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.

Plans are currently underway to build a museum-quality exhibit space inside the penitentiary. Until then, visitors can view photo reproductions (hundreds appear on signs throughout the building), while scholars carefully study the original artifacts.

And, once a year, here in the historic site’s climate-controlled conference room, we’ll display some of these precious artifacts for our visitors. Join us next year at Pop-Up Museum!
Case 1:  
**Consequence and Redemption**

The Mug Shot Book in this case showcases a cross-section of Eastern State inmates in 1906. Nineteen men and one woman stare blankly at the camera, perhaps regretting their decisions or imagining the freedom they would someday regain.

Eastern State inmates had plenty of time to reflect, make amends, and plan for their lives beyond the walls. Inmate Daniel Donahue, whose paperwork is on display here, donated some of his skin to a 9-year-old burn victim. His good deed earned him a “commutation,” a way out of his Life sentence.

Some inmates found comfort and community in organized religion. Inmates such as Claude Harris, a Baptist whose intake card is displayed here, had the support of a chaplain, access to religious literature, and opportunity for worship services.

For others, the only thing that could provide true deliverance was release from prison. Inmates constantly tried to get out of Eastern State, sometimes rioting, sometimes attempting escape. Prison officials documented these desperate attempts, photographing a thwarted tunnel escape from 1940, and a badly beaten Richard Mayberry, inmate G-2562, following a 1961 riot.
Surviving prison was a challenge. Everyday encounters could escalate into matters of life and death.

Inmates crafted weapons—called *shanks* or *shivs*—to protect themselves, and to threaten and intimidate others. 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.

Joseph Havel, pictured here in a bloodied inmate uniform, stabbed and killed his cellmate in the middle of the night.

Weapons and other *contraband*—forbidden items—were plentiful behind the walls. Eastern State inmates gambled and bartered, using candy, cigarettes, and food as currency.

Inmate William Bishie, entrusted to do electrical work around the prison, threw a guard from a corner tower and then escaped over the wall. Bishie, whose intake card is displayed in this case, enjoyed seven years of freedom before recapture.

Death was the only way out of prison for many inmates. The death ledger in this case documents those who did not survive their imprisonment.
In Case 2:

Photo: Shank, Ax, and File. Inmate Steven Saunders used these objects in his fatal attack on guard Edwin Lichtenberger. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Photo: Gem Razor Blades. Inmates could purchase razors in the prison’s commissary. They were sometimes used as weapons. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Scissor Shank. This weapon was made from half of a pair of scissors wrapped with electrical tape and a canvas belt. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Shank and Sheath. Made of flat metal wrapped with black cloth tape. The sheath consists of black cloth tape wrapped around college-ruled notebook paper. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.


Comb Shank. Made from a pocket comb taped to a piece of metal with remnants of institutional green paint. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Shank with Masking Tape Handle. Discovered by historic site staff in Cellblock 14, this weapon had been wedged into the base of a table for at least 40 years. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, found in 2012.

Shank with Riveted Wood Handle. This knife was possibly stolen from the prison kitchen and sharpened further by its owner. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Shank with Black Leather Satchel Sheath. Fashioned from a prison-issued cafeteria knife. It fits into a black leather sheath with two shoelaces tied to it. Until 1953, inmates at Eastern State were issued their own set of utensils upon arrival. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Shank with Black Tape Handle. Made from a prison-issued knife, this Shank is stamped with the initials “MK” on the back. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Small Metal Shank. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.


Shank with Rounded Black Handle. This Shank features a blade filed down to a rounded shape, tapering to a sharply defined point. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Copper Pipe Club. This club’s handle is wrapped in light jersey-weave cloth. Underneath the cloth is some sort of joint, indicating the club may have been a handle of some sort. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift 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 Case 1, was described after a 1961 riot as a “zip gun hobbyist.” Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.


Agitator Card for Inmate C-1348, Salvatore Battaglia. Battaglia was identified as “an agitator among the Italian Element.” Though prison officials did not elaborate on the meaning of this, Battaglia was indeed affiliated with some Italian underworld figures. He was incarcerated for killing a police officer in a South Philadelphia gambling house run by mobster John Scoopetti. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Eastern’s friends at CAMA-PA.

Solitary Card for Inmate C-1348, Salvatore Battaglia. Sent to a solitary punishment cell for hitting another inmate, Battaglia consistently ran afoul of prison officials. He was released from prison in 1949, on the condition that he be deported to Italy. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Eastern’s friends at CAMA-PA.


United States Penitentiary in Pittsburgh, he was involved in an inmate riot that left two guards dead. He was sent back to Eastern State. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Eastern’s friends at CAMA-PA.
Case 3: Salvation

The penitentiary’s founders hoped that inmates would experience some measure of salvation while incarcerated. With reform and redemption as a goal, prison officials supplied every inmate with a Bible.

As seen on the intake cards throughout the exhibit, many inmates entered the prison with some religious affiliation: Baptist, Catholic, Hebrew (Jewish), Christian Science, and more. In the prison’s early years, a weekly religious service was held in each cellblock; inmates were encouraged to listen from their cells.

By the mid-20th century, the prison hosted as many as six religious services in the chapel on an average Sunday. Inmates took part in a variety of holy rites during these services, including baptism and communion. Jewish inmates worshipped in the synagogue off the Cellblock 7 alley.

A variety of choirs and evangelists, including Billy Sunday and Billy Graham, visited the prison and ministered to the inmates.

In Case 3:


Book: Christ in Prison, George G. Meley, Assistant to the Chaplain of Eastern State Penitentiary, 1948. Meley wrote about his prison ministry, telling the stories of inmates transformed by Christianity. One such inmate that Meley documented was James Kehoe, whose intake card is in this case. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift in honor of Dr. Marvin Wolfgang from a friend.


Photo: Rev. Linn Bowman, Rev. Bernard Farley, and Rev. J.A. Kenney. Farley served as Eastern State’s Catholic chaplain in the 1930s. When he left his post in 1939, Eastern State staff and inmates threw him a farewell party. Bowman was the prison’s Protestant chaplain, and Kenney was Farley’s replacement. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary, gift of John P. Farley, Mary B. Maiden, James J. Farley, Kate Farley, and Bernard C. Farley.

Photo: Inmates in Chapel. The Eastern State chapel occupied the second floor of the prison’s Industrial Building. This photo dates from the 1950s or 1960s. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Photo: Father Gallagher Directing Inmate Choir. Worshiping together was one of the first things inmates were allowed to do when the prison transitioned to a congregate system in 1913. Through much of the 20th century, inmates sang and played music together. Father Edwin Gallagher, the prison’s Catholic
chaplain in the 1950s, facilitated an inmate choir. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Silver Charm Marked with Hebrew Writing and a Star of David. Found on site in a small glass “Tiger Balm” jar that also contained a fake $10,000 bill, a small Asian print, and the instructions for the Tiger Balm. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Bertillon Card for Inmate C-717, Mary Bukowsky. In the 1900s, Catholicism was one of the dominant religions practiced by inmates, including Mary Bukowsky. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Soap Carving: Figure in Prayer. Inmate-carved soap figure in prayer, c. 1960. Harry Shank, the inmate who carved the soap figures in this case, was an alleged ringleader of a major 1961 riot at the prison. Officials transferred Shank to Western State Penitentiary in Pittsburgh after the riot. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, hand-carved by Harry Shank.

Soap Carving: Figure in Prayer. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, hand-carved by Harry Shank.


Tinsel Art Portrait of Jesus. Believed to have been made by an inmate, this recently-conserved portrait of Jesus was created by painting the glass and applying a foil backing. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Joseph J. Mucerino.

Letter to Unknown Recipient from Inmate A-1122, William Hoagland. In this letter, Hoagland admits feelings of guilt for lying about his belief in religion. Hoagland expresses sorrow for his lack of faith, as he feels that the Catholic faith has many merits. Hoagland was at Eastern State for 13 years for burglary (1881-1894). Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of John P. Farley, Mary B. Maiden, James J. Farley, Kate Farley, and Bernard C. Farley.

Framed Document Honoring Rev. Thomas Simons, Signed by Inmates (Case 5). This document celebrates Rev. Thomas Simons, Eastern State’s Catholic chaplain from 1942 to 1952. It was signed on the back by a multitude of inmates, including Daniel Donohue, whose commutation is featured in Case 1. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Mrs. Barbara Henkels.

Chaplain’s Suitcase (Case 5). This suitcase belonged to Rev. Bernard Farley, who served as Eastern State’s Catholic chaplain in the 1930s. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of John P. Farley, Mary B. Maiden, James J. Farley, Kate Farley, and Bernard C. Farley.


Tabernacle (Case 6). Found in Cellblock 8, this object is probably a Catholic tabernacle designed to hold a chalice (a cup holding sacred wine). Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Decanter/Cruet (Case 6). This decanter (used to hold wine and water for serving communion) is thought to have been used in the chapel at Eastern State. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the family of Howard H. Haines, Captain of the Guards.

In Case 3:
Case 4:  
**No Idle Hands**

Inmates found purpose through their labor and leisure activities. Work interrupted the monotony of prison, and it readied inmates for life beyond the walls.

During Eastern State’s early years, inmates worked as tailors, weavers, and shoemakers. Later, they labored in the prison’s workshops, producing rags, pins, hosiery, and crafts. Their handiwork resulted in inlaid boxes, beaded jewelry, pincushions, and bookends—some of which are on display here.

During World War II, a number of inmates made model ships and tent pegs for the War Production Board. Being industrious improved inmates’ quality of life, as well as the day-to-day functioning of the prison: inmates served food in the mess halls, provided support for the prison’s medical staff, and maintained the gardens and grounds.

In addition to work, inmates participated in a variety of clubs, classes, and sports leagues. The *Eastern Echo*, a quarterly magazine produced in the 1950s and 60s, was written, edited, and illustrated by inmates.

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**In Case 4:**

**Photo: Jacob Pensendorfer with Wooden Handcrafts.** Pensendorfer, nicknamed “Lifetime Jake,” served 25 years at Eastern State for murder. He was paroled around Christmas time in 1926. Pensendorfer built up a woodworking business while imprisoned. He sold it for $6,000 upon his release.

Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, photo by Acme.

**Photo: Dental Lab.** Inmates worked in the prison’s medical and dental facilities.

Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Biedermann Family.

**Shoe-Shaped Pincushion.** Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

**Wood Carving: Dog.** Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

**Inlaid Wooden Box.** Inmates made crafts and sold them to the public in the prison’s “Curio Shop” in the front gatehouse. On the bottom of this box’s drawer, it read: “Feb. 27, 1908. Made by one of the convicts in the Eastern Penitentiary.” Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

**Beaded Necklace.** The father of the donor of this object owned a bakery at 7th and Dickinson Streets in South Philadelphia, and brought doughnuts and bagels to Eastern State’s prisoners. An inmate gave the baker this necklace in 1929, and he, in turn, gave it to his daughter. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

**Bookend.** Shaped like the prison’s original front door, this bookend features a heavy bolt from that door.

Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Katherine W. Sharp.

**Eastern Echo, Fall 1965.** The *Eastern Echo*, a quarterly magazine published in the 1950s and 1960s, was written, edited, illustrated, and printed by Eastern State inmates. Feature stories covered sports at the prison, inmate perspectives on the death penalty, and highlights about the prison’s medical and religious staff. From inside this issue: “The cover was designed by S. R. Cantoral and Calvin Milligan. It is an attempt to convey ‘football’ behind these walls in our exercise yard.” Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift in memory of Retired Bernard M. Sekula, Correction Officer I.

**Wooden Cup.** Small wooden cup made of two different tones: dark and medium brown.

Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.


**Wooden Piggybank.** Made by an inmate, this piggy bank is decorated with a measuring cup, rolling pin, cupcake pan, and tulips. A staff member purchased this item from an inmate around 1960.

Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Rev. and Mrs. Anthony Dibenedetto, Jr.

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*continued*
In Case 4:

Photo: Inmates Playing Baseball. Inmates played baseball in the ball field between Cellblocks 3 and 4. The roof of Cellblock 3 provided a good vantage to watch the game. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Jack Flynn.

Miniature Bone Cutlery Set. The note accompanying this set states that it was made in 1856 for Mary Anna Kaighn by a prisoner in the “Spring Garden Street Prison Philadelphia.” He made them from the bones in his soup, using the blade of his jack knife. Mary Anna, a child, visited the prison with her father, James Kaighn, a member of the Board of Visitors. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.


Photo: Inmates and Staff at Christmas. Sixteen inmates, one guard, a chaplain, and a Santa Claus pose for a photo around Christmas. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of the Scheerer Family.

Wallet Made from Kool and Pall Mall Cigarette Packs. This wallet was said to be created by inmate David Aiken, one of the 1945 tunnel escapees. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary, gift of Richard Griffin.

Photo: Inmates Shaking Hands. Inmates pose for a photo while gathered on the ball field for a football game. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.


Photo: Chinese Inmate and Warden Smith. This inmate, who composed a solo for the occasion, performed during the prison’s 1939 Christmas broadcast on radio station KYW. Warden Herbert Smith is pictured on the right. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, photo by Arme.

Photo: Inmates Playing Instruments. An inmate bandleader (left) conducts fellow prisoners during the 1939 Christmas broadcast on radio station KYW. According to the sheet music, the band is playing the song “Sugar Blues.” Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, photo by Arme.

Painting of a Cell Window (Case 5). Inmate John J. Andrews painted this cell window around 1969. The cell wall is streaked with rust from the window’s bars. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, gift of Dr. and Mrs. Fulmer.

Painting: “The Country Church” (Case 6). Painted in oil on a thin canvas or muslin, this object is signed “By Jos. Duvia 9/12/16” in its lower right corner. The frame, made of oak, was added later. This object was most likely painted by inmate B-6329. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

The Umpire, November 1, 1916 (Case 6). Inmates sold their handcrafts to each other, advertising their creations in the inmate-produced newsletter, The Umpire. On this page, about halfway down the far right column, it reads: “FOR SALE—Fancy hand-painted trays, photo enlargements in crayon, water color or oil; also oil paintings. Prices reasonable. B 6329, 8th Block.” It is believed that this inmate painted “The Country Church” on this counter. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

Wooden Ship (Case 6). Some inmates were in business for themselves, building successful craft production enterprises and selling them to other inmates upon their release. Collection of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.