

By Pamela Morello  
The North Haven Citizen

Five-time Emmy Award winner and filmmaker Karyl Evans can add another accolade to her arsenal as the recent recipient of the Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) for her documentary about a Connecticut landmark. The Award of Merit is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in preservation and interpretation of state and local history.

Evans' film, "The Rise and Fall of Newgate Prison: A Story of Crime and Punishment in Connecticut" started as a history of crime and punishment in the state, but evolved to look at the history of the first state prison in America. Old Newgate Prison, as it has come to be known, was originally a copper mine, believed to be one of the first mines in America. Connecticut decided to use the abandoned underground tunnels of the mine as a prison, and housed its first criminal – John Hinson – for burglary in 1773.

Through her research and interviews, Evans learned a lot about how crime and punishment has changed over time. She said the instances of crime aren't necessarily higher today than they were yesterday, but that the way our society defines a crime is different.

"Our definition of what is a crime has changed," Evans said. So has our determination of an appropriate punishment.

In the past, adultery was considered a crime, and public humiliation was punishment enough for an offender, she said. In Connecticut, punishment evolved to housing criminals in the 70-foot underground shafts of Newgate, where they spent most of the day confined. Now, prisoners are held in what Evans called "high security cages."

"The Rise and Fall of Newgate Prison" is one of many films Evans has worked on. Her previous documentary films for television include "The Amistad Revolt" and "The His-

tory of Connecticut Cities," along with others about the history of African Americans in Connecticut and one on the Freedom Trail. Though the Newgate film explores the history of crime and punishment in the state, Evans considers it an extension of the research she has done on minorities in the state.

"This is a continuing study of the social and economic disadvantage minorities have," Evans said.

Evans noted that before she took on this film she did not realize how cyclical crime is. "There's a perpetuation of keeping people who are disadvantaged in the criminal system because they started off in a bad position to begin with. It's not so surprising if you look at the history of discrimination."

The film was funded by the Connecticut Humanities Council and is part of a series called "The Connecticut Experience" shown on Connecticut Public Television (CPTV). Evans said she is not aware of any plans to re-broadcast the film on television, but said those who are interested in seeing it can request it be re-aired by calling CPTV. It is also on sale through the Con-

necticut Humanities Council.

Evans has been in the television broadcast business – as a producer, director, writer and editor – for 27 years. She said recognition of her work, like that of the Award of Merit, are just icing on the cake.

"I love my work," she said. "It's so rewarding artistically. Getting this award helps me know that people out there recognize my work, and that it's important to the community."

"I do it to inform the community, and put information in front of people that adds to their understanding," Evans added. "That really is very gratifying to me."

Evans is currently working on a film about Noah Webster, creator of the first American dictionary. The Noah Webster House in West Hartford commissioned Evans to create a new orientation film about Webster, whose 350th birthday is being celebrated this year. The film will be premiered on Oct. 16 at the University of Hartford.

Another project Evans is working on is a series of four films about women scientists with a state connection for The Connecticut Women's Hall of

Fame in Hartford. The films will feature Barbara McClintock, Patricia Goldman-Rakic, Joan A. Steitz, and Jewel Plummer Cobb, and are set to premiere

at the 15th annual gala and induction ceremony on Oct. 30 at the Hartford Marriott.

Evans grew up in Newtown, Conn., and moved to North



Haven a year ago. For more on Karyl Evans visit [www.karylevansproductions.com](http://www.karylevansproductions.com). For more information about the AASLH visit [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org).

## The North Haven Citizen

Volume 4, Number 37

Your Town, Your News

Friday, September 12, 2008