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NEWS RELEASE

State Unveils Historical Marker for Female Prison Guards at Greenbank Park

The State of Delaware Public Archives unveiled a historical marker commemorating the first female prison guards in the United States at New Castle County's Greenbank Park, near the site where they served and made women's history, Delaware history, and American history.

State Senators Karen Peterson and Patricia Blevins, State Representative Kim Williams, New Castle County Executive Tom Gordon, and local historical researcher Bill Salerno took part in the marker's unveiling Saturday.

The historical marker, "The Annie Oakleys: First Female Prison Guards in the United States", notes that the New Castle County Workhouse at Greenbank was the first penal institution in the U.S.A. to employ armed female guards. The guards were nicknamed "Annie Oakleys" for their excellent shooting ability with machine guns and rifles. They began working for the prison in the lower Red Clay Valley in 1943 due to the shortage of male guards that resulted from World War II.

"When Senator Peterson came to me, it was easy to say, yes, let's put this historical marker at Greenbank," County Executive Gordon said. "I want all County employees to know about this because we should know our history and from whence we came."

Mr. Salerno said his research on the NCC Workhouse took him to the Wilmington Library, where he found several articles and learned of the first 11 women who worked as guards. Upon learning of his project, Harvey Banning Sr. then contacted Mr. Salerno and shared photos of his mother and aunt holding guns. The Evening Journal had taken the photos but did not publish them to protect the identity of the women, he said.

"As soon as I received his email I knew that I had uncovered a part of Delaware history that no one was aware of," he said.