

INSIDE CORRECTIONS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

CORONAVIRUS



MAKING HISTORY

Examine the remarkable legacy of Edna Mahan during Women's History Month.



RIGHT TO VOTE

NJDOC facilities across the state hosted activities in recognition of Black History Month.

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INSIDE WORD

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MARCH 2020



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INSIDE WORD

with Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

Although there are no confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in our facilities, as part of our commitment to public safety, we are taking the threat of the virus seriously. Out of an abundance of caution, in consultation with the Department of Health, we are taking several steps to ensure the health of our employees and those in our care. Those actions are outlined in detail on page 4 of this edition of Inside Corrections with a number of them being implemented by a medical team trained in infectious disease mitigation and management.

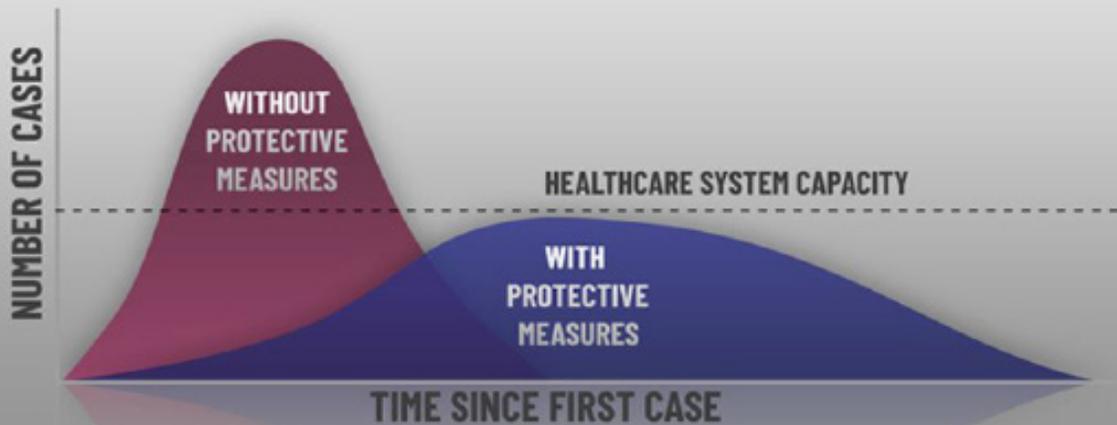
The well-being of staff and those in our custody is of paramount importance. We'll continue to post updates on how we are managing through COVID-19 across our social media platforms and website, www.njdoc.gov.

Although COVID-19 is an immediate priority, I want to take a moment to acknowledge Women's History Month and the trailblazers across the New Jersey Department of Corrections. The Department is guided by an executive team where women hold more than half of the positions in titles that include Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, Assistant Commissioner of Operations, Assistant Commissioner of Program and Community Services, Director of Legal and Regulatory Affairs and Director of Communications. From the front lines to our headquarters, we recognize you, we honor you and we thank you for all you do in ensuring the safety of those in our custody and the citizens of the Garden State.

Sincerely,


Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

FLATTENING THE CORONAVIRUS CURVE



In epidemiology, the curve refers to the projected number of new cases over a period of time. The idea of flattening the curve is to stagger the number of new cases over a longer period, so that people have better access to care.

FLATTENING THE CURVE

NJDOC Is Taking Steps to Address COVID-19

By Liz Velez

Between empty supermarket shelves, school closures and discussions of quarantines, it almost seems as if, collectively, the world is living out a scene from a movie, except this is real life.

This new reality includes social distancing and frequent hand washing, among other strategies recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to help “flatten the curve” or mitigate the spread of the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC), as part of its

commitment to safety, in consultation with the Department of Health, has taken several proactive steps to mitigate the spread of the virus among the prison population, while also working to ensure the safety of its staff. Steps include:

- instituting COVID-19-related health screenings at intake of inmates as part of regular health assessments;
- conducting health screenings with temperature scans conducted by medical staff – donning personal protective equipment – of all individuals entering NJDOC facilities, with follow-up survey questions, as needed, tracking travel

activity and contact with individuals impacted by COVID-19;

- restricting the transfer of county inmates;
- enhancing sanitization and education efforts to mitigate the spread of germs and increase availability of hand sanitizer to staff and visitors;
- providing medically supported personal protective equipment, where and when determined to be medically necessary;
- advancing preparation of medical quarantines for impacted inmates, to be utilized as prescribed by medical personnel;
- sharing best practices with county jails; and
- temporarily suspending visitations.

In addition, the Department is providing N95 masks to employees caring

for individuals with symptoms of the illness, as medically prescribed. All other facility employees will have access to surgical masks. As per the World Health Organization, surgical masks combined with proper hand hygiene can help limit the spread of other respiratory diseases.

“We recognize that families are a critical support to the population in our care,” said NJDOC Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq., explaining the reason for the suspension of visits. “However, ensuring the health and safety of our inmate population, residents, staff and the public are of paramount importance during this public health crisis.”

In an effort to mitigate the impact of this temporary measure, the Department is increasing access to other forms of communication with families in order to maintain those important ties. The NJDOC is expanding access to phone calls, free-of-charge; providing inmates with access to postage; and expanding access to communication services available through an inmate kiosk system. 

**STATE RESIDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO VISIT
NJ.GOV/HEALTH/CORONAVIRUS
OR CALL THE STATE’S 24/7 HOTLINE AT
1-800-222-1222**



Edna Mahan was the superintendent of Clinton Farms from 1928 until her death in 1968.

MAKING HISTORY

Edna Mahan - A Correctional Trailblazer

By Matt Schuman

It was the spring of 1928, and a desperately needed change was about to take place at Clinton Farms. The 15-year-old facility in Hunterdon County, which housed state-sentenced female offenders, was in a state of disarray, largely due to a leadership void. As a result, applications for a new superintendent were being accepted.

Eight days later, on June 19, the Board met and unanimously agreed to offer the job to Edna Mahan.

Mahan was born in Yreka, located at California's northern tip – not far from Oregon's border – and was a member

of the University of California at Berkeley's Class of 1922.

The six years following her graduation from Berkeley provided Mahan with work experience in social work, criminology and criminal justice, initially in Los Angeles and later in Boston. Those years, it turned out, prepared her for the superintendent's position for which she was selected at the women's reformatory in New Jersey.

She officially began her new job in August 1928. She would remain in the position until her death in April 1968. Her story is particularly relevant in March, which is recognized as Women's History Month.

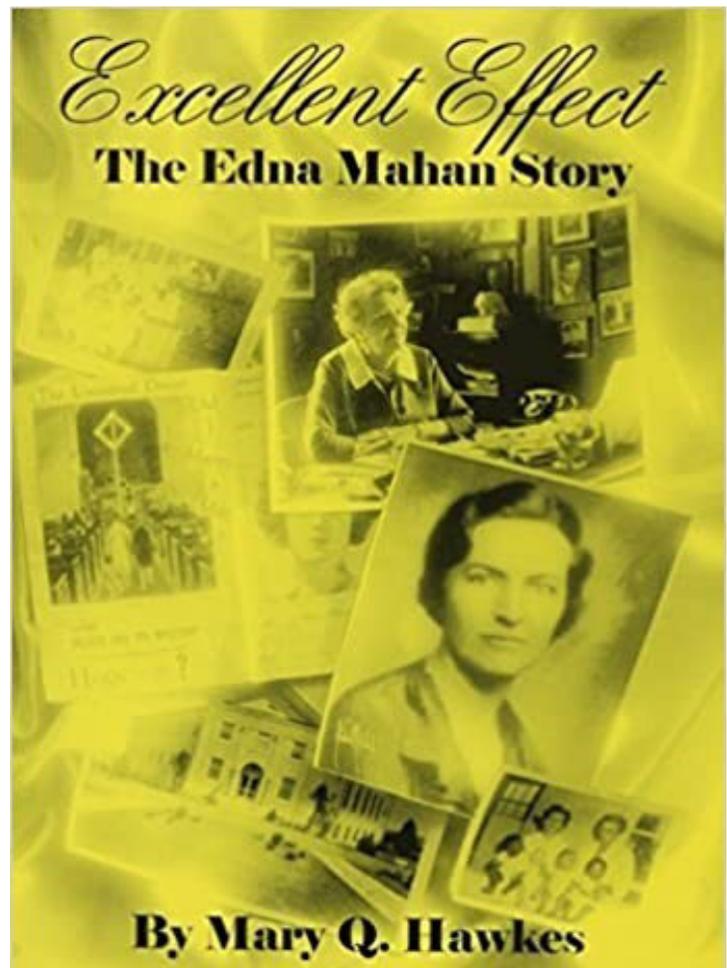
“When she first arrived, she couldn’t have been blamed if she was in shock,” said Sarah Davis, current administrator of the institution, which is now known as Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. “Back then, it wasn’t unusual for women to be locked up for petty crimes and even moral crimes. And at the time, the most basic needs of the women often weren’t being met.”

Mahan’s impact on Clinton Farms was felt almost immediately. According to “Excellent Effect: The Edna Mahan Story,” the meticulously researched 1994 biography by author Mary Q. Hawkes, Mahan’s philosophy for working with female offenders was based on her belief “in human dignity, in trust and in the worth of all individuals, and that change can most easily be effected in an open atmosphere.”

When Mahan arrived at Clinton Farms, Conover cottage was being built. Her recommendation that no bars be put on the windows received the Board’s support. Within a year, bars were gone from every cottage.

The Clinton community was alarmed when she had the bars removed, and her staff predicted there would be mass runaways,” Hawkes wrote. “This did not happen.”

In those days, the facility provided nurseries for the inmates’ babies, yet those nurseries, as per widely accepted societal standards, were segregated. The nursery designated for “colored” babies was Stowe, where the infants slept on a



“Excellent Effect,” the biography of Edna Mahan, was published in 1994.

leaking porch and were essentially ignored by the physician who was supposed to care for them.

The Board wasn’t prepared for desegregation, but Mahan was empowered to move the “colored” babies to an unused section of Wittpenn and hire a registered nurse to care for them.

It wasn’t until the mid-1940s that Mahan was finally able to desegregate the facility. By then, the superintendent had gained a national reputation for her visionary approach. One of the areas in which her efforts were especially admired was education – academic as well as vocational. The graduation ceremonies that were held each June were among the most anticipated events on the

Clinton Farms calendar.

And so it was during the June 21, 1956, commencement ceremony, at which a class of 16 women received eighth-grade certificates, and dozens of others were presented with vocational awards, that Eleanor Roosevelt served as a guest speaker.

According to the Hawkes biography, the longtime First Lady told the women that accomplishments “are the stepping-stones of life and nothing more than an opportunity to advance.”

In her newspaper column, titled “My Day,” Roosevelt reflected on her visit to Clinton Farms.

“The remarkable thing was the feeling of all the girls for the Superintendent,” she wrote. “When her name was mentioned, she was cheered – a reaction that is not always accorded the warden of a penal institution.”

Seven years later, in June 1963, graduation exercises were held in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of Clinton Farms. Nearly 800 people were in attendance, including luminaries from across New Jersey and beyond, along with virtually the entire inmate population. The featured speaker was legendary singer Marian Anderson. Following brief remarks, Anderson took her seat, where she remained until the choir, consisting of 22 inmates, sang the evening’s final musical offering – the spiritual “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

By the time she finished, a significant per-

centage of the audience was in tears.

In January 1968, just a few weeks after taking part in her beloved Christmas activities at Clinton Farms for the 39th consecutive year, Mahan underwent surgery for colon cancer. Less than three months later, she passed away, leaving behind a legacy that is unlikely to be forgotten.

She was buried on the grounds of the facility.

“I know it sounds odd, but whenever you’re there, you can feel her presence,” said Linda Lazier, a secretarial assistant who spent 26 of her 38 years with the Department of Corrections at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women.

“She had such an incredible impact on the way things are done in the correctional field and especially on the way things are done at the facility that bears her name,” added Lazier, who retired in August 2019.

The current administrator wholeheartedly agreed.

“Edna Mahan was committed to responding to the needs of female offenders,” Sarah Davis said. “She demonstrated what can be accomplished when women have advocates who understand their needs as women. That’s one of the reasons I’m so excited that the Board of Trustees has been re-formed here. It’s simple. When we know better, we can do better. Edna Mahan practiced that philosophy, and my hope is to continue that approach.”





Artwork created by inmates was displayed as part of East Jersey State Prison's Black History Month activities.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Black History Month Celebrated Across NJDOC

By Matt Schuman

The 15th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1870, gave African American men the right to vote. Specifically, the 15th Amendment prohibited the government from denying or abridging a citizen's right to vote based on "race, color or previous condition of servitude."

In February 2020, 150 years after the passage of the landmark amendment, Black History Month was celebrated.

The theme of this year's celebration was "African Americans and the Vote."

New Jersey State Prison, one of many New Jersey Department of Corrections facilities to formally mark Black History Month, hosted a program on February 27 that included a variety of performances and speakers. One of those speakers, Anna Daily of the New Jersey NAACP, focused on the impact of Thomas Mundy

Peterson, who became the first African American in the United States to cast a vote on March 30, 1870, in Perth Amboy.

“There is no better time than now to honor the legacy of Thomas Mundy Peterson,” Daily said. “His resolve in celebrating the African American community’s heritage and supporting its right to vote epitomizes the importance of Black History Month.”

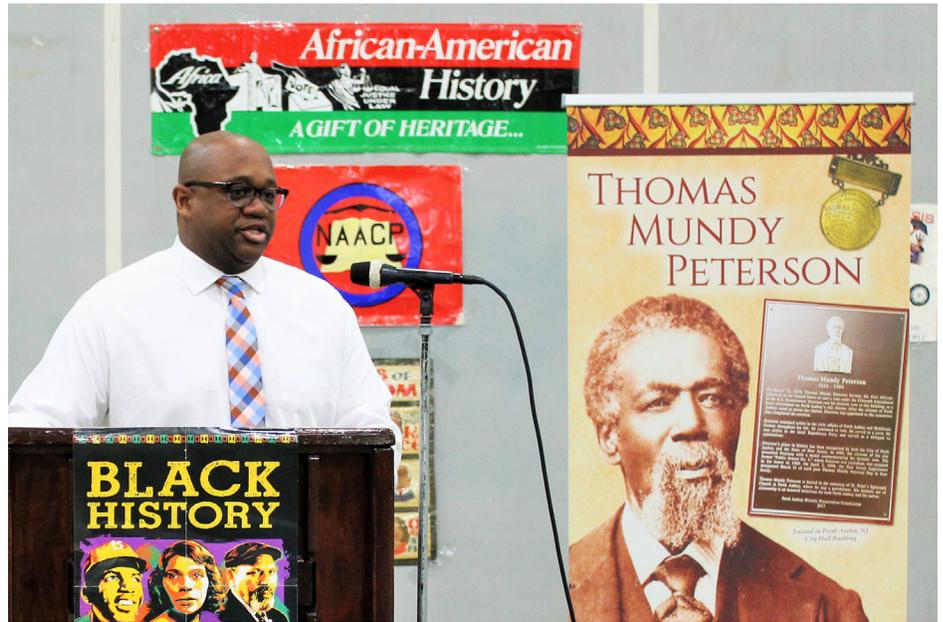
Assistant Superintendent Garyn Nathan encouraged the offender population to apply the lessons of Black History Month to their own lives.

“Black History Month is about setting and obtaining positive goals, persevering through adversity, unity, self-respect and respect for others,” he said. “That is exactly what I’ve seen since the first day that I arrived at New Jersey State Prison.”

Following a performance that featured both music and poetry, inmate Clarence Scott stated that the Black History Month gathering served as a vehicle to apply the goals Nathan discussed.

“Events such as this one offer us a voice and an opportunity to express our sense of compassion about our heritage,” he said.

Elsewhere, a February 21 ceremony at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility



New Jersey State Prison Assistant Superintendant Garyn Nathan talked with inmates about the importance of applying the values of celebrated African Americans to their own lives.

celebrated the accomplishments of famous African American inventors and contributors. The event featured guest speaker Eugene Marsh. Born in South Carolina and raised by an illiterate foster mother, Marsh grew up in an era of segregation, the oldest of 13 foster children. In 1965, he became the first African American student to integrate in an all-white high school in Lancaster, South Carolina. Although he was a homeless veteran at one time, he subsequently obtained a master’s degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Rider University and is currently working toward his doctorate at age 70.

Mountainview also offered inmates a documentary history series as well as educational facts about Black History Month.

At Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Rev. Charles Atkins conducted a telephone interview with Rev. Dr. Thomas L. Brown regarding personal life events

involving Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Last year, Rev. Dr. Brown visited Garden State and discussed his travels with the King family while he was growing up. This year's interview was presented in discussion form to members of the offender population on February 25.

In addition, Garden State screened "The Green Book," a film chronicling the experiences of a working-class Italian-American bouncer who becomes the driver for an African-American classical pianist on a tour of venues in the Deep South in the early 1960s.

Following the discussion and the movie, the facility's first annual Black History Month essay contest commenced. Inmates were asked to describe how information from the discussion or the events in the movie pertain to something that has happened in their lives.

Mid-State Correctional Facility and Southern State Correctional Facility also held Black History Month essay contests.

Northern State Prison provided inmates with an art poetry contest exploring themes related to the 15th Amendment.

East Jersey State Prison also offered an art poetry contest. Participants were asked to submit an artistic representation or poem that reflects the following quote by recently deceased basketball legend Kobe Bryant: "Once you know what failure feels like, determination chases success."

On February 20, East Jersey also had a Black History Month program through the

Toastmasters inmate group. The event enabled participants to deliver speeches about African American pioneers and key historical events involving African Americans.

Americans have formally acknowledged Black history since 1926, tracing

the celebration of the African American experience to Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a child of former slaves who spent his youth working in Kentucky coal mines and went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University.



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