

The Forum

Dedicated to the advancement of carceral interpretation for public benefit.

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Featured Site

Built in 1885, the Historic Pottawattamie County Squirrel Cage Jail was in continuous use until 1969. The design and size make it a one-of-a-kind structure. It was one of 18 revolving jails built and is the only three-story one ever made. It was acquired by the Council Bluffs Park Board in 1971 for preservation purposes and joined the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County spearheaded an effort to save the jail beginning in 1977, and today owns and operates the facility. The cell section remains much as it did in 1969 when it was closed by the county. Learn more [here](#).



Photograph of Pottawattamie Jailhouse,
courtesy of Martin Konopacki.

Monthly Meet-Up

The ACSM hosts monthly meetings for practitioners, scholars, and others involved with or interested in historic prison museums, and/or carceral sites. Meetings take place via Zoom on the second Monday of each month at 3:00 PM EST and cover a wide range of topics, including interpretation, community engagement strategies, and collaborative practices. Contact us at thecarceral@gmail.com to sign-up in order to attend. We hope to see you there!

Out of The Archive



80s Characters &
Rich Colour:
Steve Milanowski's
Photos of
Old Prisons

Story by Prison
Photography

Steve Milanowski photographed at three prisons during the 1980s — [Walpole](#), MA (1981, 1982); [Ionia](#), MI (1984); and [Jackson](#), MI (1985). In 2012, he began shooting the outside of Waupun Correctional Institution in Wisconsin. In each case, Milanowski was working independently, not on assignment.

As colourful and characterful as these images are it's worth bearing in mind that prisons of this era were beginning to creak. Dangerous overcrowding existed in Michigan prisons in the early eighties, and Jackson in particular was renowned as a tough prison with gangs and enforced convict codes.

View photos & read a Q&A with Steve Milanowski, [here](#).

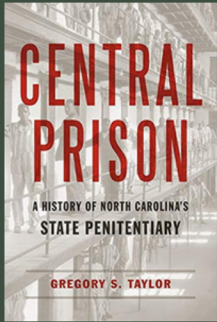
New Read!

Central Prison:
A History of North Carolina's State Penitentiary
By Gregory S. Taylor
(Louisiana State University Press, 2021)

Taylor delivers a detailed and insightful history of the primary institution in North Carolina's prison system. His book covers more than two hundred

years, from the late 18th century, when lawmakers first considered the idea of building a penitentiary, to the early decades of the 21st century, when prison officials struggled to address a mental health crisis among the prisoner population. There is much more to Central Prison than just the account of a state institution. Taylor covers such a long period of time, and provides a level of detail, that makes his history valuable for anyone interested in the wider history of imprisonment.

Summary by Paul Knepper (November 2021)



Appalachian Prison Book Project

Challenging mass incarceration through books, education, and community engagement.

APBP grew out of a 2004 graduate course on the history and literature of imprisonment taught by English Professor Katy Ryan at West Virginia University (WVU). In 2006, APBP moved into the Aull Center and mailed its first book; it became a nonprofit in 2012. In 2014, APBP held an Educational Justice & Appalachian Prisons Symposium. As a result of connections made at the symposium, APBP launched its first book club in the fall of 2014 at the women's prison at Hazelton Correctional Center. Subsequent book clubs at other facilities followed in 2016 and 2019.

The most recent turn in APBP's educational work has been to provide tuition for incarcerated students in WVU's credit-bearing Inside-Out courses. The first class took place in the fall of 2019 and the second one took place in spring of 2020 at SCI-Greene in Pennsylvania. While facilitating prison book clubs and establishing credit-bearing classes behind bars, APBP has continued sending free books to people in prison. As of 2020, APBP has mailed over 45,000 books to incarcerated people across Appalachia. Learn more, and get involved, [here](#).

Notes from the Field

The lack of documented history on Rikers Island is both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, it highlights the possibility that the horrors of Rikers will not remain in our collective memory, and great risk that those injustices will be repeated and relived. On the other hand, it gives us the chance to make sure that those who are most impacted by Rikers can reclaim that history for themselves. For this reason, the Rikers Public Memory Project has begun conducting audio interviews and collecting oral histories of those who have been detained at Rikers, their families, and those who work there. These stories will be catalogued as a part of the permanent collections of the New York Public Library. Learn more [here](#).



Poetry from Prison

"A Wasp Woman Visits a Black Junkie in Prison,"
BY ETHERIDGE KNIGHT (1986)

After explanations and regulations, he
Walked warily in.
Black hair covered his chin, subscribing to
Villainous ideal.
"This can not be real," he thought, "this is a
Classical mistake;
This is a cake baked with embarrassing icing;
Somebody's got
Likely as not, a big fat tongue in cheek!
What have I to do
With a prim and proper-blooded lady?"
Christ in deed has risen
When a Junkie in prison visits with a Wasp woman.

"Hold your stupid face, man,
Learn a little grace, man; drop a notch the sacred shield.
She might have good reason,
Like: 'I was in prison and ye visited me not,' or—some such.
So sweep clear
Anachronistic fear, fight the fog,
And use no hot words."

After the seating
And the greeting, they fished for a denominator,
Common or uncommon;
And could only summon up the fact that both were human.
"Be at ease, man!
Try to please, man!—the lady is as lost as you:
"You got children, Ma'am?" he said aloud.

The thrust broke the dam, and their lines wiggled in the water.
She offered no pills
To cure his many ills, no compact sermons, but small
And funny talk:
"My baby began to walk... simply cannot keep his room clean..."
Her chatter sparked no resurrection and truly
No shackles were shaken
But after she had taken her leave, he walked softly,
And for hours used no hot words.



Photo of "Incarcerated Minds," a mural at Rikers Island by lead artists Bayunga Kialeuka and Christopher Cardinale (2008), courtesy of Groundswell.



From The Desk of The Co-President

DR. C. MORGAN GREFF
ACSM CO-FOUNDER & CO-PRESIDENT

Just a few months ago, I had the pleasure of being invited to the monthly gatherings that Morgan Bengal had been managing throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Seeing all of you on Zoom discussing the work at your sites was more than engaging to me, it was inspiring and hopeful. Nearly twenty years ago I was spending my summers traveling around the country studying the very places in which you work. I remember how extraordinarily hard it was to collect information about tours, programs, and best practices from a distance, and sharing between sites was scant. For me, snail mail and phone calls lead to lengthy, but fascinating, visits and interviews, experiencing programs again and again and again to try to find the best ways to understand the stories behind the preservation and interpretation of the sites.

Now, of course, the speed and proliferation of information makes most of the previous research methodology seem quaint, at best. And yet, no amount of online searching can replace the learning we can experience when sharing with each other. Although the field of historic carceral tourism has grown dramatically, as have academic studies of the mass incarceration crisis, the resources available to our sites and partners has not developed at the same rate. It seemed like this group might, however, present an ideal way to start developing and sharing best practices in real time.

So, starting with May's discussion on religion and incarceration, our leadership team used notes from our meeting (not identifying who made particular comments without getting permission, of course) and turned them into a "one-pager" on the topic. In addition to notes from our conversation, this document contains links to current resources and reading suggestions.

Member Spotlight

In March 2023, Anthony Parry, the Historic Sites Administrator of the Old Idaho Penitentiary in Boise, joined Idaho Matters (NPR) to discuss recent tours of the site's cemetery. Over half of the markers in the prison's cemetery have no names, and others cannot be confirmed in any of the prison records. Congrats to Anthony!



Want your work featured in the next edition of The Forum? Share with us at thecarceral@gmail.com!

This summer our goal is to add these one-pagers to the ACSM website so that members and interested visitors can have free access to the knowledge that this group has to share. Our hope is that this will be the beginning of an online library of best practices and resources for practitioners of carceral history. And, since these will be electronic, we can update when new books and information become available.

This is just one idea we're testing during our 2023/2024 "pilot year," along with this newsletter, to find out from you what ACSM members need. For that reason, this will be most successful if you let us know what is most useful to you. What topics are you keen to discuss? How do you like to receive information? Or share your experiences and expertise?

We're eager to find the best ways to help you share your ideas, experiences, and challenges to not only better the field, but also to recognize the profound work you all do and help to build a community of learning and exchange. Thanks, again, for all you do to help everyone better understand this fundamental part of America's past and present!