



(Photo: Glenbow Archives, Calgary. NA-1010-32)

Guard Henry Strickland Traill
July 7, 1870
Kingston Penitentiary
Aged 43 years

Henry Thomas Strickland Traill was born on May 16, 1837 at the family cabin in the backwoods of the Kawartha's north of Peterborough, the third child of Lt. Thomas Traill of the Scots Fusilier Guards and his second wife, pioneer author Catherine Parr Traill. His aunt was Susanna Moodie, like her sister, also an author.

In his early years, Mr. Traill tried his hand at various occupations such as lumbering and farming, but found that his health was not up to the hard labour. After his 1864 marriage to Lily MacLean of Kingston, and the arrival of two children, Mr. Traill realized that the scant income resulting from this work would not be sufficient to support his family. He then moved his brood to Sarnia where he worked briefly in the oil fields there before moving on to Sydenham, Ontario where he took the position of Overseer at the Frontenac Lead Mine. During that time he and Lily also ran a boarding house. Still, Harry found he wasn't satisfied. In 1869, he was offered a Government job in Portsmouth, Ontario as a Guard at Kingston Penitentiary. Job security finally appeared to be in hand.

On July 7th 1870, less than a year after beginning his employment there, Guard Traill was posted at the lime house and kiln north of the penitentiary walls to supervise two inmates who were assigned to keep the fires stoked in the kiln over the noon hour. The other officers and the main body of the quarry gang marched back to the penitentiary for their noon meal.

Once alone with the officer, Inmate John Smith approached Guard Traill to show him some decoratively carved bones while inmate Daniel Mann stood behind the officer, further distracting him in carrying on an idle conversation, complaining about his wife's quarrelling. While Mr. Traill was looking at the bones, inmate Mann snuck behind and struck him in the back of the head with an ironwood sledge handle. The impact broke the officer's neck and severed his carotid artery. Not realizing the blow had been fatal, the two inmates dragged him into the lime house, where they tied and gagged him. Inmate Mann then rolled his cohort's coat into a makeshift pillow and placed it under Guard Traill's head.

Shedding their distinctive black and white parti-coloured prison uniforms, and dressed only in their underclothes, inmate Mann stole the guard's navy blue tunic before the two fled the penitentiary reserve.

After lunch, a guard returning with his work gang discovered Guard Traill's body. An intense manhunt on foot, on horseback and on the water was launched. The next day, the Government offered a significant reward for the capture of the escapees.

For almost two weeks, there were reported sightings in every direction. Occasionally the two escapees were shot at while stealing food or clothing, but they always managed to slip away. On July 18th they were finally caught near Lansdowne about forty kilometres from Kingston. Inmate Mann was recaptured after being spotted when he tried to swim from his pursuers and inmate Smith was secured when his accomplice betrayed him by pointing out where he was hiding.

Although both pleaded "not guilty" at their November trial, the jury deliberated for only twenty five minutes before returning guilty verdicts against both inmates. Inmate Mann was sentenced to hang on December 14th and inmate Smith was sentenced to fourteen years of hard labour for manslaughter. The execution was carried out as ordered at the Frontenac County Gaol.

Mr. Traill was interred in the Cataraqui Cemetery under a small white stone that reads "*There is rest for the weary*". He was survived by his wife Lily, two sons Charles and George, and a daughter Katie.