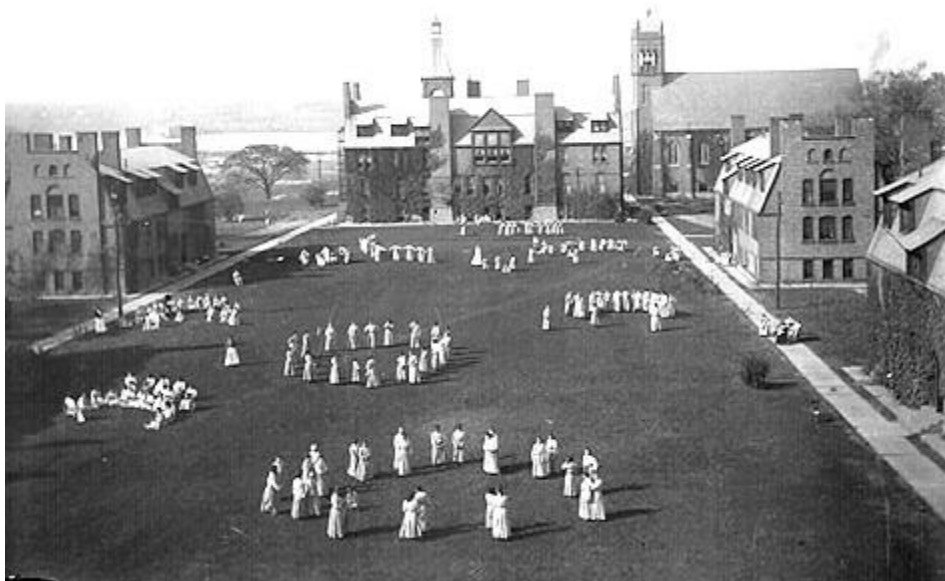


The History of Our Prison

By Carole Osterink

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The *Prison Public Memory Project*, which describes itself as "focused on making prison history relevant as a guide to the future," today launched a website and blog. The Project's initial focus of attention is our own Hudson Correctional Facility, which started out in 1887 as the Women's House of Refuge, became the New York State Training School for Girls in 1904, where in the 1930s Ella Fitzgerald was sent to be reformed, and in 1976 was transformed into what it is today: a medium-secure prison for men.

The website makes fascinating browsing. To quote the press release: "Visitors to the website can view current photos of former prison workers and inmates and listen to audio clips from their oral histories; see old photographs and maps of the prison; and read prison documents and letters from the 19th and 20th centuries. Short articles tell about ordinary as well as extraordinary prison-related events and people that influenced local, state, and national history." There's an interview with Timothy Dunleavy, president of Historic Hudson, who talks about the Dr. Oliver Bronson House

and how it was used during the Girls' Training School era (1904-1975). A section of the website invites visitors to help the Project team answer questions and locate evidence.

Project founder/director Alison Cornyn says of the Project: "Prisons, especially old prisons like the one in Hudson, have touched thousands of lives over the course of their history, in both profound and ordinary ways. Using history, art, dialogue, and new communications technologies, the Project will craft safe spaces and new opportunities for people from all walks of life—including those who lived and worked inside the walls—to connect with the past and each other and engage in conversation, learning, and visioning regarding the role of prisons in communities and in society today and in the future."