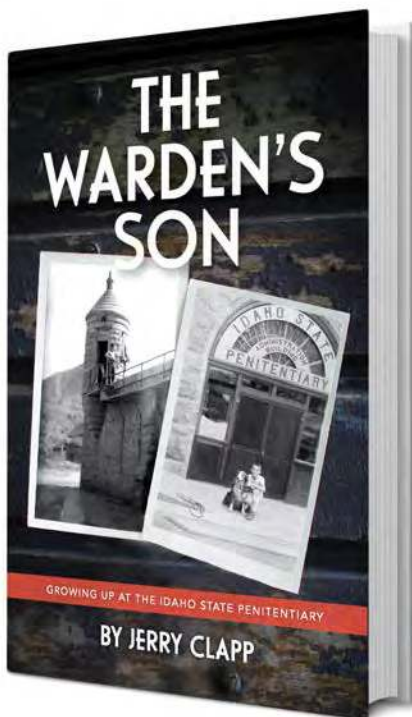


THE WARDEN'S SON

GROWING UP AT THE IDAHO STATE PENITENTIARY

BY JERRY CLAPP



For many years, Jerry Clapp told his children and grandchildren the stories of growing up at the Idaho State Penitentiary. Late in life, he was encouraged by his family to write down his remembrances.

The Warden's Son is the true story of a boy who spent his childhood at the [Idaho State Penitentiary](#).

Arriving in 1945, young Jerry Clapp quickly learned the rules and boundaries as he roamed the prison grounds and cell houses, the confidante to many a wild tale from friendly inmates. While some were too dangerous to encounter, others became friends — an old man serving life for multiple assassinations, a beautiful teenager in the women's prison, and an incarcerated war hero who became a lifelong role model.

These are the stories Jerry would tell his grandchildren — from chilling recollections of riots, escapes, and hangings to the profound remembrances of inmates, guards, and the warden.

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FORWARD FROM ANTHONY PARRY

The Idaho Territorial Penitentiary in Boise opened its doors in the spring of 1872. In the beginning, the penitentiary consisted of a single three-tiered cell house that could hold forty men for the entire territory of Idaho. A United States marshal, appointed by the president, fulfilled the position of warden until Idaho entered the Union in 1890. After that, the position was appointed by the governor. Wardens included politicians, policemen, lawyers, soldiers, and even a chaplain until the site was officially closed in 1973. The most notable of these wardens in the prison's history was Louis E. Clapp, who served from 1945-1966.

As an interpretive specialist at the Old Idaho State Penitentiary, I've dedicated my time to researching the history of the site, the lives of more than 13,000 men and women who resided here, and the prison administrators and guards who kept watch over Idaho's most dangerous criminals.

I first encountered Jerry Clapp—Louis Clapp's only son—while digitizing oral histories in 2014. Jerry had sat down with site historians in 1982 and again in 1987 to recount his life growing up on prison grounds as the son of a prison warden. I never had the pleasure of meeting him before his death in 2015, but I became captivated by his stories.

A trove of stories that had previously been lost to time, not recorded in newspapers or official records.

I was thrilled when Hidden Shelf Publishing House contacted me with questions regarding this posthumous memoir. The questions began simply enough by asking about proper spellings of the names of guards and inmates, as Jerry was not known for his handwriting. After a few spellings were cleared up, I received more inquiries about certain inmates and guards that Jerry references in his writings. This unveiled a trove of stories that had previously been lost to time, not recorded in newspapers or official records.

Jerry effectively chronicles the life of the warden's family living on the grounds of the penitentiary by witnessing escapes, executions, trials, and even developing close bonds with notorious criminals. He interacted daily with men serving long sentences who prepared his meals, trimmed his hair, and taught him life lessons in their own unique ways. Jerry's stories display humanity in a place known for punishment and brutality.

Jerry's father began his career in Idaho law enforcement. Lou Clapp served as a Wallace city patrolman, the chief deputy sheriff in Shoshone County, and an officer with the Idaho state police. In late 1944, he was the youngest man ever to be appointed warden of the state penitentiary and he would hold the position longer than any other warden in the prison's history.

FORWARD FROM ANTHONY PARRY (continued)

Warden was a political position appointed by the prison board, which consisted of the governor, secretary of state, and the attorney general of Idaho. Louis Clapp, a Democrat, served under five governors (two Democrats and three Republicans).

During each election season, the Clapp family braced for the possibility that Lou would be ousted for a new head of the prison, but because of his record and character, the prison board retained him in the post. He only resigned to continue his public service as Idaho's Secretary of State in 1966.

By all accounts, both as a father and a prison warden, Louis was beloved for his dedication to his position and his steadfast honesty. He was a straight shooter and a man of his word. During the nearly 22-year period that Warden Clapp held office, the prison saw vast improvements in the facility and quality of life for inmates. These included an expansion in rehabilitative programs, the development of the Idaho State Board of Corrections, the development of several inmate led clubs, and improvements in prison farm crop yields. At the end of World War II, Clapp spearheaded the construction of two new cell houses, avoiding problems in the late 1950s when the population of the site peaked at more than 500 convicts.

Warden Clapp further enhanced trusty programs that enabled model inmates to be trusted with special tasks and given more freedoms than other inmates. He wasn't focused on keeping men locked in cells, but on rehabilitation and providing them with vocational training for their inevitable release back into society.

Clapp was essential in finding the site of the current correctional institution, working with prison administrators in the construction of a modern facility.

Jerry Clapp followed in his father's footsteps and dedicated his life to Idaho law and public service. He became the clerk of the U.S. Courts in the District of Idaho, a position he held until his retirement.

This memoir explores the lives of an entire family living on the edge of potential danger. It provides insight into the inner workings of the prison. It exemplifies the strength required to lead a prison and make a true impact to many lives.

– Anthony Parry, Interpretive Specialist, Idaho State Historical Society

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New Release (Spring 2021): The Warden's Son

Boise, IDAHO, December 15, 2020 – The Warden's Son is a posthumous memoir about Jerry Clapp's life growing up at the Old Idaho Penitentiary while his father, Louis Clapp, served as warden for twenty-two year.

For years, Jerry Clapp told his children and grandchildren the stories from his childhood. From chilling recollections of riots, escapes, and hangings to the profound remembrances of inmates, guards, and his dad, the warden. Late in life, Jerry was encouraged by his family to write down his remembrances.

With meticulous attention to historical accuracy, The Warden's Son explores the lives of an entire family living on the edge of danger and it provides insight to inner workings of the historical prison.

The Warden's Son will be released in the spring of 2021 by Hidden Shelf Publishing House, an independent Boise/McCall based publishing company. The book will be sold at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple Books, Kobo, and at local bookstores.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 1

The huge house was quiet and cold, a light snow falling outside. It was January 9, 1945, my first night in this unfamiliar place. I rolled over from a deep sleep, curling up against the chill that pervaded the air in the bedroom, a draft from the door purposely left ajar. I tried to pull the blankets up to my face, but was met with resistance, a weight holding them down. Pal, our border collie, was asleep at my feet, unmoved by my adjustments. I was 10 years old, so I welcomed the security of his presence. His body warmth was comforting in the drafty old house my family would now call home. I hunkered down into the blankets rather than trying to pull them up.

Suddenly, a sound unlike anything I had ever heard jerked me awake. My eyes flew open as a loud siren screamed just outside my window. Huge bright lights shone directly into the room, casting terrifying shadows on the walls. The tree outside my window had no leaves, just sharp, angry looking branches that appeared to be reaching in to grab me from my bed. Without a curtain covering the window, the shadows splashed across the wall, making the darkest corners a pitch black. The light between the stark cage-like shadows was bright and unforgiving against the mostly empty room. I was terrified.

The bare walls echoed the sound of the siren. It was deafening. I could hear men shouting and running on the snow-covered road outside the house. I realized that the siren was an emergency signal; one or more prisoners had probably escaped. Pal, my great protector, was cowering on the bed, quietly whimpering with his ears perked up and eyes nervously looking around the room. I was stiff as a board, horrible scenarios dashing through my head.

With the siren still screaming, men's voices seemed to be growing louder. What do I do? I thought to myself while I searched for the safest looking place in the room. Do I hide? These thoughts rapidly circled in my brain. However, I suddenly felt conflicted. I was scared, but also curious. Maybe I should get up and peek through the window. Frozen in my bed, I heard a creaking floorboard outside of my room. The light from the hallway—which I purposely left on all night—now cast a looming shadow that seemed to creep across the bedroom floor.

It was too late to hide; the escaped prisoner was outside my room, coming to get me. The sliver of light from the hallway was no longer visible as the figure moved closer to my door. I jumped, yanking the covers over my head. I was curled into a ball as close to Pal as I could be. I hardly dared to breathe, my racing heart feeling as if it was about to burst. Pal didn't make a sound either. "Come on, Jerry," my dad commanded. "Put your shoes on. We have to go. It's best we leave Pal here."

The panic ebbed away as I climbed out of the bed. "No time for boots," Dad said. "Put on your slippers and coat. You'll be indoors in a moment." We left the house through the front door, locking the dog behind us. I could finally see the scene; guards running back and forth, some of them armed. I could hear shouts from all over the grounds and from as far away as the foothills. There was an escaped convict. Dad hurried me toward his office in the administration building.

"You'll be safe here," he said. "The door will be locked and I'll have men stationed outside the door. I'll be back."

Q & A WITH LEAD EDITOR, RACHEL WICKSTROM

Where did the information for this book come from?

This book is a collection of stories that Jerry often told his kids and grandkids about his interesting and unique childhood, growing up just feet from the entrance to the Idaho State Penitentiary. Late in his life, Jerry's family encouraged him to write down these memories, so that they would be recorded and the stories would live on even after Jerry passed. We worked with Anthony Parry, interpretive specialist at The Old Idaho State Penitentiary, consulted newspaper archives, and scoured through ancestry.com to verify as much of the information as possible.

What challenges were faced in compiling this work?

The historical records consulted were recorded by hand and on paper—this often led to various spellings of names, some inaccuracies of specific dates, and loss of records due to fire or other elemental damage. For example, it was difficult to verify the correct spelling of an inmate's name when various records spelled it differently.

One of the elements that I was personally interested in was what happened to the inmates after they were released. Unless they were arrested again, in Idaho or elsewhere, it was often impossible to track down where they went and what they went on to do with their lives.

What role does *The Warden's Son* take in preserving Idaho history?

Meaning, importance, and understanding of historical events is often revealed by the connections we make and the personal stories that we hear or read. It is one thing to read a headline about a riot, it is another to hear a personal account of the fear pulsing through veins, and the sounds of tear gas bombs blasting. *The Warden's Son* also sheds light on the people behind the crimes; it reveals the humanity of the individual inmates and the guards who were often lumped together in a tangle of numbers and transgressions. Personal stories are an integral part of what makes up Idaho history.

ABOUT HIDDEN SHELF PUBLISHING HOUSE

We are an independent McCall / Boise based publishing house delivering wonderful and creative works to an audience of passionate readers.

Several years ago, when Hidden Shelf founder, Bob Gaines was signed by a literary agent, he told her about his novel, The Brave Historian. While she loved the concept, she only handled nonfiction.

"With fiction," she said, "the big publishing houses don't want to take a chance on unknowns. Of course, when somebody does manage to publish something different that finds success, all the other publishers then want to copy it."

Literary agents and editors were becoming extremely frustrated that the fate of great literature was now being decided in corporate board rooms based on accounting projections. "They will print Lady Gaga's autobiography," she added, "but snub the next Ernest Hemingway."

Based in a beautiful mountain town in Idaho, Hidden Shelf was founded in 2017 with the goal of providing wonderful and creative works to an audience of passionate readers.

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