

1945 Eastern State Penitentiary Escape Participants

1. **Willie Sutton**

Although he was not the first man to crawl out of the tunnel, Willie was the first escapee captured as he ran into Patrolman John Hamm within minutes after seeing daylight. After a short chase Hamm was joined by Patrolman George Hummell and after shots were fired by the officers, Sutton surrendered. While in his two books Willie has the reader believe that he was the leader and mastermind of the tunnel escape, there are several contradicting accounts of the event.

2. **Clarence Klinedinst**

A skilled mason and plasterer, it is most believable that Klinedinst was the true mastermind of the tunnel escape. One account of how the tunnel came about was that cell #68 was initially being used for storage and while the prison was getting overcrowded, Klinedinst offered to repair the cell if he could call it his own. In the process he created a false panel in the side wall and perfectly camouflaged it with a metal waste basket. He combined efforts after "lights out" with his cellmate, William Russell. Klinedinst was captured the same day of the escape just a few blocks from the prison. Two years later, he was captured as a participant in a five-man escape from Holmesburg Prison and it wasn't until years later that his sentence was commuted and he was released.

3. **Horace "Bow Wow" Bowers**

Starting a career of crime in 1929, Bowers graduated from an automobile thief all the way up to a cop killer, when on August 14, 1937 he and an accomplice shot a Pennsylvania State Policeman during a robbery. While odds were that he would be sentenced to the death penalty, he drew a life sentence instead. After a police car rammed into the stolen milk truck, Bowers attacked one of the officers with a knife. He was shot, captured and hospitalized. He was paroled in 1963. On July 27, 1987, Bowers shot a 25-year old woman outside of his home and after his arrest, conviction and sentencing, spent the remainder of his life in prison.

4. **Robert McKnight**

With a criminal record back to 1934 for automobile theft, McKnight went on with arrests for robberies and assaults. He entered Eastern State Penitentiary in 1938 on a life sentence for a 1937 murder. He was paroled in 1956. But after committing an armed robbery in June 1957, he was back in prison. After finally paroled, he moved to Philadelphia, living a quiet life for ten years and opening an ice cream parlor. In June 1987, at the age of 70, McKnight was arrested again for murder when he shot two 19-year olds outside his store, killing one and wounding the other.

5. **James Grace**

On the morning of April 11, 1945, eight days after the tunnel escape, 24-year old James Grace appeared at the front gate of Eastern State Penitentiary, surrendering himself. It appeared that he did not feel he could continue hiding and needed to eat.

6. Victor Szymanski

Age 26 at the time of the escape, Victor was sentenced on February 9, 1940 to serve 20 to 40 years for several armed robberies. He was captured three days after the escape along with David Aiken.

7. James Simister

Serving a 5 to 10 year sentence for robbery, Simister was captured just a few blocks from the prison, along with three others after fleeing in a stolen milk truck.

8. James "Botchie" Van Sant

By the time he ended up at Eastern State, Botchie was no stranger to prison or prison escape. In September 1942, Van Sant was serving 10 to 20 years at Graterford Prison in Philadelphia for the armed robbery of a liquor store and shooting of the clerk. Along with fellow inmate, Freddy Tenuto they escaped from the prison, only to be recaptured the following day. Three years later, it was only fitting that Botchie and Tenuto were the last two of the dozen fugitives captured from the Eastern State tunnel escape. After remaining free for seven weeks, on May 21, 1945 Tenuto and Van Sant were tracked down and captured in New York City along with Michael Quinn, a paroled convict who was hiding the duo. In 1959 James Van Sant was finally released from prison and never returned.

9. Frederick Tenuto

Serving two concurrent 20 to 40 sentences and a veteran of escapes from other prisons, it was only natural for Tenuto to be a part of the biggest escape effort in Eastern State's history. Along with James Van Sant, Tenuto remained a fugitive the longest of the April 3, 1945 escapees. Not long after his recapture, he was transferred to Holmesburg Prison, from which he escaped in 1947 along with David Aiken, Clarence Klinedinst and Willie Sutton, all participants in the tunnel escape. Tenuto was never recaptured nor heard from since that final escape.

10. William Russell

Sentenced for 15 to 30 years at Eastern State on April 21, 1943, Russell eventually ended up as Klinedinst's cellmate in cell #68. The two inmates worked together at night digging the early stages of the tunnel. They made a plaster face mask which they put in the bed of whoever was digging at the time, while the other kept watch. After escaping, Russell was captured as he walked into a trap with state police waiting for him when he paid a visit to an old girlfriend. He was shot seven times and returned to recover in the prison infirmary.

11. Michael "Mickey" Webb

Arrested in 1928 for attempting to murder a former police detective, along with burglary and larceny, Webb got 15 to 30 years. He made parole in 1937, but after an arrest for assault and battery, he was sent back. He was one of the escapees who stole the milk truck and was captured the same day of the tunnel escape.

12. David "Pop" Aiken

At age 48, Aiken was the oldest of the escape crew and actually old enough where in addition to being arrested as a horse thief, it is speculated that he was Philadelphia's first automobile thief. With a criminal career starting at age 11, Aiken was serving his current 10 to 20 year sentence for a 1937 armed robbery. After crawling through the tunnel, he remained free for three days, when he was eventually captured along with Victor Szymanski. Aiken also participated in the 1947 escape from Holmesburg Prison, where he was recaptured.