

PRISON MUSEUM POST

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

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MUSEUM HOSTS HOMESCHOOLERS

Prison Museum members Cindy Earl, Ian Johns, Carl Taraschi and Janet Sozio had a great time hosting the Living Water Homeschool at the Museum on May 2. Living Water is a homeschool cooperative consisting of six families in Shamong.



While public school group tours have decreased steadily over the last couple decades, private, vocational and homeschool groups show more and more interest in the museum. While we do a pretty good job in adapting our tours to fit the needs and interests of all groups who visit (if we do say so ourselves), homeschoolers pose a special challenge because they often appear in groups with huge age diversity. The Living Water group ranged in age from three to 18. Undaunted, Janet came up with a program which was enjoyed by all. They were a delightful, smart group of kids.

NEXT BOARD MEETING: TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2025 AT 7 P.M. AT PMA OFFICE



Cindy (sporting sunglasses on the left) took the little ones to the Exercise Yard, where she used our historical coloring book to tell them about our local history. Later, they walked through the Jail and frolicked in the yard. Inside, Ian (above left) and Carl (above right) took the intermediate students on a tour.

The high schoolers enjoyed the escape game:



ANOTHER TRAMP STORY

The last issue of the *Post* featured the plight of tramps in the 1880s. We came across an interesting short blurb dated January 4, 1882 from the *Hopewell Herald* that led us to consider the problem through one family's experience.

In the Burlington County jail a mother and daughter were recently serving a sentence for disorderly conduct when news came to them that the husband and father, Frank Harmon, had been suffocated while asleep on the edge of a lime kiln. Both mother and daughter pledged themselves never to drink again. The family once possessed a happy home.

Our interest piqued, we did some further investigation and found that the mother had been arrested for drunkenness on the street in Camden. For some reason, she was sent to our Jail instead of Camden's. Her 13-year-old daughter was sent with her. According to the *Courier Post*,

She was put in the Mount Holly jail for thirty days, but was released to attend the funeral of her husband. Harmon belonged to New Brunswick, where he has very respectable connections. With the woman is a bright girl thirteen years of age, and Justice Tarr is taking steps to separate her from her dissolute mother and secure her better surroundings.

While Harmon might have had "respectable connections" in New Brunswick, it appears that he might have had more than just an alcohol problem, as is indicated by the fact that he had spent some time in Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia and had an alias (Frank O'Neill and Frank the Stone Cutter). Upon his release from Eastern State, he went to Camden, where Camden Mayor Claudius Bradshaw had him locked up on a drunk and disorderly charge.

By December 7, he was out of jail. He and two other men, Joseph Elverson and Henry Moran, spent the day drinking at a place called Gordon's in Camden. They left at 11 p.m. in search of a warm place to spend the night. According to Moran, it was Harmon who suggested the lime kiln on Federal Street near Cooper River. Apparently lime kilns were the equivalent of

today's subway grates for tramps looking for a warm spot to sleep in the winter. Unlike subway grates, however, lime kilns spewed out toxic gases that often burned and asphyxiated the hapless souls looking for a warm place to sleep.



In the 1800s, there were many lime kilns along the Delaware River and near the Jersey shore. In these kilns, oyster shells were burned to produce the quicklime that New Jersey farmers applied to the soil to produce the fabulous vegetables for which the Garden State was named. There were plenty of oyster shells, as Jersey fisherman brought in about 1000 bushels a day (as compared to about 1000 bushels a year now).

Unfortunately, we couldn't find any pictures of the lime kiln in Camden. We think it might have looked like the one pictured above.

Today's lime kiln operations are a little more sophisticated:



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

Harmon and Joseph Elverson died that night from the fumes of the lime kiln.
Henry Moran lived to tell the story to the *Courier Post*:

The story of Henry Moran, now in the lock-up at the City Hall, is as follows:

“Yesterday morning I was with Reddy the Tinker (Elverson). We were around drinking. I met him again at Jimmy Gordon’s, where we found a stranger (Harmon), and we had some drinks. I used to

belong to Camden and my wife lives there somewhere. I saw her yesterday. I live anywhere. About 11 o’clock last night we left Gordon’s, all pretty full. The stranger led us to the lime kilns. Reddy and me had never slept there, but the stranger had, and said he knew all about it. Reddy and the stranger laid down on the edge, but I found it was too cold and placed a couple of planks over the kiln and laid down. Reddy told me not to lay there, as there was danger of my falling off. I stayed there an hour or two and began to cough, when I laid down on the side opposite the others. The gas kept me awake a good deal of the time, but the others slept. Towards morning I called them, but they did not answer. I shook Reddy, but he would not awake. I felt them and found the dead...My head was swimming...”

Elverson was about 37 years old, raised in this city, was in the army, and since the war for the Union he has been among the homeless hosts who sleep and eat where it is most convenient. The dead men made their couch on the warm side of the kiln, where the noxious fumes were driven over them, while Moran owes his life to his restlessness and to the fact that he slept on the windward side. There have been several cases of asphyxia at these kilns, and hardly a night passes during cold weather without one or more tramps seeking the dangerous warmth while they sleep.

Courier Post, December 9, 1881

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In Memoriam
Jay Tomlinson 1893-1967
David Kimball 1930-2021

**Prison Museum Post Editor,
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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.

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