

PRISON MUSEUM POST

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

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PLEASE HELP US PROMOTE THE HAUNTED PRISON !

Board member and Haunt Producer Clark Bish and his merry band of Haunt enthusiasts, including PMA members and co-producers Jim Reed and Ken Orangers, outdo themselves every year, and this one is no exception. We want to take this opportunity to thank Chief Promotion Officer Lindsay Pietsch and Acting Coach/Coordinator Tim Bozarth for their extraordinary promotional efforts this year. Lindsay also serves as our Chief Makeup Artist.

The set is going up at lightning speed, full of new horrors for those brave enough to participate in what has evolved into a truly spectacular theatrical event. As most of you know by now, the Haunt is the engine that drives our Prison Museum train. Without it, we would not be able to acquire interesting artifacts, preserve our history with publications or sponsor great events like the Treasure Hunt in the spring. We can always use volunteers to help in the construction of the set and at the event itself.

What we really need our members to do, however, is help us *promote* the event. We are enclosing a couple of flyers for distribution. Call the office if you need more.

SAVE THE DATE

Speaking of great events sponsored by the PMA, mark your calendars for the **Re-enactment of the Battle of Iron Works Hill** on Saturday, December 8. The Museum will be open for free, as will other wonderful historic sites in Mt. Holly, including the 1759 Schoolhouse and the Friends Meeting House.

The Prison Museum will be open again for free on New Year's Eve as part of the **First Night** festivities. Like Iron Works Hill, this event gets more popular every year. Don't miss out on these great events which are fun for all ages. More about both in the November *Prison Museum Post*.

Now sit back and enjoy *The Sad Tale of Philip Lynch*. Be forewarned: it's a little shocking and gory. But after all, this *is* the Prison Museum, and it *is* that time of year.....

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Please help us preserve and promote the Prison Museum by joining the PMA. Our annual dues are only \$15(individual)/\$25 (family). Membership benefits include a quarterly newsletter, event updates, 10% off gift shop purchases, and free admission to the museum. Go on website for an application.

THE SAD TALE OF PHILIP LYNCH

For this issue's historic piece, we will travel back in time 153 years, to Bordentown. There we will meet Philip Lynch, the first convicted murderer executed in the Exercise Yard. Prior to the 1850s, hangings were public spectacles; families enjoyed a picnic lunch and the sight of a human being strangling to death from a tree on Marne Highway in Hainesport. In the 1850s, a court ruling mandated that hangings were to be carried out with some semblance of privacy and dignity. Thereafter, the condemned were hanged inside the Exercise Yard in the rear of the Prison, which is enclosed by a high stone wall. The gallows constructed for Lynch's execution consisted of two uprights and a cross beam. A rope, to the end of which a hook was fastened, passed over pulleys above. To this were suspended weights of 364 lbs. held up by another rope, the cutting of which caused the weights to fall and the condemned to be suspended in the air and hanged.

Lynch emigrated from Ireland in 1847, smack in the middle of the Great Famine. A blight which ravaged potato crops caused the death by starvation and disease of a million Irishmen. A million more emigrated out of the country. Many, including Lynch, ended up in America.

He landed in New York, and traveled throughout New England and Pennsylvania before settling down in Bordentown. We first hear of him in 1850, when he served a year in state prison after being convicted of assault and battery with intent to commit rape. In 1854, he was again convicted of assault and battery and resisting arrest, for which he was fined \$21. Unable to pay the fine, he was incarcerated for some time in our Jail.

On September 24, 1859, Lynch would meet George Coulter, a farmer who had come into town with his 11-year-old son, James, to sell some butter. Within a few hours, Coulter would be found dead on a Bordentown street. Lynch would be arrested and charged with the murder. The trial commenced on January 5, 1860. James testified for the prosecution. Within a week, Lynch would be found guilty and sentenced to death. The execution was carried out on March 23, 1860 before approximately 150 witnesses, including the Burlington, Ocean and Camden County Sheriffs, the Burlington County Freeholders and the Mt. Holly National Guard. Tickets of admission were in great demand and sold for as much as \$2.50. The local paper reported, "A large tree in the rear of the prison wall was filled with persons, who looked at a distance, like so many crows, perched on the limbs."

Philip Lynch stood 5'8" tall and weighed 180 pounds. He had a dark complexion, a pug nose, black hair and grey eyes. He was survived by a wife and two children, a four year old daughter and an 18 month old son. He was, at the time of his execution, approximately 30 years old.

The following are excerpts from the local paper about the arrest, trial and execution.

MURDER IN BORDENTOWN

September 29, 1859 ARREST OF THE MURDERER Brutal murder was committed in Bordentown, on Saturday night or Sunday morning, which created the greatest excitement throughout the neighborhood. The particulars are as follows: A man named George Coulter, a Scotchman, who had been engaged for several years past, as tenant farmer for Mr. A. Beckett, on the "Bonaparte Property," came into Bordentown, on Saturday evening, accompanied by his son James, a lad about 12 years old, for the purpose of selling some butter. He stopped first at Mr. Gordon's store, but being unable to dispose of his butter there, went to a small grocery, kept by an Irishman, where he sold it, and got a drink or two. While here, it commenced raining, and he was obliged to wait some time. When the rain ceased, he started for home with his little boy. When he reached the row of houses on the Trenton road, formerly belonging to Prince Murat, and which are occupied by Irish families, he saw a number of persons in one of them, and went in. They were engaged in raffling for a watch. Coulter took a chance for it and drank several times. Here he met an Irishman named Philip Lynch, who insisted that Coulter should go home with him and take a drink. Coulter, by this time, was considerably intoxicated. Soon after reaching Lynch's house, a man named Peter Condin came in. They drank several times, and while there, Lynch went upstairs and brought down his gun, standing it in the corner of the room. Coulter and Lynch soon after commenced talking of their strength, and it was proposed that Condin should measure their arms— which was done, and Lynch's arm decided to be the largest. This offended Coulter a little; but after another drink, he became satisfied, and left for home, Lynch and Condin accompanying him, followed by the boy. When about 200 yards from the house, a dispute occurred between Coulter and Lynch, and they clinched. Lynch fell down, with Coulter on top. Condin relaxed Coulter's grasp. When they got up, Coulter desired to "make up and be friends." Lynch was greatly excited and said "I'll be damned if I will." The little boy became very much frightened and begged Condin to take him home. This was between 11 and midnight. Condin went home with the boy, but when he returned, he could neither see nor hear anything of Coulter or Lynch. Early in the morning, the dead body of Coulter was found by the roadside, near where Condin left him and Lynch. The head, face and neck were cut and mangled in a shocking manner, presenting a sickening and terrible appearance. Pieces of the stock of a gun and a lock were found near the body. The particulars of the previous evening's proceedings being made known, search was at once instituted for Lynch, when he was found in one of the back streets. His house was searched and his gun found under the bed, the stock broken, the lock off, and the barrel considerably bent. There were also marks of blood upon it. The pieces of the stock and lock, found near the body, were tried on the gun, and fitted exactly. A bloody shirt was found in the bottom of a cradle. There was also blood upon the floor, where he washed his boots. Spots of blood were likewise found upon his boots. From all the information that could be obtained, it is supposed that after Condin left Lynch and Coulter, they got to quarreling again, and Lynch getting the better of him, perhaps knocking him senseless, he then went home, got his gun, came back

and beat him to death. The evidence before the Coroner's Jury being conclusive, a verdict was rendered that George Coulter came to his death by blows inflicted upon him by Philip Lynch, with a gun. Lynch was brought to Mount Holly, on Sunday afternoon, and lodged in Jail. He still denies knowing anything of the occurrence, and says that Coulter is complete stranger to him. The trial of Lynch will not take place until the December term of our Court.

January 5, 1860 TRIAL OF LYNCH. The trial was commenced in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, on Thursday morning. The State was represented by Garritt S. Cannon, Esq., Prosecutor of the Pleas, and Ewan Merritt, Esq., appeared for the prisoner. A Jury was obtained without any unusual delay. Several Jurors, as their names were called, asked to be excused, stating that their conscientious scruples were such as would prevent them from agreeing to a verdict which would result in the capital punishment of the Defendant. They were excused. The following is the Jury empanelled: Stacy Joyce, Jesse A. Thomas, George M. Evans, Aaron Lewis, Levi Rogers, Samuel Tatem, William C. Stokes, Benjamin S. Rogers, John H. Antrim, William Bryan, Jr., Solomon Shinn, Joseph L. Budd. Mr. Cannon then opened the case on the part of the Prosecution--giving a clear and concise statement of the facts as they would appear in evidence. The first witness called, was Mrs. Maria Coulter, the widow of the deceased ... James Coulter, 12 year old son of the deceased, was then sworn: The last time I went with father into Bordentown, was on Saturday night. We went to Mr. Beckett's, then to Bordentown: went to Francis B. Gordon's store: went to sell some butter... we turned and saw Lynch and father fighting; father was on top of Lynch; Lynch told Peter Conlin to take father off, he took him off; they both got up and father wanted to make friends; father said, "won't you make friends, Phil?" Phil said he'd be damned to hell if he would; then I cried for Peter to take me home. On Cross-Examination, James said: I only drank once at Kane's raffle... father first proposed measuring arms; father got angry because Phil's arms were biggest... Phil and father were both scarcely able to walk when they came out; it was because father was hardly able to walk, that I was afraid to take him home; Phil and father were about evenly drunk; Peter was not quite so drunk; he took no liquor from Phil's; they drank it all up.. Dr. Henry H. Longstreet testified to the nature of the wounds upon the head and neck of the murdered man. Saw his body on Sunday, September 25th ...horribly bruised about the head, face and neck; there were three large wounds. upon the head. He made a post mortem examination, assisted by Dr. Young, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The wounds... on the head might have been made with any kind of club. They could have been made with a gun-barrel..... Peter Conlin sworn: Was at Lynch's house the night Coulter was killed; was passing by about 11 o'clock, heard voices and went in: found Lynch and wife, Coulter and his boy-- the boy who was here today: there was a bottle on the table: they were talking about their work and their strength: I measured their arms with a cord: was asked to do it: could not say by which of the two: I was asked to give a decision of the strength and size of arms, and measured them with that view: I said Phil had the thickest, when in fact George had: I decided so, so as to keep Phil in a good humor ... Had known Coulter 3 years. Never heard Coulter talking about his strength before that night. When I decided against Coulter, I did not see that he became angry. Phil hit me with hand and foot both. I made no remonstrance. The scuffle and the striking me, both took place at the same place. Coulter was

on Lynch. Both were angry and wanted to fight. As soon as I put them apart, I went right on. I was pretty tight that night.... The boy did not cry till the scuffle--then I took pity on the boy. To State's Counsel: -- Didn't resent being knocked down--because both the men were drunk and I was drunk, too, and I didn't want to have a fuss... saw Lynch with a gun three or four weeks before the murder. It was in good condition. Had lock, stock and barrel. Thought the gun produced in Court, the same....

The efforts of Defendant's counsel were directed to showing that the prisoner, if convicted at all, could only be convicted of Manslaughter, or at most, of Murder in the Second Degree. The case was submitted to the Jury, under the Charge of the Court, about 3 o'clock on Saturday afternoon. After an absence of an hour, they rendered a verdict of Guilty of Murder in the First Degree. The prisoner heard the announcement with the utmost composure.

SENTENCE OF THE PRISONER. Lynch was brought into Court on Tuesday morning, to receive his sentence. The Court room was crowded to overflowing. A number of ladies occupied seats back of the Judges. Judge Van Dyke gave a brief review of the case, detailing the principal circumstances, and then stated to the prisoner that all that remained for the Court was to pronounce the sentence of the law upon him, and asked him if he had anything to say why such sentence should not be pronounced. He replied: "Yes, your honor, I've much to say." He then talked for a considerable time, but positively denied knowing anything of the murder. Lynch, we think, undoubtedly believed that the Court would take his remarks into consideration, and not sentence him at once. When he was told by the Judge, that what he had said, could not alter the matter, and that the Court must proceed with the sentence, which was, that he be taken back to the jail, and there remain until Friday, the twenty-third day of March, when, between the hours of 10 and 4 o'clock of said day, he should be taken to the place of execution, and hanged by the neck, until he was dead--he became perfectly furious, and gave such an exhibition of malignant ferocity and diabolical hatred and revenge, as, we believe, was never before witnessed by any one present. As soon as the last word of the sentence had fallen from the lips of the Judge, the countenance of Lynch exhibited all the ferocity of a fiend, and he exclaimed in loud tones, "and may the Devil die with ye."-- He swore in the most terrible manner, told the Judge there would be a higher Judge to pass sentence upon him, that he would have revenge upon all who have been concerned against him, and turning to the Prosecuting Attorney, said, "And I'll be after you as soon as the breath leaves my body." He continued his horrible execrations and profanity, until he entered the prison. In a short time, he became comparatively calm, and permitted the officers to chain him without any difficulty. He told the Sheriff ... "If you do hang me, I'll be back before night, after all of you."

REMARKS BY THE JUDGE AT SENTENCING: The prisoner, surrounded by a number of Constables, was ordered to stand up, when Judge Van Dyke addressed him as follows: Philip Lynch, You have been indicted by the Grand Jury, for the crime of Murder. You have been tried by a Jury, almost of your own selecting. You have had the aid of able, laborious and faithful counsel. You have had a period of three months to prepare for your trial, but notwithstanding all these advantages, the Jury, under the evidence, has been compelled to find you guilty in the first degree. With this verdict, the Court is entirely satisfied--for we do not see how the

Jury could well have done otherwise. The evidence in this case, has disclosed an amount of cruelty and ferocity, on your part, which scarcely has a parallel in the country. What earlier grudge you had against George Coulter, if any, we know not; but your first meeting, on the night in question, that we know of: was at a raffle. . . There, after indulging for a time, both of you, in the miserable practice of drinking, you invited him into your house ... and after still further trying to brutalize yourselves with liquor, Conlin started with Coulter and his son, with a view to take them home. Along with them, at a still later hour, and without any invitation, or request, and for what reason we know not, you also started to go... You and the deceased, having been left together, with no one else present, he seems to have made his way, some fifty yards, to the sidewalk and gate of Mr. Wood, and there he either fell down, lay down, or was possibly knocked down. You then went home and got your gun, and in the lateness and darkness of the night, when you supposed no human eye could see you, you again returned to him, and with merciless cruelty, beat and thrust him to death, in the most shocking and revolting manner, bending your gun-barrel, forcing it from the lock, and scattering the stock in broken fragments, over the ground. Leaving him weltering in his blood, with his life ebbing out with the crimson tide, you again sought the shelter of your own house, and while the quiet people of Bordentown, were startled by this scene of horror, on the morning of the sacred Sabbath, you, with the blood in your house, with the blood upon your garments, and with the blood upon your hands, went forth denying that you had ever known the man...

EXECUTION OF PHILIP LYNCH. On Friday morning last (March 23, 1860), Philip Lynch, convicted at the December term of the Court, of the murder of George Coulter, suffered the extreme penalty of the law, in the yard of the County Jail... The murder of Coulter was one of peculiar atrocity... Lynch's violent conduct when the sentence was pronounced by the Court, his profanity and threats against the State's Counsel, are no doubt fresh in the minds of our readers. Since the sentence, he has conducted himself comparatively well, and his keepers have had little or no difficulty with him. He has received those who have visited him, pleasantly, and appeared glad to have persons come and see him... He had, or pretended to have, an idea that he could come back to earth again, after death. He has, since his sentence, disclaimed any ill-will towards any one, but said he wanted to come back, that he might see his little girl-for whom he always expressed a very strong attachment. He said he thought more about his little girl than anything else: she used to go part of the way with him, when he went to work in the morning, and came to meet him, when he was returning home in the evening... On Friday morning, after good breakfast of beef-steak, he was taken to the cell of the condemned man, but he refused to eat anything-saying he didn't want any breakfast. In reply to a question, by the Keeper, as to how he had rested during the night, he said, "Very well". Soon after, his Counsel, Mr. Merritt, visited him, and informed him that the effort to obtain a writ of error in his case had failed, and that his fate was sealed. He cast his eyes upon the floor for a moment, but raised them immediately, and said he was ready. About 10 o'clock, the Rev. Father Bolles entered his cell, and in half an hour afterwards, the sister of the prisoner arrived, and was admitted. The two remained with Lynch till the hour for the execution approached. His sister had a babe in her arms. She was very much affected at parting with him, and wept bitterly. He shook hands with her, kissed her on the forehead as she leaned over him, and bade her good-bye. He

betrayed no emotion whatever. His wife visited him for the last time, on Tuesday.--She tried hard to persuade him to pray, but unsuccessfully... A white shroud was then produced, which he suffered to be put upon him--he himself buttoning the belt and the wristbands. While doing so, he enquired of the Sheriff, if his wife had sent the shroud. The Sheriff answered "she did not." "If she had," he then said, very emphatically, "I wouldn't put it on"...All the time the Sheriff and his assistants were adjusting the noose about his neck, his lips were in motion, but the only word that could be distinguished, was "Christ." Whether he was engaged in an imprecation upon his enemies or (what is the more charitable conclusion) in prayer, could not be determined. All things being in readiness, the prisoner was conducted from his cell into the yard...The gallows stood at the south-east end of the jail-yard, between the prison and the wall which surrounds the yard. It consisted simply of two uprights with a cross-beam... The black cap was drawn over his face, the noose adjusted, the Sheriff cut the rope with one blow of a hatchet, and at 20 minutes of 12, the weights fell... The wretched man was thrown upward with a tremendous jerk, giving a return fall of several feet, and in the opinion of the attending physicians, instantly dislocated his neck. After hanging about thirty minutes, the body was cut down and placed in a walnut-stained poplar coffin. His friends not having sent for the body, it was privately buried on Saturday night. We incline to the belief that the wretched man did not at any time--even when under the gallows--fully realize the fate that awaited him... Much credit is due Sheriff Thompson, for the humane manner in which the execution was conducted. He had a trying ordeal to pass through--but he performed the painful duty with a firmness and self-possession that was remarkable. His assistants rendered valuable service, and are also deserving of much praise... About one hundred and fifty persons witnessed the execution. Among the number, we noticed Sheriffs Wilson of Camden, Aumack of Ocean, and Ex-Sheriffs Dobbins, Pancoast and Gaskill, of this County (Burlington). Most of the members of the Board of Freeholders were also present. The National Guards of Mount Holly, and Marion Rifles of Burlington, were in attendance--a portion of them surrounding the gallows, while the remainder guarded the approaches to the Jail, and acted as sentinels around the wall. There was a large crowd of persons lining the fence of the yard, in front of the prison, while the execution was in progress. Tickets of admission were in great demand. We heard of several offers of five dollars being made for a ticket, and of one offer as high as ten dollars. A well-known citizen sold his ticket for \$2.50. But very few of those who had no tickets of admission, were able to obtain a glimpse of the execution. A large tree in the rear of the prison wall, was well filled with persons, who looked at a distance, like so many crows, perched on the limbs..We noticed also, a number of persons upon the roof of a barn in the neighborhood, and two or three upon the roof of a house: but what kind of a view, if any, they had of the proceedings, we are unable to say. A dozen or more women collected on some of the door-steps, nearly opposite the jail-- What they expected to see--whether they wished to "see the soldiers," or to gaze upon the blank wall, behind which a human being was being "hung by the neck until he was dead"--is more than we can imagine. The front windows of several of the dwelling houses, in the immediate vicinity, were closed. The gallows being just beneath the cell window of the prisoner Palmer (charged with the murder at Hampton's Gate), he had a fair opportunity of witnessing the execution. He was seen looking out the window; but the instant he saw that he was observed, he withdrew his head.

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