

PRISON MUSEUM POST

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

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PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Please renew your PMA membership for the fiscal year starting July 1. Your dues, along with donations and gift shop sales, make it possible for us to fulfill our mission of preserving the history of the Prison Museum.

We accomplished a great deal over the last 12 months. In addition to issuing five newsletters full of newly-discovered information related to the Jail, we also produced a 40-page manual for tour guides and four new booklets for sale in the gift shop: *The Murder of Warden King*, *The Trial and Execution of Cyrus Emlay*, *The Trial and Execution of Philip Lynch* and *An Introduction to the Burlington County Prison Museum*, which features color photographs. We also upgraded our internet service and installed phone service. We archived all of our newsletters (over 20 years-worth!) on our website with a key word search bar. (Go on our website www.prisonmuseum.net and click on the "Resources" tab to get to the *Prison Museum Post* archive.) One of our members, Alvin Figueroa, translated our audio tour into Spanish. Very accomplished in several fields, Dr. Figueroa is retired from the College of New Jersey as a Professor of Spanish Emeritus. Getting his voice in Spanish on our audio tour is our Number 1 goal for the coming year.

MORE ON ESCAPES

Another thing we did last year was start a list of escapees on our website. You can find it under the "History" tab on the home page. We will add to the list as we find more stories of escapes in the Jail's history. In the last *Post*, we discussed several escapes in the first half of the Jail's history. An account of the incredible Lorenzo Atkinson was featured. We will continue the discussion of escapes in this issue.

The post-Civil War editors of the *Mount Holly Herald* loved thinking up nicknames for the county jail - "the County boarding house," "the stone mansion" "the county stronghold," Fort (sheriff's last name)", etc. However, they missed an equally appropriate one - "the stone sieve." Despite the building's impregnable appearance, both inmates and county property vanished from the building with some regularity.

There were several reasons for this - window bars and manacles of soft iron, the niches in the yard on either side of the building not visible from the keeper's office or quarters, the gate in the wall needed to bring in wagon loads of wood or coal, the presence of iron and steel bars required to keep stoves and furnaces burning, and, especially, lots of idle time for imaginative inmates to plot escape or other mischief and a corrections staff too small to keep adequate watch.

The old Jail's population was often very low. On the day the 1860 Census was taken, there were only 11 inmates. When the Jail **was** overcrowded, it was overcrowded with vagrants who had no desire to escape - they were more than happy to have a place to stay. So, for most of the 19th century, the sheriff and keeper could alone provide sufficient security. Additional guards were hired on an as-needed basis only if a death row inmate required a death watch to prevent a suicide spoiling the prospect of a public hanging, or the authorities thought an inmate was both a threat to the community and likely to attempt escape.

In the last issue, we discussed several escapes that occurred through the 1870s. Let's pick up here with one that occurred on February 3, 1869:

Friday evening last at about 6 o'clock, three prisoners escaped. **Thomas Broom**, who was just committed a few weeks ago for robbing Peter Lynch, Esq., **Robert Mullaney**, the Burlington horse-thief and a boy from Beverly. It seems that the custom is to allow the prisoners to go out in the yard to get water just before they are locked up, and on that evening, the three were allowed to go out, while the turnkey remained in the building. As they were gone a long time, he naturally suspected things were not working exactly right, and on searching for them found that they had escaped by a hole in the wall. It was thought at first that outsiders had done the work, but on examination, it was found that an iron bar had been taken out of a chimney and with this instrument, the hole was made. Broom and Mullaney were generally kept locked in their cells, and the work had been done by other prisoners. The parties made rapid tracks toward Beverly, where Broom took a boat and crossed to Pennsylvania. Since then nothing has been heard of his whereabouts. The boy was retaken at Beverly on Saturday, and conveyed to his old quarters. (*Burlington County Herald*, Feb. 13, 1869)

Broom was eventually recaptured. He struggled as the constable put him in leg and wrist irons and vowed that he would bite an artery, and thus kill himself. He had concealed on his person a file, and once in his cell succeeded in sawing his manacles before being discovered and manacled again.

Other inmates went through holes in the roof or filed-off window bars, over the wall on bed ticking ropes, or along the eaves, down the slope to the top of the yard wall,

down the woodpile beside the yard gate and out the gate, or (after 1888) onto the Warden's house roof, down to the porch roof and then to the ground.

None of the numerous escapees were quite as thoughtful as this one:

Charles Gaines, the colored man who escaped from jail a short time since was recaptured in Langhorne, Pa. on Sunday, where he had gained employment with a farmer. Officer Stanton brought him back and lodged him in jail. The jail lock which he carried off when he escaped, he left with a Rancocas farmer to take back to Sheriff Conover, as he did not want to steal anything. (*Burlington County Herald*, August 9, 1879)

Sheriff Conover may have gotten that lock back, but a lot of supplies vanished over the years. In June of 1881, a large lot of goods stolen from the jail were discovered in a nearby house. Included were 35 blankets, 19 pairs of shoes, 24 pairs of pants, 11 shirts and 8 knit jackets, all stored in the jail to be used by inmates whose clothing was worn out.

A year later, a Board of Freeholders concluded that tramps committed to the jail should be kept there during their sentence, and not permitted out, after an investigating committee reported that

A large quantity of goods have been taken away without the knowledge of the parties in charge...It would seem that the goods have been taken by tramps who have been committed for a term, and have been allowed to go on the streets and about the town on the plea of doing errands for the Sheriff, and in some instances have gone as far as Burlington on the cars. Your committee can see very clearly, after having gone through the jail and seeing where the goods were kept and also where the key hangs, how perfectly everything is arranged for their convenience.

Another escape in 1881:

As turnkey Harry Warner was looking out into the jail yard at an early hour on Tuesday morning, he saw something which very much resembled a rope hanging over the outer wall and he at once concluded that something was radically wrong. He at once went into the lower tier and found the grating of the bathroom pried completely off, showing the manner in which the prisoners had made their escape. A search through the lower tier developed the fact that three prisoners were missing. They are **Charles Hart**, 30 years of age, 5 feet 7 inches in height, dark hair and eyes, weight about 175 pounds. He was committed by Justice Reeves of Bordentown, July 5 for assault and battery on a boatman. The other two men are **James Burk** and **Thomas Kelly** and they were committed by Justice Powell of Beverly for fighting and resisting an officer. Burk is 21 years of age, medium height,

large eyes and light hair. Kelly is also of medium height, smooth face and dark hair, weighs about 145 pounds. All of the escaped prisoners have been quiet and orderly since their incarceration and seemed to be perfectly satisfied to await the action of the grand jury. The rope by which they managed to get over the wall, was made of strips of bed ticking and its construction was a marvel of ingenuity. There were stops at various points along the rope to give the climber an opportunity to rest and the rope itself was stout enough to hold a ton. Sheriff Conover has offered a reward to \$75 for their capture, or \$25 each. (*Burlington County Herald*, July 1881)

Like today, many who serve time get out only to commit another offense. Such was the case of **Henry Wilkinson, alias Alexander Johnson**, who escaped in June of 1877 by cutting a hole in the roof. He was captured by a Bucks County, Pa. constable. Wilkinson, called the "negro desperado" by *Vineland's Evening Journal* (Jan. 3, 1879) was arrested again in 1879, this time for grand larceny. He had stolen whiskey from the home of William Emlay of Cookstown and other items from another person named Emlay in Jacobstown. He also stole (presumably commercial) bees hives from B.B. Horner. He pleaded guilty and served several years in state prison.

A daring escape on August 7, 1882 as reported in the *Burlington County Herald*:

Turnkey Robert Taylor was sitting on the front steps of the jail a few minutes after eight o'clock on Saturday evening, waiting for a breeze to cool his heated anatomy when his attention was attracted by a sharp whistle coming from the direction of the Surrogate's office. On its being repeated he walked in the direction of the sound and met young John Dolan coming toward the fence. "What's up?" asked the turnkey. "I'm pretty sure I saw a man jump off the wall just now," was the response. But the turnkey was not going to believe anything of that kind, besides it was too early in the evening for prisoners to attempt to break jail. Just then he glanced along the wall and saw the end of a rope dangling from the top, and he realized Dolan was right. Rushing into the jail for his revolver he came out and grasped hold of the rope which had been fastened to a small tree outside of the wall. It was swaying to and fro and it was evident someone was climbing up on it from the inside. Both men took in the slack and when the fellow got near the top, he suspicioned something was wrong and took the back track. After waiting a few minutes longer without another attempt being made to escape they went into the jail, but by this time the news of the escape spread through town like wildfire, and a crowd of a hundred or so men and boys came tearing up the street in the wake of "Secretary" Stanton and Alonzo Bodine*. If prompt measures had been taken it is certain that at least one of the three fugitives could have been captured, but there was so much confusion and useless palaver that by the time they had begun to talk business the prisoners had half an hour start. The turnkey then went through the jail and found the absentees to be **William Griffin, James**

Henderson and Thomas Gibbs. Pearce, a partner of Henderson's, had tried to get away, but failed. They found him going up into the third tier, his face covered with perspiration from the violence of his exertions. The escape was effected by sawing off the bars of the window under the stairway and was well planned. An old case knife had been toothed like a saw and was used in cutting off the bars. It was found down in the corner by the wall. The rope used was made of strips of bed ticking plaited together and was at least 50 feet long. The men had concealed it from the eyes of the turnkey by wearing it underneath their clothing. A large piece of iron from an old bedstead was bent in the shape of a hook, and attached to the end of the rope to be thrown on top of the wall, and was wrapped with pieces of cloth to deaden the sound. Some time ago Mrs. Taylor heard the sound of sawing and communicated the fact to her husband, who in the company of the sheriff made a tour of the cells, but could find nothing wrong. After this the sounds were not heard for a week or two. Where the bars were sawed was filled up with a mixture of soap and blacking, making it almost impossible to detect. Henderson was the ringleader of the plot to escape. He boasted that he had broken out of the Cherry Hill prison, and said "No jail could hold him." He was committed with Charles Pierce of Palmyra for stealing billiard balls at that place. The worst of the gang is William Griffin, of Moorestown. Last Christmas, he made a murderous attack on John Krieder at Moorestown, but got away and went to Europe.

**Bodine was a Mt. Holly resident who had served with distinction in the Civil War in the Fredericksburg and Chancellorville campaigns. He is buried in St. Andrews Cemetery in Mt. Holly.*

We don't have a record of Henderson, who had been charged with larceny of the billiard balls, ever being recaptured. Griffin and Gibbs were recaptured, but not until the following year.

Griffin, who had been charged with atrocious assault and battery, turned himself in in June of 1883, saying he was tired of life on the lam. Gibbs, who had been charged with bigamy, was arrested in October of 1883:

In April of 1882, Gibbs was married in Gloucester City to Miss Alice McGee. At that time he claimed to be a widower and went under the alias of Givens. A month or two later he was married under his right name to Miss Jennie Serviss, at South River, N.J. His third and last marriage was contracted in Georgetown, Delaware, where he married a young woman who still bears the name of Annie Gibbs. He is a young man of genteel appearance and good address. (*The Morning Post* of Camden, Oct. 10, 1883)

Another group of four inmates escaped in March of 1883. **William Riley**, age 40, was facing several charges, including atrocious assault and resisting and shooting an officer. **Reuben Read**, age 30, was serving time for larceny. Two years prior, in August 1881, Read had been jailed for assault and battery. He escaped, was

recaptured and served time in state prison. **Fred Rendfrew**, age 30, was awaiting trial for assault and battery and highway robbery. **John Moriarty**, age 35, was awaiting trial for horse-stealing. This escape provides a good example of how poor newspaper coverage could be. One article said that Moriarty's wife smuggled in the tools used to cut the bars. Another said it was Rendfrew's wife. One said they cut the bars of their cell window and escaped through same after overpowering the jailer. Another said they cut the bars of the cell door and then left by way of the hall window, undetected. *The Courier Post* probably gave the most accurate report:

This morning when the turnkey of the Mount Holly jail went his usual round of inspection he discovered that four prisoners were missing. They were confined in one cell on the second floor, and had secured their liberty by sawing off several bars and the iron sheeting with which the door was enveloped. After gaining the outside of the cell a rope was produced, made out of the bed ticking. And by its aid the walls were scaled. The most singular thing about the affair was the quiet way in which they effected their

escape, as they neither alarmed the turnkey, his family or the young man in the next cell, who, having committed some minor offense, was placed in the cell to watch them as it was feared they would make an attempt to escape. The young man said this morning that at two o'clock they were in their cell talking and it must have been later that the escape was made. An examination of the cell showed that they had been at work several days, covering up the works of the sawing with shoemaker's wax....The Sheriff (Hays) has offered a reward of \$200 for the recapture of them, and \$50 for the return of any one of them. (*The Courier Post*, Mar. 22, 1883)

Rendfrew was recaptured in May 1883. We have no record of what happened to the others.

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Please help us preserve and promote the museum by joining the PMA. Annual dues are \$15(individual)/\$25 (family). Membership benefits include a quarterly newsletter, event updates and free admission to the museum. Go on the website for an application.

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

The Escape of Eddie Adamski

We have already devoted a whole issue (July 17, 2012) to the escape of the safecracker and burglar Eddie Adamski in June of 1933. You can look it up on our website archive. We loosely base our very popular escape game on this escape.

Adamski was a career criminal who, at 28, had already committed dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of burglaries and had spent years in prison. In 1932, he and two of his gang members, Adam Szewczak and Solomon Lutz, committed a \$150,000-bond robbery in Philadelphia. Camden detectives investigating this crime apprehended them in a Gloucester City restaurant. Adamski shot at one of the detectives. Szewczak and Lutz were sent back to Pennsylvania, where they were convicted and imprisoned for the robbery. Adamski remained in New Jersey, where in February of 1933 Judge Shay of the Camden county court tried him on the gun charge and sentenced him to serve time in Trenton State Prison.



Adamski was a few months into his state prison term when our famous detective, Ellis Parker, learned of his connection to numerous Burlington County burglaries, including the burglary of the Moorestown home of a circuit judge named V. Claude Palmer and the home of Kirkland Marter in Burlington. Parker was able to get Adamski transferred to the Burlington County Jail while he continued his investigation. Through exquisite detective work, Parker also found that the gun Adamski used to shoot at the Camden detectives was the same gun that shot Cinnaminson homeowner Bradway Brown in January 1933 in what Parker correctly surmised had been a botched burglary attempt. Upon discovering this, he rushed back to the Jail to question Adamski, only to be told that Adamski had escaped.

It took several months, but Parker finally tracked Adamski down in New York City in the spring of 1934. Back in Burlington County, Adamski and Szewczak were indicted for Brown's murder. Adamski turned state's evidence against Szewczak, and confessed that they had broken into the home of 28-year-old affluent printing executive Bradway Brown to burglarize it. Brown came home unexpectedly. Adamski wanted to run, but Szewczak, who Adamski accused of "drinking on the job", got into a fight with Brown and shot him. Both Adamski and Szewczak were arrested a month later in the Gloucester City restaurant for the Philadelphia bond burglary. Szewczak was sentenced to life in prison for Brown's murder. Adamski, whose real name was Koronkiewicz, was sentenced to 20 to 30 years for his role in the murder. He was

paroled after 10 years, much to the chagrin of local newspapers, who thought the original sentence was too light to begin with given his record.

Adamski's escape from the jail in June of 1933 has always been somewhat controversial. He had been confined to a cell overlooking the niche where the gallows replica is currently located. He was supposed to be under close watch and additional staff was hired to do so. Nevertheless, he was said to have sawed three 2-inch-thick bars off the cell window, which is only 13 by 7 inches, lowered himself 15 feet down from that tiny window by a rope made of bed ticking. He then scaled the 20 foot wall and jumped down on the other side onto the



roof of an outhouse, then to the ground. Above is a picture of the niche where the gallows replica is currently located and the wall Adamski supposedly scaled. The outhouse was on the other side of the wall where the drum is. (Photo by Acme Newspictures, taken June 19, 1933.)

This incident was definitely not a good look for Burlington County corrections officers. A black inmate from Florence named Franklin "Pug" Wilson, in for stealing chickens, was convicted of supplying Adamski with the saw and a gun in exchange for \$50. Wilson had been selected by the warden as a trusty. Inmate Susan Melvin of Burlington, in for prostitution, said she heard the sawing and the men discuss the escape and the splitting of \$100 with another, unknown accomplice. She basically implied that everybody in the jail knew what was going on - or should have. Clifford Belle of Palmyra, in for drunkenness, testified that he told a guard, Clifford Compton, about the escape plan, but was ignored. During Belle's testimony, inmate Edward Cutter, who was Pug's only witness, stood up and shouted "Liar!" The judge ordered Cutter, who was noticeably drunk, removed. None of the jail staff could explain why the jail yard dog, which typically ran free in the yard, was tethered to Pug's bed the night of the escape. It was hard even for Ellis Parker to believe that Adamski was able to squeeze through the 13 by 7-inch window and then scale the wall with only Pug's assistance. Whether any of the guards were guilty of anything other than incompetence that night is something we may never know.

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