TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT CHRONOLOGY

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

The Tennessee Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of the state's death penalty statute. Here is a chronology of capital punishment in Tennessee.

1796 - Tennessee becomes a state. Common law allowed the death penalty, generally by hanging. The first of three state Constitutions also refers to "capital offenses."

1829 - Tennessee adopts a new criminal code, continuing to allow capital punishment by hanging.

1834 -The Second Tennessee Constitution contains identical language as the first on capital offenses.

1870 - third state Constitution (which, although amended since, remains in effect) contains the same language as the first two on capital offenses.

1888 - Electrocution is authorized as a method of capital punishment in New York. That state's legislature approves this method in carrying out death sentences. Tennessee continues use of gallows.

1909 - Executions are moved from county of conviction to the state prison.

1913 - Tennessee replaces hanging with the electric chair as its method of execution.

1915-16 - The death penalty resumes with electrocution. Executions reach peak in the state during the 1930's, when 47 convicts are put to death in the electric chair.

1960 - The last Tennessee execution by electrocution is held Nov. 7, when William Tines is executed for rape.

1972 - The U.S. Supreme Court declares in Furman vs. Georgia that the death penalty is unconstitutionally cruel and inhuman.

1974 - The General Assembly responds with a new death penalty statute, declared unconstitutional by the state's high court.

1976 - The U.S. Supreme Court allows states to reinstate capital punishment. Tennessee adopts a new statute.

1977 – The Tennessee Supreme Court strikes down the death penalty law. The legislature enacts a new law that, except for amendments, is in use today.

1979-81 - The State Supreme Court upholds the death penalty statute in two cases and it continues through the 1980s.

1990 - A new state Supreme Court is elected and asks lawyers in a capital punishment case to include constitutionality of the death penalty as part of arguments on appeal for the first in-depth review of the issue in a decade.

1991 - The state Supreme Court upholds the death penalty in a 3-2 decision.

1998-Tennessee law makes lethal injection the method of execution for those committing an offense on or after January 1, 1999.

2000-Tennessee law is amended making lethal injection the primary method of execution and allows death row inmates committing their offense prior to January 1, 1999, to choose electrocution. Robert Coe is executed by lethal injection April 19th for murder, aggravated rape and aggravated kidnapping.

For more information contact TDOC PIO at 741-1000 ext. 4005