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**The Murder at Cherry Hill**

**Final Project**

## **Introduction**

Eastern State Penitentiary (ESP), also commonly known as the Prison at Cherry Hill, opened in Philadelphia in October 1829. Life in the prison would be austere—one prisoner in a small cell with a bed, a Bible, an attached exercise yard, and an “Eye of God” skylight in the ceiling. This isolation led to penitence, and penitence led to reformed criminals. Dozens of other prisons of the time period copied the innovative model, generally referred to as the Pennsylvania System. The structure of ESP, a central rotunda off of which cell blocks shoot, is largely the same today as it was in the nineteenth century, although the Pennsylvania System was officially abandoned in the early twentieth century. It was judged unduly harsh for the inmates, and it failed in its rehabilitation goals. While the isolation of the punishment had a deleterious effect on inmates, the systematic abuse of prisoners under the first warden, Samuel Wood, was just as damaging. It is this abuse—along with general prison mismanagement—that serves as a framework for one of the most enduring mysteries in ESP’s history.

An investigation begun in December 1834 revealed a host of accusations. Warden Wood and the male prison staff were exonerated in January 1835, but blame was shifted to a woman—Mrs. Richard Blundin, overseer of a small contingent of female prisoners and wife of the ESP underkeeper. Of particular interest to the investigating committee was Mrs. Blundin’s special treatment of an African-American woman charged with murder by the name of Ann Hinson, who is alleged to have played violin at Mrs. Blundin’s wild prison parties and cooked for sick inmates. The results of the investigation reveal a troubling truth about the nature of punishment, justice, and patriarchy in Philadelphia in the early nineteenth century. What follows is a fictionalized speculation about how reality may have differed from the historical record.

## The Murder at Cherry Hill

The leather slap of Hannah Blundin's shoes echoed off the high white arch of the cell block, ringing in her ears as loudly as the shouts from behind the wooden doors that lined the corridor. Another forty feet, and she could bolt across the yard to the small apartment she shared with her husband, Richard. *Not anymore*, she reminded herself. Even the taste of the thought was dour in her mind.

Behind Hannah in the rotunda of the Prison at Cherry Hill, a guard laughed, cruel and sharp. "You ain't going to find her. Warden made sure of that," he yelled.

"Ann!" she called, but only the hoots of inmates answered. She could just make out the guttural voice of Charles Smith. He'd spoken against her, all because she'd dared to stop him from taking Ann by force. Told that sham of a committee she'd offered Ann to him and then told him how to escape. Hannah nearly snorted. Leave it to the men in Warden Wood's pocket, the men who sat on the committee, to swallow that twaddle. If she'd given the man a route out of the prison, why was he still in his cell? The cone-shaped Eye of God looking down on Charles hadn't done anything to make an honest man of him. It had been her job to oversee the women inmates in this house full of ugly justice, protect them from the chaos and lewd morals of guards and prisoners, and that's just what she did. Now Hannah would pay in full measure for her skill.

Out in the exercise yard, a group of men huddled, the drab of their clothes turning them into a gray splotch against the frozen mud. Hannah pulled her shawl tighter until she saw Thomas Vandyke. A decent man amongst them.

"You best take your leave," he said when he noticed her sprinting toward him. His wispy hair twirled, and his light eyes narrowed. His skin was nearly bloodless with the cold. "The warden, he won't truck with you being here now."

“What did they do with Ann?” Hannah asked. “Ann Hinson.”

“Spirited out of her cell no more than thirty minutes afore, screaming,” he said. “I hear the warden found a man to pay her fine. Ask me, she’s still here. No man going to pay a murderer’s fine.”

“Hannah Blundin!” Richard shouted from a distance. She could just make out his dark tuft of wild hair. The violence in his voice was unmistakable. “Woman, you get back here now!”

Through the yard she tore, strands of hair escaping her neatly tucked bun. Inside cell block four, scarcely warmer than outside, she vaulted up the stairs. The heavy wooden door to Ann’s cell had been rolled away, the metal gate unlocked and throw open. The tiny room within lay empty; only Ann’s fiddle on the table proved she’d ever been there at all. An image came unbidden to Hannah’s mind, that of Ann playing like the devil at one of the warden’s parties. It was the first time Hannah had noticed Ann’s hands—long and thin, the color of acorns. A jagged scar ran from the wrist to the tip of her index finger. Later Ann displayed her fingertips, heavily calloused from working the strings. A burn marred the narrow palm.

Hannah paused only a moment before taking to the walkway again. By the time she scrambled down the stairs at the end of the block, two guards yelled from far behind. No choice now—she’d have to brave the rotunda and whoever might be waiting. She only hoped her husband hadn’t found a way to catch up.

A peek around the edge of the doorway revealed an empty rotunda, but guards patrolled the blocks, sticking out like spokes from the central hub. She had to find Ann. She wouldn’t leave the prison until she knew the truth, but something deep in her chest shrank from hope. Hannah had seen the warden’s justice. Poor Mathias Macumsey, the blood upon his lips and chin after Richard had forced the iron gag on him. Or the man who’d dared to sing in his cell. A sin it was to march him into the yard in the dead of winter only to pour water over his head for hours.

Dr. Bache had lied to the committee, same as everyone else. *Comfortable* was hardly the word she would have used for Seneca Plimly. His skin had gone black with the cold, icicles hanging from his nose. Both dead now, of course, and the warden still in his post. And he'd stay there, too, when the hearing ended. The warden as much as said so.

She slid behind the great cabinet and waited. Running feet, the sound of guards grumbling her name, rushed by her hiding spot. Then a single set of footsteps. Richard's, probably. She'd recognize the sound of those boots and the slight limp of his step anywhere. But just as the noise entered the rotunda, it disappeared down a cell block. The frozen stone behind her chilled her through the shawl and dress, and a radiating fear set her teeth to chatter. She dared to peek from behind the cabinet. The guards and Richard had scattered, and still no one came to the rotunda. That wouldn't last long.

A glance back into cell block four revealed a guard she didn't like, a tall, gaunt boy of no more than twenty, climbing the stairs to the second floor. She pulled her ring of keys from the deep pocket of her skirt. If she could be quiet, if she could move on steady feet, if her shaking hands might be sure, she could hide in an empty cell. One such cell was only yards away.

Hannah snuck around the corner, cell key clutched in her fingers. Above her the guard stalked. The heavy wooden door of the cell in front of her slid silently aside, nary a squeak made. She fumbled with the steel lock, careful not to let it clink against the metal gate. The tiny click of the lock coming apart sounded for all the world like a gunshot, but no matter—the man on the walkway continued his investigation, oblivious to her presence beneath him.

The gate swung wide with only the tiniest of groans. She ducked inside and rolled the wooden door back into place, mindful not to allow the clasp of the metal gate find its home. She'd never escape then. There was no way to reach far enough through to unlatch it again. Forehead against the frozen stones inside the door, she listened.

There was naught but her own trembling breath.

“Ain’t no escape,” hissed a voice from behind her. “That what they tell me.”

Hannah’s knees trembled as she whirled. The face half-hidden in the gloom was dark, hair braided tight. The woman was tall and voluptuous, the gray prison-issue dress clinging.

“Don’t worry none,” the woman said. “You stay here long as you want. You make it out, maybe you deliver a message for me. You get a message to my boy.” She stepped out of the shadows into the weak light thrown from the single window—a strong face with dark eyes.

“Who are you?” Hannah asked when she regained use of her tongue. “No one is supposed to be in this cell.”

“The guards, they tell me I’m prisoner number 128.”

“Not your number. Your real name. You won’t get in trouble. Not with me.”

“Agnes,” the woman. “Agnes Mess. We have a deal? You tell my boy where I am?”

“He doesn’t know? Surely you had a proper trial.” Hannah edged closer to the wall at the sound of footsteps outside.

A sound issued from Agnes, a short laugh. “They come for me, sure did. Bawdy house, they says. Making enough to pay off Miss Jeanne for food and my little room, says I. S’ all the same. They take me, put me in irons, and bring me here.” Agnes cast an appraising eye full on Hannah. “Who you?”

“Hannah Blundin. My husband’s the underkeeper of the prison.”

“That so? You the lady they looking for? I heard them guards talking. What you do?”

“Damn the warden’s eyes! I did nothing at all.”

“Don’t look it to me, Miss Hannah. Look to me like you in trouble.”

Hannah’s head swung toward Agnes. “Does it? I suppose I am at that. You might be, too, if they find me here.”

“Don’t you worry none. You just come sit here and talk. Look like you goin’ to fall over.” Agnes pointed toward the cot. “Been in here an hour, and already the quiet too much.”

Hannah inched away from the door. There wasn’t a single woman in this place who was dangerous, most of them guilty of nothing more than unfortunate circumstances.

“So why them guards looking for you?” Agnes asked.

“They want me to leave.”

“Why you don’t go? They tell me go, I run out of this place.”

“One of the prisoners. Her name is Ann. I . . . my job was to oversee the women prisoners. This place was never meant for women, not really. So since I was here with my husband, the board of this place asked me to watch over the ladies. But that hearing! Those rascals say I was giving Ann special privileges, and the things they said about me!”

Agnes leaned against the stone wall. “Hearing?”

“I shouldn’t be telling you this. If they think you know anything about it, it could mean punishment for you.”

“Don’t you worry none,” she said again. “I take care of myself.”

Hannah glanced up. What would hurt now? The woman should know. “Many of the guards, my husband, the warden. They make a mockery of the spirit of this prison. It’s supposed to be a place of penitence and solitude, not whippings and torture. The pets, the one who will do what the warden wants, say what the warden wants, they have the run of this place. The women aren’t safe.”

Agnes nodded, eyes downcast, and leaned against the wall. She folded her arms across the shirtwaist. “Ain’t no different anyplace else.”

“But this place should be. Oh, I do what I can to make sure my girls don’t have trouble. I thought when the governor called the investigation the warden would be cast out.”

“That so? Sound of it, it don’t make no difference. You hiding out with me, afear’d for your life.”

“There were guards who testified—told the investigating committee all about the prisoners killed, about the warden using prisoners to work on his farm, about the food and supply thefts, the misspent money, all of it.”

“And what happened?”

“Those guards—the ones who testified the truth—they were fired. I woke up one day, they were gone. But then the guards outside, those still here, they said I was the one stealing, who organized parties and gave Ann and the rest of the prisoners spirits. They lied about me. A bribe here and there must have greased the wheels, because prisoners said I was a loose woman, having relations with guards and the very warden himself! I’m no harlot!”

Agnes’ lips pursed. “Wouldn’t be the first woman to do such a thing.”

Scandalized, Hannah spit out, “But I am a married woman!”

Agnes shrugged. “Don’t matter.”

“But I didn’t do any of those things. I’m a church-going woman.”

“A religious man always want dirtier things than anyone else,” Agnes said. “Church-learning don’t mean a thing. Book learning, neither. But don’t none of that matter. So people made up gossip. Why you don’t defend yourself?”

Hannah sighed. “I haven’t been allowed to attend the hearing. No women are. Oh, Richard was there, and so was the warden, making up stories as pretty as you please. Richard told me all about it, told me how he confessed to seeing me going into the warden’s private rooms alone. The guards and prisoners, they say the same. One even said I spread filthy disease! My name is all but ruined.”

“And your husband told you all this? You got those bruises on your neck from him?”

Agnes stared, frowning.

Hannah’s mouth tightened, but she remained silent. Finally, she said, “And then today, the hearing’s not even over. The warden, the guards, they’ll be none the worse for it, no matter what. But not me. Me, I have to leave the prison. Give up my home. Warden Wood, he called me into his office, smug as can be. Tells me when the hearing comes to end next month, I have to go and not say a word against him. Says the committee will blame only me and turn a blind eye to the rest of it. The hearing is all done in private, isn’t it? No one outside these walls knows or is willing to believe the truth about the place. And when I ask after Ann, he tells me she’s no longer a concern. The warden, you’re either with him or against him.”

“This Ann. She a prisoner, you said.”

“One of my first charges.”

“Why you so worried about her?”

“The woman has seen more wrong in this place than anyone, and she threatened to go to the newspapers. Her sentence was up. They kept her here past her sentence because of a fine the warden concocted, but a prisoner told me the guards came and took her away today. I fear the worst.”

“What about you?” Agnes asked. “You goin’ to tell folk what happened?”

“I will,” Hannah declared. “And I will let your son know where you are.”

Agnes’ face pinched into a knot. “You seem like a good lady, Miss Hannah. Awfully sorry about all this, what the warden bid me do.” She stepped forward and raised her hand, a large dark club grasped in her fingers. Before Hannah could move out of the way, the club descended and she knew no more.

A pain in Hannah Blundin's head jerked her awake. She sat abruptly, hand rubbing over the swollen lump above her ear. That woman—Agnes—had struck her. The things of which that man were capable . . .

The room was unfamiliar. Dingy and rumpled bed. A small bureau on top of which stood a white ewer. A rickety table and chairs. She glanced out the window. Beyond it the prison rose like a giant stone demon. She could only be in the inn across the road. Her hands curled into fists—how dare Richard allow Warden Wood to arrange an assault on her person.

Upon the table lay a box and a torn slip of paper. Richard's spiky handwriting covered the note, but one sentence stood out: *Tell no one, or the same fate waits for you.* Her eyes narrowed, wondering what trick this was.

The box was wrapped in plain brown paper and had an unexpected weight to it. She picked at the rough string with short nails and slowly unwound it from around the package. The paper crinkled in her hands. She lifted the lid.

At first Hannah couldn't decipher what she was seeing. An upside down spider, legs waving in the air? A tangle of dark thread? Splashes of rust streaking torn paper? Dread gathered in Hannah's belly, cold and hard. No, it had fingernails. Slim, acorn-brown fingers with callous-thickened pads at the tips. Crooked little finger with a long jagged scar running its length. The white web of a burn on the narrow palm.

## **Bibliographic Essay**

Most of the sources used to research ESP, the Blundins, Ann Hinson, etc. are readily available in libraries, bookstores, or online. Full bibliographic details are provided, divided into section or page (introduction and short story).

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### *Introduction*

Eastern State Penitentiary (ESP) was also commonly called **the Prison at Cherry Hill** owing to the prison's location. The area on which it was built had previously been a cherry orchard. The nickname for the prison fell out of favor in the early twentieth century, according to Annie Anderson, ESP Historic Site Researcher. This information was relayed in an email exchange between the two of us during which she directed me to a range of research on female inmates at ESP.

**The Pennsylvania System** of rehabilitation through penitence is well-documented in Jacqueline Thibaut's "'To Pave the Way to Penitence': Prisoners and Discipline at the Eastern State Penitentiary 1829-1835." Other sources that provide useful details include Negley Teeters' "The Early Days of the Eastern State Penitentiary at Philadelphia," Norman Johnston's "Early Philadelphia Prisons: Amour, Alcohol, and Other Forbidden Pleasures," and Daniel Giansante's senior thesis, "Authority Freed From Violence: Robert Vaux's Anti-Slavery and the Creation of

the Separate System at Eastern State Penitentiary.” For additional details, see Jennifer Janofsky, “‘There is No Hope For the Likes of Me’: Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829-1856”; and Thomas B. McElwee, *A Concise History of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, Volume 2*.

Details about the **1834/1835 investigation into ESP mismanagement and prisoner abuse** are detailed in Jennifer Janofsky, “‘There is No Hope For the Likes of Me’: Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829-1856”; Norman Johnston, “Early Philadelphia Prisons: Amour, Alcohol, and Other Forbidden Pleasures”; Thomas B. McElwee, *A Concise History of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, Volume 2*; and Leslie Patrick, “Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country's Premier Prison, Eastern State Penitentiary.”

The **parties Mrs. Blundin is alleged to have held** are discussed in “‘There is No Hope For the Likes of Me’,” Janofsky. Historical record indicates that parties were held in the apartment the Blundins occupied in ESP, but the only commonly cited events were those organized by Warden Samuel Wood. These parties were generally given to benefit political parties or corporate interests.

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Some disagreement exists about **the first name of the underkeeper**. It has been variously listed in historical documents as Richard or William. Thomas McElwee’s *A Concise History of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, Volume 2*, as close to a primary source as is available, lists it as Richard, so for the purposes of this story I have chosen to refer to the underkeeper as *Richard* Blundin.

Investigative and historical documents do not include the **first name of Mrs. Richard Blundin**. I have appropriated the name Hannah for her character based on a listing in *The*

*Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English* that indicates it was in use as a first name during the early nineteenth century.

While no records of **where Mr. and Mrs. Blundin lived within ESP** exist, Annie Anderson tells me the current consensus is that they lived in a small apartment in what is now the admissions building that houses a gift shop and exhibits.

All **descriptions of the prison** were obtained when I visited ESP in November 2012. In addition, I was also able to study and operate the rolling wooden doors on the outside of prisoner cells, the metal gate just inside those doors, and the padlocks that secured the gates to the cell entrance. The metal gates were situated in such a way that made it impossible for a prisoner to reach through far enough to engage the latching system. Further, the latching system, even without the padlock on it, was difficult to operate—in an innovative move, the architect designed a mechanism built into the cell door wall so it could not be dismantled by inmates. See also descriptions on page 2 and 3.

General information about **women in prison** came from two sources: Kay M. Harris, “Women’s Imprisonment in the United States” and Kathryn Watterson, *Women in Prison*.

**Early nineteenth century language usage** was confirmed through the use of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Temple University librarians were consulted about the best dictionary to use for this purpose.

Hannah Blundin refers to **“the men in Warden Wood’s pocket.”** Jennifer Janofsky’s doctoral dissertation “There Is No Hope For the Likes of Me” points to Wood as politically-connected, noting that many members of the prison’s board were close friends (125). Janofsky theorizes that the former president of the board (Judge Charles S. Cox resigned in protest) might have approached the governor to jumpstart further investigation (126). Thomas McElwee, the Bedford County, PA Democratic representative, had all testimony published (his *Concise*

*History*), which was also likely politically motivated—apparently, Wood was not a Democrat (127). McElwee was also outraged that Wood and the male staff had not been punished (146). Leslie Patrick, in her paper “Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country’s Premier Prison, Eastern State Penitentiary, 1831,” notes that McElwee’s report was the minority report. The majority report exonerated all parties except Mrs. Blundin (366). Janofsky speculates that Wood and his remaining male staff were spared punishment to avoid damaging ESP’s reputation (128).

**Thomas Vandyke** is not recorded as ever having known Mrs. Blundin; however, he was a prisoner at ESP. Janofsky mentions him in her dissertation; guards caught he and another inmate passing notes through the plumbing pipes (158).

**Charles Smith** is a fabricated name for a very real prisoner. Leslie Patrick’s paper, “Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country’s Premier Prison, Eastern State Penitentiary, 1831” points to testimony about a “light mulatto man” who’d been convicted of rape; he complained that Mrs. Blundin gave him liquor and sexual access to women, was constantly drunk, and offered to help him escape. He also intimated that Mrs. Blundin offered to have sex with him and was a “strumpet” (370).

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The details about **Ann Hinson’s fine** as well as Warden Wood’s arrangement of payment are detailed in Leslie Patrick’s paper (365).

**Women inmates were housed in cell block two**; however, Leslie Patrick’s paper indicates that Hinson was moved to the second floor of cell block four (364). Patrick notes that women were not supposed to be housed there, but her presence there may have been a move influenced by Hinson’s relationship with Mrs. Blundin.

**Ann Hinson's skill with the violin** is well-documented. Leslie Patrick points to testimony about it (369). Currently on display at ESP is an installation that portrays Hinson playing during a party at the prison. The installation, called *Recollection Tableaux*, was created by artist Susan Hagan and was available to view during my visit to the prison in November 2012. My interview with amateur violinist Madeleine Farraday reveals the range physical hand changes possible from musical training; the scars on Hinson's pinky finger and palm are fabrications for the purposes of the story.

**Mathias Macumsey**, 45, was sentenced to twelve years at ESP in 1833 for the crime of murder. Macumsey was considered insubordinate by ESP guards for communicating with other prisoners (by shouting over the wall of his exercise yard and speaking through the plumbing pipes). Warden Samuel Wood ordered Macumsey to be punished by use of a strait jacket and iron gag. Richard Blundin administered the punishment to a struggling Macumsey. Blundin struck Macumsey in the chin while the gag was employed, which made Macumsey's mouth bleed, and Blundin forced the gag in farther. Hours later, Macumsey was found dead, lying in a pool of blood. Whether Macumsey choked or bled out is not recorded; in fact, Dr. Franklin Bache, penitentiary physician, indicated Macumsey's death was caused by a diseased brain. This event is detailed in Janofsky's "There Is No Hope For the Likes of Me" (117-118) as well as McElwee's *Concise History*.

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**Seneca Plimly's punishment** is discussed in Janofsky's dissertation (135-136). Dr. Bache's reaction is taken from Norman Johnston's "Early Philadelphia Prisons: Amour, Alcohol, and Other Forbidden Pleasures" (16).

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**Agnes Mess** is a fictional character. She consists as an amalgam of information gleaned from an Excel spreadsheet sent to me by Annie Anderson, ESP's researcher. The spreadsheet included information about all female prisoners, including the number incarcerated, age, race, length of sentence, and reason for conviction. The first four female prisoners arrived at ESP in 1831. All were African-American, all convicted of murder. Despite this, larceny was the most common crime committed by the female prisoners housed at ESP between 1831 and 1906. Only 750 female prisoners total were convicted to ESP (compared to 22,876 men). Their average age was twenty-five. Fifty-nine percent of female inmates were white; thirty-three percent were African-American. The average sentence was 2.9 years. Like the fictional Agnes Mess, twenty-eight female inmates were convicted of working in a bawdy house. Other statistics of note: eleven women convicted of performing abortions; one woman convicted of maiming a cow; one convicted of poisoning sheep; and two convicted of mayhem.

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Janofsky's dissertation lays out the **charges against Mrs. Blundin**, as well as why she was unofficially hired on in the first place (128-131). Testimony against Mrs. Blundin came from the guards who hadn't been fired after the board's investigation (129). Janofsky points out that Mrs. Blundin was not allowed to testify because of her gender.

While **Mrs. Blundin was removed from her position** at the conclusion of the committee hearings, her husband voluntarily resigned some weeks afterward (Janofsky 154).

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Janofsky's dissertation points out that the **central witnesses** to the hearing testimony about Warden Wood's wrong-doings were ESP's guards, noting that relations between the guards and the administration were strained (122 and 140). As the board of the prison began interviews prior to the hearing, Wood complained to the board about the insubordination of guards and began lecturing male staff about laziness and loose morals, likely as a means of discrediting the guards who complained (123). Wood fired many of the guards and staff against whom he mounted complaints (124). Others were harassed until they quit (126).

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The **inn across the street from ESP and the attack on Mrs. Blundin** are fabrications. No evidence exists to suggest the presence of an inn.

## Appendix I: Analysis

Eastern State Penitentiary (ESP) was built not only to provide punishment to criminals and to enact justice, but also to rehabilitate prisoners. Sentences were to be carried out in solitude, providing each prisoner with ample time to reflect on his or her crime and become a productive citizen. The board of ESP relied on Warden Samuel Wood and his staff to lead exemplary lives themselves, to run the prison in a manner above reproach. Research available on the early years of ESP reveals the men who ran the prison were as criminal as those within the cells. The warden used his considerable personal contacts to downplay his involvement and that of his male staff in egregious acts of theft, violence, and mismanagement. Some historians have suggested that Mrs. Blundin, the only member of the staff to be singled out for official blame, was the victim of sexism and misogyny (Johnston and Janofsky). Hinson also may have been singled out due to racist attitudes among committee members; *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* by Kali N. Gross includes evidence to suggest that African-American women could not receive a fair trial in the nineteenth century due to a pervading racist attitude among whites. Allegations were made against Hinson and Mrs. Blundin by guards, inspectors, and prisoners, but no hard evidence was entered into the record. It is possible that these two women were nothing more than convenient scapegoats to ensure the prison's reputation would not be sullied.

Wood's reputation was also at stake, though. He made a personal statement early on in the investigation that "any challenge to his authority" was "an attack on his reputation" (Janofsky 121). He denigrated the reputation of guards who moved against him and retaliated against them, so it is entirely possible that the campaign against Hinson and Mrs. Blundin was purposefully orchestrated in much the same way. The remaining guards at ESP were loyal to Wood, and

prisoner testimony could have been coerced. Because women were not allowed to offer testimony at the hearing called by the governor, they could not make trouble for Wood in that capacity; however, they could have threatened to speak to reporters, etc., that would have exposed Wood's misdeeds (and the state's negligence) to a wider audience.

My short story "Murder at Cherry Hill" functions as a speculative analysis of what might have happened on the day that Ann Hinson's fine was paid, as arranged by Wood. Janofsky notes that Hinson disappears from the public record after her release from ESP, which occurred approximately three weeks prior to the final outcome of the investigation into ESP mismanagement and prisoner abuse, and Mrs. Blundin's expulsion from the prison (Janofsky). A close reading of Janofsky's dissertation makes it obvious that Mrs. Blundin did her best to afford some level of comfort and dignity to the women she was charged with overseeing at the prison, and she may have had a special relationship with Hinson. McElwee's *Concise History* shows that there was conflicting testimony about Mrs. Blundin's character, though, so there is no way of telling whether she was truly an aggressive, profane criminal, as charged in the end, or a polite woman dedicated to her charges. Both Janofsky and McElwee reveal an established pattern of Wood's retributive justice against those who would, in his words, assault his reputation. With Wood's disregard for human life and dignity as well as the general male attitude at the time toward women, particularly African-American women, it is not a leap to theorize he may well have done violence to Hinson and even possibly Mrs. Blundin as a means of ensuring their silence.

"The Murder at Cherry Hill" explores one possible explanation for Hinson's disappearance and theorizes that Wood had a disturbing level of authority over guards and prisoners that might have contributed to an egregious subversion of justice. From a wider lens, it calls into question the possibility that women of any color could count on the phallogocentric

government and justice system to distribute punishment in a fair or balanced manner.

Government and the justice system in the United States continue to be male dominated, although strides have been made in that respect. Still, the sexism and racism at work in the investigation into ESP and their existence in the twenty-first century cast doubt on whether modern courts and prisons have improved significantly since Wood's day. While attitudes about women and African-Americans have changed, equality is still far from the norm, and prisons are still seeing wardens and guards involved with scandals (see Chuck; Beyerlein; Rudolf).

**767 words**