the new legislation, Prohibition was difficult to enforce.

Clara was one of many who ignored Prohibition - to their peril. We first find her facing the law in the winter of 1920-21, when she was arrested by County Detective Ellis Parker (presumably no relation), who reportedly caught her pouring the evidence out of a second story window. She was fined \$1000.

Arrested again in April of 1921, she and her bartender, Harry Cameron, both posted \$1000 bail. She was arrested again in 1922, and fined \$500. She was arrested again in August of 1923. In October, she faced a jury. A man named Albert Moore testified on Clara’s behalf. He said that the jug of liquor which had been found in his room in the hotel belonged to him. He went on to swear that he found it in the bushes and hid it, without the knowledge of Mrs. Parker, in the cellar. The jury didn’t buy it and convicted her. Her 60-day jail sentence was suspended pending appeal filed by her attorney, Robert Peacock.

A month later, with the appeal still pending, she was arrested again in a raid conducted by the “Tornado Squad” led by County Detective Clifford Cain and

assisted by Mount Holly policemen Leon Claypoole and Norman Gaskill. During the raid, Warren Major, who operated a garage in the rear of the hotel, said a five-gallon jug containing a liquid which appeared to the officers to be whiskey was actually wood alcohol he purchased a year ago for use in automobile radiators. His story didn't fly, and he got hauled in. Mrs. Parker's arrest is described here:

When the raiding party entered the hotel, Detective Cain met Mrs. Parker in the kitchen and she followed him upstairs. In a bedroom on the second floor, the detective found a pitcher of alleged whiskey, and attempted to seize it. Mrs. Edna Conners, daughter of Mrs. Parker, attacked Cain, and the pitcher was broken. Cain saved a portion of it with the liquor in it and took it downstairs. As Cain was reading the warrant to Mrs. Parker, she leaped to the table on which the pitcher was standing and broke it into pieces on the floor, thus also being charged with destroying evidence. *The Morning Post, Camden, Nov. 15, 1923*

Clara was convicted in January 1924, but her jail sentence was suspended and she was put on two years' probation. Judge Wells closed the place for ten months and put Mrs. Parker on probation.

We find her being arrested yet again in May of 1927, when the *Camden Evening Courier* reported another raid, this time on her home on Woolman Street, where a two-gallon jug of whiskey was found.

Although she received several jail sentences, and we believe that she was taken to the jail on a few occasions, there's no record of her ever having stayed more than a few hours. It looks like she had a very competent mouthpiece in Robert Peacock, Esquire, who apparently got her out each time.

Prohibition was one of the most misguided and counter-productive measures the American government ever took. The increase of the illegal production and sale of liquor ("bootlegging") and the proliferation of speakeasies and the accompanying rise in organized crime led to repeal of Prohibition in 1933.

If a tombstone in the Mount Holly Cemetery marked "Fred and Clara Parker" is that of our subject, she died in 1948 at age 78 following her husband, who died at age 46 in 1913. If anybody knows more about her, let us know.

The wasted time, money and effort to prosecute people like Mrs. Parker during Prohibition makes stories like the next one all the more frustrating. In that case, leniency and the failure to keep a dangerous person behind bars led to the murder of three innocent children.

THE CASE OF THE BEAUTIFUL PSYCHOPATH

The subject of our next case was a pretty 38-year-old brunette named Lena Schmidt, or Lena Brown, who on September 28, 1892 murdered three children in Bordentown.

She had given birth to a son, Charles, five years before. According to newspaper reports, she had been married to the boy's father. By 1891 they were separated, and she had taken up with a 30-year-old man. In April of 1892, a John Gilbert of Burlington City employed her as a domestic. Three weeks into the job, Lena was arrested for assaulting Mr. Gilbert's 84-year-old mother. The assault was atrocious - Lena used the elderly lady's cane to bash her in the head. She picked up a flat-iron from the stove and threatened to use it to finish the job. The woman was found lying on the floor, her face and clothing covered with blood. The beautiful Lena spent seven days in jail. Although a family in Burlington offered to take care of Charles, she insisted on bringing him with her to jail, which was permitted at the time. On the eighth day she was released on bail, *Mr. Gilbert being one of her bondsmen!*

By September 28, she was residing with Charles at 4 Chestnut Street in Bordentown. At that point she was eight months' pregnant, presumably by her younger lover. Her poor reputation, including the pending charge of atrocious assault on a helpless elderly woman, apparently wasn't enough to dissuade her neighbors from leaving their two toddlers, George and Joseph, ages three and 18 months respectively, in her care when they went to Trenton to enjoy the state fair.

The couple returned to Bordentown that evening. As they stepped off the train, they were told that Lena had strangled all three children to death. They arrived at Lena's home a few minutes later to find the three little bodies being carried out to Keeler's Funeral Home. They were buried in Bordentown on September 30.

After murdering the children, Lena went to the town constable and told him what she had done. She said her son had fallen down the stairs and got a bloody nose. The sight of the blood "drove her crazy" and she strangled him to stop it. She then strangled the other two children. She wept, saying that she did not know why she committed the act, and was sorry for it.

Lena was taken to the Burlington County Jail, where she gave birth to another baby boy at the end of October. She was permitted to have the child with her in the jail until her murder trial a year later. On October 4, 1893, she was acquitted on the grounds of insanity. John Ward, the medical director of the state insane asylum,

testified that she suffered from "puerperal insanity" (mental derangement due to pregnancy). Judge Garrison directed the jury to find that she was insane. He ordered that she be admitted to the insane asylum in Trenton. Her baby was placed at St. Vincent's Home in the Tacony section of Philadelphia, where he died a few weeks later. St. Vincent's Orphanage was founded by German Catholics in Philadelphia in 1855 and was in use until about 2010. The building was demolished in 2021.

This story provides yet another example of why you can't believe much of what is reported in old newspapers. The name of the couple who lost the two toddlers is variously reported as Bowker, Bogart and Harvey. Some reports describe Lena as the daughter of Bordentown farmer named William Brown, while others describe her as a German immigrant named Lena Schmidt.

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In Memoriam
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David A. Kimball 1930-2021

**Prison Museum Post Editor, Researcher, Writer,
Typesetter and Distributor:**
Janet L. Sozio, Esq.

It's the principle of the thing....

To leave on a lighter note, we give you the case of *George Geiger*, an inmate in September of 1903:

Prof. George Geiger, of Burlington, has been committed to the county jail for his refusal to pay poll tax. He declined assistance in the matter, stating that he would test the law. It is probable that he will come around all right after testing the prison food and beverages. The amount of the claim against him was \$1, but the added costs have sent the amount up to \$4.19. Mr. Geiger is a well-known musician, and at one time was organist at the Sacred Heart Church.

Courier Post Sept. 2, 1903

Destroy not the ancient landmarks which the fathers have set. Proverbs 22:28

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