

13 Stories III
Story Options 2022

Option #12: Ida Laherty

Ida Belle Laherty was born in Washington in January 1887 and grew up in a Catholic home. Her father died when she was eleven, and her mother, very poor, had six children to support. She later remarried John Bertholf, a temperamental man who would often beat the children with straps and whips and moved the family to Saint Maries, Idaho. Ida, the eldest, had very little schooling, dropping out after just a year and a half. She left home at age fifteen, settling in Moscow, Idaho. There she met and fell in love with a young man named William Lewis from Reardon, Washington. One day, William hatched a plan to have Ida hire a team of horses for one day from a livery stable in Moscow and ride by herself to Sprague, Washington where William would meet her and the two would sell the horses for a large profit. On October 2, 1902, Ida drove the team to Sprague and waited for William to come. He never came. Several days later, Ida was arrested for stealing the team. She never saw William Lewis again.

Ida was transported by authorities back to Moscow, Idaho and on November 8, 1902, she went to trial. She was found guilty of grand larceny and sentenced to the Idaho State Penitentiary for one year. She was just sixteen years old. During her trial, she had no family members or friends present to help or assist her in legal advice. Moved with compassion, the local branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union sent three petitions to the Board of Pardons pleading on her behalf. There were over three-hundred-seventy-six signatures on the petitions.

When Ida first entered the prison, the guards described her as a "ill mannered" child. The warden once caught a male inmate, Fred Marshall, speaking to her through her window. He boarded the window to prevent them from communicating. However, Fred continued to pursue Ida, asking for her hand in marriage. Shortly afterwards, the prison officials felt it was necessary to isolate the female inmates and moved them into the Women's Ward outside of the penitentiary walls. After the move, Warden Parrin wrote, "The child was kept in a separate cell but allowed to take daily exercise in company with Mrs. Kensler." Josie Kensler, an older female inmate serving time for manslaughter, became a kind of maternal figure to Ida, teaching her how to sew and cook. The warden claimed that Josie "set a good example for [Ida]." The community continued to voice concern over Ida's young age and sent petitions to the board to release her. After serving three months, Ida was released from prison and turned over to the Florence Crittenton home to be cared for until her parents could be contacted. During that time, Fred Marshall was released from prison and posed as Ida's uncle at the Crittenton

home, trying to lure her to run away. The plot was discovered, and Fred was banned from the house. He never bothered her again. Ida was one of the youngest female inmates to serve at the Idaho State Penitentiary.

