

Reformatory's complex history to be detailed in new book

BY JAI'MICHAEL ANDERSON
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

LA GRANGE, Ky. — As the Kentucky State Reformatory prepares to close, three Kentuckians are making sure its demolition doesn't also leave the prison's history in the dust.

Having worked at KSR, Gaye Holman, Larry Chandler and Kyle Ellison are writing a book to preserve its story. It's complex, but they aren't shying away from the good, the bad or the ugly, they said.

"We've all taken an interest in this place for a variety of reasons, but now it's come to an end," said Chandler. "The history needs to be told, not only for the community, but for all the people who worked there, and the tens of thousands of inmates who have come through there."

HOPEFUL BEGINNINGS DIDN'T LAST

KSR was built in La Grange in 1937 and was an innovative prison project at the time. Gov. A.B "Happy" Chandler reportedly toured the country in search of ideas to make the new institution the "correctional showplace of America."

Designed similarly to schools and hospitals of the era, KSR was not built with individual cells; instead, it featured open-wing dormitories. Additionally, the imprisoned men grew their own food on a 2,700-acre farm located on the property.

Today, several units provide "extensive" health services to the incarcerated men. The grounds feature a Psychiatric Treatment Unit, a Nursing Care Facility and a Medical Service Building, which includes a 50-bed Daily Assisted Living Unit, according to the state's website. But that focus on health wasn't in full swing until around 1999, said Larry Chandler.

Perhaps the most eye-catching feature is a 12-story building that towers over the property. This held staff living quarters, medical offices and a now-defunct 150,000-gallon water tank.

The tower is a key point of



Photo by Jai'Michael Anderson

The Kentucky State Reformatory pictured on July 17.

interest to Holman.

"It's been a horror for so many," she said.

Currently, the general population is housed within two dormitories. As of July 15, 235 men are incarcerated in KSR, with a capacity of 363. But the reformatory was designed to hold 1900.

Now, KSR faces an aging facility and staffing challenges. A black sheet encases the tower to contain its decaying material, and the Department of Corrections is transitioning out of the facility.

The Little Sandy Correctional Complex was expanded to accommodate KSR's closure, and a new medical facility is being added to the Blackburn Correctional Complex. Morgan Hall, the communications director for the Kentucky Justice & Public Safety Cabinet, confirmed these changes to the Era, but she did not comment on KSR's expected closure date.

Chandler, who helped expand Little Sandy, said KSR may not close until later this year or early next year.

While the institution began as a hope-filled project to reform the men between its walls, Chandler said that from the 1950s to 70s, KSR was "overcrowded, underfunded and just a mess."

"When I went to the reformatory, the count was 2,030," said Chandler. "We had 500 staff."

Housing space was also poor, and inmates were reportedly "free to engage in gambling" and tak-

ing narcotics, according to a Grand Jury report, covered by the Era in 1960.

The three authors agreed that both state prisons faced similar issues; the population was growing, and people were getting longer sentences, said Chandler. In 1981, the Department of Corrections entered a consent decree with Kentucky State Penitentiary inmates who sued over the prison's living conditions. The decree brought sweeping changes to both prisons.

The many and wide-ranging changes to KSR included more educational programs, reduced capacity, a new law library containing public federal documents and mandated specialized staff training programs.

There were significant and successful changes, but Ellison argued that the decree spelled more trouble for local jails.

A deep dive into the reformatory's history would take a much larger book than what the authors plan to write. KSR's information is decentralized and, at times, missing, but the authors are working hard to condense nearly 80 years of history into 200 pages.

AN HONEST APPROACH
"Different" is the word the authors used to describe themselves. They each bring a unique background and relationship to the reformatory.

Chandler, from La Grange, has

over 33 years of experience in the criminal justice system. He began as a correction officer at KSR in 1982. Throughout his career there, he held several positions and eventually became warden in 2003.

Retiring from the Department of Corrections in 2008, he served as warden of several other state prisons. He designed the Little Sandy Correctional Complex in 2005, became its warden in August 2020 and was a crucial part of its recent expansion.

Former Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary Kerry Harvey once called him "a trailblazer who has created the textbook for corrections to advance into the future."

To the team, Chandler brings a wealth of knowledge about the corrections system.

But he has a less scholarly outlook on the reformatory than his co-author, Holman, a sociologist from Lexington.

While employed by Jefferson Community and Technical College, she taught sociology at KSR and every other area prison between 1988 and 2008. She was the coordinator of the college program for most of those years.

During that time, she interviewed 50 men, most of whom were imprisoned in KSR. Seventeen of them were still imprisoned when she reignited those conversations 20 years later.

In 2017, she released her book "Decades Behind Bars," which uses their stories to examine the human costs of long-term incarceration.

Ellison has looser ties to KSR but spent around 50 years studying the state's correctional history.

He began working for the Department of Corrections after leaving the Army in 1972. Ellison was a parole officer at Louisville Metro Corrections for nine years, then, partly because of the consent decree, became a prison and jail training officer.

"I could hardly stand to make decisions about people I didn't know anything about, like whether to lock them up, or who

to take a chance on," he said.

During his time as a training officer, from 1981 to 1988, he researched the state's prisons and collected artifacts, like photographs and newspaper articles. Though he quit, the reformatory never left his mind.

"I couldn't really stop thinking about it," said Ellison. "I kept saving newspapers and following all of the issues."

Ellison is a collector. When he worked as a trainer, he distributed materials to his classes, indicating that he was gathering information about the prisons.

"Pretty soon, 2,000 prison folks knew that Kyle Ellison was looking for history," he said. "I became a repository for stuff."

He continued his research after retirement and gravitated towards the history of prison privatization, which he said is entangled with social issues such as race and gender.

The book may briefly cover those issues.

The authors are still organizing their research; Holman has taken this charge and created a rough chapter list.

Among the proposed ideas are chapters about the buildings, the Chicken Hill graveyard and programs at the prison. Other chapters may cover ghost stories, illegal activities, and the riots, deaths and escapes.

Notably, though, the authors plan to feature first-hand accounts from wardens, workers, employees and guards. Memories from the imprisoned men may also be included. Holman said their perspectives are key to the story.

"I would drive home crying at night because I had seen such goodness in the men that had done horrible, horrible things," she said. "I couldn't get my mind around it, and I still can't. And that's the draw of what prison is to me."

From the fun staff stories to the pain behind the bars, they plan to reveal it all. The authors hope to paint a picture of KSR that readers have never seen before.

Those with photographs related to the prison can submit them to Larry Chandler.

TRIMBLE COUNTY COURT NEWS

Items published in court news are public record. The Trimble Banner publishes all misdemeanors, felonies, and small claims judgments recorded in district court, as well as all civil suits recorded in circuit court. Juvenile court cases are not published. Crime reports are provided by local law enforcement agencies. Charges or accusations reported to The Trimble Banner do not imply guilt.

The following cases were heard July 7 (Editor's Note: This entry is publishing out of sequence after the July 14 court report was published in last week's edition).

COMMONWEALTH VS. ARRAIGNMENTS

Christina Adams, 1993. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Paid. Remand.
Rick Armand, 1963. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Paid. Remand.
Jacob Bird, 2005. Failure to

wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Paid. Remand.
Jennifer Bowling, 1974. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). FTA. DOT.
Jimmy Clark, 1975. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Next appearance July 21.
Ian M. Coombs, 1978. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Next appearance July 21.
Kristen Covington, 1997. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Paid. Remand.
Keaton Alexander Fester, 2005. Speeding 23 mph over limit (FTA eligible) (guilty). Paid. Remand.
Craig T. Fitzgerald, 2000. Operating motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol first (FTA eligible) (pleaded not guilty), failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible).
Alex Gomez, 2000. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible), failure to produce insurance card. Next appearance July 21.
William Glenn Heissenbut-

tel, 1968. Speeding 26 mph over/greater (FTA eligible), improper passing (FTA eligible). Next appearance July 21.
Miranda L. Henry, 1979. Amount due \$25. Public intoxication-controlled substance (excludes alcohol) (pleaded not guilty), resisting arrest, possession of marijuana, buying/possessing drug paraphernalia, disorderly conduct first degree (amend). Next appearance Aug. 18.
Abigail Huling, 2003. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Paid. Remand.
James Jupin, 1983. Flagrant nonsupport. Public defender appointed. Next appearance Aug. 4.

Earl Mason, 1964. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Next appearance July 21.
Christopher Pipes, 2003. Assault fourth degree domestic violence no visible injury (pleaded not guilty). Next appearance July 21.
Whitney Sanders, 1993. Failure to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Next appearance July 2.
Alejandro Sardina Perez, 1995. No/expired KY registration receipt (DM), no/expired registration plates (DM), failure to register transfer of motor vehicle (DM), failure of owner to maintain required insurance/security first (FTA eligible) (pleaded guilty) (\$250 plus costs), operating on sus-

pending/revoked operator's license (FTA eligible) (pleaded guilty), failure to surrender revoked operator's license (FTA eligible). Next appearance Sept. 29.
Xavier James Villa, 2003. Speeding 24 mph over limit (FTA eligible). FTA. DOT.
Crystal Wynn, 1980. Failure

to wear seatbelts (FTA eligible). Paid. Remand.

PRETRIAL CONFERENCES

Cecil Hewitt, 2006. No operator's/moped license (FTA eligible) (DM).

SEE TRIMBLE/PAGE A7



LEGAL NOTICE

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS
Carrollton Utilities Commission (Owner)

Carrollton Utilities Office
P.O. Box 269, 900 Clay Street
Carrollton, Kentucky 41008

Sealed Bids for the SCADA Upgrade Project will be received by Carrollton Utilities at the Carrollton Utilities Office, 900 Clay Street, Carrollton, Kentucky, until 2:00 p.m. (E.S.T.), July 31st, 2026, and then at said office publicly opened and read aloud. Proposals should be labeled with the name of the proposer and SCADA Upgrade Project on the outside of the proposal envelope.

Project overview: Carrollton Utilities will be accepting bids for a SCADA software upgrade. This project involves switching out the old software for new software, which must run on Windows 11, and requires new programming for every remote site. The scope of work includes 5 water storage tanks, 5 pump stations, 1 well that is separate from the water plant, and all of the water plant controls. The work must be completed and invoiced by October 11th, 2026. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Frank Thieman by cell (502) 525-0437 or email fthieman@cuky.us.

Carrollton Utilities will award the project based on the lowest and most qualified bid.

The Contract Documents, consisting of the Addenda (if any), may be examined, or picked up at the following locations:

Carrollton Utilities Office
900 Clay Street
Carrollton, Kentucky 41008

The OWNER reserves the right to waive any informality or to reject any or all proposals. No BIDDER may withdraw his proposal within thirty (30) consecutive calendar days after the actual date of the opening thereof.

Federal law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, color, national origin, religion, age, handicap, and sex.

Carrollton Utilities
Terry A. Roach, P.E., General Manager



LEGAL NOTICE

NO.25-CI-00090 TRIMBLE CIRCUIT COURT
PENNYMAC LOAN SERVICES, LLC PLAINTIFF
VS. DEFENDANTS
GARRETT A. HARDIN, ET AL.
COMMISSIONER SALE
VINCENT J. EIDEN, MASTER COMMISSIONER

Per Judgment in Trimble Circuit Court, Master Commissioner will sell at 11:00 am on Friday, July 31, 2026 at public auction to the highest bidder at the Trimble County Courthouse, Bedford, Kentucky 40006, the property described as:
PROPERTY ADDRESS: 123 Mitchell Rd., Milton, KY. 40045.
Parcel No.: 021-50-00-017.00 AND 021-50-00-018.00, Deed Book 153, Page 527.

Terms are 10% by cash, certified check or money order & bond per KRS 426.705, balance due in 30 days; property is indivisible; sold free & clear of all liens encumbrances & interest of the parties except: A) All current real estate taxes and all taxes due thereafter, for which the purchaser shall not have a credit against the purchase price; B) Easements, restrictions, stipulations and agreements of record; C) Assessments for public improvements levied against the property; D) Any facts which an inspection and accurate survey of the property may disclose. However, neither the Plaintiff, its Counsel, the Court, nor the Commissioner, shall be deemed to have warranted title to any purchaser. At bidder's own expense, bidder is to carry fire and extended insurance coverage on said property from the date of sale until purchase price is fully paid. Amt to be raised-\$139,507.55. Claire T. Morgan, Esq., Plaintiff's Atty. Vincent J. Eiden, Master Commissioner, Post Office Box 563, Crestwood, Kentucky 40014; (502) 243-1981.



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P.O. Box 269, 900 Clay Street
Carrollton, Kentucky 41008

Sealed Bids for the **Well A Replacement Project** will be received by Carrollton Utilities at the Carrollton Utilities Office, 900 Clay Street, Carrollton, Kentucky, until 2:00 p.m. (E.S.T.), July 31st, 2026, and then at said office publicly opened and read aloud. Proposals should be labeled with the name of the proposer and Well A Replacement Project on the outside of the proposal envelope.

Project overview: Carrollton Utilities Will be accepting bids for cleaning a drinking water well using the twin disc surge method. The well is located at 302 6th Street Carrollton Ky 41008. The Work must be completed and invoiced by December 31st, 2026. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Frank Thieman by cell (502) 525-0437 or email fthieman@cuky.us

Carrollton Utilities will award the project based on the lowest and most qualified bid.

The Contract Documents, consisting of the Addenda (if any), may be examined, or picked up at the following locations:

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900 Clay Street
Carrollton, Kentucky 41008

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