

PRISON MUSEUM POST

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

VOLUME XXII, ISSUE IV

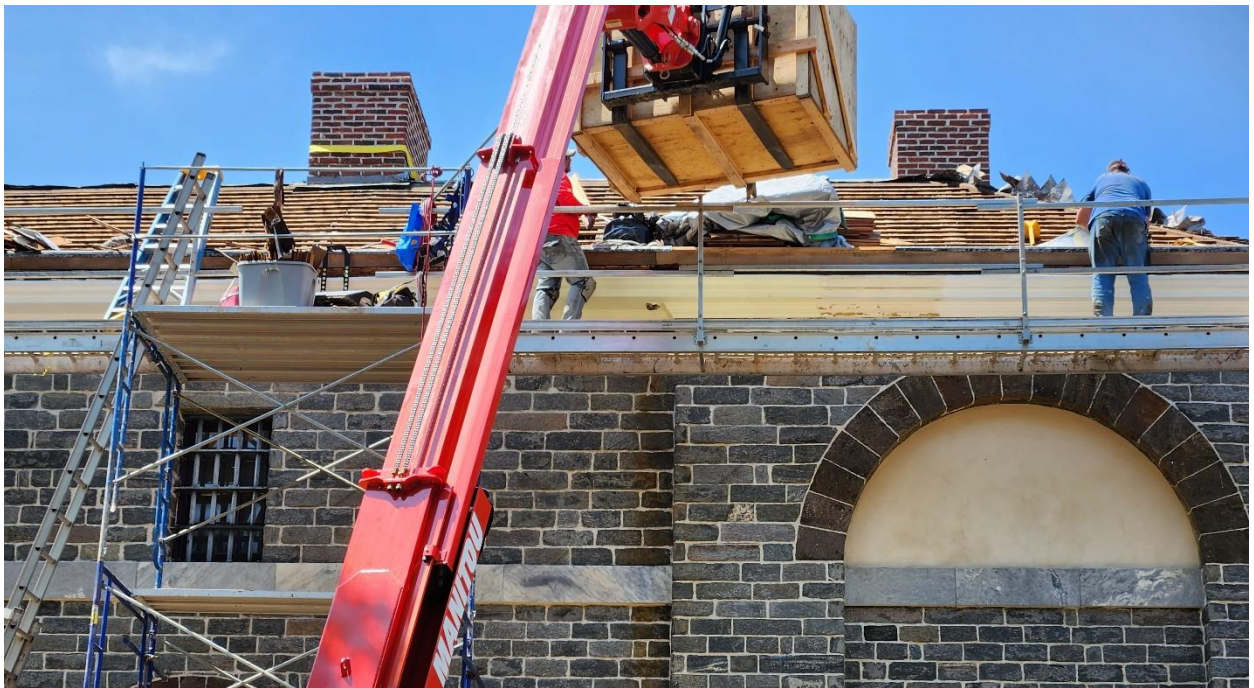
AUGUST 11, 2023

THANK YOU!

We would like to thank all who renewed their memberships. If you renewed and have not received an acknowledgment and/or your name does not appear on the attached list, send us an email. The support of our members is always appreciated, but even more so this year because we have no other income during the renovation.

RENOVATIONS ARE PROGRESSING WELL

Here is a picture of the roofers working on August 9, 2023. Notice how wonderful the new pointing looks.



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



The above photo was taken on August 9 as well. The job is so big that it's hard to get a feeling for it all in one picture. There were about ten guys working out back that day. Below is a picture of the artisan who does the pointing on the building. It was about 95 degrees the day that picture was



taken a few weeks ago. Several of the old trees were removed, as was the stucco from the walls. It looks about a thousand times better already.

THE FIRST INMATES

Our most recent William Paterson intern, Kyle Stickles, was determined to find out who our first inmate was. We kept him too busy with other projects to pursue the issue. Recently, however, we picked up the gauntlet and here is what we found.

THE EARLIEST INMATES WERE DEBTORS

Because any log books that existed before 1870 are now lost, we have to depend on court records, Freeholder minutes and newspaper articles to find names of people incarcerated before then.

The Jail opened soon after February 11, 1811. The Freeholder Minutes for that date noted that "as soon as the walls are dry, the jail will be ready for the reception of prisoners". The first inmates we know of were three fellows who were imprisoned for debt in 1811. Their names were James Potter, John Emlay and Charles Riley. Prior to the passage of bankruptcy laws, insolvent debtors could be imprisoned. Of course, this made no sense, because imprisoned people generally couldn't work to make money to use to pay their debts. Robert Mills tried to address this issue by designing a prison in which debtors could work off their debts. The impracticality of this very "good-on-paper" idea is a topic for another issue.

Incarcerated debtors eventually petitioned the Freeholders to be released. Notices of their petitions were published in the local newspaper. On the right appears a copy of the notice which Potter, Emlay and Riley had printed in the November 27, 1811 issue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Don't get frustrated if you have trouble reading the old print. Just stick with it. Remember, the

Notice to Creditors.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, That the subscribers, Insolvent Debtors, now in actual confinement in the gaol of the county of Burlington for debt, having applied, according to law, to the Inferior Court of Common Pleas of the county of Burlington, for the benefit of the acts of the Legislature of the State of New-Jersey, "For the relief of persons imprisoned for debt," the Court have appointed Saturday, the fourteenth day of December next, at ten o'clock in the forenoon of said day, to meet at the Court-House, in Mount-Holly, in said county of Burlington, to hear what can be alledged for and against our liberation from imprisonment.

JAMES POTTER,
JOHN EMLAY,
CHARLES RILEY.

Dated the 6th day of November,
Anno Domini 1811.

•5

letter "s" looked like an "f" whenever it appeared at the beginning or the middle of a word. An "s" at the end of a word was printed like "s" is today. Thus the word "subscribers" looks like "fubfcriters". "Gaol" means "jail".

OUR FIRST MURDERER

The next inmate we know of was arrested on February 4, 1812 for murdering his wife and step-mother. His name was John Riley, Jr. and he lived in his

father's home located at "Cross Roads", which is the area near the corner of Church Road and Mount Holly/Medford Road (County Route 541) in what is now Medford. At that time it was still Evesham Township.

Riley was never prosecuted for his crime because he was obviously insane. This will surprise some readers, who may be under the mistaken impression that criminal defendants at that time were denied constitutional rights

and/or routinely strung up. This case is interesting not because he wasn't prosecuted, but rather because he spent the next 18 years confined in the jail. Thirty-eight (38) years old at the time of the murder, he was 56 when he died 18 years later, in the jail, on June 24, 1830. As far as we know, with the exception of those awaiting trial or appellate decisions, he was the only person held more than 364 days. (The average stay was about 30 days.)

The sensational story was reported in papers as far away as South Carolina. (At the time, there were only 18 states.) Here's an article that appeared in the *Pittsburg Weekly Gazette* on Friday, February 28, 1812:

A shocking murder was committed at this place by John Reily on his step-mother Esther Reily and Sarah Taylor, a woman with whom he had lived for 8 or 10 years, in which time they had several children.

For several weeks previous to the shocking scene, he appeared unsettled in his mind, and had shown a disposition to drown himself. A few days before he committed the murder, he appeared

more settled and composed; so much so that his brother went with him to Philadelphia one day and returned with him the next. But after his return he was more unsettled and complained as he had frequently done, that all his connections were against him, and conceited that they had, or then wished to poison him and were otherwise devising means to take his life. He even imagined that the Doctor had bound poison in his arm after bleeding him.

On the morning of the 4th inst., while the aforesaid women, with several children, were at breakfast, he came into the house, and was invited to set down with them, but he declined and continued walking about the room, At length, however stepping behind Sarah Taylor, with a razor which he held in his hand, cut her throat, and before his stepmother could make any effectual resistance, he cut her throat also.

It appears that his stepmother had made some resistance by there being marks of the razor in different places, which is supposed to have been caused by the struggle.

Sarah Taylor at the fatal moment held a child in her lap, and on receiving the wound immediately fell; his step-mother arose from the table and walked a few steps towards the door, and fell also, and in a few minutes after both lay lifeless on the floor. The murderer immediately left his father's house and went toward that of his brothers, which was but a few rods distant, when he met his brother near the yard gate, who was out, but was just then returning home. His brother insensible to danger, went up to him, when he drew the hand which still held the fatal razor from behind him, and with considerable force drew it across his brother's throat – but very fortunately the knot in his silk handkerchief which he had around his neck effectually prevented it from doing him any injury. He then attempted to get into his brother's house, but the door had been previously fastened by his brother's wife, on being informed of the circumstance by a sister about 10 or 12 years old who was at the table when he killed her mother. The situation of the dead, the distress of the families, the screams and lamentations of the children, all combined to make this awful scene unusually affecting and can much better be imagined than described.

The murderer was soon after secured, but was not taken to prison for several hours during which time he did not appear fully sensible of the dreadful crime he had committed – but was nearly all the time before his commitment, running on the following strain: They are all against me – all the world is against me – and wanted to take my life – I must suffer! I have committed a dreadful!

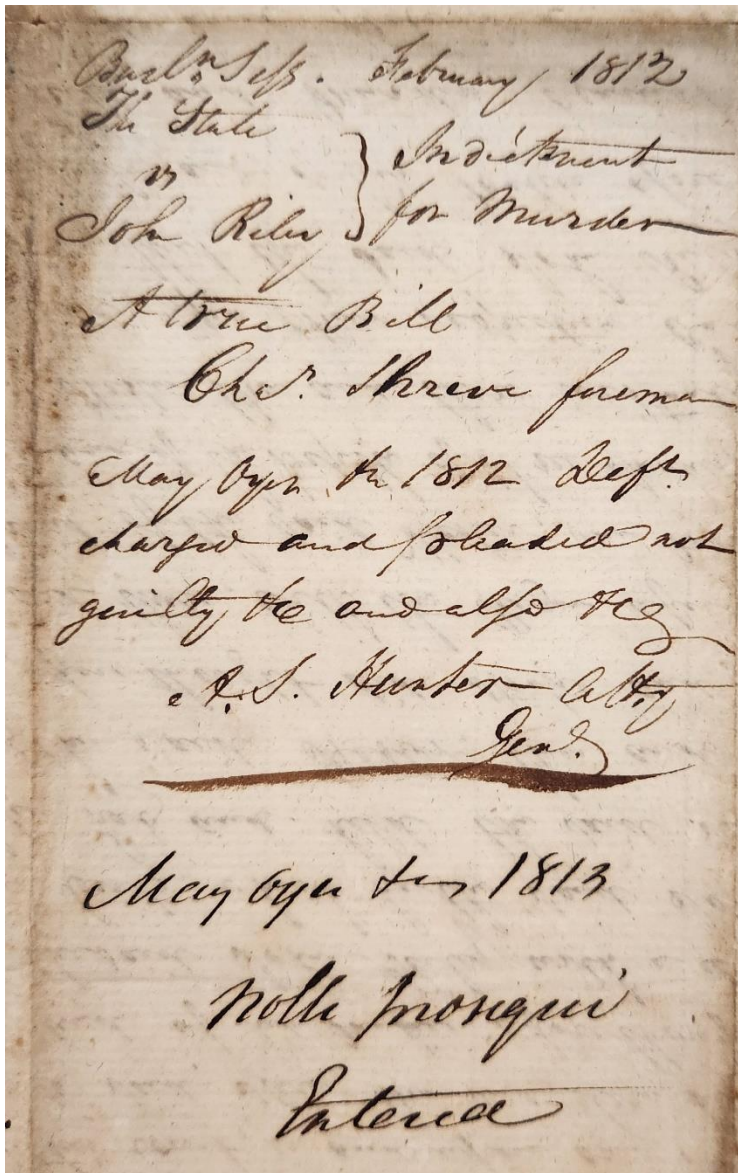
Dreadful act! But they were all against me. I must die- and I am willing to die, etc.

On the left is the cover page of the Riley's indictment for the murder of Hester Riley. Thanks to Kate Gulick-Tues at the State Archives for digging it up.

It says:
Burl(ington) Sess(ion),
February 1812, Indictment for
Murder,
The State vs. John Riley
A true Bill
Cha(rles) Shreve foreman,
May Oyer Ter(miner) 1812
Def(endant)
Charged and pleaded not guilty
A.S. Hunter, Atty Genl

A year later someone added:

May Oyer Ter(miner) 1813
Nolle prosequi entered



"Nolle prosequi" means "refuse to pursue" in Latin. This means that the prosecutor chose not to prosecute the case, finding Riley to be too mentally incapacitated to even stand trial.

This is not to be confused with a defendant found "not guilty by reason of insanity". Here a criminal defendant alleges successfully that he suffered from a mental illness which made it impossible for him to have the intention or knowledge necessary to be legally guilty of the crime. The most famous case involving this issue is that of John Hinckley, who fired six shots at President Ronald Reagan on a sidewalk in Washington D.C. in 1981. One shot ricocheted off the President's car and hit him in the chest, just missing his heart and possibly contributing to his later dementia. Another shot hit the President's press secretary in the brain; he was severely injured and died of his wounds 30 years later. Two others were shot as well. Hinckley not only carefully planned the crime, but also had a reason for committing it: an aspiring musician, he wanted to obtain fame and the attention of a then-famous actress, who suffered severe psychological trauma as a result of the event. Despite the premeditation and extent of the harm, Hinckley was found not guilty by reason of insanity. He spent 30 years in a mental institution. Today he resides, unrestricted, in New York City, where he continues to pursue his musical career.

A great public outcry after the Hinckley acquittal led to revisions of state and federal insanity defense guidelines. But back in New Jersey in 1812, there was no question about Riley - he was mad as a hatter. The question apparently was-- what to do with him? It appears that the County got "stuck" with him. The Freeholder Minutes of May 10, 1815 noted that Freeholders Ebenezer Tucker, William Reeves and Clayton Newbold were assigned the task of "enquiring into the sanity of John Riley now in the jail and to report thereon". The Minutes of February 12, 1816 note that the committee reported that he was insane and that the County had been supporting him. They further reported that he had a house and lot in Medford; a committee was formed to sell it to reimburse the County. Further research is needed to see if this was ever done.

We next hear of Riley in the summer of 1830, when papers all over the country reported his demise:

We are informed that the unfortunate John Riley...was on Monday morning last released from confinement by the stroke of death. Riley served an apprenticeship to the saddle and harness making business at Haddonfield, and was a young man of decent and genteel appearance; about 14 years ago we

visited him in his solitary abode; the apartment was roomy, neat and clean – he had a bible in his hand, and conversed on several subjects apparently rational, but on others his mind appeared confused, and bewildered, particularly on that of his crimes and misfortunes.

Buffalo Bulletin reprinting *Camden Star* article, July 3, 1830



IN THE WALLS

It is very gratifying to see the contractors becoming more and more attached to the Old Jail and its history. The building has that

effect on people. They recently showed us a few things they found in the wall – the bottom of an old shoe, a deteriorated bank note, and a business card of a grave digger (see left). The reverse side (right) is dated "Aug 1967", so it seems that if Mr. Johnson left the card, he was either a visitor or a volunteer. We wonder why he might have stuck his card in the wall. Does anyone have any ideas?



**Historic Burlington County
Prison Museum Association ("PMA")**
Holly, NJ 08060
PMA Office Fax: 609-261-5252
PMA Phone: 609-288-6372
Museum/Gift Shop Phone: 609-265-5476
Email: info@pma1811.net
Website: www.prisonmuseum.net

Board of Trustees
Clark Bish (Vice President)
Susan R. Dargay, Esq.
Ian Johns (Secretary)
Brenda Marris (Treasurer)
Rhondilynn Schwartz, Esq.
Janet L. Sozio, Esq. (President)
Carl Taraschi, Esq.
Gary F. Woodend, Esq. (Secretary)

In Memoriam
Jay B. Tomlinson 1893-1967
David A. Kimball 1930-2021

COMMITMENT BOOK PROJECT CONTINUES

We are happy to report that the commitment book project is progressing well. Researcher Wade Jablonski just finished transcribing the log books for the 1920s. He has also started a list of inmates who were incarcerated in years we don't have log books for. The first four on the list are the ones mentioned in this issue. Eventually the list will be put up on the website.

PRISON MUSEUM ASSOCIATION MEMBERS (through 6/30/24)

Janet C. Aaronson
Doris Alaimo
Dick Alaimo
Jennifer Anderson, C.P.A.
Brian Frampton, C.P.A.
Mazzucco and Co.
Richard Andronici, Esq.
Wendy Andronici
Jennifer Apell, Esq.
Jeffrey Apell, Esq.
Marc Baldwin
Arlene Baldwin
Robert Bannon
Joel Bewley
Devika Gill-Bewley
Clark Bish*
Bryan Branson
Jennifer S. Brooks, Esq.
Dr. Ari Brooks
Hon. Susan Claypoole
Richard Cosden
Susan Dargay, Esq. *
John Dargay
Paul Detrick, Esq.
Roni Detrick
Sarah Dunne
Cynthia Earl, Esq.
Dennis Earl
Stan Fayer
Ellen Fayer
Burl. Co. Historical Society
Alvin J. Figueroa, Ph.D.
Gary Haines
Glen Filippone, Esq.
Joseph Filippone
William Frey
Fred Galdo
Salli Gordon
Adam Greenberg, Esq.
Holly Haines
Hon. Philip Haines
David Hasson
Jane Hasson
Hon. Linda Hynes
Nicholas Jelenic III

Lisa Post
Ian Johns*
Barbara Johns
Warren S. Jones, Jr., Esq.
Daniel Kimball
Lisa Kruczek
Cameron Legg, Esq.
Hon. Marie Lihotz
Russ Lloyd
Linda Lloyd
Andrew Lubin, Esq.
Brenda Marris*
Thomas Marris
Carole Melman
Glenn Kenny
Rocco Minervino, Esq.
Mareg Monaghan
Stacy L. Moore, Esq.
Anne Moore
Michael L. Moubert, Esq.
Jan Myers
William H. Oliver, Esq.
Nona Ostrove, Esq.
Catherine Plummer
Roy Plummer
Armed Forces Heritage Museum
Henry Reeves
Lois Reeves
Michael Resnick
Mary Ann Foy Rivell
Michael Rothmel, Esq.
Randi Rothmel
John Ruggiero
New Jersey Paranormal
Andy Sahol
Hon. James Saxton
Wendy Schmidt
Rhondi Lynn Schwartz, Esq.*
Marsha Silcox
Dean M. Sozio
Janet L. Sozio, Esq.*
Eugene Stafford
Joyce Stafford
Maurice Stevenson
Hon. Karen Suter

Carl Taraschi, Esq.*
Arlene Taraschi
Brooke Tidswell, III
Pam Tidswell
Dr. Eugene V. Timpano
Dr. Eugene D. Timpano
Berge Tumaian, Esq.
Any Tumaian
Robert F. Weishoff, Esq.
Carol Weishoff
Andrea Weishoff
George Weishoff
Gary F. Woodend, Esq.*
Dorothy Wright, Esq.
Steve Goldberg, Esq.
J. Robert Ziccardi
Elena Ziccardi

**Board members*

**MEMBERS WHO ARE ALSO
OUR ATTORNEYS AT
PARKER-MCCAY:**

John Devlin, Esq.
Susan Basco, Esq.
Stephen Mushinski, Esq.
Gene Mariano, Esq.
Harris Neil Feldman, Esq.
John Nechonchuk, Esq.
Brian Caine, Esq.
Kiera-McFadden-Roan, Es.
J. Brooks DiDonato, Esq.
George M. Morris, Esq.

**RESEARCHERS,
ARCHIVISTS, DOCENTS,
PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS**

*Anthony Arena
Rachel Maudin
Mark Paul Wenger
Wade Jablonski
Dan Wolverton
Amos Rodriguez
Mackenzie Tansey
Megan Virella*

**WEBSITE & OFFICE
MANAGEMENT**

*Lisa Kruczek
Brenda Marris*

INDICTMENT OF JOHN RILEY FOR THE MURDER OF HESTER RILEY:

Burlington: The Grand Inquest of the State of New Jersey for the Body of the County of Burlington, upon their respective oath and affirmation, present that John Riley Junior, late of the Township of Evesham in the County afore said, Sadler, not having the fear of God before his Eyes, but being moved and seduced by the Instigation of the Devil, on the fourth day of February in the Year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twelve, at the Township of Evesham aforesaid, in the County aforesaid and within the jurisdiction of this Court, in and upon one Hester Riley, in the peace of God and of the said State, then and there being with force and arms he wilfully and of his malice aforethought did make an assault and that he the said John Riley with a Razor, with the value of twenty-five cents, with the said John in his right hand, then and there had and held the said Hester Riley, in and upon the throat of the said Hester, then and there willfully and of his malice aforethought did strike and cut, giving to the said Hester then and there, with the Razor aforesaid, in and upon the aforesaid throat of the said Hester, one frontal wound, of the length of four inches and of the depth of three inches, of which said mortal wound the said Hester then and there instantly died; and so the Grand Inquest aforesaid, upon their respective oath and affirmation afore said, do say, that the said John Riley in manner and form aforesaid, wilfully and of his malice aforethought for the said Hester Riley did kill and murder; against the form of the statute in such case made and provided, to the evil example of all others in the like case offending, and against the peace of this State, the government and Dignity of the same –

A.S. Hunter, Atty Genl

Witnesses for the State: Reuben Stratton, Mark Reeves, Laurence Webster, Isaac Garwood, Isaac Wilson, Alice Riely

(The indictment for the murder of Sarah Taylor/Riley is exactly the same except that the wound was described as five inches long and two inches deep.)

Burlington Co. The Grand Inquest of the State of New Jersey for the Body of the
County of Burlington, upon their respective Oath and Affirmation, present
That John Riley, Junior, late of the Township of Evesham in the County aforesaid,
said, doth, not having the fear of God before his Eyes, but being moved
and seduced by the temptation of the devil, on the fourth day of February
in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twelve, at the
Township of Evesham aforesaid, in the County aforesaid and within the
Jurisdiction of this Court, in and upon one Hester Riley, in the peace of
God and of the said State, then and there being, with force and arms
He wilfully and of his malice aforethought did make an assault
and that he the said John Riley, with a certain Razor, of the Value
of twenty five Cents, which he the said John in his right hand,
then and there had and held the said Hester Riley, in and upon
the throat of the said Hester, then and there wilfully and of
his malice aforethought did strike and cut, giving to the said
Hester then and there, with the Razor aforesaid, in and upon the
aforesaid throat of the said Hester, one mortal wound, of the length
of four inches and of the depth of three inches, of which said mortal wound
the the said Hester then and there instantly died; And so the Grand
Inquest aforesaid, upon their respective Oath and Affirmation aforesaid,
do say, that the said John Riley in manner and form
aforesaid, wilfully and of his malice aforethought her the said Hester
Riley did Kill and Murder; against the form of the Statute in
such case made and provided, to the evil Example of all
others in the like Case offending, and against the peace of this
State, the Government and Dignity of the same —

A. S. Hunter Atty Genl.

Witnesses for the State

Amos Stratton —

Mark Harvey

Lawrence Webster

Isaac Garwood

Isaac Wilson —

Abner Riley —