

PRISON MUSEUM POST

The Official Newsletter of the 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. If you are not already a member, please consider joining us in our mission to preserve the history of the Prison Museum, and all the local, state and national history that goes along with it. Your dues, along with donations and gift shop sales, make it possible for us to fulfill that mission. **We call on all our members to bring at least one new history lover into the fold!**



2026 marks not only the 250th Anniversary of our Country's founding, but also the 60th anniversary of the Historic Burlington County Prison Museum Association. The organization was incorporated in July of 1966, and if it were any other year, we would plan a celebration in that month. But because we expect that many will be busy over the summer celebrating the Semi quincentennial of our great nation, the PMA will wait until the fall to celebrate our anniversary.

MONUMENT RENOVATED



We are very grateful that the County Commissioners were able to renovate the museum in time for the 250th as well as for our 60th. The PMA wanted to do its part by renovating the National Historic Landmark monument in the front yard. Installed in 1987 following the museum's designation as an NHL in 1986, the monument was really showing its age. We hired monument makers Will Hope and Son of Burlington City to refurbish the old girl. They did a fantastic job. Get a load of the before and after!



HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONFERENCE REVIEW

The New Jersey Historic Trust was created in 1967 "to preserve New Jersey's historic resources". In 2023, they gave Burlington County a grant of \$500,000 which was used along with another two million smackers to renovate the museum. The Trust holds an annual two-day Historic Preservation Conference where representatives from the state's historic sites gather to learn the latest about the history biz. We were very happy when the Trust chose Burlington County as the site of this year's conference on June 4 and 5. Some of the June 4 activities were held at the Lyceum and the Prison Museum, followed by a reception in the Exercise Yard. About 150 guests were quite impressed with the Museum and Exercise Yard, especially the north Jerseyans, most of whom rarely deign to venture down here. On June 5, an array of seminars were held at Rowan College at Burlington County in Mount Laurel.

The Historic Trust was particularly interested in our museum because it provides a perfect backdrop for three of this year's themes, i.e. dark tourism, paranormal and immersive activities. We hate to think of ourselves as a "dark tourism" site, which is a site associated with death, disaster and suffering. But while much of our history is pretty amusing and provides a unique window through which can be viewed the history of our state and nation during the period of the Jail's use, we have to admit that we do have our dark side. This issue's historic piece, about Louis Lively, is a perfect example. "Dark tourism" sites are often, like ours, a magnet for paranormal enthusiasts. The Historic Trust representatives were very impressed by our spirit boxes (transistor-radio-like devices we rent out to visitors to detect paranormal activity) and our escape game. Apparently, we have many more "immersive activities" than most other historic sites.



We were flattered by the compliments about the escape game and the spirit boxes, but as PMA President Janet Sozio noted in her remarks to one of the groups (there she is on the left in the Warden's House giving the remarks), we want to use these attractions (and paranormal investigations) primarily to get people into the site to learn about American history; we don't want to become an amusement park. She was so gratified when every single person in her group voiced the same concern.

Everyone agreed that the primary purpose of public history museums, especially

those funded by governments (in our case, county government) is to present American history to the public in interesting and engaging ways so that visitors feel that they share a common history. By unifying people in this way, our country and our community are strengthened.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE COMES TO THE JAIL

Two of the speakers at the conference were Anthony Setaro and Doug Booton, Monmouth County cousins who own and operate Setaro House, a media company in Red Bank. They were both bitten by the history bug in 2020 when they bought their great-aunt's home in Red Bank and started renovating it. They found that their ancestors came to Monmouth County from Italy in the 1880s. This led them to create a podcast and video game about their colorful family history. Now they re-create historical characters using AI.

There they are on the right in the Dungeon (the top floor solitary confinement/death row cell), demonstrating their AI version of Bordentown resident Philip Lynch, hanged in 1860 in the Exercise Yard for the murder of George Coulter. Using the information we had on Lynch, an AI-generated psychological profile and image produced a re-creation of the murderer. Visitors could ask him questions about his crime and he would answer appropriately. The Preservation Conference attendees were enthralled. Very creepy, but fun!

We have lots of questions, and a long way to go before we take the next step toward obtaining a permanent AI exhibit, but it is something we definitely will pursue. The possibilities appear to be endless, but again, we want the balance the goal of attracting visitors with the equally important goal of promoting American history.



VISITORS GALORE

We continue to attract more and more visitors. The escape game is more popular than ever. The museum was recently the scene of an "escape-game sweet-sixteen" party. Approximately a dozen young ladies from the Bridgeton area did the escape game and then enjoyed pizza on our picnic tables out in the Exercise Yard. Fun was had by all.

The **SPIRIT BOXES** are also getting a lot of use. We charge \$5 for 45 minutes. They are like transistor radios. The core idea is that spirits can manipulate radio waves to form words or phrases, which are then heard by the user as snippets of audio amidst the static or white noise. Almost everybody hears a spirit. These spirits often say some of the damndest things!

Visitors come from all over. In one week in June, we had visitors from Tacoma, WA, Punta Gorda, FL and Ventura, CA. A group from the Y.A.L.E. School in Cherry Hill and senior citizens from the Masonic Home are both scheduled for tours within the coming weeks. PMA member Carl Taraschi continues to give tours on Thursdays. Thank you, Carl! We could use guides on the other days. Let us know if you would be interested. It's fun and you meet lots of nice and interesting people! **Email us at burlcopma@gmail.com (note new email address!)**



Last week, 60 Mount Holly Township Summer Campers visited us. What a cute, sweet bunch of kids! They came in three groups. Here is one group on the left. Thanks to PMA members Cindy Earl, Carole Melman, Ian Johns and Janet Sozio, who kept the crowd moving.

*Next Board Meeting
August 19 at 7 pm*

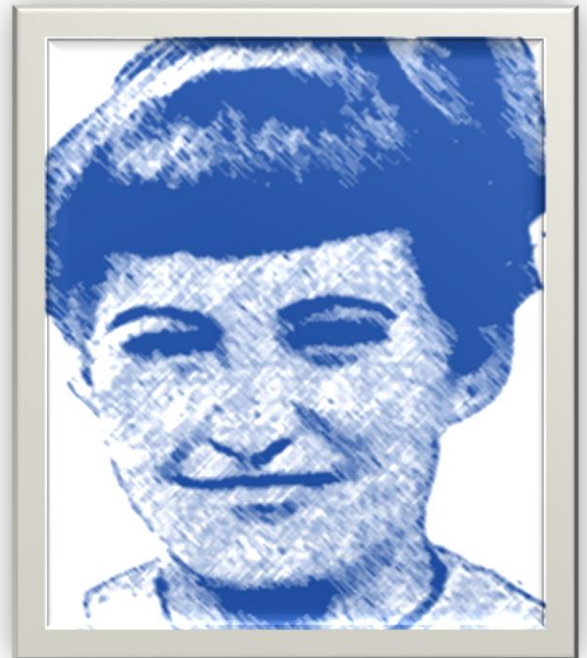
THE LAST INMATE EXECUTED

Thirteen inmates were executed for murder over the 154 years that the Jail was in operation. The last execution in the Exercise Yard occurred in 1906. The last four were executed at Trenton State Prison. In this issue we will explore the case of Louis Lively, the last inmate to be executed.

Put to death in 1922 for the murder of Matilda Russo, Lively was not only the last inmate of the old Jail to be executed, but also the last person from our county to be executed.

The story is interesting because it shows how history depends on who's telling it. It also provides a great case study for a discussion about criminal recidivism and public safety.

Let's start where all these stories *should* start: with the victim. There she is on the right, a seven-year-old * named Metille (called "Matilda") Russo, who lived on East Second Street in Moorestown with her Italian-immigrant parents, Michael and Mary, and her six siblings: Mary, Pascal, Alfred, Charles, Michael and Eleanor. She was second to the youngest. Her father, a tailor, worked in a shop on Main Street. She was big for her age, and wore her black hair in a bob. She was a smart child, and did well in school. She was last seen alive on June 4, 1921, wearing a pink gingham dress and black shoes and stockings. She is buried in Mt. Carmel Cemetery on East Camden Avenue in Moorestown.



The story comes down to us mostly through accounts given by Burlington County Detective Ellis Parker to *True Detective Magazine* (December 1928) and to writer Fletcher Pratt, whose 1935 book, *The Cunning Mulatto and Other Cases of Ellis Parker, American Detective*, was a compilation of stories about the crimes that the famous sleuth had solved. The book's title refers to Matilda's murderer.

**some reports say she was nine*



The basic story outlined in these sources is as follows. Lively and his wife and stepson lived next door to the Russos. On June 4, 1921, his family was away, and Lively had placed a warm pudding he had just purchased from the bakery on his windowsill. Matilda, smelling the confection, entered his house and ate it. Catching her in the act, Lively became enraged and hit her on the head with an object, killing her. He panicked, buried her body in his cellar and left a few days later, causing Parker (pictured above) to conclude that he was culprit. Our world-renowned gumshoe, the first "profiler", then searched the house, found the body and put out a bulletin to all bakeries to be on the look-out for a light-skinned black man who liked pudding. Lively was apprehended eating pudding in Vineland, brought back to Burlington County, tried, convicted and executed.

The story, like many stories about Parker's cases, features Parker's sleuthing prowess above all else. A review of numerous newspaper articles written at the time, however, indicate that Parker's involvement in the case was minimal and that other law enforcement officers put their lives on the line to solve the case.

Lively had been born 35 years earlier in Bridgeton to an African American mother and an Italian American father. Here he is on the right as a youth. His criminal record started early, as is outlined in the following newspaper article:



Lively's criminal record began at the age of ten years, in 1894, when he was committed from Cumberland County to the State School for Boys for burning buildings. Three years later he ran away, was captured, convicted of burning buildings at Bridgeton, and returned to Jamesburg. In 1901 he was indentured to George F. Day, near Drayton, and in 1903 broke into the bedroom of Hattie Owens, attempted to attack her, assaulted Day's son, stole a revolver, some money and a bicycle and escaped to Newark, where he was captured. For this crime he got 14 years in State prison*, served eight and was paroled on July 8, 1911. In 1914 he was sent from Camden County to serve from one to seven years for carrying a concealed weapon and making threats and was paroled in 1915. In 1917 he murdered Edward Madden, of Burlington, in Philadelphia at the home of his sister in Philadelphia, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to serve from two to three years. He was paroled from

*The length of the sentence and other newspaper articles about the incident indicate that the assault on the woman was sexual in nature.

Eastern Penitentiary on February 7, 1920. *The News of Cumberland County (Bridgeton, NJ)*, November 29, 1921.

Not mentioned in this article is that Lively attempted to shoot Bridgeton detective Frank Lore, who arrested him for the 1917 murder.

We find Lively a month after his release from Eastern State married to a woman named Marie (or Bertha, depending on which newspaper you read) and living next to the Russos on East Second Street in Moorestown with his wife and her five-year-old child, Robert, whom everyone called "Snowball". It's notable that the neighborhood was integrated and everyone got along with each other. Lively was actually known as an affable fellow. No one would have suspected his criminal past. He worked at a brush factory in Philadelphia. His wife was also from Cumberland County (Swainton) and a few weeks before had taken a temporary job in a cannery in Bridgeton. She and her son were in Bridgeton the night of the murder.

June 4 had been a Saturday. The Russo children were out playing until about 7 p.m., when they all came home - all except Matilda. Mr. Russo returned home from work around 8 p.m. Mrs. Russo told him that she had heard a scream coming from the Lively home. She had already started worrying about Matilda, and frantically wondered if it was Matilda screaming. Mr. Russo reminded her that the Livelys also had a young child, and surmised that they were probably punishing him.

Of course, it had in fact been Matilda screaming. Lively had hit her on the head with a hammer and then slit her throat from ear to ear with a razor. The gash went all the way through to her spine. Then he cut her in half. He buried the pieces of her body in the basement. He had ripped off all her clothes, and hid them either in a hole in the wall or with the body (again, depending on which newspaper you read). The doctors who performed the autopsy (Dr. Longsdorf of Mount Holly and Dr. Ulmer of Moorestown) testified at the trial that she probably died immediately from the hammer blow, but might have died from the cuts. They also testified that she probably had been sexually assaulted.

The Russos spent the night searching for Matilda. They went to all the neighbors' homes. Mrs. Russo went to the Lively home and Lively coolly told her that he had not seen the child. Sometime after midnight, they called the police. All the neighbors were questioned by Moorestown Police Chief John Bradshaw. On Wednesday, Bradshaw got around to questioning Lively. He then called Ellis

Parker, who also questioned Lively and found discrepancies in his statements. Also, by then, the lawmen noticed that neither of the Livelys had been home in the previous few days. Furthermore, the Russos, who amazingly forgot to mention the scream Mrs. Russo heard coming from the Lively home, finally remembered it and told Chief Bradshaw. At that point Parker and Bradshaw finally checked out Lively's past criminal history.

On Friday, June 10, someone reported seeing Lively going in and out of his home. After midnight, Chief Bradshaw and patrolman Ira Jacobs broke into the house (apparently without a warrant) and searched the basement, where they found a spot on the dirt floor where the earth appeared soft. They dug it up and found the body. A short while later, Lively called Bradshaw and said he had heard that someone had broken into his house. Bradshaw told him that there was a mistake, and that if he came to police headquarters, the matter would be straightened out. Lively never showed up, but his wife did. Lively had apparently sent her to see if the body had been found. The wife was taken into custody and charged with murder; she would not be released until Lively was convicted on November 30.

Lively eluded the police until October 19, when he was arrested in Vineland. No one really knows where he was between June 10 and October 19, 1921. Parker later said Lively's ability to elude capture for so long made him the most "cunning" criminal he ever dealt with. Lively claimed to have been in Philadelphia, New York, Maine and even Canada, but most thought he probably stayed the whole time with various people he knew in the Vineland area.

On Monday, June 13, a delegation of African American men met with Burlington County Prosecutor Jonathan Kelsey and told him that they would like to form a posse to capture and lynch Lively. Kelsey told them that there had never been a lynching of anyone, white or black, in Burlington County, and there never would be. They should go home and not worry; Lively would be caught, prosecuted and legally executed, and nobody would blame them or anyone else for Lively's crimes.

He was in fact caught, on October 19. Of course, once Matilda's body was found, alerts were sent to law enforcement all over the country. Photographs of Lively were widely distributed. We can find nothing to indicate that Lively's description included his penchant for pudding, if he in fact had one. Lively was only 5'3" tall, weighed 130 pounds and was a very light-skinned bi-racial man with straight hair. He was pretty distinctive looking and everyone and his brother was on the look-out for him, especially in the Vineland area.

At 6:15 a.m. on October 19, Vineland police officer Asa Wilson was about to be relieved from his foot patrol night duty at Sixth Street and Landis Avenue by Officer James Florentino. The two men were talking there on the corner when Lively walked by. Florentino remarked that he looked like Lively. The officers then flagged down a cab, and drove it in pursuit of Lively. At Fourth Street, Wilson jumped out and confronted Lively, who pulled out a .38 and shot Wilson three times. Florentino emptied his gun at the fleeing Lively and then hailed another cab to take Wilson, who was badly wounded with a gunshot in the right lung, to the hospital. Florentino then stopped at a local home, borrowed the owner's shotgun and drove the commandeered cab to Landis Park, where Lively had fled. Lively shot at him from behind a tree. Once his revolver was empty, Florentino, who was behind another tree, stepped out with his shotgun levelled at Lively. At that point Lively surrendered and was taken to the Vineland police station. Here are photos of Asa Wilson on the left and James Florentino on the right. In the middle is Burlington County Detective Clifford Cain, who worked on the case.



Lively was interrogated in the Vineland lockup by both Police Chief Hudson and Mayor Ferdinand Koetz. He told them that he had gone to Bridgeton the day before to kill police officer Frank Lore, who had arrested him in 1917 for the murder of Edward Madden. (Lively had unsuccessfully tried to shoot Lore during the arrest. Lore was hot on Lively's trail relative to this crime, and was reportedly

about to apprehend him.) Not finding Lore in Bridgeton, he then went on to Vineland.

Lively confessed to Matilda's murder but gave different accounts to different lawmen as to why he killed her. The first account mentioned nothing about pudding. In his confession to Chief Hudson, he didn't say how Matilda had come to his home. He said that "after he had been having 'some fun' with her, he took her in his arms and she screamed" (*The News of Cumberland County, October 21, 1921*) He said struck her to make her stop screaming, he didn't mean to kill her, and that when he realized she was dead, he cut up her body because he thought it would rot quicker.

He told others that she came to visit Snowball, and not finding him home, started to throw things around and broke a dish. He clubbed her to make her stop. And then there was the story about him killing her because she ate his pudding.

The trial was held on November 29. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Kalisch presided. Lively was represented by a court-appointed attorney, V. Claude Palmer of Mount Holly. The prosecutor was Jonathan Kelsey, assisted by attorney James Mercer Davis. The trial went into the next day, November 30, when the jury started deliberating. They were out for 90 minutes before rendering a decision. Justice Kalisch said that the defendant's argument of lack of premeditation was outweighed by the superlative injuries inflicted on the child. Lively was taken directly from the courthouse to Trenton State Prison, where he was executed by electrocution on January 17, 1922.

Burlington County Sheriff Flagg, Warden Thomas Mahaney and Ellis Parker accompanied him on the trip to Trenton State. On the way, he remarked that his only worry was that he would get a half decent burial and that his body would not be autopsied. "I don't want to be cut up. You rest better when your body is all together," he said, apparently without irony. (*Gloucester County Times, December 1, 1921.*) He got his wish and was buried in a cemetery in Swainton. He was laid to rest outside the wall, away from the other graves.



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

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In Memoriam
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 David Kimball 1930-2021

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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. See
 website for application.