

All Things Judicial "Fright Court" Episode Focuses on Two Haunted County Courthouses and the Tale of Legendary Accused Murderer Tom Dooley



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Margaret Ferguson Carter Martine of the Whippoorwill Academy and Village guided All Things Judicial to the gravesite of folk legend Tom Dooley.

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RALEIGH — Each Halloween season, *All Things Judicial* releases a [special episode called "Fright Court,"](#) where the focus turns to ghostly legends associated with North Carolina's courthouses and legal community. In this year's episode, we focus on courthouse ghosts in [New Hanover](#) and [Mitchell](#) counties, and dive into the folklore of the 1866 murder of Laura Foster and subsequent trial and execution of her accused killer, [Tom Dula \(Dooley\)](#). This story became a worldwide pop culture phenomenon beginning in 1958 when the Kingston Trio released a murder ballad which reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart.



"I've always believed that the hanging of Tom Dooley here in our little town of Statesville, North Carolina is the most widely recognized execution in U.S. history," said Steve Hill, curator of the Statesville Historical Collection. "Everybody wanted to make a dollar off of Tom Dooley while they could, and a lot of people did."

The first segment of this episode is an interview with John Hirschak, who, along with his wife Kim, operate the [Ghost Walk of Old Wilmington](#) and [The Black Cat Shoppe](#). Hirschak shares stories about three spirits who occupy the historic New Hanover County Courthouse, and we discuss possible explanations for hauntings.

The second segment is a dramatic reading of an [article](#) published by the [Mitchell County Historical Society](#) which details firsthand accounts of seeing and hearing a ghost which haunts the historic Mitchell County Courthouse.

In the third segment, we meet Margaret Ferguson Carter Martine from the [Whippoorwill Academy and Village](#) in [Wilkes County](#). She recounts the Dooley story and shares her personal connection to a key figure in that historic event.

Then we travel to [Iredell County](#) where we meet Keith Ryan, Director of the [Historic Sharpe House](#). He shares details about May 1, 1868, the fateful day Tom Dooley was hanged in Statesville.

In the final interview of this episode, we meet Steve Hill, curator of the [Statesville Historical Collection](#). He provides insight into the worldwide impact of the Dooley story.

You can find out more about *All Things Judicial* or hear previous episodes in the Fright Court series by visiting [NCcourts.gov](#).

MORE INFORMATION

All Things Judicial is a podcast about the important role of the North Carolina Judicial Branch in state government. The podcast follows a bi-monthly release schedule with each new episode available for download every other Wednesday and can be found on all podcast apps and on [NCcourts.gov](#).

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About North Carolina Judicial Branch

The [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#) is an equal and distinctively separate branch and core function of government. More than 7,000 Judicial Branch employees statewide administer justice in courthouses in North Carolina's 100 counties. The [Judicial Branch budget for FY 2021–22](#) was \$672.4M, 86.2% of which is used to pay salaries and the remaining 13.8% is used for operations. The Judicial Branch receives only 2.59% of the overall State budget.

About North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is the administrative agency for the [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#), providing administrative services to help the North Carolina court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources.

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