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The Jails of Virginia

A STUDY OF THE LOCAL PENAL SYSTEM

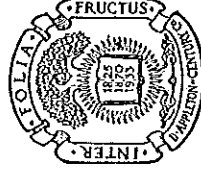
BY

FRANK WILLIAM HOFFER, P.H.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

DELBERT MARTIN MANN, M.A.
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
SCARRITT COLLEGE
SOMETIME RESEARCH ASSOCIATE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

AND

FLOYD NELSON HOUSE, P.H.D.
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



ALBEMARLE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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*Section on Albemarle Co. Jail
(1876)* →

with no passageway between, was added. The walls are of brick, 18" thick, and the floors are concrete, while the roof is slate as in the old section. Both sections are fireproof except for the women's rooms in the new section. One large room (50'4" x 22'4" x 10') containing a steel cage with six cells and an interior corridor occupies the entire first floor. Eight windows, each measuring 6' x 2'8", with a ratio of 1 to 5.3 between window area and floor area, provide better light and ventilation than in the old jail. Walls and floors were fairly clean except near the windows, prisoners in the cage having failed in the attempt to expectorate tobacco juice out the windows.

The cage is constructed of $\frac{3}{4}$ " steel strips which render the interior quite dark. It is not reached by sunshine. Each of the six cells measures 6'10" x 6' x 7' and contains four folding wall bunks. When the twenty-four bunks are occupied there are available only 285 cubic feet of air space per prisoner. There is a flush toilet in each cell and a sink with running water in the prisoners' corridor. Cell-work is painted gray once in one or two years. The paint was off in places and the cell-work was quite dirty.

Iron stairs lead to the second floor, which is divided by wooden partitions into six rooms, three of which are used by women prisoners, one by a trusty, one as a wash-room, and one as a bathroom. The latter contains two showers and is used by all of the prisoners, who are taken up two at a time once a week for this purpose. The wash-room contains two stationary wash-tubs and a toilet. Two of the rooms for women measure 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' x 11'; the other measures 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' x 7'8" x 11'. Two single iron cots are ordinarily used in each room, though sometimes three and even four may be used. With two in each room, there are 562 cubic feet of air space per person. One window in each room gives a ratio of 1 to 6.4 between window area and floor area. There are a flush toilet and a lavatory in each room.

A small room at the rear of the new section contains a hot-water furnace which provides heat for the entire jail.

Colored men are kept in the cage on the first floor of the newer section; white and colored women are kept in separate rooms on the second floor. White men are confined in the rooms on both floors of the older section, although white women are sometimes confined in one of these rooms when the women's quarters become too crowded. This is a very unsatisfactory arrangement, since the door of the room used by the women is directly across the hall from one occupied by men. There are only bars at the doors, so that not only can conversation be carried on freely but the occupants of one room can look directly into the other.

CHAPTER IV

SOME TYPICAL JAILS — II

A. THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY¹ JAIL

THE Albemarle County jail stands in the middle of a block surrounded by substantial and attractive residences from which an 18' stone wall serves to isolate it quite effectively. The jailer's residence, an attractive two-story, six-room brick structure, built in 1886, stands ten feet from the jail to the southeast. Entrance to the jail yard is through double gates on the south near the residence.

The present jail consists of two distinct sections. The older section, measuring 25' x 44 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' and two stories high, was built in 1876, and is of rough stone with walls 3' thick. On the first floor there is a central hall from which heavily barred doors give entrance to four rooms, two on either side. The second floor, reached by a rough wooden stairway, has the same arrangement except that one large room on the west corresponds to two on the first floor. The floors consist of rough flagstones which are very difficult to keep clean, although they are scrubbed twice a week. Ceilings are vaulted and are 9' high in the center. Ceilings and walls are whitewashed twice a year, in April and October, and were in fair condition at the time of observation except for numerous penciled inscriptions. One small window, measuring 5' x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' in each room (except the large room, which has two) gives very inadequate light and ventilation, the ratio of window area to floor area being 1 to 14.4. There are no heavy wire screens or fly-screens, but heavy steel bars 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter, set in thick steel frames, reduce the opening very greatly. Very little sunlight enters the rooms on the south and none on the north. Each room is equipped with a flush toilet and lavatory, and there is one extra toilet in the upper hall. Some of the toilets were rusty and insanitary, but all were reported to be in working order. Single and double-decked iron cots are used, with provision for three prisoners in some rooms and four in others. When a room is occupied by four prisoners, there are only 244 cubic feet of air space for each.

In 1880 a new two-story section, abutting the old jail on the east but

¹ Albemarle County has an area of 751 square miles and a population of 26,981. Charlottesville has a resident population of 15,245.

However, when there are large numbers confined, no other arrangement seems possible with the existing structure.

There are no rooms set apart for the use of juveniles, and in practice they are not separated from adults. At the time of the first visit a white boy, sixteen years of age, charged with stealing, was confined with several white men in one of the rooms, and a colored girl, twelve years of age, also charged with stealing, was confined with several colored women.

The white insane are held in separate rooms in the old section, the colored in a cell in the cage until officers from the State Hospital come for them. This is usually a matter of several days, but if relatives pay for their transportation they are taken away immediately. Those awaiting trial are not separated from the convicted. Cases of venereal and other contagious disease are confined in separate rooms when discovered and are sent to the State Farm as soon as possible. If there is a large number of prisoners present, the facilities for segregation are obviously inadequate. Beyond certain limits it is impossible for the jailer to segregate the various classes properly.

The 18' wall surrounding the jail, together with the jailer's residence, interferes somewhat, though not seriously, with the light and sunlight. As indicated above, the old section is inadequately provided with windows. The small size of the windows, together with the thickness of the walls and the size of the bars, results in very inadequate lighting and ventilation. A very little sunshine enters the upper rooms on the south, none at all on the north. Windows were fairly clean and could be opened. The upper rooms are said to be hot and stifling in the summer. Conditions of light and ventilation are much better in the cage room than in the old jail, but even here the flat cross-bars of the cage tend to shut out both light and air. No artificial ventilation is provided. Four electric lights in the jailer's corridor of the cage room and one in each room in the women's section give fairly adequate artificial light, but in the old jail the electric lights in the halls do not adequately light the rooms. Hot-water radiators in each room provide sufficient heat.

Cotton mattresses of good grade, 4" in thickness, are used on all bunks and cots. When the jail was visited in August, 1929, these were very much soiled, but at the time of a later visit in May, 1930, clean mattresses with new cover slips had been provided. Mattresses are said to be aired and sunned and cover slips changed once a week. Blankets are provided for covering. These are washed by the prisoners at intervals varying from two or three weeks to two or three months, depending on the cleanliness of the persons using them. After each prisoner is through using

them they are disinfected, or washed if dirty, before being given to another prisoner.

Meals are prepared by a cook in the jailer's kitchen. Trustees serve them in oblong tin pans which are pushed through the bars of the cells or rooms. Prisoners not working receive two meals a day, at 6:30 A. M. and 12 noon. Those working in the chain-gang receive an additional meal at 5:30 P. M. For breakfast prisoners receive a strip of fried salt pork with grease, one-third loaf of bread, syrup, and a cup of coffee without sugar or milk; at noon they are given one cup of boiled beans and one-third loaf of bread, or, as an occasional variation, boiled potatoes and bread. The evening meal is usually the same as at noon. Prisoners complained that they did not get enough to eat and that the coffee was very weak. They are allowed to purchase food, and most of them do when they have money. Relatives and friends sometimes bring food. No store is maintained, but the jailer sells such things as tobacco, sugar, bread, canned peaches, and tomatoes. At the time of the second visit prisoners were frying eggs over a small fire made on the floor of the corridor by wadding up newspapers.

Two physicians appointed by the court come on call and are paid by the city and State a fee of seventy-five cents for each day they attend one prisoner and fifty cents for each additional patient when they attend more than one a day. A prisoner is allowed to have his own private physician if he pays for the physician's services. Prisoners who are seriously ill or require an operation are sent to the University of Virginia Hospital. There is no regular medical examination at the time of admission but prisoners are examined before being sent to the State road camps.

Prisoners are not required to bathe when admitted to jail, but bathe once a week thereafter. Laundry soap is provided, but towels are not. No clothing is supplied except to those who work in the chain-gang. Prisoners wash their own clothing in the wash-tubs or in cold water in the lavatories.

Religious services are conducted by Salvation Army workers once in about two months in the white section but only about once a year in the colored section. Prisoners are allowed to buy books, magazines, and papers. The *War Cry* is frequently supplied by the Salvation Army. Playing cards and playing checkers are the most common forms of amusement, but dice are not allowed.

The jail is directly under the control of a jailer who devotes most of his time to it. The county board of supervisors visits the jail two or three times a year. There is no matron for women prisoners. There

is no supervision at night except for the fact that the jailer's bedroom is within ten feet of the newer section of the jail, which would make it possible to awaken him in case of need.

No especial rules or regulations have been made for prisoners other than the very general ones that they are to keep order and be quiet after the lights go out at 9:30 P. M. Prisoners who become unruly may have their four days of good time per month taken away and more time added at the discretion of the judge. They may also be deprived of certain privileges, such as receiving visitors. In exceptional cases a court order is secured, a medical examination given, and the disorderly prisoner is whipped with a strap by the jailer or a guard. One man was thus whipped for attacking a guard.

Prisoners formerly held "kangaroo court," but this was broken up about a year before our visit by the jailer when the men became rough and engaged in fighting. There are two trustees selected from the misdemeanants who are known to the jailer. These men clean the corridors, serve meals to prisoners, and perform other similar tasks about the jail but are not allowed outside the jail without guard.

Visitors are allowed on Friday for a half-hour. In most cases where the offense is not very serious, they are allowed to visit the prisoners alone, being locked in the cell with them. They are not searched except where the offense is serious or there are grounds for suspicion. Packages for prisoners are inspected, but not incoming mail. Letters the prisoners write are not read unless the offense is serious. The jailer stated that there had been practically no smuggling of liquor, drugs, or saws into the jail. Only once had liquor been discovered in jail. No prisoners had escaped from the jail itself for a number of years, although one escaped over the wall of the yard a year or so ago.

State prisoners do no work except the necessary cleaning about the jail, remaining locked in the rooms or cells day and night in practically complete idleness. On the other hand, all male city prisoners over eighteen years of age, if physically able, have to work nine hours a day. This group rises at 6:15 A. M., eats breakfast at 6:30, starts to work at 7, eats dinner at 12 noon, returns to work at 1 P. M., returns to the jail at 5, eats supper at 5:30 and retires when the lights are put out at 9:30. They must work unless ill, in which case they are examined by a physician. According to the jailer, they usually prefer work to remaining in jail in idleness. They are employed at repair work on the city streets, and occasionally at the city water-filtering plant. Whites and Negroes are worked together, and occasionally paid laborers are worked on the same gang with prisoners. The jailer states that prison-

ers perform about the same amount of work that a corresponding number of paid laborers would.

Prisoners at work on the streets are always guarded by armed guards, three men being employed for this purpose. There are usually one or two trustees with the gang to carry water, run errands, etc. Prisoners who have bad reputations or give trouble, those who are under large fines and do not belong in the community, and those having other charges pending are forced to wear a twenty-five pound ball and chain attached to one ankle. Some are forced to wear a "step chain" which is fastened to both ankles, thus permitting the taking of a reasonable step but very effectively preventing running. Despite these precautions, there are occasional attempts at escape and more infrequently actual escapes. Three escaped last year.

Prisoners receive no compensation other than the very plain work clothing which is provided.

Transients are not admitted to the jail but are allowed to stay overnight in the city lockup. No special consideration is shown to any type of prisoner, the jailer stating that all are treated alike.

A permanent record is kept by the jailer of all prisoners admitted. For State prisoners a record form supplied by the Virginia State Department of Public Welfare, giving the data required on the monthly jail cards, is used.

B. THE AUGUSTA COUNTY² JAIL

The County of Augusta was established by an act of the General Assembly of the Colony of Virginia on November 1, 1738, but was not fully organized and started on its independent career until 1745. In December the Court of Augusta was organized, and a committee was appointed to build a prison and erect stocks. The jail built at this time is described in the "presentiment" of the Grand Jury in 1748 as follows:

Twenty two feet three inches long, and seventeen feet three inches wide, from outside to outside, built with square logs near one foot thick, holes at the corners and elsewhere two or three inches wide, and so poorly dovetailed at the corners that it would be a very easy matter to pull it all down. The chymney that was formerly built in a very poor manner, now part of it is down, so that there is an open way to the roof which a man might easily break with his foot and hands.³

² Augusta County has an area of 1,006 square miles and a population of 38,163. Staunton, the county-seat, has a population of 11,990.

³ *Augusta County Records.*