

Thief

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Connor first gained attention in the 1960s as leader of a Boston-area rock band called Myles and the Wild Ones. He added to his reputation over the years with several high-profile art thefts and, though he was in prison at the time, has been linked to the infamous 1990 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum art heist in Boston. He also has been accused of assaults, drug trafficking, shooting a police officer, and of murdering two Boston women in 1975, the last of which he eventually was acquitted.

On Wednesday, Connor recounted how while visiting relatives 49 years ago in Sullivan, he was captured after police caught him stealing antiques from a local dead woman's house. A copy of his 2009 book, "The Art of the Heist," lay on a table in the old jail booking room while cameras recorded Connor looking in a dusty jail cell and talking to relatives of Merritt Fitch, the sheriff who ran the jail at the time of his escape.

Dorothy "Dot" Fitch, the wife of the now-deceased former sheriff, said she cooked hot meals for inmates at the jail, including Connor.

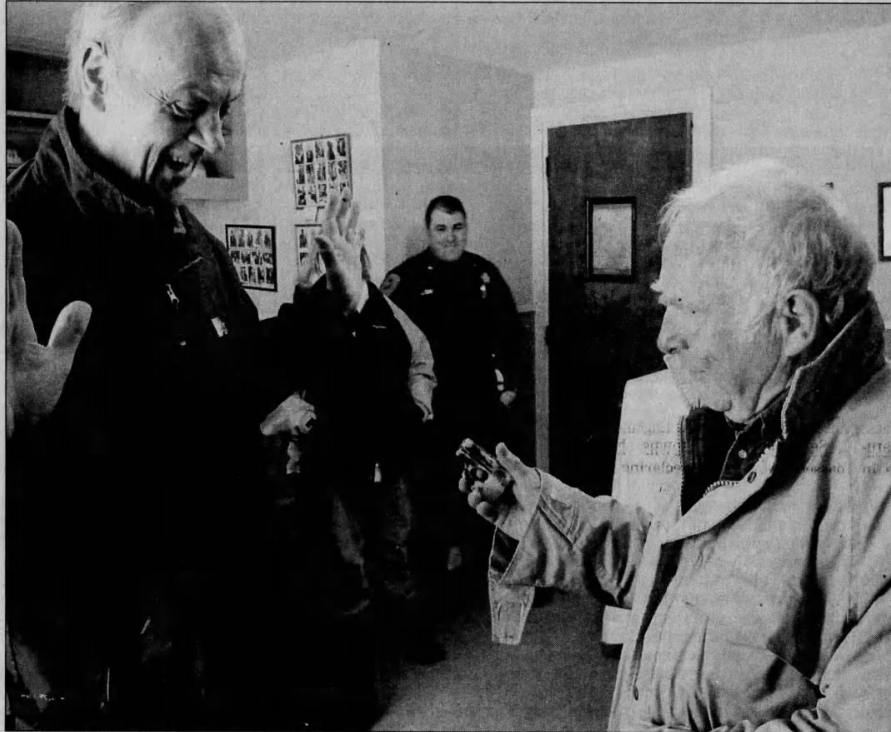
"This is the first time I've seen him since I saw the back of him running out the door," she said.

Ernest Fitch, the sheriff's son and himself a former detective with the Hancock County Sheriff's Office, said he was in the attached house where his family lived when Connor escaped. Recalling the commotion, he said his father got on the phone and called for assistance after Connor ran down the hill and jumped into the Union River.

"He said 'Bring in the bloodhounds — we're going to need them,'" the former detective said.

Connor, whose grandfather was from Sullivan, used to travel in the summers from Milton, Mass., where his father was a police sergeant, to visit his grandfather's family. He already had developed an interest in acquiring art and antiques when, one July night in 1965, he heard his relatives talking about a neighbor.

"I was at the dinner table at my granduncle's house and I remember them talking about how sad it was that Mrs. so-and-so had passed on and her children



Myles J. Connor Jr. (right) holds a bar of soap carved into the shape of a gun Wednesday as Al Dotoli, a longtime friend who accompanied Connor on his visit, holds up his hands in mock alarm at the old Hancock County Jail in Ellsworth. Connor, a notorious art thief, escaped from the jail in 1965 by using the fake firearm to fool a guard.

BDN PHOTO BY BILL TROTTER

were going to get everything that she had and she despised her children," Connor said. "Being aware there was this house filled with antiques and stuff, I decided to take a look."

Connor went to the dead woman's house and was carrying a grandfather clock out to his car when a sheriff's deputy, responding to a tip, pulled into the driveway. But it wasn't the clock in his hands that worried Connor when he saw the officer, he said.

"In the trunk of my car I had some [illegal] firearms, heavy-duty firearms that I had brought up to Maine to do some target practice with," Connor said. "They were machine guns."

Connor got into a "tussle" with the deputy, snatching away his gun and shooting out the communications radio in the cruiser before he drove off in his own car. He was apprehended a short distance away on Route 1 by other officers responding to the call.

He was taken to the Ellsworth jail but soon hatched his escape plan. Officials would not let him out on bail, he said, and he was

desperate to get back to his apartment in Revere, Mass. "Back in Revere, my apartment was filled with high-quality antiques," Connor said.

Among them was a silver plate made by Revolutionary War hero Paul Revere that had been stolen from Harvard University's Peabody Museum. He was concerned that people he knew back home would help themselves to the valuables while he was locked away in Maine.

"It was paramount that I get out and get down there," Connor said. "That was the reason for the desperate act."

So about 8 p.m. July 26, 1965, Connor sprung into action. He brandished the blackened soap at a guard, knocked him down and ran out through the booking room entrance, down the hill behind the jail and jumped into the Union River. After seeing people with flashlights on the far side of the river, he swam back to the eastern bank and ran into the library, next to the jail.

"I reposed in the library for two days," Connor said. He found a ladder and

hatch that led into the attic and crawled up, kicking the rolling ladder away as he went.

Two days later, he snuck out of the library, walked east a few blocks through Ellsworth and then followed railroad tracks east toward Hancock. He lived in the woods for a few more days until, after being spotted a few times, he ended up being caught in a police dragnet.

This time he was taken to Penobscot County Jail in Bangor and, after posting \$15,000 bail, went back to Massachusetts, where he got into more trouble that kept him from ever returning to Maine to serve time.

In the decades since, Connor has been connected with a 1974 theft of Wyeth paintings from the Woolworth estate in Monmouth, Maine; a 1975 theft of paintings from the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College; and a 1975 daylight robbery of a Rembrandt painting from Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, among other capers.

More recently, he has been implicated in more petty crimes — a 2011 sunglasses shoplifting attempt and a 2012 drug-related rob-

bery of a cellphone, both in Woonsocket, R.I., and a 2011 hay theft in Mendon, Mass.

Connor is free after serving time in prison for his crimes. He was incarcerated in Walpole, Mass., on assault and attempted murder charges, and in Illinois for drug offenses and illegal transportation of stolen art.

When asked Wednesday about the infamous, unsolved Gardner Museum heist, Connor repeated what he has said in other previously published reports: that the theft, which netted 13 works of art now estimated to be worth up to \$500 million, was his idea but that it was carried out by two associates of his who have since died. He added that he believes the stolen artworks are now in Saudi Arabia, "probably in some wealthy sheik's basement."

FBI officials announced last year that they have identified who the thieves were, but they declined to release names, saying the case is still under investigation. Other people with highly publicized criminal records have been linked to the Gardner heist, but none ever has been charged in the crime.

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when he was found guilty of arson, a Class A felony for which he served a nine-month sentence and was ordered to pay \$6,779.46 restitu-

Jail officials. His address at that time was listed as Veazie.

The case remains under investigation by the Bangor

El Nino could strike as early as summer

summer, the U.S. weather forecaster warned on Thursday.

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