

# BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE TRAGEDY

How Jerry Condo, Turnkey at the Centre County Jail, Was Killed Last July.

## FIVE PRISONERS BROKE JAIL

Lay in Wait with Deadly Weapons—Skull Crushed—Finally Were Captured—New Trial Refused—Supreme Court Disappoints Them—Pardon Board Would Not Interfere. An Appeal to the Governor for a Respite Made Last Saturday.

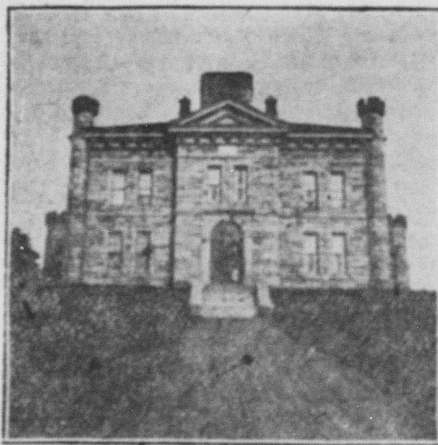
While the fate of William Dillen and Ira Green has been the topic of general discussion since last July, and most persons are acquainted with their unfortunate career, it is appropriate at this time to give a brief account of their reckless crime, for which they have paid the penalty with their lives. Many incidents may have been forgotten, or others view it in a mistaken light. For that reason we have carefully compiled the following data from court records so as to present a complete

### HISTORY OF THE CRIME.

William Dillen was confined to the jail of Centre county, awaiting trial on a charge of assault and battery with intent to commit rape brought to No. 34 August Session, 1904, at the time of the murder of Jerry Condo. Ira Green was confined, at the same time, in said jail, charged with larceny, the proceedings being brought to No. 21 August Session, 1904. In the former proceeding Anton Sakabosky was the prosecutor, and in the latter, Alice Pierson.

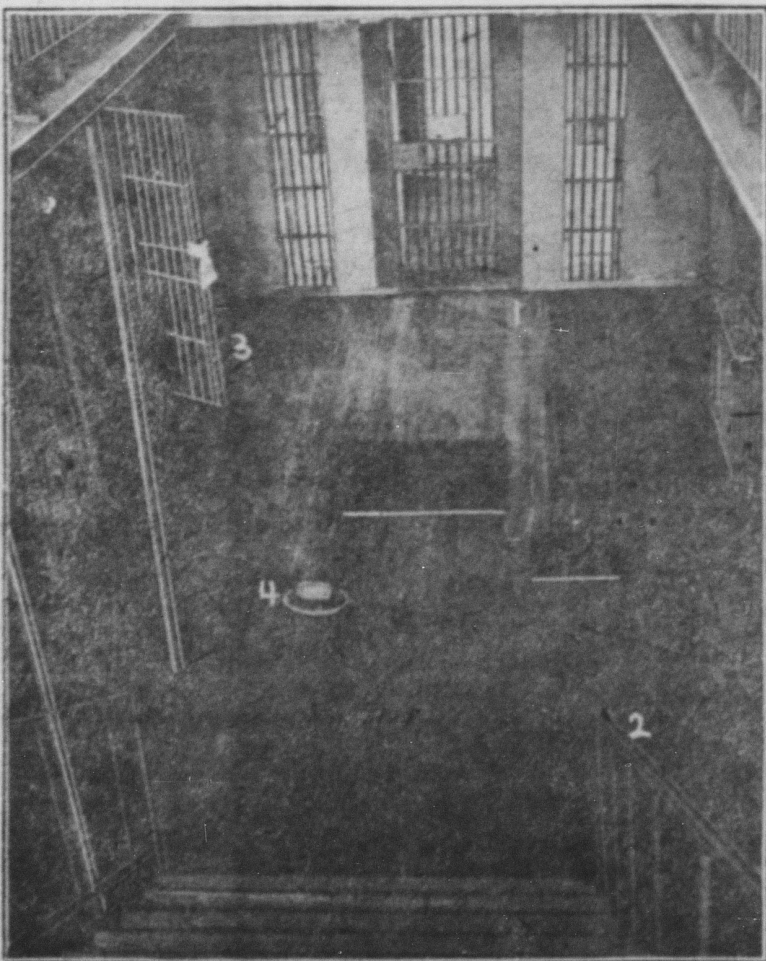
Owing to threats which these two men had made on several occasions, and being informed that there was a design to escape, they were together locked up in a steel cell, on the second floor of the jail, known as No. 8. This was sometime during the latter part of the month of July, 1904. All of the other prisoners, serving light sentences or awaiting trial on minor offences, were allowed the freedom of the corridor of the jail in day time, with the exception of Dominick Constance and George Henderson. Every night, between the hours of eight and nine o'clock, turnkey Jerry Condo, locked up all prisoners in their cells. Sometime during the middle of the month of July last, the Sheriff or some one of the attendants missed several of the knives which

long, one and one-half inches wide and one-half inch in thickness, weighing a pound and one-half. They also in some way broke off the foot from an iron bed, which was a "T" shaped piece of iron somewhat longer than the brace, weighing two and one-fourth pounds. They had partly sawed the upper hinge and with these irons broke it, and bent back the upper part of the iron door and crawled out into the corridor of the jail. The brace or smaller piece of iron was incased in an old stocking, twenty-five inches in length, and wrapped with a string, so that Green, who used it, might get a better hold or use it as a sling-shot.



CENTRE COUNTY JAIL.

They passed to the rear end of the corridor and slid down a post which stood behind the stairway, evidently for the purpose of not being seen, and then concealed themselves in the bathroom, which was immediately to the right of the main entrance to the jail. Dillen took with him the "T" shaped iron and Green the brace enclosed in the stocking. They remained in the bath room three-quarters of an hour awaiting the arrival of Jerry Condo to lock up the prisoners.



INTERIOR OF CENTRE COUNTY JAIL.

View from head of stairs looking down on first floor where Condo was killed. (1) Main entrance. (2) Where Condo was struck. (3) Door of bath room partly open. (4) Where Condo was found in pool of blood.

the prisoners were allowed to use at meal time. Immediately a thorough search was made of the entire jail, and one of the knives was found. By some unknown device they had converted this knife into what might be termed a saw. No knives of any kind were thereafter admitted into the jail. About two weeks later these defendants, together with three other prisoners, made their escape from jail. This was on the evening of the 29th of July last. The finding of these knives in the cell of Green and Dillen, at the time the search was made for them, naturally engendered an ill feeling on the part of these defendants toward Jerry Condo, the turnkey, and on several occasions they said they "would kill the old bald-headed—" and they "would give the old bald-headed—"—all that was coming to him."

On or before the evening of July 29th, last, Dillen and Green broke from the iron bedstead in their cell a foot brace, being a piece of iron thirteen inches

Dillen removed his shoes so as to avoid any possible noise at the moment of attack. Edward B. McCullough was a prisoner in the jail at this time, on account of his inability in complying with the sentence of the Court to pay certain costs and was known as a "trusty" and was out in the resident portion of the jail on this particular night.

### The Assault and Escape.

At a little after eight o'clock in the evening of July 29th, last, Jerry Condo, the turnkey of the jail, and Edward B. McCullough, the "trusty," entered the jail for the purpose of locking up the prisoners in their cells, who were allowed the freedom of the corridor. All the prisoners were to be locked up on the second floor of the jail. McCullough came in the door first and walked ahead of Condo some five or six feet. After Condo had locked the outside door and walked a distance of about twenty feet to the stairway, Dillen, in his stocking feet, quietly came out of the bath room,



CELL DOOR.

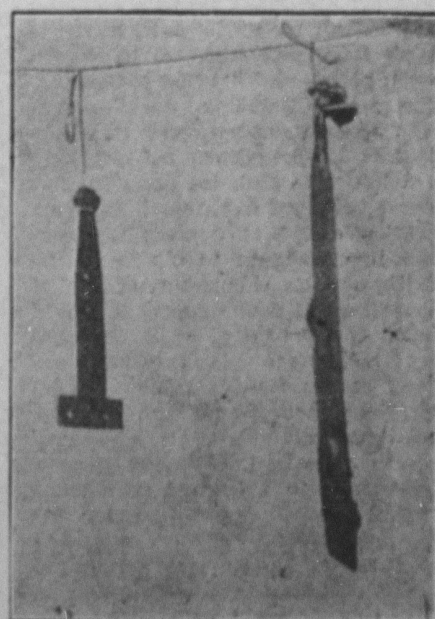
Shows outside door open, and inside door sprung back, allowing Dillen and Green to get out (X) where hinge was sawed off.

approached Jerry Condo from the rear and struck him a heavy blow on the back of the head, with the "T" iron. Immediately Green appeared and struck Condo some eight or ten times on the head with the iron brace which he used as a slingshot, causing a fracture of the skull at almost every blow. Condo's skull on the left parietal eminence was crushed in, having a pulpy appearance and indicating that he had been struck four or five times at the same place. There were eight or nine other distinct wounds which had lacerated the skin, exposing the scalp and showing fractures of the skull. While Green was finishing the work begun by Dillen, the latter went to the bathroom and put on his shoes. In the meantime the jail keys were taken from Condo's person, given to George Livingston who unlocked cell No. 7, releasing Dominick Constance and George Henderson, after which the main entrance to the jail was unlocked, and there was a general jail delivery. Green and Dillen took with them in passing out of the jail the irons they had used on Condo, dropped them some distance from the jail, after they had passed all likelihood of meeting further resistance. The piece of iron incased in the stocking was matted with blood and gray hair, and it was admitted by the defendants on the trial that they had used these irons.

Sheriff Taylor, at the time of the escape, was away attending the Annual Encampment of the National Guards of Penna., as captain of Company B., 5th Reg. of this place. The deputy was down street listening to a band concert, other inmates of the residence were away attending a picnic, so that the prisoners made their escape from the jail without any further resistance or occasion to use the deadly irons. Children on the outside gave the alarm; another prisoner summoned a physician by telephone. A crowd soon assembled and those who entered the prison found Jerry Condo lying on the floor in a large pool of blood, in an unconscious condition. There was a compound fracture of his skull, a stella fracture, a fracture leading to the base of the brain near the left ear, and a fracture in the anterior fossa of the skull. He was bleeding from all of these fractures, as well as from the left ear, from which the cerebro-spinal fluid was oozing. He was never able to speak and died within about twenty-eight hours. The body of the unfortunate turnkey was taken to his home at Spring Mills where the interment occurred the following Wednesday and was largely attended.

### The Prisoners Recaptured.

After the five men emerged from the front door they passed around the north corner and out East High street. A number of persons saw them but did not know that they were fleeing from prison. Dominick Constance separated from them on the outskirts of town. The other four cut across the mountains, northward in the direction of Clarence. Out in Marsh Creek they sought food and inquired for the way to Renovo. They turned and came back and down towards Mt. Eagle, Tuesday were captured near Mill Hall, excepting Livingstone who left the party in the mountains and since was never heard of. Dominick Constance was seen by several persons in the vicinity of the lime kilns, two miles west of town. Monday August 8th, Sheriff Taylor and a posse of men made an exciting skirmish over



"T" IRON AND BAR IN STOCKING. Weapons used to kill the Turnkey.

the mountains, and John Switzer, with the aid of James Rowan, captured Constance after some resistance, and he was landed in the jail that evening.

No trace of Geo. Livingstone was ever found. To this day some think the boy was foully dealt with, as the others feared he would finally weaken and give up. He disappeared, that is all the community knows; and all his companions to this



WILLIAM DILLEN.

(Taken immediately after capture.)

day declare emphatically that they did not harm him. He simply wandered from them, while in the mountains, and that likely is the correct story.

The escape of these prisoners and the killing of the turnkey created the wildest excitement. The reward offered for their capture caused hundreds of armed men to patrol the mountains night and day in every direction, running down every plausible clue. The entire military company under Sheriff Taylor joined in the search. Many other scouting parties were sent out. Every hour misleading rumors and reports came in that confused the situation until the capture at Mill Hall was announced.



IRA GREEN.

(Taken immediately after capture.)

### THE TRIAL.

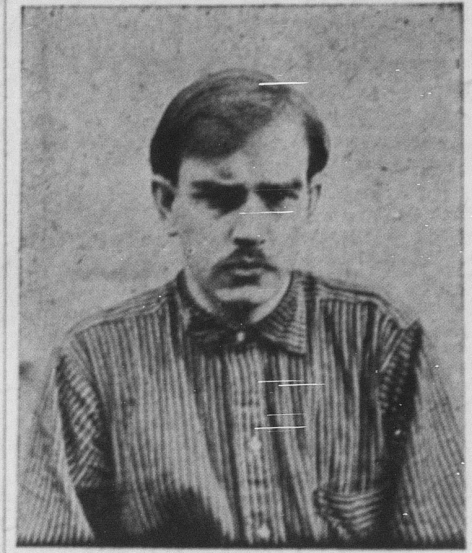
Soon after the arrests H. C. Quigley, was retained by the county to defend the prisoners. Later Clement Dale was retained by Ira Green, and Hon. A. O. Furst by Dillen. The prosecution was represented by District Attorney Spargler, Col. Edw. R. Chambers and Ellis L. Orvis. Geo. Henderson and Dominick Constance, previously had been indicted of jail breaking and were convicted. Geo. Henderson was indicted for the Julian robbery and jail breaking. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two years and eight months in the penitentiary.

Dominick Constance pleaded guilty to jail breaking, but on the charge of felonious arson, for attempting to burn David Rothrocks house, stood trial and was convicted. He was sentenced to four years in the penitentiary.

The trial of Ira Greene and Wm. Dillen came up Thursday, August 25th. The nature of the assault was proven by inmates of the prison, also the threats against the life of Condo. When the prisoners took the stand they surprised all by admitting almost all that was proven. Their version was that Dillen carried the "T" iron, but struck Condo only with his fist and dropped the iron. Green admitted pounding the turnkey's head with the iron bar in the sock. Both disclaimed any intention of killing

Condo—only wanted to render him unconscious, so as to secure the keys and make good their escape. The defendants' attorneys pled their case to the jury for a verdict of murder in the second degree. The jury retired Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock. Sunday morning they reported a verdict of "Murder in First Degree."

The jury consisted of the following: Wm. VanTries, Ferguson; Ellis Williams, Worth; J. H. Sands, Bellefonte; I. L. Binwell, Ferguson; Wallace Shimmel, Philipsburg; Daniel Eisenhuth, Haines; G. W. Ream, Gregg; John Shontz, Philipsburg; J. H. Griffin, Halfmoon; Geo. Garbrick, Bellefonte;



GEO. HENDERSON.

(Taken immediately after capture.)

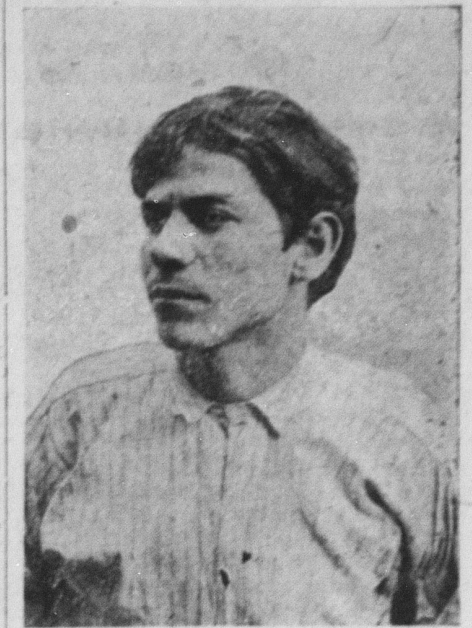
C. L. Gramley, Miles; J. D. Wagner, Bellefonte. The first two ballots stood 6 to 6 for first and second degree; next five ballots were 7 to 5; the eighth ballot Sunday morning was 12 to 0 for "Murder in the First Degree."

An effort for a new trial failed. The case was then carried to the Supreme Court in January and the verdict was affirmed. Next an appeal was carried to the Board of Pardons, and it could not find any grounds for interfering with the verdict, and with it the last ray of hope had flown. Since then the prisoners fully realized that no possible step could be taken to prevent their execution on Tuesday, May 9th, between the hours of 10 am., and 3 pm., as fixed in the death warrant signed by Gov. Pennypacker.

### Viewing the Scaffold.

Many hundred curious people visited the jail yard the last few days to get a view of the scaffold. On Sunday the crowd was unusually large, but no

visitors were admitted to the prison and everything was quiet.



DOMINICK CONSTANCE.

(Taken immediately after the capture.)

## THE RACKET



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THE RACKET.

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