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Local Authors

## Lafayette Author Profiles Important People behind Prison Reform

By Lou Fancher



Ted W. Fuller Photo provided

Lost in Gov. Jerry Brown's scramble to meet the court-ordered directive to reduce the population of California's 33 adult prisons by year's end is an issue dear to the heart of Lafayette author Ted W. Fuller: prison reform.

"Prison Reform Catalysts" is his latest book, published by Pleasant Hill Press, the small operation he founded and has owned since 1992. The Lafayette resident's slim volume briefly profiles 21 men and 16 women whose lives and philosophies have contributed to the sane, compassionate care of prisoners.

From Thomas Eddy, an Irish Quaker who insisted that incarceration's purpose must be reformation, not merely separation, to Sister Helen Prejeans, whose "Dead Man Walking" was made into an Oscar-nominated film, Fuller's investigation reveals a rich history of change.

Delving back to 1764, writer Cesare Beccaria's "On Crimes and Punishments" issued a swift treatise on the ineffectiveness of the death penalty, suggesting a good education might be a better path to reduced recidivism.

Women - Fuller's book includes a notable number, especially given prison reformation's male-dominated, political landscape - played major roles, even as far back as the early 19th century. Elizabeth Fry, fearing her "life was slipping away to little purpose," eventually spawned a

number of organizations devoted to improving conditions for female prisoners. Dorothea Dix lobbied in Massachusetts for humane, appropriate treatment for the mentally ill. Although many of her specific efforts were thwarted, her resounding message - that overcrowding and inappropriate care must be combated with federal funds - led to the founding of mental health hospitals, prison libraries, and nurse training facilities.

Clearly, metamorphosis in prison practices did not come easily or without cost: Fuller's "catalysts" often suffered ostracism or opposition. What keeps the profiles from becoming a depressing read on a difficult topic is the tenacity of the individuals.

In 1841, Boston's John Augustus paid \$3.76 to save a bootlegger from the House of Correction: 37 years later, Augustus was called "The Father of America's Probation" system. Clara Shortridge Foltz, married at 15 and abandoned with five children by her husband 12 years later, passed the bar exam in 1878. To earn her position as a member of the legal profession, she replaced "white males" with "person" in a state bar exam bill, got it passed and argued her way into law school. Her efforts on behalf of indigent people accused of a crime led to court-appointed counsel, the separation of juvenile and adult inmates, and other reforms.

Contemporary activists like San Francisco county jail program director Sunny Schwartz bring the book full circle to modern day problems of drug addiction and limited education in the prison population. Schwartz developed what Fuller calls "the nation's first charter high school for inmates."

Fuller keeps the Prison Reform Catalysts profiles streamlined; a welcome touch for those who only want a quick journey through the subject's history. And for readers with deeper interest or historians seeking an expansive reference, there's enough information to generate a Google search beyond the book's realm. Regrettably, especially for reviewers of non-fiction for educational purposes, the book lacks a standard bibliography or proper footnotes. Asked why these items were not included, Fuller replied via email, "The absence of a bibliography stems, I suspect, from the view that I'd identified sources in the profiles when it seemed relevant."

Also missing is a biography, which might have included delightful bits, like the story of the author's own "incarceration" at the age of 11. After two of his buddies convinced him to swipe licorice from a candy store display case, Fuller spent a night in a juvenile detention center. He experienced "restorative justice" in the form of a pancake breakfast and his mother's decree that he repay and apologize to the store owners.

CreateSpace produced the print-on-demand edition, which Fuller said took 10 months to write. He "learned the hard way" to format the book in Microsoft Word instead of Microsoft Publisher and appreciates the support members of Lafayette Senior Services have offered through book signings.

"Prison Reform Catalysts" (112 pages, \$8.99) is available from Amazon, or by emailing plsnthillpress@gmail.com.

## PRISON REFORM CATALYSTS



**Ted W. Fuller**

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