

*Twenty Feet High and
Ten Years Wide:
A History of Prison
Escapes From The
Lancaster County Jail*

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*T*he Lancaster Prison—What a lovely place. Why would anyone want to leave? One would think that the walls were to keep people out, not in! Well, believe it or not, many people have tried to escape from the various Lancaster prisons, quite a few successfully.

Before leaping into the subject of Lancaster jailbreaks proper, let's see a little about the history of Lancaster County jails so that we know who's escaping from what.

The whereabouts and whatzits of the first jail are still a bit foggy. Tradition mentions a wooden jail at Postlethwaite's Tavern, our first courthouse. Tradition also speaks of a jail on the property of Robert

Barber, the first sheriff, in Columbia. Both are supported by evidence which has been presented elsewhere.

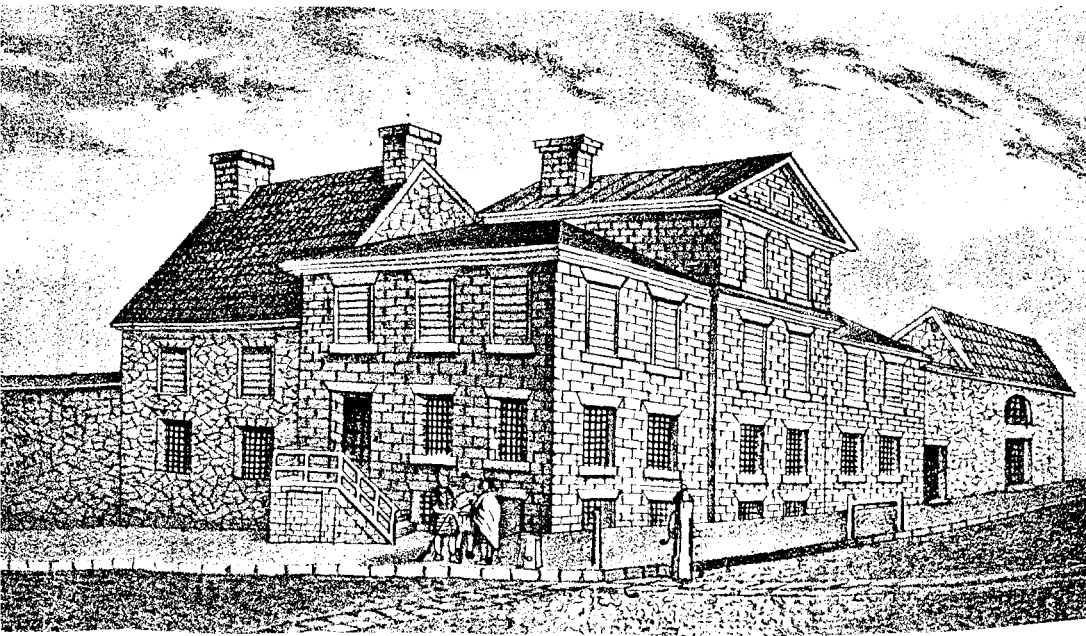
The next jail was on the west side of North Prince Street near the site of the present Fulton Opera House.¹ It was built around 1737. This was used until the early 1850s when it was declared obsolete and too small.

The new prison, which is still in use but greatly altered, was built in 1852. Originally the prison had three towers at the front not just the two now seen. This third tower, which was above the entrance, was removed in the 1800s. Since then there have been many improvements and expansions resulting in our present prison.²

Getting back to the subject of jailbreaks itself, the reader should realize that, after a thorough analysis, there are only five basic ways to escape from a jail. The prisoner can go over the wall, under the wall, or through the wall. He can mingle with nonprisoners and leave with them. Lastly, he can have someone else get him out, sparing himself all the trouble.

The latter method was the type used by four men on October 26, 1737. The four men, Daniel Lowe, George Bare, Philip Yeiger, and Bernard Weymer, had been associated with Thomas Cresap, the Marylander infamous for his actions in the bloody skirmishes that took place in the Pennsylvania-Maryland border war.³ Some of the citizens of Maryland felt that the four had been incarcerated unjustly and a few took it upon

Lancaster County erected its first jail in the 1730's at the northwest corner of North Prince and West King streets. Attached to the jail was a workhouse. This structure, with occasional additions, survived until the present prison was built in 1852. A portion of the rear stone wall along Water Street was incorporated into the Fulton Hall.



themselves to right the situation. Their actions were described to the Council in Philadelphia as follows:

. . . on Wednesday the twenty-sixth day of October last, about twelve of the clock in the night, John Charleton, the Captain of the Maryland Garrison, with sundry other persons unknown, to the Number of about Sixteen, armed with Guns, Pistols, and Cutlasses, broke into the house of said Richard Lowdon, adjoining the Prison of the said county, and getting into his Bed Chamber, where he & his wife then lay, pulled them out of Bed, and presenting cock'd Pistols to their Breasts, demanded the Keys of the Gaol, that the Doors might be sett open, and the sundry prisoners . . . sett at Liberty.⁴

The attackers claimed that the four men “belonged to the Province of Maryland” and threatened to shoot Lowdon, Keeper of the prison, if he didn't do exactly as they commanded.

Frances Lowe, the sister of Prisoner Daniel Lowe, had, by visiting Daniel frequently, noticed where the keys to the prison were kept at night. She started looking in drawers around the room until she happened to find the right one—and the keys. The attackers could then continue their mission:

. . . the said Charleton & his Associates required the Said Richard Lowdon forthwith to take the Keys, open the Doors himself, & to dismiss the aforesaid prisoners, upon pain of instant Death which he perempterily refused to do, even tho' they should carry their threats against him into Execution;* that one of the Company took the said Keys, unlocked the Gaol Doors, & calling to the said four prisoners, they came forth and with the said armed Company rode off towards Maryland; . . . Lowdon's Wife and Maid endeavoring to escape, in order to give the Alarm, were seized by some of the said Company, kick'd and beat, and the whole family were held & detained, so that no timely Notice could be given in the town of Lancaster of this Action until the Rioters were all gone off.⁵

This escape was, of course, no small event. It was the only time in Lancaster history where the prison was taken over by outside armed force. A letter was sent to Governor Ogle of Maryland by the Council demanding that Charleton and his accomplices be delivered to the Pennsylvania authorities and that the escaped prisoners be returned to the Lancaster prison. The letter said of Charleton that “there is nothing . . . too heinous for him to undertake.”⁶

Ogle, needless to say, did not return the prisoners or turn over Charleton. He implied that some Pennsylvanians may have been involved in the escape,⁷ though he did eventually admit that the attack was “a very wrong proceeding.”⁸ With this note the episode fades into the history of interstate politics, a maze from which we can safely state it will never escape.

Records pertaining to the early history of the Lancaster County prisons are missing. Other records of the period such as the newspapers, lack detail. Because of these two rather frustrating facts we have to jump a bit in time for our next notable escape.

During the Revolutionary War Lancaster became a center for holding prisoners of war by virtue of its geographical location and available resources.⁹ Many of the prisoners were housed in the barracks, built about 1776, which is presently thought to have been located on the northwest corner of what has become East Walnut and North Duke Streets.¹⁰ A plan of the barracks appeared in the *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society*, Vol. 84, No. 3, pp. 132-133.

Escapes of the prisoners of war from the barracks appear to have been rather common. William Atlee explained the problem to Joseph Reed, the President of Pennsylvania, in a letter dated August 6th 1781.

... I beg leave to trouble your Excellency, to express my wishes that the duty here could be preformed by the militia of the Town only, or that we might at least have one Company of the Town militia always on duty; they seem to me to be much better officered than the militia from the Country and being more accustomed to duty, are better qualified for keeping in order a set of artful fellows who frequently persuade some of these from the Country, as well officers as privates, when on duty to let them from the Barracks on various pretences; by which means they get opportunities of straggling into the country and with the assistance of the disaffected make their escape.¹¹

The escapees had good reason to want to leave. Apparently the barracks held as many as two thousand prisoners of war at a time—over twenty-five people to one room.¹² That's a bit two crowded for most sardines, let alone human beings.

While some prisoners were just sort of walking away from the barracks, there were other, more original, ideas. One of these ideas were recorded in a letter from Colonel Adam Hubley to President Reed dated May 21, 1781.

A daring plot was discovered on the night of the 16th instant at the barracks, in which are confined the British Prisoners, which however by the early intelligence we received was happily frustrated. About 11 o'clock at night I was called upon by the officer of the Guard who informed me a soldier of the 71st regiment had come to the guard house (one of ye Blockhouses) desiring admittance; that he had a matter of importance to communicate; he was accordingly admitted and gave the following intelligence. The sergeants of the prisoners had a private and unanimous meeting that day and formed a plan to effect the escape of the whole, viz: They, after their meeting broke up informed the prisoners of their resolution and gave direction for the whole to be in readiness on the proceeding to avail themselves of the opportunity when the Gates opened for the delivery of their wood—the whole would rush out, surprise the Guard and disarm them; they would then proceed to town where a certain inhabitant (his name we cannot find out), would conduct them to a Magazine of arms and ammunition; these they were also to take, then to fight their way thro' the Country and effect their escape.

I immediately on receiving the information, after making some necessary dispositions of the Guard, entered the Barrack yard, and ordered the whole of the sergeants (upwards of forty in number), to parade which after some time was effected; I then gave them in charge of the Guard and had them conducted to the jail where they are now safely lodg'd. We have 800 prisoners here.

Colonel Hubley went on to say that he felt that once the prisoners cleared the barracks guard, they would have had very little trouble doing what they wanted because "the number of disaffected people thro' this country is very considerable."¹³

The most interesting set of Revolutionary War escapes involved all of the intrigue common to a Hollywood spy feature. It seems that, during the Revolution, prisoners kept disappearing from the barracks, in spite of increased security. George Washington was notified of the problem and he sent General Hazen to put things in order. Believing that the prisoners were being aided by Americans, Hazen devised a strategy to catch the conspirators.

Hazen chose a Captain Lee of the American Army to "assume the dress of a British prisoner" while the news was spread around that Lee was absent on "furlough or command." Lee was given a story to use about how he was supposedly captured and delivered to the barracks. His mission was to see if he could uncover any plans of escape. Lee's disguise was, so good in fact that the superintendent of prisoners, who knew Lee, did not even recognize him though he saw the new "prisoner" daily.

Lee's apparently slightly fictionalized odyssey was described as follows:

For many days he remained in this situation, making no discoveries whatever. He thought he perceived at times signs of intelligence between the the prisoners and an old woman who was allowed to bring fruit for sale within the enclosure. She was known to be deaf and half-witted, and was therefore no object of suspicion. It was known that her son had been disgraced and punished in the American army, but she had never betrayed any malice on that account, and no one dreamed that she could have the power to do injury if she possessed the will. Lee watched her closely, but saw nothing to confirm his suspicions . . .

Lee was awake around midnight one stormy night in autumn thinking about what he had gotten himself into when things began to happen.

All at once the door was gently opened, and a figure moved silently into the room. It was too dark to observe its motions narrowly, but he could see that it stooped towards one of the sleepers who immediately rose; next it approached and touched him [Lee] on the shoulder. Lee immediately started up; the figure then allowed a slight gleam from a dark lantern to pass over his face, and as it did so, whispered, impatiently, "not the man—but come!" The unknown whispered to him to keep his place till another man was called; but just at that moment something disturbed him and making a signal to Lee to follow, he moved silently out of the room.

They found the door of the house unbarred, and a small part of the fence removed, where they passed out without molestation; the Sentry had retired to a shelter where he thought he could guard his post without suffering from the rain; but Lee saw his conductors put themselves in preparation to silence him if he should happen to address them. Just without the fence appeared a stooping figure, wrapped in a red cloak and supporting itself with a large stick, which Lee at once perceived could be no other than the old fruit woman. But the most profound silence was observed; a man came out from a thicket at a

little distance and joined them, and the whole party moved onward by the guidance of the old woman. At first they frequently stopped to listen but having heard the Sentinel cry "all's well," they seemed re-assured, and moved with more confidence than before.

The group finally reached the old woman's cottage, about a mile away.

A table was spread with some coarse provisions upon it and a large jug, which one of the soldiers was about to seize, when the man who conducted them withheld him "No," said he, "we must first proceed to business." He then went to a small closet, from which he returned with what seemed to have been originally a Bible, though now it was worn to a mahogany color and a spherical form. While they were doing this, Lee had time to examine his companions; one of them was a large quiet looking soldier, the other a short stout man with much the aspect of a villain. They examined him in turn, and as Lee had been obliged formerly to punish the shorter soldier severely, he felt some misgivings when this fellow's eyes rested upon him. The conductor was a middle aged harsh looking man, whom Lee had never seen before.

The "conductor" wanted the men to swear on the Scriptures that they would not try to escape or reveal who had helped them. The prisoners wanted to drink instead. It flashed through Lee's mind that he might be hanged as a spy. At this point the alarm gun was heard, the conductor dropped the Bible and the group left the house.

For the next two or three hours the company stumbled through the woods, Lee feeling that he couldn't leave because he hadn't yet discovered enough information. Eventually they were led to a barn where they spent the rest of the night and the next day. When day came, horsemen came and inquired about the missing prisoners. Lee gathered that their escape was as mysterious as ever.

The group continued toward the Delaware River, passing their days in barns, caves, cellars, and even in a tomb (the bodies, if there were any, had been removed). After the twelfth day, the soldier Lee had punished gave him away, though Lee, who was in a different room was not supposed to know.

Finally on the bank of the Delaware Lee was left alone with the soldier he had punished, and who wanted revenge. A fight ensued but was stopped by a group of local militia. The two were placed in jail. When a letter from Lee was taken to General Lincoln he was released immediately.

Lee returned to Lancaster and retraced his steps. Fifteen people who aided in the escape were "brought to justice."¹⁴

After this rather dramatic episode, we are again forced to slide a bit in time. It is known that in 1807 a coat of plaster was "wanting to be put on the inside of the wall of the Gaol yard"¹⁵ Presumably to make scaling the wall a more difficult task. In 1813 the wall where the firewood was kept appeared "to require immediate repairs—in order to prevent escapes"¹⁶ which had previously occurred at that spot.

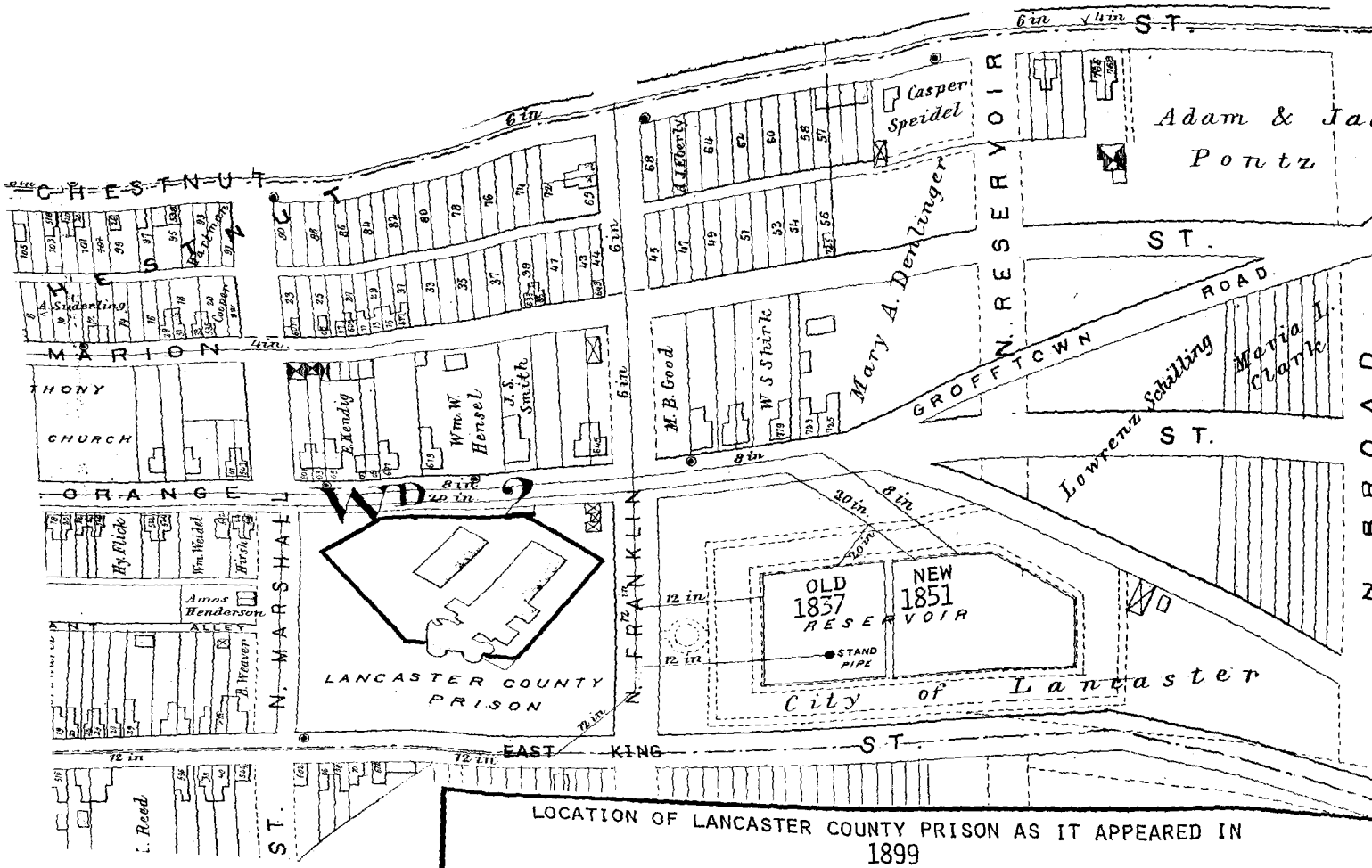
The next attempted escape of note occurred in 1832. The potential escapee was Daniel Shaeffer, who had turned himself in to the sheriff after he murdered Elizabeth Bowers of Maytown. Shaeffer was sentenced to death. Mr. Shaeffer can best describe his thoughts and actions so I will turn the narration over to him.

The Sheriff got the Death Warrant at last; and when it was read to me, my soul sank within me, though I said but little and appeared resigned. And then it came into my head, which I never thought of before, to make my escape. . .

It was long before I could determine upon the best plan by which to escape. I thought of many schemes, but none seemed likely to succeed. I examined the bars of my window, which looked into the yard, but I had no means of sawing them apart, and I tried to force them, but found they were too strong. For a while it appeared to me that my best method would be to take off my hopples [leg shackles] and conceal them behind me, and when Mr. Reed would enter my room with my provisions, to suddenly knock him down, take the keys from him, and find my way to the street door. I had heard of such things before—but I soon gave over the idea, for, upon reflection, it did not appear to me likely to succeed, and I had been so kindly treated by Mr. Reed, that I do not believe I could have brought myself to do him any harm.

At last, one afternoon, while I was sitting on my bed, my eye caught a part of the floor which had been patched, and I at once determined that I would rip it up, and make the attempt that very night—When I had been in prison before, for stealing the petticoat from John Myer's wife, I had not been confined to my room, except at night, but had permission, during the day, to walk about the house, as well as in the yard. I recalled that the entry which opened into the brick yard was under my room and thought that if once I could let myself down into the entry, it would be an easy matter to get into the yard. When Mr. Reed left me in the evening, I kept awake till all was quiet. I suppose it must have been between eleven and twelve o'clock when I began. I had no handcuffs, and only a light pair of hopples on my feet, and I soon screwed them off with a large spike nail which I pulled from the wall. Then, after much time and labor, I succeeded in opening a hole in the floor, with the spike nails and broken hopples. Things went on far better than I had expected, for through this hole I could swing myself on to the stairs which went into the entry. I opened the back door without a great deal of trouble; and when I was once more in the open air, and saw the sky above me again, I thought that surely I was now safe.

I had to remain quiet for quite a while, for several persons were talking very loud in the street and they appeared to be quarrelling. They made such noise that I felt very much afraid that they would awake Mr. Reed and alarm the neighborhood. At last some new person came up, (I took it to be the watchman, or a constable) and he said "damn you, if you don't hush up and clear out, I'll put you where the dogs won't bite you!" After that, they all went away together and I sat still on the step hardly daring to breathe, when I heard the clock strike two; then I thought it time to be doing something. I got up and searched about the yard for a log of wood or piece of plank, but there was none to be found. I then felt the wall from one end of the yard to the other, in hopes of finding some crack by which I could climb to the top, but all appeared to be quite smooth. I returned to my room, and took my bedstead apart, and brought it with the bed and blankets to the yard. —then I broke the bedstead to pieces and cut up the blankets into strips, with which I tied the pieces of bedstead together, so as to make a sort of pole. I next filled an old pair of pantaloons with brickbats, and tied the bundle to the end of a rope, which I made by cutting the chaff bags into strips. I thought that by putting the bedstead pole



LOCATION OF LANCASTER COUNTY PRISON AS IT APPEARED IN 1899

against the wall, I could climb partly up and fling the pantaloons over the wall, where they would catch, and so enable me to draw myself to the top, from which I could easily jump, or let myself down. But it was too weak for my weight, and I scarcely got a foot upon the pole, before it broke, and fell with me to the ground. I took it apart, and tied the pieces of blanket to the rope made by my chaff bag, and then I had a rope larger than to the top of the wall. I flung the bricks up to the wall time after time, but they would never catch, and always fell back again, and once struck me in falling, and nearly stunned me. I now despaired for I saw plainly that escape was hopeless.

At last day broke, and I had nothing to do but return to my room for I could hear them stirring through the prison. I had hardly got in again when I heard Mr. Reed passing through the upper entry, and, after some conversation with the prisoners in the other rooms, he came into mine. I threw myself upon the floor, and pretended to be fast asleep, but he soon saw what was wrong; for I had been so hurried that I had left everything in the yard, and the hole in the floor was uncovered. He appeared thunderstruck, and called me up and said he could hardly believe it of me. He then hallooed for another person, and they brought up the broken bedstead and blanket strips from the yard, and fastened strong irons upon me, by which I found that it was useless to make another attempt.¹⁷

Daniel Shaeffer was equally unlucky, or would unskillful be a more correct term, in escaping from prison as he was in escaping the noose. He was hanged on April 14, 1832.

In 1850 a law was passed by the Pennsylvania General Assembly creating a Board of Prison Inspectors. The Board of Inspectors was required by law to submit a report on or before the first Monday of the first term of the Court of Quarter Sessions every year.¹⁸ Luckily for us, most of these reports still exist.

The first escapes of note which they record occurred in 1858. In this year John Becker and Henry Jones escaped. John Becker, a basket maker, was the first to escape. He was allowed to go in and out of the yard so that he could prepare the willow branches from which he made baskets. For this reason the back door to his cell was left open. The usual job of closing the door belonged to one of the underkeepers. On May 29th this particular underkeeper, with the proper permission, took the day off, leaving the other underkeeper to do "double duty." Because of this, the closing of the outside doors was left until a later time than usual.

Becker, "a man of no mean sagacity and cunning," had closed the door himself—almost. He didn't latch it. The underkeeper doing double duty thought that one of the watchmen was kind enough to close it for him and didn't check it himself. The prisoner then made his escape in the following way:

During the night the prisoner gathered enough of small fragments of waste yarn & other material similar, deposited in a compost heap in the garden, together with remnants of basket timber & fish net bows none of which sticks were more than 2 feet & some [were] 18 inches long, to make a ladder with which he scaled the wall. The telegraph alarm upon the Parapet wall, had been

accidentally discharged the day before by a prisoner whitewashing around it, and unbeknown to the keeper or any of the assistants, so that there was really no obstacle to his escape.¹⁹

To facilitate the return of the prisoner, handbills were printed and handed out and advertisements taken out in local newspapers. A reward of fifty dollars was offered. Becker was returned on July 31st to serve out his term.

The next escapee was Henry Jones. Jones was one of those who, by force of necessity, had learned the art of escaping. Before he found the need to escape from the Lancaster jail, Jones had escaped from both the Chester County Prison and the Lehigh County Prison.

Jones' cell was one of those which had two rear cell doors, one at the end of the cell, the other a ways in. The former being constructed of wood and the latter sheeted with iron. The iron door was closed by sliding it into the wall and was secured by a bolt "running through a hasp or strap of iron which ran horizontally across the door, and extended some 10 inches beyond the cage and farther into the wall," and completely out of view. The "hasp" was found to be completely broken off and was recovered after the prisoner's escape. The break was not new, so the door had been in this deteriorated state for quite a while. Jones merely opened the inside cell door and walked through.

Jones next encountered the wooden door. This door was constructed of one and one-half inch ash planking. He made his way past this obstacle, and to freedom, in the following manner:

The prisoner was confined in a room containing a loom and as [it] is customary to furnish each loom with some sort of knife for weaving purposes, so one had had been left sticking in this loom which had been in use but 2 or 3 days before Jones came into prison. This knife was the veriest stump of an old shoe knife, and with it[he] cut out the panel of the door 6¼ inches wide, and about 14 inches long, through which he passed into the yard. He built a staging from some building materials which was being used then in roofing over a Cell yard for a shop: that it was not carelessness or negligence to leave this material in the yard will readily be understood when it is stated that it was only carried there the day before and required but a couple of days, two or three at the most, to complete the job and that there was no room to store and lock it up, it was absolutely necessary to have the material convenient to the work. As before singularly unfortunate, the telegraph alarm had been discharged and run down by a Prisoner whitewashing around it a day before, and not heard by any of the Officers of the prison, consequently no alarm was given when he scaled the wall.

After scaling the wall Jones was free. He was not recaptured within the year.²⁰

Several daring escape attempts occurred during the Civil War years. These attempts were recorded by one of the watchmen at the prison in his "Watchmen's Register;" after all he was *almost* literate.

For instance, on June 13th, 1862 the watchman caught John Henson trying to dig out. Henson was punished by being placed in a new cell and not given any breakfast.²¹

Later the same year John Frankford, whom we'll be hearing more about later, was caught "giting out beleene the slite and the Doore," What a "slite" is, the author cannot say for sure but, regardless, the watchman caught him "in good time and . . . mate him go back dobel wick time . . ."²²

On July 19th 1864 a man referred to only as #29 tried to make his break for freedom. Unfortunately for him the guards got him "treed on a peach tree" putting a quick end to his plans.²³

Interestingly, people were not the only creatures trying to escape from the prison. On the night of August 24th 1864 the watchman recorded the following:

" . . . 12.0 [clock], the prisoners all quiet, I thought in the early part of the evening I heard some one picking at the lock of his cell but the noise turned out to be one of the cats that happened to be imprisoned in No. 74 trying to get out."²⁴

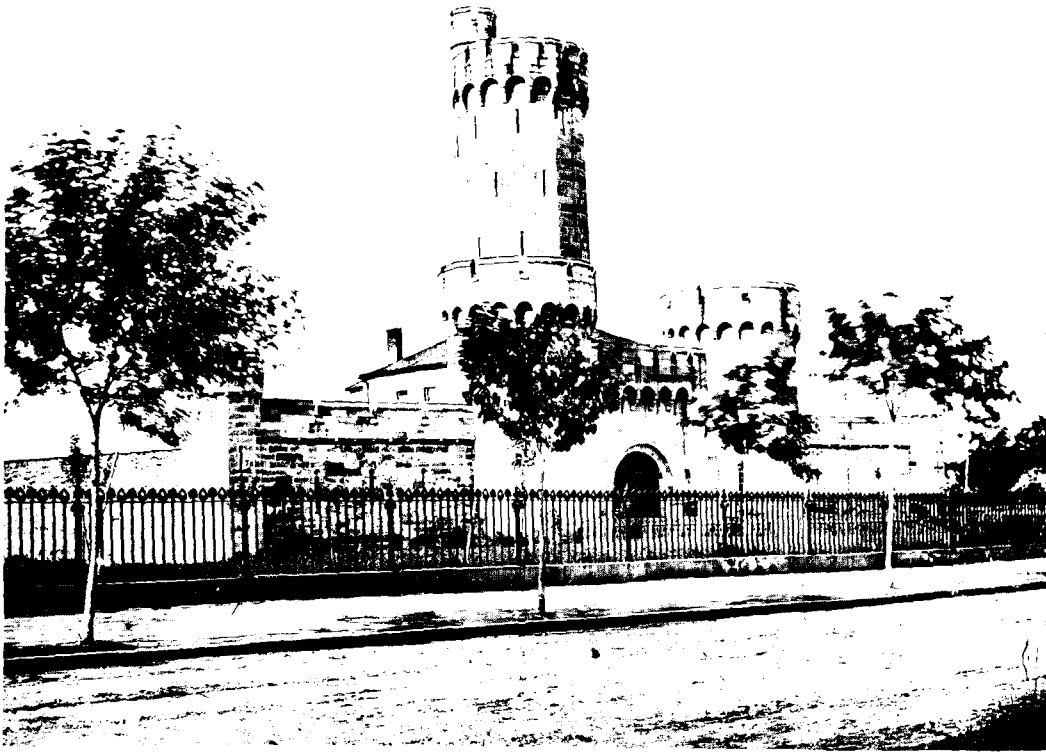
The next human escape attempt occurred on April 24, 1867. The person from cell #69 only got as far as the roof of the basket shop where he was stopped by the watchman who "very respectful invited him in."²⁵

Around six o'clock in the morning on September 5, 1869 an escape attempt occurred, with an unusual twist. Every morning between five and six the night watchman would go off duty. Before leaving he had to unlock, but not open, the outer cell doors.

Henry Coleman and Jason Hamilton were in cells #58 and #59, which were two adjoining iron-clad cells in the northeastern part of the corridor on the second tier. During the night or day before the escape attempt Coleman had managed to break the lock on the inner iron door, cut a hole in the outer door, and, using a wire, trip the lock. Coleman got out and opened the outer door of Hamilton's cell. The inner door had already been unlocked by Hamilton.

Underkeeper Lewis Murr had just relieved the night watchman, W.H.M. Miller, and was reclining on a low table in front of cell #9, which was used as an office. He was calmly watching two men sweep the corridor when Hamilton and Coleman sneaked up behind him, one grabbing Murr by the throat, the other by the legs. In an instant he was bound to the table.

Once the underkeeper was secured, the two men took the keys to the "office," breaking into the cabinet housing the revolvers, and keys to the rear gate.



Front view of Lancaster County Prison as it appeared in 1870. The high central tower was removed because it became structurally unsound in the 1880s. Although legend says the prison was copied after the castle in Lancashire, England, a comparison of pictures shows no similarity. This structure was started in 1852 and completed in 1853. John Haviland was the architect.

Hamilton then ran to unlock the cell doors of the other prisoners. He intended to first unlock the cell of Thomas F. Hamilton, of no relation, who was sentenced to ten years for shooting a Mr. Landis of Manheim. Unfortunately for the second Hamilton, Jason Hamilton got the wrong cell and let out Samuel Curtis, a man awaiting trial for pickpocketing, instead.

In the meantime "an inmate of the Prison Keeper's family" heard the ruckus and stepped into the hall to find out what was happening. What happened next was described as follows:

She ran to the Keeper's (Mr. Sensenig's) room and cried that the prisoners were out and were murdering Lewis [Murr]. Mr. Sensenig was just in the act of dressing himself when the alarm was given. He hastened down stairs into the corridor and then up to the gallery. Just as he reached the head of the stairs, the man who was opening the cell doors, turned hastily and fired a shot at him, but the shot missed its aim. The prisoner ran down stairs followed by Mr. Sensenig. By the time Julius Fletter, the baker of the prison, came to the rescue. He snatched an iron pointed stick from Mr. Sensenig's hands and struck the prisoner, and purchased a hole in his legs with the point. The latter turned upon him, snapped the revolver twice at his breast, but finding it would not go off, attacked him with the butt, cutting several severe gashes in his head. The prisoner was then overpowered and secured. The other prisoner broke for the yard, where he showed fight and was clubbed into submission.

But what about the third prisoner, Curtis the pickpocket? He simply obtained the keys to the rear gate and escaped.

Two of the four revolvers were found immediately. A search of Coleman's cell recovered a third. The fourth was presumably taken by Curtis.

The disturbance caused an uproar in the prison. All of the prisoners, being deprived of even their limited freedom, were locked in their cells hypothesizing what had happened. They added to the already confusing scene by yelling and banging on the cell doors. Many of the prisoners were described as pacing their cells "like enraged animals." Reports spread through Lancaster that there had been a mutiny at the prison, resulting in the shooting of several prisoners."²⁶

Curtis was captured the next day near Elizabethtown. He endeavored to steal a coat by throwing it out the back window of a store, then asking for the "rest room." He was pointed in the direction of the outhouse. Once in the yard he grabbed the coat and ran to a nearby tavern. Upon his arrival there, Curtis untied a horse and carriage and drove off. The act was noticed and Curtis was pursued. Unfortunately for him, he made a wrong turn and lost his way, also losing his long lead. Curtis was taken to Elizabethtown where he was recognized as an escapee. He made it back to the prison around midnight.²⁷

To use the old cliché in reverse: "easy go, easy come." Unfortunately Curtis didn't take it that way. The next day he tried to commit suicide by taking arsenic. Once again Curtis failed, luckily for himself.

As a result of the escape Lewis Murr was relieved of his position of underkeeper. Night watchmen W.H.H. Miller and George B. Mowery were also relieved of duty.²⁸

A particularly bold escape attempt occurred on April 22, 1874. This escape didn't occur at the prison but at the sheriff's office.

Earlier in the day, prior to their escape, the escapees, Joseph Hinder and one of our escape attempt record holders, Phares Armstead, were found guilty of stealing a number of pigeons from Henry McIntyre. They were sentenced to three months in prison each.

The court adjourned at 2:30 in the afternoon.²⁹ Hinder, Armstead and three other prisoners were taken to the sheriff's office by Sheriff Groff to wait for transportation back to the prison. Groff then left to watch for the vehicle from the prison, leaving Deputy Sheriff Rowe to watch the prisoners. Rowe looked up and noticed that only four prisoners remained. Groff returned at the same moment and Rowe notified him that a prisoner appeared to be missing. The sheriff disagreed, claiming that only four prisoners were brought up. At this point one of the other prisoners spoke up saying that Hinder had indeed escaped. Rowe left to search for him,

leaving Sheriff Groff in the room with the prisoners. Groff made the mistake of turning his back and Armstead took advantage. He escaped in apparently the same way as Hinder—by jumping out of the Sheriff's window! Outside the window, which was on the west side of the Court House, was an eight foot drop to the street. Armstead was chased "up Court Avenue to Grant Street, Grant to Christian" where he was lost. All in all this was quite an embarrassment for the Sheriff's office!³⁰

These were not the only members of the Hinder-Armstead group of pigeon thieves to escape from the Mayor's office. Escapee Benjamin Leaman was recaptured in Dillerville on April 25, 1874.³¹

Later the same year problems again arose at the prison. John Bowers, one of the prisoners was seen trotting about downtown. He was supposed to be in prison awaiting trial. Officer Fisher, the man who arrested Bowers in the first place, saw Bowers and went to the prison to find out what had happened. When he presented his enquiry to Keeper Weise he was rather surprised to find that this was the first the prison was alerted to Bower's escape.

The new watchman, a Mr. Smith, had sounded the door of Bower's cell with a hammer at noon. Bowers, sharing the cell with two other prisoners, was decked out in civilian clothes all ready for his trial. He had waited until the watchman went by and then slipped out of the cell and mingled with a group of people visiting the prison. Bowers then left—right through the front gate with guards' permission! The escapee proceeded down town to Court Avenue and talked with friends, causing rumors to spring up as to how he made a rope out of his blanket and scaled the wall.³²

*I*n our next escape of note we meet the infamous Buzzard Gang. The Buzzard Gang terrorized Eastern Lancaster County, and surrounding counties, though only chickens had any real reason to worry! The leader of the gang, Abe Buzzard, spent a total of fifty years in prison for chicken thievery and other assorted crimes.³³

This particular escape involved Abe's brother, Jacob "Jake" Buzzard and Adam Murr. In the early morning hours of July 11, 1876 the two used an awl to finally break through the brick wall between their cell, #13, and the basket shop, cell #14. This excavation had actually been started a week earlier, the two hiding the debris with pieces of willow from the Basket Shop. Once this phase was completed the hardest part of the escape was over.

It is often said that experience is the best possible teacher and this definitely was the case in this escape. Another of Jake's brothers, Martin Buzzard—"Mart" to his friends and the general public—had previously

escaped from cell #14 and Jake benefited from this knowledge.

Following Mart Buzzard's example Jake and Adam Murr cleaned out a gutter which carried off excess water from the Basket shop and crawled through it. The gutter led under the foundation of the building. Once outside the two were faced with the task of scaling the wall. This presented no particular problem. Using a piece of water pipe as a hook which was connected to the end of a tarred rope taken from prison windows and also using a sixteen foot board, the two were able to scale the wall quite easily.³⁴

After their escape, Buzzard and Murr headed for the Welsh Mountains, passing through Intercourse before their arrival there the next morning. After two days later they went to Mart Hower's woods where Buzzard and Murr got into a nasty argument. Murr, it seems, wanted to return to prison as he had but seven months to serve on a two and half year sentence. Murr parted with Buzzard and went to his mother's house near New Holland.

Keeper Weise felt that Murr might indeed be feeling this way and wrote him a "friendly advertising letter" saying that he could come and serve his remaining time and have immunity from punishment for jailbreaking.

In the meantime Detective Lyon and Constable Arters got wind of the fact that Murr was at his mother's house and rode there to get him. This was easier said than done. Upon their arrival they met the "old lady" who was armed—with a broomstick! She informed the two officers that Murr had received a letter from Keeper Weise and that he would turn himself over to him only. ". . . she straightway proceeded to initiate the officers into the mysteries of the broomstick. But it was of no avail; broomsticks were of no account with men who care even little for bullets, and Mr. Adam Murr was captured."

Murr did have every intention of giving himself up as the following letter, found on Murr's person, will attest:

Sir: I will accept your offer. I will come back and serve the rest of my time, if it is all right—if you treat me the same as you did before and take the commutation off, if I behave well from this time out. You said you would come down after me. You can come whenever it suits you. I will be about any time. Ask at Abe Settlely's where we live. If you can't come, write and tell me. Yours Adam Murr

To S. P. Weise

With this agreement Murr returned to prison.³⁵ This action took quite a lot of courage. Conditions at the prison were far from good at this time. Temperatures were in the nineties. The reader can appreciate what conditions must have been like for the inmates—after all, two to six prisoners were housed in cells designed for a single person. Ventilation was also

poor—it was also designed for one person to a cell. There were worries that portions of the outside wall would fall down at anytime. Convicts had to sleep in the same narrow cells where they had to work during the day. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, the plumbing was not working. Murr was not returning to a country club.³⁶

Though Keeper Weise and Underkeepers George S. Smith and B.S. Trout were not blamed for the escape of Buzzard and Murr because of the deplorable conditions at the prison, the incident put them on their guard for other escape attempts from their “rotten shell.” The three took turns on night watch in the yard armed with a double-barrelled shotgun. A suggestion was made to the Keeper that the cell doors be kept open about six inches, being confined in place by locking bars. This action made digging during the day by the prisoners impossible lest it be heard.

A thorough inspection was then put into progress with rather surprising results. Eleven prisoners were put on bread and water. Many of the cells had “speaking holes” in the walls so that the prisoners could hold conversations. Three escape attempts were uncovered.

The first was that of John Lippincott. When Underkeeper Smith tested the floor of his cell, #27 on the ground floor, with a crowbar, he found several loose boards. Once removed, the boards were found to be concealing a hole “almost large enough for a horse” The *Express* reporter stated:

He had dug through the foundation wall until daylight glimmered through, and another night’s operations would have made him a free man. The debris had been concealed in a barrel, covered on top with cigar fillers, and the deception was complete. A rope had been knitted by Lippincott out of the twine used in making fish-nets, and which was certainly smuggled to him by someone. This rope or band was flat in form, six inches in width and THIRTY-TWO FEET IN LENGTH. When first discovered a deadly pallor stole over the face of Lippincott, but he soon recovered and made a clear breast of it. He now carries a ball and chain on his leg, wears handcuffs and will diet on bread and water for one week at least.

Phares Armstead, who, as you will remember, had jumped from the window of the Sheriff’s office, was in Cell #24. He had attracted a bit of attention to himself and his escape attempt by constantly pasting paper over the guard’s peephole in the cell door. Loose planks were again removed, revealing an excavation in his cell also, though not quite as large as that in Lippincott’s cell. Armstead had also made himself a “speaking hole.” He was also put on bread and water.

Frederick Fletter, who was temporarily residing in Cell #6 while awaiting trial, was also found to be planning on making a quick exit. The *Express* reporter described his attempt as follows:

Fletter had not excavated, preferring to go out through the wall, and with this

object he had attacked that portion of the wall where the ventilator is situated—the ventilator being constructed of large pieces of thin slate, thickly covered with plaster. He had removed one of these slates, and preparatory to his departure, had broken up a pine box used for holding cigar fillers, and had constructed four ladders of five feet each in length.

Several stones had fallen out of the wall outside of where he was working, which, though he did not know about them, would have made his escape much easier. He was also on bread and water and wearing a ball and chain—the prison only had two; otherwise Armstead would have had one too.³⁷

An interesting, if not terribly sad, sidelight to this prison investigation was that a “friendless German” was found to be serving a three year sentence for the theft of a silver watch. He was sentenced on a plea of guilty that he had never entered. He claimed he was innocent. Unfortunately he couldn’t speak a word of English and had no counsel at his trial. In the same court term a man was convicted of stealing a more valuable gold watch and got a mere six month sentence.³⁸

The next escape of interest occurred two years later. Benjamin Barnes and John Drachbar were pumping water in the prison when they decided to climb through the cold air flue near the furnace. The flue led to the top of the wall. From there they jumped twenty-five feet to freedom. Their escape was spotted, but not soon enough to stop the two before they made their exit.³⁹

Also in 1878 Phares Armstead (again) and Charles Gibson dug into the prison cellar and from there into the yard. From the yard they easily slipped over the wall. Gibson went to Pittsburgh where he was recaptured at the home of his mother.⁴⁰

Charles Gibson, himself a horsethief, was the son-in-law of the noted one-eyed horsethief, John Frankford, who was mentioned earlier. Gibson was not one to give up easily. On July 14, 1879, he, Alonzo Hambright and Charles Goodman escaped from Cell #11, one of the iron-clad cells. The newspaper described their escape as follows:

They made their escape by taking out the oblong register at the opening of the air flue, near the floor of their cell, and then with a saw enlarging the hole sufficiently to enable them to pass their bodies into the flue, down which they slid, to the cellar, and then they crawled along the flue to the brick stack or chimney with which it is connected, and ascending the inside of the stack to its top found themselves on a level with the prison wall and only three or four feet from it. It was an easy matter to reach the top of the wall and jump down, or let themselves down with a rope, if they had one.⁴¹

One does wonder how much of this was planned out in advance and how much of it they had to play by ear on the way. In either case the escape worked and the three were free.

Watchman's Register

Thursday night June 23rd 1862.

10. O. clock all quiet about the Prison
12. O. clock the same as last report, 2. O. clock all quiet along the line, neither picket nor skirmisher in view
4. O. clock all quiet.

Friday June 24th

No. 53 you will find the slate marked for being noisy in the evening, withhold their breakfast ~~the~~ the morning. On 61 and 65 will find new tenants that moved in this evening and in the key box you will find a pocket-book &c, belonging to one of them. 12 o'clock all quiet - we have had a shower of rain but think it is nearly all we will have to-night, 2. o'clock all quiet inside the wall but a little loud singing outside since my last report. 4 o'clock some of the prisoners up making their beds & presume they cannot sleep well on account of the heat or something else, a little coal oil put on some of their bed-steads would be an improvement as No. 70 told me this evening. The bugs are cunning, during the day they creep into the cracks about the bed, and at night they come out and bite so that he cannot sleep.

Saturday night June 25th

10. O. clock all quiet in and about the prison.
12. O. clock all quiet, the weather is very warm.
2. O. clock all night
4. O. clock all quiet, the same as my last report.

Before we move on to the great escapes of 1882 and 1883 note should be taken that Phares Armstead tried to escape again in late July 1879, this time with Joseph Groff. The two were being held in iron-clad Cell #12.

The two were suspected of trying to escape but repeated inspections turned up nothing. Finally the discovery was made that, using only a knife which they had turned into a saw, the two had cut a hole in the floor, which was made of boiler plate. The hole was directly in the center of the floor. When the two were finished working beneath the floor, they would replace the boiler plate. The joint was almost invisible when a bit of it was sprinkled around.

This little tunnel was apparently directed to the basement but was stopped short before it received its destination.⁴²

Our little excursion through the history of jail breaks has now reached a milestone. We are up to the greatest escapes of all time—the great escapes of 1882 and 1883.

The time was just about noon on May 24, 1882. Fifteen convicts were at work in the prison cigar factory under a labor contract. The cigar shop, Cell 39 was formerly the shoemaker's shop. When the decision was made to make the shoemaker's shop into a cigar shop, Keeper Burkholder ordered the walls, made of brick, to be covered with wood planks on the inside.

At noon the convicts in the cigar shop received their dinners and the "boss cigar maker", Charles Greiner, left to go to lunch as did Underkeeper George Smith. This left no one inside the cell to watch the prisoners, but then, they were in a locked cell. Why should they be watched?

At about one o'clock, while Underkeepers Smith and Murr were talking in the corridor, Greiner returned and entered the cigar shop. Of the fifteen prisoners he left there prior to lunch, only five remained! Greiner notified the Underkeepers claiming that "They are all gone!" Smith and Murr, believing Greiner to be joking, told him to report to Keeper Burkholder. Burkholder was also of the opinion that Greiner was rather humorous—that is until he looked in the cell himself.

When all were convinced that the escape was real, those in charge discerned that the following men had escaped: John Frankford, Abe Buzzard, Ike Buzzard, John Lippincott, Morris Bricker, Paul Quigley, Joseph Groff, Andrew Ehrman, George McAlpin and Michael Lentz.

Soon it was seen how the convicts escaped. With their work being

hidden by the new wooden planking, the prisoners broke a thirteen by fourteen and a half inch-hole in the wall. This hole led to the chicken coop. All of the prisoners entered the chicken coop with a slightly undecided John Frankford bringing up the rear—Frankford had been rather badly injured trying to escape recently and wasn't too eager to try it again. From the chicken coop the prisoners passed through a window, which had no bars to contend with (apparently the chickens weren't trying to escape), and entered the yard.

The prisoners had made two ropes, one of bed ticking and the other of thirty-five strands of carpet chain, to be used to scale the wall.

Johnny Brock and his younger brother, the sons of one of the stewards at the almshouse, were passing Franklin Street when Johnny noticed a man sitting on the prison wall pulling up other men with a rope and letting them down on the other side, the man himself leaving last. The entire assemblage ran across the reservoir grounds. The man who was on the wall said a few words to young Brock—after all he knew him well; the man was John Frankford.

Brock ran to the prison to notify the authorities but no one would answer the door. He then ran to the almshouse and his father Mr. Brock was able to see the prisoners running past the house of Isaac Zimmerman, who also saw them.

Many of the prisoners appeared to be wearing civilian clothes. It was found that they had made these themselves out of blankets from the prison.

The prisoners had been seen going out Rockland Street Pike. At the "old factory bridge" eight of the convicts crossed the creek but separated there. A party of three, which apparently included Frankford, "was traced to the Mellinger and Hersh farms, over Mill Creek and down the creek to Harnish's farm, just above Groff's mill on the Willow Street Pike, when they crossed a cornfield. Here the trail was lost . . ."

Another party of prisoners went toward Eshleman's mill. They were seen crossing a wheat field on the West Lampeter farm of Frederick Beates.

Joe Groff was recaptured at the depot and locked up.

Abe Buzzard and two others were reputedly seen hiding in the canal in the vicinity of Bainbridge. The three hopped a freight train to Middletown and from there a train to Harrisburg where they were lost.

Immediately John Frankford was suspected in the theft of three horses from the stables of Mr. Keen on the Old Philadelphia Pike between Soudersburg and Greenland.

A reward of fifty dollars per prisoner was offered by the Board of

Ike Buzzard did not manage to stay out of prison very long. Ike, who was the first prisoner to get over the wall, described his experience immediately after the jailbreak as follows:

We ran across the fields, but soon I lost the others. I ran about five miles when I got up to a rye field where I hid until night . . .

When I came to I went to a farmhouse and entering through the cellarway, I got something to eat. I then went upstairs and stole a pocketbook containing three dollars out of a pair of pants hanging on the bedpost. The pants being too large for me I left them hang. When I got outside, I discovered a pair of overalls and an old jacket hanging on the porch, also an old hat and a pair of boots. I put them on and went to the barn and took a horse and saddle. I started off but the horse was unmanagable, it being a very young colt. He ran across the fields and into a fence, spraining my ankle. When I got him on the road, it started to rain very hard. I could not see where we were going, and we fell down over the bridge into mud and water where I lost one of my boots. The boots were so big I could not get them into the stirrups so I had to ride with my toes curled up to keep them from falling off. I rode until I got within a mile and a half of the Welsh Mountains, when my horse laid down in the middle of the road, again hurting my ankle. I rolled off, he jumped up leaving me lay.

Ike spent the next day in the loft of a nearby barn, stealing a "fine suit of clothes", a pair of shoes, a harness, a buggy, a horse, and enough food for the next day's lunch. He arrived in the Welsh Mountains about dawn of the following day. He spent this day in a room for travelling visitors in a Dunkard Church.

Ike eventually made it to Reading where he hopped a freight train, thinking it was on the Lebanon Valley railroad. He made a slight mistake—he was on the Reading and Lancaster Railroad. Ike noticed the problem while passing through Sinking Springs but the train was moving too fast for him to jump.

Once in Lancaster Ike quickly headed westward via the Pennsylvania Railroad, getting off in Columbia. He started walking along the railroad yards where he was arrested, ironically for trespassing and sentenced to five days in the Lancaster County Prison. Of course, upon his arrival he was recognized. Ike had been out for a total of two weeks.⁴⁴

One interesting sidelight to the escape is that Joe Buzzard was also in the cigar shop at the time of the escape but opted not to leave with the others.⁴⁵ Possibly he agreed with Alonzo Hambright that the attempt was too risky in broad daylight.⁴⁶ The other prisoners who refused to escape were Fred Strobel, Charles Albright and a Mr. Lewis.⁴⁷

Ike Buzzard and Joe Groff weren't to be lonely in jail long. Soon Abe Buzzard, John Frankford and Morris Bricker were also recaptured.

On October 10, 1883 occurred the greatest escape in Lancaster

County history. Though this escape happened only a little over a year after the last escape, the same five men mentioned above escaped again in company with George Brimmer, John Wertz, William Clark, Edward E. Beek, George Watkins, Alexander Leman and James Clifford—twelve criminals in all!

After Abe Buzzard had been recaptured, his brother Ike, who had gained the confidence of a watchman, had him moved to a cell directly across from his own. Ike and Abe would now communicate using the following method:

I (Ike) had a pet canary bird that had three young ones. I put a young bird in a cage and sent it over to my brother by the watchman. Then I covered my other young birds up and hung the mother at my cell door, when I noticed that she made every effort to go to the young bird that I had sent over to my brother. I opened the cage and she flew over to Abe's cell, when she heard the young one chirp. Before I released her, I wrote a note and tied it around her neck. I told Abe in the note that I would lock the watchman in the cell with him, and if he made any noise he should keep him quiet, for I was going to liberate him and a lot of prisoners. I also wrote him to cover his young bird up and send a note back to me the same way I had done. Holding my young birds to the cell door I told him to write and let me know what he thought of my plan.

The old bird came over to its young ones as arranged. The note around its neck read, 'All right, do it quickly and wait no more.'⁴⁸

There was a prize fight downtown that night - Sullivan Vs. Slade—and Keeper Burkholder went to watch.⁴⁹ Underkeeper Murr and Stauffer were also downtown leaving only watchmen Sample and Lutz on duty.

Sample, though supposed to be on duty, went to the cell of Billy Weider for a haircut.

Lutz, a new watchman, was asked by Ike to take a birdcage over to Abe's cell, as the cage he had didn't let in enough light, and bring the other cage back to him. Lutz agreed, leaving Ike's cell open so he could return the other cage.

As Lutz opened Abe's cell, Ike bounded across the corridor and shoved Lutz in with Abe and locked the door. Ike then ran and locked Dr. Sample in the cell with convict-barber. He then unlocked the cells of ten other prisoners.

The escapees broke into cell #9, the store room, stealing the watchman's street clothing, assorted other coats, Dr. Sample's personal revolver, two large butcher knives, and a shot gun. The store room was also the site of the telephone. The wires to it were quickly cut.

John Frankford, our favorite one-eyed horsethief, busied himself by running up and down the corridor threatening any individual who might give them away. He focused his attention on Frank Blair, a cook,

bringing a knife close to Blair's body and threatening "to cut his heart out" if he did anything.

But what about Abe? He was still locked up with watchman Lutz. This was no real problem to eleven armed prisoners. They just unlocked the door and removed Abe, leaving Lutz behind bars.

Incidentally, Joe Buzzard again decided not to escape. He had only a short time to serve.⁵⁰

Once in the backyard the prisoners were faced by Bruno, the bloodhound. Ike was carrying a key weighing about ten pounds. With this weapon he hit Bruno "knocking him senseless, from which blow he died in a week."⁵¹ Newspaper reporters who saw Bruno after the escape noted that he had "a subdued look." Bruno was the first fatality suffered during an escape.

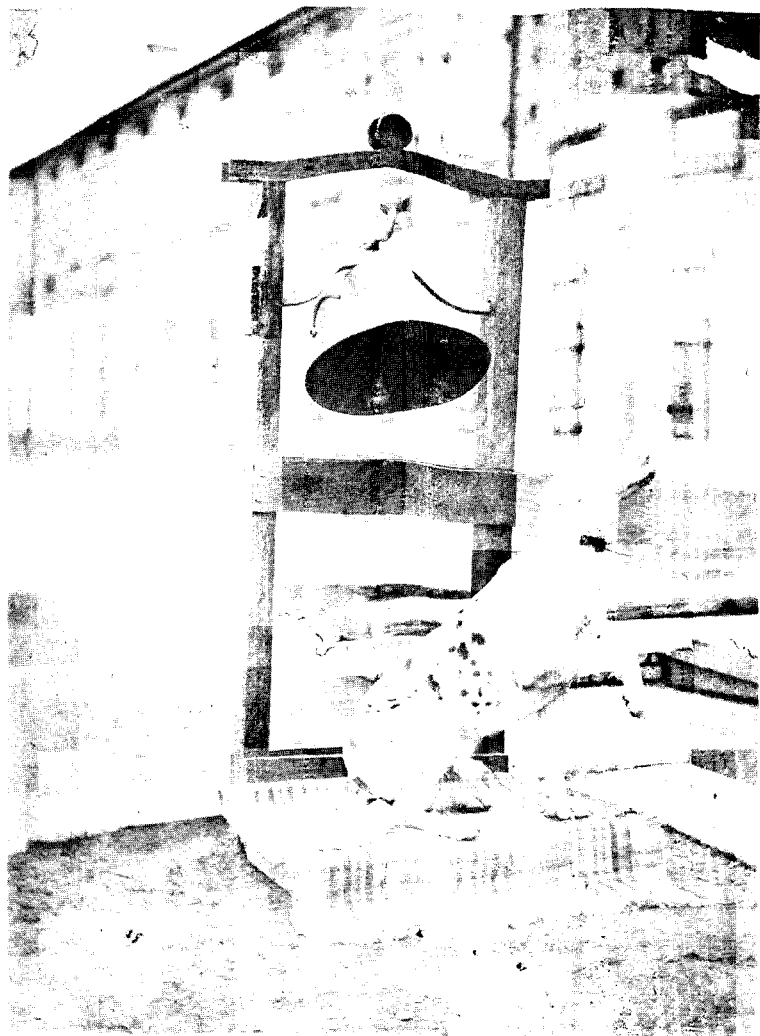
Ike's stolen key apparently did not work too well on the back door and was quickly broken. The door was then forced open and the broken key, apparently the one used to fatally injure Bruno, was left lying in the prison yard.

As soon as the prisoners left, William Dorsey, an ex-convict who stayed on at the prison as a hostler, ran to spread the alarm. Escapes were nothing unusual to this lad, having once been accused of escaping himself. In his case the court had actually made a mistake, releasing him before he was to be released!

Before long the keeper, underkeepers and the clerk arrived at the prison, as did about a thousand other people who, upon hearing the alarm, came down to see what was happening. The crowd "pressed about the front entrance and surged back and forth through the prison yard" finally dispersing when the people found they could learn nothing more at the prison.

William Cox, who lived across from the prison on East Orange Street, saw nine prisoners cross Orange Street and head down Groffstown Road. From here all track was lost of the prisoners.

Rumors flew from all over. The prisoners were immediately seen all over the county. Some of the more believable stories included statements that John Frankford was seen at the home of a relative in Paradise. Here he was supposed to have changed clothes. Frankford was also reported to have been seen leaving the stable of H. W. Skiles around 3:30 in the morning, also near Paradise.⁵² About eleven at night some youths forming a band in the vicinity of Earlville saw nine men passing through. The youths asked the strangers where they were heading. The reply was "We are a baseball nine, and missed the train." The convicts also broke into the home of a Mr. Hemling near Earlville and stole all



Bruno, the guard dog, posing inside the prison yard with original cell block in background.

of the shirts they could find.⁵³

This escape had many repercussions beside the obvious problem of criminals roaming the countryside, burglarizing and stealing to their hearts' content. Lutz and Sample were both removed for neglecting their duty. Also, in an apparent token move, the Board of Inspectors no longer allowed the prisoners to keep birds.

The local citizenry had a field day at the expense of the Lancaster

Prison. For instance, the *New Era* reportedly received the following letter from Strasburg.

Mr. Burkholder

My dear Sir: If you should be so fortunate as to recapture the twelve escaped convicts, the people of Strasburg borough would respectfully suggest that they be forwarded to the borough and placed in the Strasburg lock up, as they can just as readily escape from our shell as they can from your iron-clad dungeon and ferocious bloodhounds, and at the same time save the county the expense of watchmen.

Sympathizingly Yours
Cannabis Indica
Strasburg Pa.

West Chester was the most boisterous in its attack. The local newspaper in West Chester suggested that the Lancaster prison crew could come and take lessons from its prison workers on how to run a prison so that the Lancastrians could hold onto "the few of their convicts who failed to take last night's boat for the land of freedom." The *West Chester Republican* noted that "The Lancaster Jail would make a good sieve."

The apparent reason for this drastic attack on Lancaster stemmed from the escape of John Frankford from the West Chester jail. Even though he was not out for an entire day, the Lancaster newspapers attacked rather viciously. Since Frankford had escaped from the Lancaster prison for the second time, the West Chester papers felt justified in giving Lancaster "Hail Columbia".⁵⁴

Needless to say, the escaped gang caught everyone's attention and fascination. When Calvin Carter, one of the prison inspectors, took the bird cage, used by Ike Buzzard as a ploy to get out of his cell, to the Atglen Fair, he quickly drew a large crowd of curious onlookers.⁵⁵ The public hungered for information on the escape and the actions of the convicts once free. Local papers were glad to oblige.

Many of the convicts were eventually recaptured, but for some it took quite a while. Joe Groff was captured on April 27th 1885 along with Charles Gibson, a graduate of the escape class of 1881. The two had been in the Welsh Mountains passing themselves off as detectives looking for—who else—Abe Buzzard. They spent their nights sleeping in George Parmer's barn where they were captured by Samuel Bowman. Groff had learned cigar making during his stay in the Lancaster prison and was now a member of the Cigarmakers International Union, Union 84 of Delaware, Ohio, and had been since November 5, 1883—less than a month after his escape. He claimed to have done no "crooked work" since he escaped.

As a matter of interest to any watch collectors, Groff was carrying a Waltham watch, Bartlet movement No. 880,218. The case was No.

When Charles Gibson was asked what his "little game" was in the area, since he had been living in Pittsburgh, he replied "Oh, that is another matter, and I can't give it away." He went on to say "I will either get away or they will carry me out feet first."⁵⁶

In the April 1884 Sessions of the Court of Quarter Sessions, all of the escapees of the great 1882 escape, except, oddly enough Abe Buzzard and George McAlpin, were charged with jailbreaking. In the same term all of the escapees of the grand escape of 1883 were also charged with jail breaking—except Abe Buzzard.⁵⁷

The last page in the two great escapes was written in December of 1885 with the delivery of John Frankford, Ike Buzzard, John Lippincott and John Clifford to the Eastern State Penitentiary. Frankford had the longest term to serve, fifteen years, followed by a seven and a half year sentence for Ike Buzzard.⁵⁸

*T*he next strange quirk in an escape attempt came in May of 1885. George Watson, who had escaped from the prison back on June 3, 1873, was found guilty of felonious entry and sentenced to seven months imprisonment in August of 1884. Watson served his time and was released. On May 7, 1885 Keeper Burkholder notified Judge Patterson of the previous escape. Patterson decided that, though Watson would have to serve out the original sentence, he would not be punished for the escape attempt. The judge stated that "he did not think a man should be punished for trying to regain his liberty." Unfortunately, in the month previous to this, Watson was again arrested on suspicion of being involved in the robbery and shooting of Edward Linville.⁵⁹

Another daylight escape occurred on June 16, 1890. John Duke had been pleading with Keeper Smith to be able to work outside of the prison walls on the prison farm. Smith finally agreed, taking Duke out to the cornfield. Duke then made an excuse to go to the stable. Once he got close he ran, speeding down Groffstown road toward the Pennsylvania railroad station shedding his prison stripes and exposing civilian clothes as he went. Peter Wineberger, a prisoner who acted as a hostler quickly notified Keeper Smith who, in the company of Underkeeper Murr, chased after Duke.⁶⁰

Richard Hall had escaped earlier the same year by mingling with the crowd at the Court House after being sentenced. He simply walked out with them.⁶¹

Then there are those days when it just does not pay a constable to get out of bed. In this case the problem was not that the prisoner

escaped from the jail: he never got there after his hearing. On March 31, 1894, the day before April Fool's Day, Constable Rutt of East Earl Township was to take Frank Laurel, a Welsh Mountain chicken thief, to Blue Ball for a hearing. Laurel managed to escape not once but three times.

On the return trip from the hearing everything was going fine until the train, the Lancaster 5:15, passed through Greenfield. Here Laurel who was slightly inebriated, asked to go up and talk to Railroad Officer Pyle. Rutt agreed and accompanied him. On the way back Laurel, who was not handcuffed, jumped from the train platform. Brakeman Frank Flickering, who was helping to look after the prisoner, leaped after him. Rutt "tried the old and time-worn game of jumping off the train backwards. He was thrown very heavily and made several somersaults before he came to a standstill." Rutt and Flickering succeeded in capturing Laurel about a half-mile away from the train.

The men now had to walk to town. Laurel asked to be taken to Faegleysville to try to get bail. The two guards took him to the North Pole Hotel to see Dick Redman. Redman and Simon Book asked Laurel to have a drink. With the barroom full, Laurel again tried to run but was captured a short distance away.

At this point Flickering and Rutt split up. Flickering went to call the patrol wagon while Rutt stayed with the prisoner. Soon Constable Rutt and Prisoner Laurel were surrounded by a large group of men "of the kind that have their haunts in Faegleysville." This time, with the help of Book and Redman, the prisoner got away.

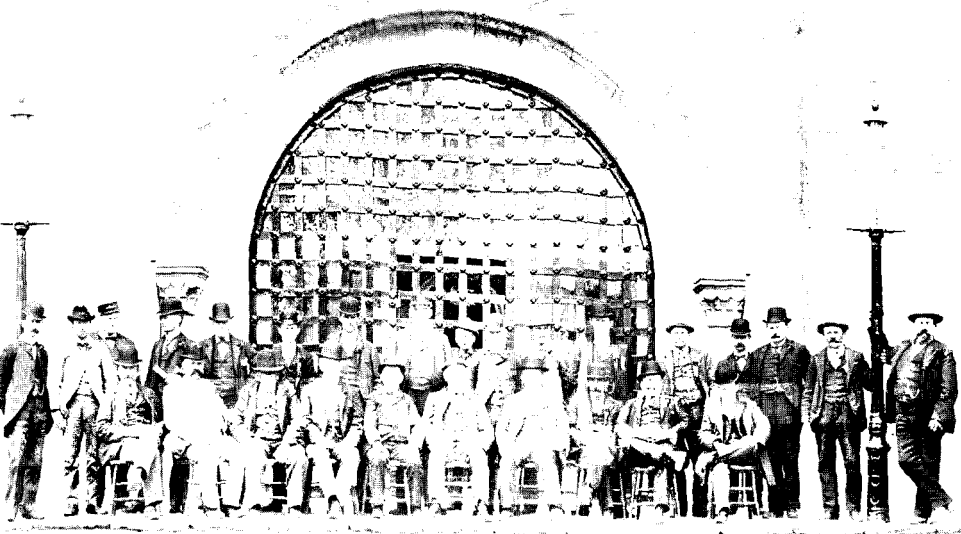
Of Rutt, who was obliged to return empty-handed to Lancaster, the newspaper had the following to say:

Rutt is said to be a shrewd officer, but in this instance he showed himself to be stupid. He had been warned a number of times that Laurel would attempt to escape, but he paid little heed to it. He does not seem to have known what kind of people he had to deal with when he went to Faegleysville.⁶²

I'm sure that Constable Rutt would agree with the prison officials in office during the next escape that bad news comes in threes. In this case the three were John Mahoney, Edward Jones, and Samuel Smith. The escape of these three men on October 25, 1896 was one of the most involved escapes in Lancaster prison history.

The three were in cell No. 66 which was on the west side of the prison, on the second floor, close to the north end of the building.

The prisoners made a saw by putting nicks in a piece of iron torn from a bed, about ten inches long. The end was wrapped in a sheet



Prisonkeeper and staff in 1898. H.H. Moore was the prisonkeeper.

to make a handle. Using this saw and an iron bar, also torn from the bed, they cut a hole in the one inch thick plank floor measuring sixteen by eighteen inches. Underneath the three found a brick and stone floor. This they dug out, hiding the debris in their mattresses. Apparently the three weren't too worried about comfort.

Eventually they cleared a space large enough under the floor for a man to work. The next obstacle was the sixteen inch stone wall of the building. The hole they made was eleven by seventeen inches.

Mahoney, Jones and Smith broke through the wall but didn't remove the last stones until the escape was to be made. The day before the escape Underkeeper William Smith noticed "a big crack" in the wall below cell #66. He just passed it off as general weakening of the outer wall. Finally, when the three thought it was safe, they broke out the wall and climbed to the roof. How they did this was not obvious but prison officials concluded the following for lack of a better idea:

It is believed that one went out first and stood upon the stone coping over the cell below. They fastened one of the blanket ropes to a hook in the window of cell #66. With this rope and by crawling upon the shoulders of each other, two of the men got to the roof and pulled their companion up with the rope which was found wrapped nicely on the window sill of their cell.

Once on the roof, the three ran to the front of the prison and scaled up the fourteen foot wall to the square tower above. From here they ran along another roof and jumped to the roof of the brick weave shop. The shop was against the wall surrounding the yard. They walked along the wooden covering on the wall for about thirty feet and rounded the corner.

Finally, at this point, on the east side of the prison near Franklin Street, the criminals managed to slip down the wall using a blanket rope with a hook.

Mahoney, Jones and Smith were not convicts, and therefore were still wearing their civilian clothes. This enabled them to quickly disappear in the town unnoticed.

As for the guards, Frank Shirely was supposed to be on duty upstairs, Harry Brubaker downstairs and George Martin in "Bummer's Hall". The newspaper claimed that the watchmen were not patrolling properly for if they had been, they could have prevented the escape.

The *Intelligencer* claimed that the watchmen got their jobs because they were owed favors by politicians, not because they were in any way capable. Harry Brubaker, it pointed out, was the brother of John T. Brubaker, the president of the Board of Inspectors. George Martin was the brother of Sam S. Martin, a Republican Leader.⁶³ The newspapers had another field day on the occasion of this escape.

The first notable escape of the new century occurred in 1903. The newspaper described the escape of James Wilson as having a "wonderful character" and as being a "remarkable" feat.

Our Mr. James Wilson had cell #52, on the second tier, on the east side of the prison as his residence.

Mr. Wilson holds the dubious honor of being one of the only prisoners up to that time to escape *through* one of the cell windows. To effect his escape he removed the iron window frame creating an opening six inches by three or four feet long. The newspaper described the first part of Wilson's escape as follows:

A thin flat strip of iron forms a sort of sill, and this the prisoner rubbed with soap in order to facilitate his passage. Greased the hole as it were. Outside the window was guarded by sharp curved spikes, but one of these was removed, being found in the prison yard to day. The ventilator frame outside the spikes was swung open then, but still the man had to pass through a very small opening . . . by the aid of a lightning rod the man drew himself to the roof of the building, the eaves being just a couple of feet above the windows . . .

Once on the roof the prisoner walked about a hundred feet along the roof until his way was blocked by a square tower. Wilson

scaled the tower by climbing up the downspout. From here he dropped to the roof of the front building of the prison. Going around the central tower, he found himself facing the battlements at the face of the prison.

Here Wilson had to make use of a rope which he had crafted out of carpet rags and yarn. He tied the rope to the battlements of the east front tower. The rope, about an inch in diameter, broke close to where it was tied. How far Wilson fell is not known but it didn't slow him down in the least. He quickly disappeared.

Interestingly enough, Charles Pinkerton, Wilson's cellmate did not follow Wilson in his escape. In fact Pinkerton claimed that he knew nothing about the escape. In actuality it seems that Pinkerton could not fit through the small hole Wilson had made and therefore had to stay.

George Martin, who we know from the last escape, made his rounds about five in the morning. He said that someone from cell #52 answered him. Pinkerton apparently answered. Christian Shenk, another guard, found out about the escape around six in the morning. Wilson's description was immediately sent out but his escape was totally successful.⁶⁴

The last two escapes to be discussed are bound together quite uniquely. George Darrenkamp and Frederick "Bocky" Keller, also known as the "Wire King", were both sought in numerous thefts from the Conestoga Traction Company. George Darrenkamp was caught while Keller got away. While out on bail, prior to his hearing, Darrenkamp disappeared only to be recaptured a year later.

Darrenkamp was to serve six months. He had served all but six weeks when he, as the paper reported, "doubtless smelled the sweet airs coming from the country, and longed for pastures new. The temptation came, and he had to go." The newspaper was waxing poetic on this escape. George simply went "over the garden wall" on May 13, 1908.

Darrenkamp had been a "trustie", being employed by the prison bakehouse. That evening, while supper was being served to his fellow prisoners, George put a pair of overalls over his prison clothes. Using an iron drain pipe, that had just been replaced and had not yet been removed, as a pole, the prisoner shinned up to the top of the wall on the Orange Street side of the prison. From the top of the wall he jumped into a nearby poplar tree and hit the ground running.

Unfortunately for George, his little jaunt in the country came to an abrupt end and he was returned to prison on May 23.⁶⁵

Frederick Keller, who had earlier eluded police, was eventually caught.

George Darrenkamp had taught "Bocky" a few tricks in the meantime. Keller also became a "trustie", occupying cell #1 on the ground floor. It was Keller's job to stoke the fires in the prison's heating plant. Bocky purposely let the fires get low in February of 1909. He was let out of his cell and ordered to go down and get the boiler fires up. Instead Frederick Keller went up and over.

It seems that Keller had passed a steam feed pipe out of the cellar door to the yard in the days previous to his escape. He had also stolen twenty feet of clothesline from the drying room.

Following the method of George Darrenkamp, Keller put the pipe against the wall where the wall was lowest because of the raised yard—on the Franklin Street side—and shinnied to the top of the wall. He then tied the clothesline to the wall and slid to safety, successfully breaching the prison's defenses as had so many other men such as himself over the past two hundred years.⁶⁶

We can rest assured that, as these escapes show, even in prison, Yankee ingenuity is alive and well.

Notes:

1. Martha M. Bowman, "Local History Contained in Early Quarter Sessions Dockets", LCHS, Vol. 26, 1922, p. 82.
2. John W. W. Loose, Ceejay Jaycee Correspondence stored at the LCHS.
3. Vol. XIII, No. 9 of the *Journals of the Lancaster County Historical Society* gives a detailed account of the actions of Thomas Cresap on pp. 237-254. (1909).
4. Colonial Records (Series 1 of the Pennsylvania Archives), Harrisburg, Pa., p. 251.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
9. M.A. Schwalm, manuscript for *Johannes Schwalm the Hessian*, p. 2.
10. LCHS Journal Vol. 84, #3. Albert G. Overton and J.W.W. Loose 1980, p. 131.
11. Mambert, J. I., *An Authentic History of Lancaster County*, J.E. Barr & Co.: Lancaster, Pa., 1869, pp. 293-294.
12. *Op Cit.*, p. 134.
13. *Op Cit.*, pp. 286-287.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 298-306. Originally published in the *New England Magazine*.
15. "Presentment for the Repairs in the Gaol c", Aug. 19th 1807. (filed in indictment files for 1807 in LCHS).
16. "Presentment by the Grand Jury relative to the jail", April 22nd 1813. (filed in indictment files for 1813 in LCHS).
17. "Life and Confessions of Daniel Shaeffer" Pub. by Peter Reed, Jr. & A. Osterlon, Lancaster, 1832.
18. "Special and General Laws for the Government of the Lancaster County Prison." Published by the order of the Prison Inspectors, Daily Intelligencer Printing, Lancaster, 1866.
19. Board of Inspectors Report of 1859 (Manuscript stored at the LCHS).
20. *Ibid.*
21. Watchman's Day Book (a manuscript filed in the LCHS), p. 42.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
26. *Daily Evening Express*, Sept. 6, 1869.
27. *Daily Evening Express*, Sept. 7, 1869.
28. *Daily Evening Express*, Sept. 8, 1869.
29. *Daily Evening Express*, April 22, 1874.
30. *Daily Evening Express*, April 23, 1874.
31. *Daily Evening Express*, April 25, 1874.
32. *Daily Evening Express*, august 17, 1874.
33. *Sunday Bulletin*, (Phila.) March 26, 1961.
34. *Daily Evening Express* July 11, 1876, July 17, 1876.
35. *Daily Evening Express*, July 17, 1876.
36. *Daily Evening Express*, July 13, 1876.
37. *Daily Evening Express*, July 24, 1876.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Daily Evening Express*, July 1, 1878.
40. Board of Inspectors Report for 1878 (manuscript filed at the LCHS).
41. *Weekly Intelligencer*, July 16, 1879.
42. *Daily Intelligencer*, August 1, 1879.
43. *Lancaster New Era*, May 24, 1882; *Daily Examiner*, May 24, 1882; *Daily Express*, May 25, 1882.
44. *Mennonite Research Journal*, Jan. 1971, p. 7.
45. *Daily Express*, May 24, 1882.
46. *Daily Express*, May 25, 1882.
47. *Op. Cit.*
48. *Mennonite Research Journal*, April 1971, p. 17.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Lancaster New Era*, Oct. 11, 1883.
51. *Op. Cit.*
52. *Op. Cit.*
53. *Lancaster New Era*, Oct 12, 1883.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Lancaster New Era*, Oct 13, 1883.
56. *Lancaster Daily Examiner*, April 20, 1885.
57. Indictments for 1883-1884 stored at LCHS.
58. Receipts from the Eastern State Penitentiary (Filed with Indictments for 1883-1884 and stored at LCHS).
59. *Lancaster Daily Examiner*, May 7, 1885.
60. *Daily Examiner*, June 16, 1890.
61. *Daily Examiner*, April 25, 1890.
62. *Intelligencer*, April 2, 1894.
63. *Intelligencer*, October 26, 1894.
64. *Lancaster New Era*, November 11, 1903.
65. *Lancaster New Era*, May 14, 1908.
66. *Lancaster New Era*, February 19, 1909.