

Pop-Up Museum: Escapes!

April 2 – April 12, 2015

Locked safely away in Eastern State Penitentiary's old darkroom, just a few steps from here, hundreds of numbered artifacts rest in neatly organized drawers. Thousands of photographs, also carefully numbered, fill museum storage boxes. Rare books line the shelves.

The darkroom has been fitted with modern climate control systems to preserve the collection. Each object—from a weapon hidden by an Eastern State inmate to a photograph developed in the darkroom where it is stored today—is irreplaceable. It tells part of Eastern State's story.

Officers and inmates saved most of these rare artifacts. Many of them took keepsakes when Eastern State closed as a state prison in 1970. We thank these men and women for returning these fascinating objects to the historic site. Other artifacts were discovered here, abandoned with the penitentiary itself.

Once a year, here in the historic site's climate-controlled conference room, we'll display some of these precious artifacts for our visitors.



On the Walls:

Floor Plan of Eastern State Penitentiary. Color coded by year of construction. From the exhibit *Crucible of Good Intentions*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1994.

All of the artifacts in this exhibit are from the Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site unless otherwise noted.

**Parental Advisory:
Adult Subjects**

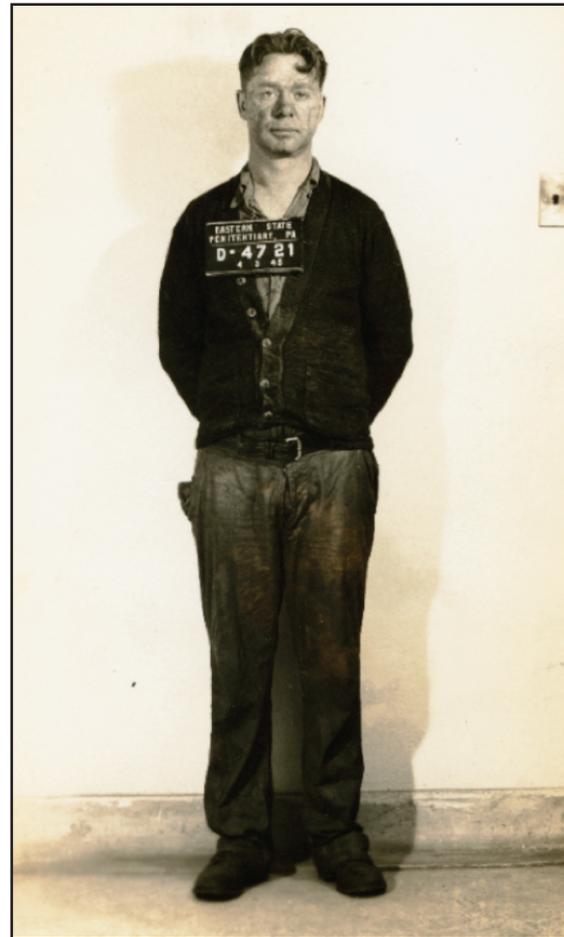
Case 1:

The 1945 Tunnel Escape

Twelve inmates crawled out of the prison through an underground passageway in April 1945—the first successful tunnel escape in Eastern State’s history. Countless inmates had attempted to dig out of the prison before, but none had succeeded.

This case focuses on the men who tunneled from Cellblock 7 to Fairmount Avenue on that April morning. All were recaptured, some within hours and others within months.

Once recaptured, the inmates were housed in the Cellblock 13 punishment block. The escapees petitioned to regain their visiting and mail privileges. Some of them, including infamous bank robber William “Slick Willie” Sutton, staged a hunger strike.



The tunnel escape was an embarrassing security breach. After an investigation placed blame on prison heads, Warden Herbert Smith resigned in August 1945.

Sutton also escaped from Holmesburg Prison in northeast Philadelphia and Sing Sing Prison in upstate New York. He enjoyed significant media attention throughout his criminal career, as evidenced by the *LIFE* magazine article featured in this case.

In Case 1:

True Detective magazine, open to the article "The 12 Who Failed," April 1945.

Criminal Histories of 1945 Tunnel Escapees.

Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Request for Privileges from the Inmates Involved in the 1945 Tunnel Escape.

Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Report of the Board, 1944 Murder of Guard Lichtenberger and Suicide of Inmate Saunders and 1945 Tunnel Escape.

Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Letter Regarding Restoring Privileges of Tunnel Escapees, 1945 Tunnel Escape.

Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Portrait of Warden Herbert Smith.

Photograph of Escape Tools.

Acme Newspictures (Corbis).

Wallet Made from Kool and Pall Mall Cigarette Packs. This wallet was said to have been created by inmate David Aiken, one of the 1945 tunnel escapees. Gift of Richard Griffin.

Mug Shots of Inmates William Russell (D-7101), David Aiken (C-3826), Frederick Tenuto (D-4986), 1945 Tunnel Escape.

Gift of Leonard Bojanowski.

Standing Mug Shots of Inmates Michael Webb (C-4721), James Simister (D-5104), Robert McKnight (D-3224), James Grace (D-7270), 1945 Tunnel Escape.

Gift of Leonard Bojanowski.

LIFE magazine, open to the article "Curtains for 'The Actor,'" March 3, 1945.

Gift of Edward F. Peters and Irene Dooley born and raised here in Fairmount.

Expenditures for Inmate William Sutton (C-9523). Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Bertillon Card for Inmate William Sutton (C-9523). Gift of Eastern's friends at CAMA-PA.

Wanted Poster for Inmate James Van Sant (D-3385), 1945 Tunnel Escape.

Gift of Leonard Bojanowski.

Onsite connection: Learn more about this escape by visiting the site of the tunnel in Cellblock 7. Please ask any staff member for directions or more information about the artifacts.

Case 2:

Getting Out By Any Means Necessary

Inmates risked their lives trying to escape. They saw severe punishments—from placement in a dark cell to reduced food rations—if caught plotting an escape. If they actually broke out of prison and were recaptured, they faced drastically extended prison terms and the ire of prison officials.



Still, inmates dared to try. Dozens escaped throughout the prison's history. Many more attempted and failed. They broke out in pairs and small groups, but most escaped alone.

Inmates William Bishie and William Lynch, entrusted to do electrical work around the prison, threw a guard from a corner tower and then escaped over the wall. Lynch was apprehended four days later. Bishie, whose intake card is displayed in this case, experienced seven years of freedom before recapture. *Finger Print and Identification Magazine*, included in this case, featured both inmates on its cover.

George Nelson (B-3943), shown in the mug shot book in Case 3, attempted to dig out of his cell in 1908. His plan was foiled when another inmate told the warden. Nelson died at Eastern State in 1913 of endocarditis. The prison's death ledger, featured in this case, recorded his passing.

In Case 2:

Death Ledger, 1830-1936. Open to the year 1913.

Finger Print and Identification Magazine, open to reward information for escaped Eastern State Penitentiary inmate William Lynch (C-2930), December 1927.

Bertillon Card for Inmate William Bishie (B-6311). Gift of Alan J. LeFebvre.

Locks and Keys. Unless otherwise noted, all of the locks and keys in this case are gifts of the Scheerer Family. The Scheerer Collection was donated in memory of Andreas Scheerer, Captain of Maximum Security from 1946 to 1971. It is the largest collection donated by one family to Eastern State Penitentiary.

Key. Metal key with large loop at top. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Large Key. Key seems as though it may have fit in the pedestrian door of the middle gate in the penitentiary gatehouse. Gift of anonymous donor.

Metal Key. Key looks as though it is made out of two different metals: the base is a goldish color, shaft and teeth are silvery. Gift of Russell David Schaefer 1970.

General Rules of the Eastern State Penitentiary for the Government of Inmates. Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Mug Shot Book, 1904-1906 (Inmates B-2375 to B-3374, open to pages featuring B-2885 to B-2904). Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Handcuffs. Stamped with laurel wreath pattern on one end, "HARD" on outer ring, and "BEST," "3," and "WARRANTED WROUGHT." Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Yale Lock. Metal lock. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Handcuffs. The writing on the cuffs reads: "The peerless handcuff co. Springfield Mass."

Onsite connection: While standing in the kitchen courtyard, notice the guard tower in the northwest corner of the penitentiary. Inmates William Bishie and William Lynch threw a guard from this tower and escaped over the wall. Though badly injured, the guard survived the fall. Please ask any staff member for directions or more information about the artifacts.

Case 3:

Sewers, Tunnels, and Supply Trucks

Inmates found creative ways to escape: underground through sewers and tunnels; over the wall with ladders and ropes; and through the front gate, concealed in supply trucks or dressed in civilian clothing.



Victor Andreoli, whose

WANTED poster is featured

here, attempted but failed to escape through a tunnel in 1940. He made a successful break in 1943, hidden in a truck. He swore he would never be recaptured alive. His vow proved true; he was shot and killed in a diner in Chester, PA by local police who recognized him and attempted to arrest him. A photograph of the gun found on his body is featured in this case.

The two intake cards and three photographs that line the bottom of this case all relate to a 1934 sewer escape, in which five inmates broke out of the prison. The inmates swam several blocks through the sewer system before emerging above ground. Some of them discarded their clothing along the way. In one of the pictures, a half-naked escaped inmate, William Conway, is returned to the prison in a wheelchair. In another, a man from the neighborhood holds up a pair of pants discarded by an inmate swimming to freedom.

In Case 3:

Mug Shot Page, 1921 (Inmates C-665 to C-674). Inmate C-674, Francis Joseph Flynn, escaped through the front gate with two other inmates in November 1923. A fourth inmate was shot dead while trying to escape. Gift of anonymous donor.

Bertillon Card for Inmate Frank Willey (Wiley) (C-8825).

Bertillon Card for Inmate Martin Farrell (C-8359).

Wanted Poster for Inmate Victor Andreoli (D-2515), and Photograph of Victor Andreoli's Gun and Bullets. Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Black Bullet Found in the Penitentiary in 2007.

Silver Bullet. Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Cellblock 14 Cellar Keys and Keychain.

Parole Violator Poster for Inmate Harry Brown (B-5063).

Lock.

Yale Lock.

Photograph of William Conway Being Returned to the Penitentiary in a Wheelchair. Acme Newspictures (Corbis).

Photograph of Man Holding a Pair of Inmate Trousers after 1934 Sewer Escape, and Photograph of Officers Looking into Sewer Grate in Prison Courtyard after 1934 Escape. Acme Newspictures (Corbis).

Mug Shot Book, 1906-1908 (Inmates B-3375 to B-4374, open to pages featuring B-3925 to B-3944). Gift of anonymous donor.

Large Key. This key may have fit in a pedestrian door in the prison's gatehouse. Gift of an anonymous donor.

Onsite connection: When exiting the penitentiary, look at the sewer grate on the patch of grass near the end of Cellblock 9. In 1934, five inmates escaped through this grate into the sewer system, swimming several blocks to freedom. A photograph of officers looking into this sewer grate after the escape is featured in the bottom right of the case. Please ask any staff member for directions or more information about the artifacts.

Case 4:

The 1961 Riot and Escape Attempt

In January 1961, a group of 30 inmates rioted. They roamed the cellblocks, beating guards and releasing several prisoners from the punishment block. They made their way to the garage, where they hoped to steal a prison vehicle and escape.

Prison officials initiated “Operation Breakout,” using their riot training to put down the uprising. State and local police, using tear gas and billy clubs, joined prison guards in subduing the rioters.



Two weeks before the riot, inmate Richard Mayberry was caught with a zip gun—an improvised handgun similar to the one in this case. Prison officials placed Mayberry in the Cellblock 15 punishment block. One of the first to be released by the rioting inmates, Mayberry helped lead the uprising. He is featured twice in this case, as a bespectacled youth on his intake card (G-2562), and as a badly beaten prisoner in a wheelchair following the riot.

After officials regained control, they discovered a trove of shanks, also called shivs—inmate-crafted weapons. Every weapon on view here was created by an Eastern State inmate, and eventually discovered by the guard staff. The collection was saved by Officer Andreas Scheerer when the penitentiary closed.

In Case 4:

Weapons. All of the shanks and shivs in this case are gifts of the Scheerer Family.

Zip Gun. A “zip gun” is an improvised hand gun. Zip guns typically use ground-up match heads as firing powder. This example is made from wood and a length of threaded plumbing pipe. Inmate Richard Mayberry, pictured in this case, was described after the 1961 riot as a “zip gun hobbyist.” Gift of the Scheerer Family.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, “Many Tried to Flee but Few Made It,” January 9, 1961.

Photograph: Richard Mayberry (G-2562) in a Wheelchair. Gift of the Biedermann family.

The Evening Bulletin, “Prison Break Thwarted at State Correctional Institution in Philadelphia,” January 9, 1961.

Photograph: Riot Aftermath. Taken in Center, this photograph shows two officers near the doorway of Cellblock 4. The clock reads 12:52 a.m., shortly after the riot was put down.

Two Small Photographs of the Riot Aftermath. Gift of the Biedermann Family.

Photograph: Riot Aftermath. Gift of a friend of ESP.

Ring of Keys. This ring attaches to a leather clip for a belt; it holds 21 keys.

Thin Metal Key. Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Bertillon Card for Inmate Richard Mayberry (G-2562).

Green Padlock. Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Onsite connection: Visit Cellblock 15, nicknamed Death Row, to see where Richard Mayberry was held. Please ask any staff member for directions or more information about the artifacts.

Cases 5 and 6:

Foiled Breaks & Dashes to Liberty

The media paid attention to Eastern State escapes. Newspaper coverage fueled the sentiment that a maximum security prison in the middle of a bustling urban community was illogical and potentially dangerous.

When officials discovered two incomplete tunnels within days of each other in 1940, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* proclaimed on its front page that 200 inmates were plotting to escape. The real story was far less exciting. Just nine inmates were implicated in the digging.



Lewis Edwards, featured in a magazine article in Case 6 on the counter, escaped from the penitentiary in 1923. Recaptured in Honolulu, Hawaii, and returned to Eastern State, he oversaw a successful boat-building enterprise while imprisoned. Pardoned in 1929, he was re-arrested soon after. The media loved documenting Edwards' exploits—from his booming business to his encounters with reformation and criminality.

Edwards' story embodied the contradictions of being an Eastern State inmate: the potential to turn one's life around and the desire to escape.

In Case 5:

Seen and Heard, open to "Escapes from the Eastern Penitentiary," March 27, 1901.

Map of 1945 Escape Tunnel.

Gift of the family of John D. Shearer.

Bertillon Card for Inmate Joseph

Corrigan (C-8352). Corrigan and others were implicated in attempting to tunnel out of the prison in 1940.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Rush Machine Guns to Eastern Pen after 200 Plot to Tunnel Way Out," February 15, 1940 (Front Page). Gift of Paul Abner.

Photograph of Guard in the Cellblock 9 Tunnel, 1940. Gift of Eastern's friends at CAMA-PA.

In Case 6:

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Rush Machine Guns to Eastern Pen after 200 Plot to Tunnel Way Out," February 15, 1940 (Page 3).

Gift of Paul Abner.

Old Original Bookbinder's Fishing Yawl 1865.

Gift of the family of Willis and Ruth Dixon.

Bertillon Card for Inmate Leo Callahan

(C-366). Callahan escaped over the wall in 1923 with a group of other inmates, including Lewis Edwards, also featured in this case. Callahan is the only inmate known to have avoided recapture. Gift of the Scheerer Family.

Everybody's Magazine, "Bossing a Hundred Workmen from a Cell," c. 1924.

Photograph: Car Used in 1923 Escape.

Spanish Galleon Ship.

Escape Poster for Inmate Howard Martin Keavin (James Williams) (C-1677).

Photograph: Escape Ladder on Corinthian Avenue, July 17, 1923. Photo by Acme Newspictures (Corbis).

Onsite connection: When exiting the penitentiary, notice the Cellblock 1 guard tower. In July 1923, Lewis Edwards and five other inmates overpowered the guard on duty here. They locked him in the guard box—then located on the ground instead of at the top of the tower—and used a ladder to escape over the wall. Please ask any staff member for directions or more information about the artifacts.



Drone photograph by Nick Lang.

EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY

America's Most Historic Prison

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