

# OLD COURT HOUSE IN CAMDEN DISAPPEARING

Camden's old Court House is rapidly disappearing under the hands of scores of workmen, who are razing the structure to make way for the \$700,000 building. Yesterday it had been reduced to a mere heap of ruins—bricks, plaster and broken timbers. Within two weeks it will be but a memory. Then work will at once be commenced excavating for the foundations for the four-storied granite building that will vie with any in the State for architectural beauty.

Doubtless there are many persons now living who vividly recall the time when Camden, Haddonfield and Long-a-Coming hotly contested for the honor of being the county seat. After constant warfare in the Board of Freeholders' a resolution was adopted in 1848 providing for the erection of a Court House at Long-a-Coming, now Berlin, but the Legislature adopted an act calling for an election in the matter. Camden won out by a big majority.

The plot of ground bounded by Market, Federal, Sixth street and Broadway was purchased from Abigail Cooper for \$5000 on which to erect a Court House to cost \$26,800. Before it was completed in 1855 the building had cost \$40,970.79.

## The First Case

The first case tried in the new building was that of William Hope, a ferryman, who was charged with assault and battery. Thomas Dudley, afterwards Consul at Liverpool, was deputized to act as prosecutor.

One of the features of the building was the iron cage in which murderers were confined. It was used until 1880, when James McFadden, who had been committed to await trial for shooting a negro, committed suicide in the cage. In 1890 it was sold as scrap iron.

Prisoners were constantly escaping from the old jail. At one time six got away and the whole country was aroused. As a result it was decided the jail was inadequate. In 1881 plans were adopted for a group of sandstone buildings, prison, court house and county offices, to cover the plot of ground owned by the county. It was decided to build the jail first at a cost of \$80,000. It was nearing completion in 1883 when the plans were changed to turn it into a court house. The alterations were made and the first court was held in May, 1885. The building cost \$129,762. Several months after the Court House was turned back into a jail once more, and it has remained so since.

## Famous Murder Trials

There have been many murder trials in the old court room that were of more than

local interest. The first murderer to be hanged was John Ware, a mere boy, who shot his father at Berlin. This execution took place December 15, 1871.

On the night of January 23, 1878, occurred the murder of John W. Armstrong, who was struck in the head with a hatchet near Fifth and Vine streets. Benjamin Hunter, a bosom friend, was finally convicted of the crime and hanged January 10, 1879. Thomas Graham, an accomplice, was sentenced to twenty years in State Prison.

Probably the most celebrated murder case was that of Chalkley Leconey, who was charged with cutting the throat of his niece, Annie Leconey, near Merchantville, on September 9, 1889. Leconey was arrested as he was returning from his niece's funeral in Ohio. He was placed on trial February 3, 1890, before Judge Garrison. The defendant had for his counsel the late ex-Attorney General S. H. Grey, ex-Judge D. J. Pancoast and Judge Joseph H. Gaskill. Leconey was acquitted after a sensational trial. He has since died, as have nearly all the principals in the famous trial.

## The Miller Murder

A similar murder took place on September 25, 1890, when Mrs. Anne Miller was found in a thicket near Merchantville with her throat cut from ear to ear. Francis Lingo, a notorious negro now serving thirty years in State Prison for attempting to abduct a white girl, was accused of the crime. Lingo was found guilty. He was granted a new trial and was acquitted.

Nearly a decade later occurred the murder of Mrs. Sarah Shaw and her mother, Mrs. Emma Zane, who were shot at their home on Line street. Eli Shaw, son and grandson of the women, was arrested, charged with the crime, and indicted. He was acquitted.

The most recent murder case was that of Paul Woodward, who was placed on trial for the poisoning of W. Price Jennings and William Coffin. The crime was committed October 1, 1902, and on January 7, 1903, Woodward was hanged.

## Other Noted Trials

Other murder trials of more or less interest were those of James Moulton, who killed Mrs. Lydia Ann Watts at Sixth and Kaighn avenue, to sell her body. He was hanged July 29, 1892. Theodore Lambert, a negro burglar, who shot and killed William K. Kairer, September 25, 1894, was hanged December 19, 1895. Edward Oswald cut the throats of his wife and child the latter part of 1899. He was sentenced to sixty years' imprisonment.

Many men of prominence have appeared in the little court room. George M. Robeson, Secretary of the Navy under President Grant, was among them.