

Jail Program
July 2024
Cecil Township Historical Society

On July 15, 1781 Cecil Township was formed. It is richly underlaid with coal and is one of pioneer oil townships and gas was found in questionable quantities. This along with the farming and dairying with extensive shipments carried out daily by the railroad people of different backgrounds all living in a small community lawlessness was bound to follow.

The coal industry brought in a lot of immigrants to work in the mines. The French, Belgians, Italians, to name a few. After a hard day at work these miners would need to unwind and many places were nearby for them to ease their day with hard liquor. Along with this came many issues which required some law and order.

A Constable was elected to help with the lawbreakers but prior to the building of the jail the men had to handle the situation as best they could, many times bringing the offenders home with them until they could be transported to the Washington County Jail. First by horse and buggy and later the automobile. Their families were often subjected to foul language and blasphemy

Location: The Jail/Lockup/Bastile is located off Route 50 in the middle of town behind a house next to the parking lot of Doc's BBQ. Can be easily seen from the road now since a huge tree fell that was in front of it. Fortunately it did not hit the jail.

I have been unable to find another town that has a jail still standing. This is why the society is so determined to save this history of our town. It would be the only one I know of in the county.

History: In January of 1902 a Letter to the Editor signed by Ignoramus stated that they wanted to know what the Constable had to do with the Republican primaries in our township. It said they knew his duty was to notify the voters of the time of the township election, but that the constable should issue a call for the Republican primary is something they could not fathom.

As of now, there was a disagreement between the political parties. The Democrat's, who supported the workers, were opposed to the

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jail; and the Republicans, with support from the business owners in the community wanted those disturbing the peace locked up. The drive to get a jail failed.

Talk of having a Bastille first comes up again February 19, 1903 when voters at the election as to whether the town should or should not have a jail. The residents voted in favor of it with the hope that the evildoers will have to be more careful or they will be treated to a dose of confinement. At that time several mining camps and settlements around the coal mines began springing up, mostly Belgians. Votes were 36 for the lockup and 20 against.

Then on February 26, 1903 the then Road Supervisor, John Buchanan stated that the action amounted to nothing because the election was not held according to the law. The law expressly says that the supervisors must order the vote taken on the question. He stated that the board was not in shape to take legal action on that or any other question, as it never organized last year so therefore, no action could be taken. He said it was mandatory that the voters be told by the constable or auditor, at least 10 days previous to the election that it was up to be voted on. It was not and Mr. Buchanan said the vote could not be binding.

Now it's October, 1904 and there is talk again about building a lockup. It was expected to be voted on at the November election, but some felt that the law required them to wait until the February election.

So, now it is February, 1905 the request comes up for vote. This time it is 115 for the lockup and 171 against. So, no lockup yet. Martin Nugent was voted in as Constable replacing John Morris who was the incumbent. (184-123)

Then in 1906 there was a Letter to the Editor signed by "Uncle Banks" at that time no one was sure who he was but it was later learned that he was John Banks Holland, a civil war veteran from Hill Station, a man very involved with township business including the schools. At this time there

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January 24, 1907 it was reported in the Washington Observer that C.W. Linn, T.J. Tope and William Patterson, Supervisors of the township, filed a statement of the township's indebtedness with the Clerk of Courts and in that report it stated that the recently built lockup costing \$1,000 and was proposed to be paid for by a special tax levy.

One article said that Mr. Nugent also acted as a bondsman at least one time in 1908. It was for a woman from Canonsburg who was charged with murder and her bail was \$1,500. He, also with 2 other gentleman posted her bond. She killed her husband and when she was taken to jail her 3 year old child was put in the Canonsburg Jail with her.

After one year only one person had been confined. From what I have read this jail was more a place to house the offenders overnight and was not planned to be used for any type of long term lockup. It did provide shelter for many persons who violated the laws, especially public intoxication, fighting, stealing, murder, barroom brawls, moonshine raids, working on Sunday to name a few.

April 6, 1922 - Otto Behling was appointed Constable to replace Martin Nugent after his resignation. Mr. Nugent was somehow involved with a an issue of some kind and he was made to resign.

The jail remains open until approximately 1938-1939. In October of 1942 two young Junior Commados asked the township if they could remove the iron door cages since that this time the jail had been unused for 3 years. Joseph Kinskey, 12 and Bobby Julian, 11, with the help of Wilbert Behling, who used a welding torch. They got about two tons of iron and steel for the defense. Mr. Behling was active in civil defense. It took them over two hours. At this time the township was considering turning the jail into an office for the water department.

At one time, a discussion was had by the supervisors to add a second floor to the building for offices.

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was no Hotel-de-Booze in the township and there were many temperance people who lived here. This was stated in the evidence to license court that a Bastille was needed. Some citizens wanted the jail so as not to allow disorderly ones to go unpunished. Booze hotels were located on the borders of the township and that was firing a passion of otherwise civil men when amply loaded came into this town to vent their spleen and devilish actions in, about or on innocent residents.

August 16, 1906 the township advertised for bids for the erection of a township lockup. Structure was to be brick, fifteen square ad with twelve inch walls. It will have two cages for the confinement of prisoners. They are hoping to be it finished before the cold weather comes. Since the Millers Run valley had become largely a mining community, the need was felt as there were frequent outbreaks among the miners, especially the foreign element. I have looked for the numbers of the vote for the final yes but could not find them.

September 22, 1906 The Daily Notes reported that work had begun on the new lockup. By November 2nd, the McDonald Record said the lockup was progressing slowing but surely and that the cages and doors arrived from the E.T. Barnum Iron Works in Detroit, Michigan.

The property was deeded to Cecil Township by deed dated September 14, 1906 for the sum of \$80.00. The owners of the property were the Klein Bros. and their wives. The Klein's did reserve the bituminous coal underlaying the property with all mining rights and privileges to remove the the same.

Early 1907 the jail officially opens.

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Crimes that can land you in the jail and conduct that the Constables had to deal with:

Prior to the jail being built:

1. Cloud burst - flood and heavy loss of life along Millers Run. This flooding included the Ridgeway Mine in Bishop (near Granish Club). Took seven lives.
2. Dispute among Belgian and an American family ended with brickbats and pitchforks being used.
3. A young man was charged with assault and battery by a young woman of a neighboring farm. It was said that he pointed a gun at her and threw stones at her and a cow. At trial, he was deemed Not Guilty because it was brought to the Judge's attention that the girl had a bad reputation in the community for truth and veracity.

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After jail built:

1. Man arrested for letting his wife go into the coal mine with him dressed as a man so they could get two paychecks. At this time it was a State law that no woman could work in a mine. He was a Slav and worked in the Creedmore Mine (down by entrance to Reissing Road). She had worked three days before it was known. He pled guilty and was fined \$10 and sent to jail for 30 days. This was 1907.
2. Two Cecil Women arrested for selling liquor without a license. \$500 fine and three months in jail each. 1906
3. Investigated a rumor of a murder. Reported that a Russian had killed a fellow countryman. Seems man was just knocked up but everyone that he was dead and left him. By the time the Constable arrived he was gone. 1908
4. 1909 - Alleged "Yeggmen" arrested. Two gentlemen - Yeggmen are pickpockets, any type of theft.
5. Fathers arrested for not sending children to school and/or paying child support for their families.

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6. Raiding Speakeasies. 1921 One in Hill Station raided and they found barrels of raisin mash and a quantity of various kinds of brews. Part of the still was also taken. This was also a problem in 1913 and thought to be the cause of stabbings and cutting affrays in the railroad construction camps here.
7. Miners robber, cheated out of their money and fights at the bars
8. 1926 - Explosion of Dynamite under store in Muse. Fortunately no one was hurt and family living there were able to get out.
9. Farmers always had trouble with trespassers - taking their crops, digging holes in their fields to find groundhogs to kill, people hunting on their property without their permission, animals being taken, horses, cows, sheep, etc
10. Gypsies - A Cecil man was robbed of \$40 from his home by a band of them as they had been infesting the county.
11. Barroom brawls, horse and buggy accidents, vehicle wrecks, automobile accidents, etc.
12. Women who set cup roadblock on a road in Cecil in a protest move to get supervisors to oil that section of highway. The road was near Monoco's Greenhouse that lead to Bishop.

Our constables, there were many, were kept very busy by our residents even before the jail was ever considered.

There is a lot of history here and much more information to be found. Let's save this piece of history, not many towns can say they have a 1906 jail in their neighborhood.

Do you have an ancestor that may have spent a night at the jail? Let us know!