

The Longest Trial in

By Michael Harris

The trial of the San Quentin Six, the longest criminal proceeding ever conducted in a California courtroom, ended 507 days after it began in a specially secured area of the Marin Civic Center.

Although there appears to be no accurate way of reaching a total figure, the trial is believed to have cost at least \$2.2 million in public funds.

The court sessions began on March 25, 1975 — about three weeks after the start of the San Francisco trial of four men accused of the random Zebra murders in which 14 persons were shot or stabbed to death.

The Zebra trial, ending with

convictions for murder against each defendant, lasted 376 days — up to then the longest criminal trial in the state's history.

Its cost has not been calculated, although apparently it ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Many of the extra costs incurred in the San Quentin Six trial were apparent even to the most casual visitor to the imposing civic center north of San Rafael.

Extra guards were stationed both inside and outside the courtroom of Superior Court Judge Henry J. Broderick to prevent — and if necessary combat — outbreaks of violence.

The courtroom itself was divided into two sections by a transpar-

ent, bullet-proof shield. Spectators were able to get a somewhat blurred view of the defendants, the judge and the other participants in the trial through the thick barrier. The testimony was piped into the back of the courtroom over a public address system.

Some costs were small, but symbolic — like the expense of fastening chairs to the floor so that shackled prisoners could be chained to them during the lengthy proceedings.

Outside the courtroom, near the entrance to the twin elevators serving the top floor of the civic center, deputies from the sheriff's department screened visitors with metal detectors like those that have become commonplace at commercial airports.

California's History

Everybody, including lawyers from the district attorney's office, was required to undergo the daily screening before attending the trial sessions.

Sometimes visitors to the other Superior and Municipal courtrooms on the floor were obliged to pass through the screening process before they could go on with their routine business.

Other expenses were less visible, but each of the following items cost well in excess of \$100,000 — recording and printing a transcript of the testimony, payments for outside lawyers and extra expenses for the district attorney's office.

Extra costs in the neighborhood of \$100,000 were incurred by the public defender's office. It appeared similar amounts were spent for clerical expenses and nearly as much for jury fees.

Much, though not all, of the financial burden will be assumed by the state of California because the crimes for which three of the six were found guilty occurred in

San Quentin Prison, owned and operated by the state.

Perhaps the most astonishing statistic of the trial was the extraordinary length of time required to pick a jury — 14 weeks.

Most trials take less time than that altogether and, in federal courts, jury selection in even the most complicated and controversial cases rarely takes more than a couple of days. Even the selection of a jury in the trial this year of Patricia Hearst required only six days.

But in the case of the San Quentin Six, there were separate lawyers for each defendant, and each of the lawyers exercised his duty to question each prospective juror for possible bias.

The lawyers still kept their questions going when the testimony itself began, and there were times when it appeared to some that the case would never end.

But end it did — one year, five months and 13 days after it started.