

# PRISON MUSEUM POST

Official Newsletter of the Historic Burlington County Prison Museum Association

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June 10, 2008

## 1959 TELEVISION SHOW FILMED IN MT. HOLLY TO BE SHOWN IN WARDEN'S HOUSE ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18

In 1959, an episode of a weekly television program called "Sunday Showcase" was filmed in Mt. Holly. It starred Tony Randall and Kim Hunter as a young couple who, disappointed at the town's failure to pass a local school tax, seek to find the "Secret of Freedom", which is the title of the show. The show is slow moving, wordy and as preachy as the day is long. For us, however, it is *simply fascinating* -- because it has Tony Randall walking up and down High Street, giving us a rare glimpse of Burlington County 50 years ago. He walks by the Old Courthouse, the Jail, the Washington House and the gas station where Mike McHale's Cobbler Shop is currently located. He stops in front of the old law office of PMA members Judge Ferrelli and the late Judge Haines at the corner of High and Grant. We are going to show it in the Warden's House on Wednesday, June 18. Coffee and cake will be served at 7 p.m., followed by the show at 7:30 p.m. The show is approximately 50 minutes long. If you would like to join us, please call the PMA Office at 609-518-7667 and leave a message on our answering machine.

## PRISON MUSEUM CONTINUES TO ATTRACT VISITORS FROM FAR AND WIDE; GIFT SHOP NEWS

Historic Burlington County Prison  
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Please help us preserve and promote the Prison Museum by joining the PMA. Our annual dues are only \$10. Membership benefits include a quarterly newsletter, event updates, 10% off gift shop purchases, and free admission to the museum. For an application, call the PMA office.

We have averaged several hundred visitors per month since we were featured on The Ghosthunters in March. We have had visitors from Virginia, Ecuador, Mexico, Massachusetts, California and New Hampshire. Last week we hosted the Bayonne Historical Society.

We have obtained a number of very nice items from the Mt. Holly Historical Society for sale in our gift shop, including throws with scenes Mt. Holly, wildflower note cards and copies of Henry Shinn's *History of Mount Holly*. We also

have new long and short sleeve shorts with our Haunted Prison logo. They should go like hotcakes and so you should come by and get a few before we are sold out! We now take credit cards and hope to be able to sell our quirky and interesting wares over the internet.

## **IN MEMORIAM**

The PMA offers its most sincere condolences to the family of PMA member Martin L. Haines. Judge Haines died on April 27, 2008. He was the son of Mt. Holly attorney Ralph Haines and the grandson of civil war veteran Martin Haines. He was raised in Vincentown and was a long time resident of Moorestown at the time of his death. His brother, who predeceased him, was the great and visionary cranberry farmer, William Haines, whose son Bill is one of our Freeholders. Judge Haines was a Superior Court Judge in Burlington County for many years. Just prior to his retirement in 1989, lawyers all over New Jersey voted him one of the two best judges in the state. He was a Past President of the New Jersey State Bar Association. He served in the Navy during World War II and had ships blown out from under him in both Europe and Asia. He was sophisticated, charming and keenly intelligent, and loved to stir up the pot with controversial ideas. He is survived by his wife, Berne.

The PMA also offers sincere condolences to PMA member Peggy Francis on the loss of her husband, the Honorable Robert Francis. Mrs. Francis is a descendant of former Burlington County sheriffs named Kirkbride and Haines. Ironically, she is distantly related to Judge Haines. Judge Francis was a Superior Court Judge in Gloucester County. PMA President Janet Sozio is an attorney who tried her first case in front of Judge Francis and can attest to the fact that his reputation as a superb judge and an all-round great guy was well deserved. He will be sorely missed.

## **EXECUTIONS IN BURLINGTON COUNTY**

PMA president Janet Sozio was asked to speak at the Law Day Ceremony on May 1, 2008 at the Olde Courthouse. Specifically, she was asked to speak about executions which occurred in Burlington County. We are attaching a copy of her speech for your enjoyment. She did not have time to discuss the execution of Charles Brooks in 1863 for the murder of his stepfather or the double execution



of Charles Brown and John Young for the robbery and murder in Riverside of Young's former employer. Curator Marisa Bozarth is currently researching where the condemned were buried. Wesley Warner is buried in Coopertown Friends' Meeting Cemetery on Route 130 behind Ott's Restaurant. Rufus Johnson and George Small are buried in New Lisbon.

## THIS 'N THAT

We gratefully acknowledge a generous donation made by PMA member and assistant county prosecutor Rocco Minnervino, Esquire... We were open for free the day of the car show and received \$200 in donations, which is probably more than we would have taken in admission receipts!.... We are sponsoring the annual Mt. Holly - Smithville Bike Race this year on July 19. The Mt. Holly Library has offered to handle the concessions. We hope this is the first of many joint ventures between our groups. We need volunteers to help us man the Jail that day. Give us a call if you would like to help out....

## SQUIRREL BREAKS INTO JAIL

A squirrel ran into the front door of the Jail twice on May 17. Each time, he ran up the outside steps and through the front door, made a quick left and ran up the stairs, through the tunnel and into the Warden's House. Several PMA members ran after him and chased him through the upstairs of the Warden's House, down the stairs and out the Grant Street door. Undaunted, he returned again the next day, May 18. Chief Volunteer Ron Reed chased after him as he ran into the Warden's House. This time, though, our little friend got stuck in our mousetrap. Ron was able to dislodge him from the mousetrap, whereupon the squirrel rolled over our insect trap, a paper with sticky stuff which lies on the floor. He was last seen scurrying up a tree with the sticky paper stuck to his back. This squirrel is quite spunky, to say the least. We have decided to make him our mascot. No disrespect to our friends at Smithville, but we think our squirrel has more on the ball than their moose, who always seems to wander about aimlessly. If a Bullwinkle ever needed a Rocky, it's that moose out at Smithville. Maybe we should get them together...

**Museum Hours:** Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday noon to 4 p.m.

(No admission after 3:30 p.m.)

**Admission Fee:** \$4 for adults, \$2 for students and seniors over age 55, and free for children under age 5. The tour is self guided. Guided tours and groups rates are also available. Call for further information.

<b>PRISON MUSEUM ASSOCIATION MEMBERS</b> <b>2008</b>
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**SPEECH GIVEN BY JANET L. SOZIO, ESQUIRE  
IN THE OLDE COURTHOUSE  
LAW DAY, MAY 1, 2008  
THE SPECTACLE OF EXECUTION  
IN BURLINGTON COUNTY**

I am an attorney and past president of the county bar association. My hobby is history and the Historic Burlington County Prison Museum Association, a volunteer group which assists the Burlington County Freeholders in the preservation and promotion of the historic jail. I've been a member for 25 years and the president for the last 10. Assistant Public Defender Kevin Walker, who coordinates Law Day activities, has asked me to speak about executions which occurred here in Burlington County.

In colonial times, New Jersey was divided into West and East Jersey, with Burlington City as the capitol of West Jersey. After independence, Burlington remained the county seat of Burlington County until 1795, when the seat was moved to Mt. Holly. The County Jail remained in Burlington, however, until 1811, when the county government finally came up with enough money to build a jail in Mt. Holly.

Between 1718 and 1811, when the Jail was in Burlington, there were 32 executions. Between 1811 and 1906, when the Jail was in Mt. Holly, there were 9 executions. In 1910, the State mandated that all future executions were to be carried out in Trenton. All of the executions in Burlington County were by hanging. Theoretically, the neck breaks and the person dies relatively quickly. But for it to work like this, you need a very thick rope, an expert hangman and a relatively heavy convict. Unfortunately, in our county, we had neither thick rope nor trained executioners. Furthermore, we had several skinny condemned souls. Thus, most of our executions were pretty grisly affairs.

Before 1811, hangings took place in or near Burlington, although we don't know exactly where. From 1811 through the 1850s, people were hanged from a tree out on Marne Highway. Hangings were public spectacles; people brought their families to enjoy a picnic lunch and the sight of a human being strangling to death. In the 1850s, a court ruling mandated that hangings were to be carried out with some semblance of dignity and privacy. After that, the condemned were hanged inside the Exercise Yard in the rear of the Prison, which is enclosed by high stone

walls. Admission was by ticket only. This didn't stop spectators from climbing up into trees and rooftops to observe the proceedings.

Of the 32 executions prior to 1811, 2 were for horse theft, 1 for home invasion, 2 for rape, 1 for treason, and 7 for burglary, the last execution for burglary being in 1772. Men named Anin and Shoemaker were hanged in 1766 for murdering an Indian woman. This is notable because in most places in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they would not have been tried at all. Two of those executed were women, three if a black person named Robin was a female.

The first of the 9 people hanged after 1811 (all for murder) was Eliza Freeman, a free black woman hanged for the murder of her husband, David Freeman. I always mention when I tell this story that I was once married to a man named David Freeman. Unlike Eliza's husband, he managed to survive our brief and uneventful marriage in one piece. Getting back to Eliza, the indictment, a copy of which survives, says that in February of 1832 she made a 6 inch long and 3 inch deep slit in her husband's throat with a razor valued at 25 cents. The valuing of murder weapons was apparently a holdover from English law. She remarked that her only regret was that she had to wipe his blood off the floor. She was reportedly hanged off the back of a buckboard -- the horse drawing it was scared off, leaving Eliza to twist in the wind.

The second hanged on the Marne Highway tree was Joel Clough, who hanged in 1833 for murdering his girlfriend, Mary Hamilton. The murder occurred in the boarding house in Bordentown where Clough lived. The victim's mother was his landlady. After a two-day bender in New York, the alcoholic and unemployed Clough called Mary, who had broken up with him, to his room. He asked her to marry him. Her reply -- "Not in your reduced circumstances" -- caused him to fly into a rage, pull out a dagger, and stab her into eternity. He escaped from the Jail while awaiting his sentence. He was caught, returned and hanged. It's notable that he was reported to have placed the rope around his own neck. No relatives came forward to claim the body. Rather than springing for the cost of a cemetery plot, the Freeholders had him buried in the Exercise Yard. The PMA exhumed him two years ago and a few of his bones are on display in our museum. (Only kidding! Workmen did dig up bones back there, but they are probably those of somebody's pet or dinner. We do display them and use poetic license by labeling them as Clough's remains. It's a conversation piece.) He is said to haunt the Jail. A few years ago, a man renovating an old house in Gloucester County found Joel's "Confession" in a wall. We have reproduced it and sell it in our gift shop for \$3.



Philip Lynch was the first person hanged in the Exercise Yard. He was convicted of the murder of George Coulter in 1859. Lynch was Irish, Coulter Scottish. They met in a bar in Bordentown. Coulter's child was with him. They argued over who was stronger, specifically, whose arm was bigger. They walked home together and started fist fighting along the road. Lynch knocked Coulter senseless, then went home, got his gun, and came back to where Coulter lay in the road and finished him off. He didn't shoot him -- he beat him with the gun. Go figure. Coulter's child was a witness. The interesting thing about this execution was that it wasn't performed on a gallows. This was the first execution that had to be held in the "privacy" of the prison yard, and there were no trees there at that time. Instead of building a gallows, county officials built a contraption with a pulley, hook and weights. The rope was cut and the weights dropped, causing Lynch's 5'2" tall, 180-pound body to be flung through the air in what must have been a horrible sight.

Wesley Warner was hanged in 1894 for the murder of his girlfriend, Lizzie Peak. Warner was a 27-year-old Burlington native, the father of four, who left his wife to run off with the beautiful Lizzie Peak, a Mt. Holly girl hussy was living in sin with her sugar daddy in Burlington, a man named Bunting. They went to New York, and returned a year later with a baby they said they had "found". Warner got a job at the Fairgrounds State Fair in Mt. Holly, working a concession stand. (Where the Fairgrounds Plaza and Acme are now.) Lizzie would come to see him each night to get money and openly flirted with other men. Warner, who was a drunk, planned her murder. He screwed up his courage with liquor while Lizzie went out with her 2 sisters and their 3 male companions for an evening at the Mt. Holly opera followed by a bicycle ride. Warner laid in wait in the bushes on Pine Street with his knife. He jumped out, exclaiming "God damn you, Lizzie!", and slit her throat in the presence of the 5 witnesses. He was apprehended the next day and tried and convicted within 3 months. He appealed and lost. He dangled for 22 minutes on the gallows before succumbing. We have a photograph of the gallows on display in the museum. The case incited a lot of local interest since Lizzie was from a notorious Mt. Holly family. Her brother Barclay was at the time serving a sentence in state prison for murdering *his* girlfriend, who also happened to be his cousin. Barclay had originally been sentenced to death for his crime, which sentence was overturned on appeal. His life sentence was the result of a plea bargain. Hundreds of spectators lined the rooftops on Grant Street to witness Wesley's demise. A tabloid, sensationalized account of the crime and punishment was published and widely circulated. We sell a copy

of it in our gift shop for \$3. If you buy both the Clough and Warner books, they're two for \$5. A true bargain if there ever was one.

The last two murderers hanged at our jail were Rufus Johnson and George Small. The victim was Florence Allinson, a cultivated Englishwoman employed as a governess at a residence for homeless children owned by the Strawbridge family in Moorestown. A 4 year old named Bessie led a deliveryman to her body in the barn. She had been brutally beaten. The crime was solved within days, one of the early triumphs of the celebrated Burlington County detective Ellis Parker. Johnson and Small were traced through a valuable English watch they stole from the victim. Parker's patient prodding of little Bessie, aided and abetted by his offerings of gumdrops, produced the fact that the watch had been taken by the men. Johnson was caught trying to sell it in Baltimore. They were hanged together in the yard on March 6, 1906, two months after the crime.

New Jersey abolished the death penalty in December of 2007. Only a couple of states have abolished it. There have been no executions in New Jersey since 1976.

Last month, the US Supreme Court ruled that death by lethal injection is not unconstitutional. Justice Stevens disagreed in a dissent. 92 countries have abolished it, including Canada, all European countries, Australia, New Zealand and Mexico. 62 countries still execute criminals, although in many places, such as Africa and South America, execution is used rarely, for example, for treason. The United States of America, and countries in the Middle, Near and Far East are among the few places where execution is relatively routinely used.

I invite everyone to come to the Historic Jail, where our curator, Marisa Bozarth, and our Chief Volunteer, Ron Reed, will be more than happy to tell you more about the prisoners who served time here in Burlington County. Please consider joining the Prison Museum Association. We have a nifty publication which issues about five times per year. I'll leave copies for you to pick up on the way out. The publication gives our website address, which we urge you to visit. Thank you.