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www.prisonmuseum.org
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October 1st-May 1st

10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Weds-Sun. only

**From May 1st to September 30 Summer Hours
 will be from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. OPEN DAILY.
 Admission \$10**

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The *Tall Wall* is published quarterly for Museum members. If you have comments or are interested in having information published in the *Tall Wall*, please send articles, pictures, and/or correspondence to the above address.

TALL WALL



March 30, 2019
Issue 1/2019

TO THE MEMBERSHIP:

Hello Everyone,

I don't know about you but I am looking forward to spring and warmer weather. We have a lot of exciting stuff happening this summer and I for one can't wait.

I hope everyone will join us for one of our fundraisers. We are going to have a movie night on the wall, and later, our Alferd Packer Cannibal Buffet. Don't forget our ghost hunts, and we are bringing back the Ghost Walk. During the ghost walk we will take you through downtown and tell you about the history of Canon City, about the buildings and the ghosts that still haunt them. If you can't make it to any of the fundraisers please come by and check out the museum. It is always changing and our gift shop has some pretty cool stuff.

As always, I cannot thank you enough for your support!

Maureen Sheridan

Punishment is not for revenge, but to lessen crime and reform the criminal.

- Elizabeth Fry
-

**Museum Hours
 Changing May 1st**

From October 1st to May 1st Winter Hours are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wed. through Sunday only.

From May 1st to September 30 Summer Hours will be from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. OPEN DAILY.

As of May 1st The price of admission will be \$10.

Due to higher costs of insurance, maintenance, and wages, the Museum raised the admission prices. There is still a discount for CBOP and FBOP and Military.

THE NOT-SO-GREAT ESCAPE

By Stacey Cline

On a warm sunny day in May 1971 Canon City's annual Music and Blossom Festival parade was well under way. School marching bands from across the state were gathered in the Prison Park in front of "Old Max" at the west end of Main Street and lined up all along 1st Street waiting for their turn in the marching formation. Colorfully decorated floats, including the Blossom Queen and Attendants' float, were in place and ready to enter the parade route. Block after block to the east, Main Street was lined on both sides with hundreds of people excited for the popular parade to begin.

Outside the west perimeter wall of the penitentiary Associate Warden Jack Capelli was watching the activity from his front porch when he heard the sound of a warning shot from

inside the walls. He noticed the kids in the band looking up toward the top of the wall and turned to get a better view. At that moment he saw two inmates on the wall between Towers 5 and 6. Capelli hurried his visitors into the house, retrieved his gun and ran outside just in time to hear a shotgun fired from Tower 6. One of the inmates fell off the side of Capelli's garage roof, which was adjacent to the penitentiary's perimeter wall. The second inmate ran up the gable of the garage roof and Capelli fired his weapon once. The Tower 5 officer stopped the second inmate with a rifle shot. Officers from inside the penitentiary, including Warden Wayne K. Patterson, pushed their way through throngs of people to get to the scene, gain control of the situation, and keep the curious crowds back.

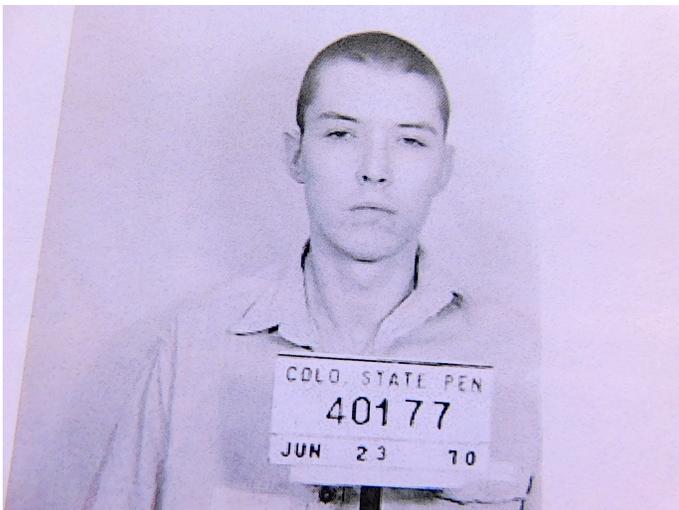


Tower 6

The inmates lying in Jack Capelli's flower garden beside his garage were

two Colorado State Penitentiary death-row inmates, 34-year-old Michael John Bell and 23-year-old Ernest LeRoy Alsip. Bell had died instantly, and Alsip expired within minutes before the ambulance from Andrew Funeral Home could arrive on the scene.

Bell and Alsip had been imprisoned on first-degree murder convictions. They were sentenced to die in the penitentiary's gas chamber located in the penthouse on top of Cellhouse 3. That day both were supposed to be in the maximum-security escape-proof exercise yard. The exercise yard was an enclosed area next to Cellhouse 3 secured by a concrete floor, high wire fence, and an internal stone wall. Bell and Alsip had apparently studied the area at every opportunity and planned an escape route—one that might succeed on a day like Blossom Day.



Ernest LeRoy Alsip

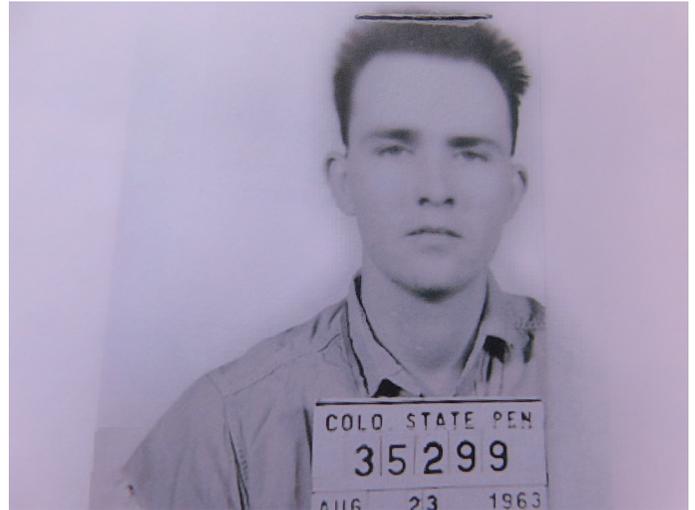
If they could get to the roof of the cellhouse where the gas chamber penthouse offered concealment from the towers' view, they could choose a time when the guards were distracted by the band noise and parade activity, cross a caged catwalk to an internal east-west wall which extended to the outside perimeter wall, jump to the ground, and be lost in the crowd. The extra boost they needed to climb the high fence proved to be as simple as a water faucet and conduit running along the cellhouse wall.

Officer Don Davis, manning Tower 8 inside the penitentiary to the west of Cellhouse 3, was the first to see movement on the roof of the cellhouse. Watching closely, he saw the two inmates appear from their hiding place. He fired a warning shot into the air. The Tower 6 officer, M.J. Parker, out on the tower catwalk holding his .30-06 rifle, ordered the inmates to halt. They kept running and were now fast approaching the perimeter wall.

Parker took careful aim as a missed shot towards the south might result in a ricocheting bullet capable of injuring innocent bystanders in the park. The rifle jammed. Parker later said this jam was possibly "the luckiest thing that ever happened to me." He then reached inside the tower for the shotgun and fired two rounds. Bell fell from the wall and off

Capelli's garage roof, hit by two shotgun pellets. Alsip jumped from the wall to the garage roof as Officer Clayton Wright, manning Tower 5 to the south, fired his rifle once, striking him. Alsip landed on the ground near Bell.

In the space of one or two adrenaline-pumping minutes both tower officers had been called upon to perform their most critical duty—to prevent an escape at all costs yet use no more force than is demanded. If a warning shot and verbal orders to halt were ignored, tower officers were expected to fire their weapons with the express purpose of stopping an escapee. Had these two desperate inmates successfully disappeared into the Blossom Day crowd, it would have been a very dangerous situation. Alsip was found armed with a homemade 8" spike made of sturdy steel wire with a twine-wrapped wooden handle. Bell had a homemade shank manufactured from a spoon handle attached to a wooden handle. Bell was also in possession of a Colorado road map with several cities in the southwestern portion of the state circle in pencil.



Michael John Bell

At the subsequent coroner's inquest, the deaths were ruled "not feloniously caused." Death certificates listed the cause of death for both inmates as "justifiable homicide." At the inquest, Officer Parker recalled his thoughts at the critical moment of firing his weapon: "You can't hit a kid and you can't let people like Bell and Alsip get among the kids."

Associate Warden Capelli later learned that the "band members thought the penitentiary was putting on a performance for them like Buckskin Joe does, and they were looking up at the wall watching these two inmates come over the top."

But the drama witnessed by so many that fine Blossom Festival Day in 1971 was a very real life-or-death situation.

- This article reprinted from the Canon City Daily Record of April 18, 2013 page A5 with permission from the author.

More on ALSIP and BELL

By Sandy Dexter

Of the two death row inmates killed outside the east wall of the Colorado State Penitentiary during Blossom Festival weekend, 1971, little is known about Ernest Leroy Alsip. Perhaps it was because of his age. He was only 23 years old. We do know Alsip was sentenced to die on July 31st, 1969, for the kidnap-murder of Ollie Mae Jackson, age 62, and that he was a native of Illinois. Officers found a homemade knife, sharpened from a piece of wire fencing and shaped to resemble an icepick on his body at the time of his death.

Michael John Bell, age 36, was a different story. He had spent 13 of his last 26 years in various reformatories and prisons. During these earlier incarcerations Bell developed his artistic talents to such a degree that Public Defender Rollie Rogers requested him to design the official seal which appears on all Colorado Public Defender letterheads.

Bell had been sentenced to death for the Sept. 12th, 1962, gunshot slaying of Denver Police Patrolman Carl Knobbe. He was awaiting the outcome of a Supreme Court ruling that could possibly outlaw the death penalty and make him eligible for parole. By 1968 his execution had been scheduled and postponed six times. In June of 1968 he was the subject of a "Life" magazine article

dealing with inmates on death rows across the nation.

So, with all this going for him, why would Bell decide to try and escape? The answer was a purely psychological one. Bell acknowledged he was "sick and not ready to return to society." He felt he was not "stable enough". By trying to escape and getting caught, he would eliminate the possibility of parole. Being shot to death instead of getting caught was not part of the plan. A homemade dagger with a three-inch blade was found on Bell's body.

According to an article in the Pueblo "Star Journal" and Sunday "Chieftain", a high school band standing near the east wall of the penitentiary was playing Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture", culminating with the boom of the cannon at the precise moment guards fired the shots that ended the lives of the two escaping convicts.

BUILDING NEWS!

Installing a New Heating System: The Sequel

Yes! The new heating system is installed and working! Four units in the basement are making life less noisy and more pleasant for staff and visitors. But...some of the invisible residents of the building have created some minor mischief! The men who

installed the equipment were called out three different times for repairing small tubing and once when they discovered a plug pulled a little way out of the wall socket.

Finally, one of the staff told the mischief-makers to “knock it off. We want a warm building to work in!” So far nothing else amiss has been reported.

GIFT SHOP NEWS

This spring we will be adding new items and re-ordering favorite items for the Gift Shop. Come in and browse. Remember, you can visit the Gift Shop without an admission fee any time the Museum is open.

UPCOMING EVENTS!!!!

WOMEN WHO WINE will be the guests of the Museum on April 4th at 5:30 p.m.

GHOST HUNT, USA is on schedule for May 3rd and 4th, Blossom Festival weekend, and May 10 and 11th; 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. Tickets will be on sale **throughout the U.S.** for approximately \$125 each. For more information go on-line to “Ghost Hunts USA.com”

Paranormal Nights will be starting again soon. Please call the Museum, 269-3015, to schedule.