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OLD JAIL AT DOYLESTOWN.

To which prisoners were transferred from Newtown May 13, 1813. Abandoned January 3, 1885, and buildings demolished same year.



NEW JAIL AT DOYLESTOWN.

Completed and occupied January 3, 1885.

The Jails of Bucks County.

BY REV. D. K. TURNER, HARTSVILLE, PA.

(Menlo Park, Perkasio Meeting, July 18, 1893).

The punishment of criminals is coeval with the human race. The first pair were violators of law, and experienced the evil consequences of their offense in expulsion from the Garden of Eden, their beautiful home, in the loss of innocency, sorrow, and the perpetuation of evil in their posterity. Ever since their day it has been necessary for the good of society to inflict some kind of penalty upon those, who disregard the rights of their fellow men in the pursuit of pleasure, gain, or revenge.

Inferior misdeeds, as justice requires, are usually followed by lighter retribution than those of greater turpitude, and accordingly in our country, offenders of deeper criminality are incarcerated in state penitentiaries for a longer term, and those of a milder type in county jails for a shorter period.

From the earliest history Bucks county has had a courthouse for the trial of accused persons and a place for the confinement of such as were convicted. Corporeal chastisement with the whip has not been unknown within our limits, but shutting up within prison walls has been more generally practiced, especially within the last hundred years. This county was designated by William Penn as one of the three original counties of Pennsylvania in 1682. Soon after his arrival in the Province, one of his first measures in the organization of local governments was the appointment of sheriffs for each county. Then the judges of the lower courts were nominated, and their sessions formally opened by the Governor. The first court in the county was held at the house of Gilbert Wheeler, March 4, 1684, William Penn presiding, and Richard Noble, sheriff. No mention has been left in the county records of the erection of the first public buildings, and we are not informed exactly where they were, nor what were their dimensions or appearance. The minutes of the second session of the Court of Quarter Ses-

sions commence thus: "Court met at Court-House, 11th day, 12th month, 1684-5" No doubt the jail was attached to the court-house or under the same roof, but on what precise spot, is left to conjecture, and few hints are supplied which aid us in forming an opinion as to its definite location. The Provincial Assembly of 1683 passed an order, that each county erect a house of correction with dimensions 16 by 24 feet, and at this session of the court William Biles and William Beakes were directed "to buy 10 or 12 acres of land to be laid to the public use of the county, and that they do it, if they can before the next Court." At the Falls Monthly Meeting of Friends, June 7, 1686, it was proposed to hold their regular meetings in the court-house, at a rent of 2½ shillings a month; but the idea was afterwards abandoned, "because there was no convenience of seats or water."

From this it appears that the first jail and court-house were in Falls township. July 14, 1687, the records state that

"Philip Conway, being in custody for misdemeanor, and being in the prison below the court, was very unruly in words and actions to the great disturbance of the king's peace and of the court in the exercise of their duties, cursing the justices and other officers, casting logs against the door, and endeavoring to make as much disturbance as he could; therefore, the Court orders that the £40 forfeited by him be levied according to his said recognizance on his lands, goods and chattels."

It seems from this incident that the jail was under the court-room. About forty years ago a tradition was narrated by Jacob Smith, who owned a farm just below Morrisville, that the first court-house and jail had been on his property about two hundred yards from the river bank and opposite to what was then called Moon's Island. The building was of logs, two stories in height, on a stone foundation, with an attic, about 20x40 feet in size. The first story was divided into two rooms, one somewhat larger than the other, the smaller being used for the jail and the others for the court. The windows of the former and the throat of the fireplace were secured with iron bars.

This description does not correspond to the idea formed from the scanty allusions of the records, but there may have been *two* court-houses before the one erected in Bristol, as the minutes of court of December, 1793, begin thus: "At the court-house near the falls," as if the judges were in a different place from

that in which they had met previously. However, if there were two, they were both in the vicinity of the Delaware river, in the lower part of the county, where the earliest settlements in the county were made. Gradually population extended into the interior and a different location for the public buildings was demanded. After much discussion the offer by Samuel Carpenter, of Bristol, in 1705, of a site, was accepted and the court determined to meet in that town in June. He directed also that a pair of stocks and a whipping-post should be reared for the punishment of those who might be found guilty of drunkenness and other misdemeanors. But the edifice, for some unknown reason, was not erected till 1709, and where the court sat in the meantime, whether in the old house or in some temporary structure, is uncertain. In that year the court ordered a tax of two pence on the pound, which is in the ratio of $8\frac{1}{2}$ mills to the dollar, to defray the expense of the new court-house and prison. The structure was accordingly built and braved the storms of 125 years, though it was not employed all that time for the same honorable ends which marked its birth. In 1834 Hon. William Kinsey bought the building and tore it down. He states that it was built of brick, two stories high, 24x34 feet, with a whipping-post attached, and a beam extended out from the end for a gallows. The upper room was for the court and the lower for a prison.

The seat of justice remained in Bristol about twenty years, during which period settlers rapidly multiplied toward the northwest and the location was inconvenient for many, who were obliged to travel long distances over poor roads to transact public business. In 1724 the Assembly passed an act empowering Jeremiah Langhorne, William Biles, Joseph Kirkbride, Jr., Dr. Thomas Watson and Abraham Chapman to build a new court-house and jail in the county of Bucks. The expense was not to exceed £300, which, if English currency, would be \$1,500, a sum which seems small, but which had much more purchasing value than at the present day. The committee decided upon Newtown, and purchased five acres of land in that place from John Walley. The court-house and prison were separate edifices, made of brick, and faced the south, but no minute account of

them has come down to us. Before many years had passed, the prison was found too small and in 1745 a more commodious structure superseded it, and the old jail was employed as a workhouse and reformatory. The new jail was surrounded by an ample yard, enclosed by a stone wall, and furnished with a set of stocks, according to the custom of that era. It has been a tradition, generally credited, that the jail in Newtown was once destroyed by fire, whether the older or later building is not specified, nor does rumor intimate if it was due to the incendiary scheme of some inmate anxious for his liberty.

The story is confirmed by a presentment of the grand-jury, in what year is uncertain, that "John Webber, being a prisoner in the prison-house in Newtown, wilfully set fire to the said house, whereby the same was consumed to ashes."

Joseph Doane, one of the five brothers of that name, who were celebrated during the Revolutionary War for their deeds of daring and hostility to the cause of independence, was captured and incarcerated at Newtown. He was endowed with great physical strength and activity, and was accused of robbing and plundering houses, stealing horses and committing other acts of violence against the lives and property of those who favored America. He was held for trial and might have been condemned to death, if he had not by cunning and agility succeeding in escaping in the night, when the keeper was asleep. He fled to New Jersey, where he is said to have made a better use of his talents, than he had done before, in teaching school, but not feeling safe there he went to Canada, the refuge of modern culprits, where he died at an advanced age.

During the struggle for freedom from Great Britain some of the Society of Friends were confined in the prison at Newtown, because they refused to take up arms or pay taxes for the maintenance of the army. General Davis mentions in his history of Bucks county that "Joseph Smith, of Buckingham, the inventor of an iron mould-board for a plow, declining from conscientious scruples to pay anything for the support of the war, was put in jail." It is said that he amused himself during his confinement by making with a jackknife models of his plow, which he threw over the jail wall, and which excited much in-

terest as an important improvement in agriculture, which was destined to prove the source of great benefit to the country. Thomas Watson, of Buckingham, also another Friend, was imprisoned. On account of a detachment of troops being encamped in the neighborhood of his home in the winter of 1778-79 hay had become extremely scarce. Watson had saved a stack and rather than sell it for worthless Continental money, determined to distribute it among his neighbors, who had suffered more from military requisitions than he. This was made a ground of accusation against him. He was tried by court-martial and sentenced to be hanged for treason. Efforts to obtain his pardon were in vain, until his wife went to Lord Sterling, then in command of the American troops in that region, and with tears prevailed upon him to issue an order for his liberation.

Toward the last part of the last century the public buildings in Newtown had become old and inadequate to the wants of the county. Many in the lower districts wished to see new edifices in the same place, and presented petitions to the Legislature with that in view. But this plan was not acceptable to the people in the upper townships, who by this time had greatly increased in numbers. They asserted that Newtown was thirteen miles from the centre of the county and that they ought not to be compelled to go so far to the courts and public offices. In 1800 a meeting of citizens was held at Shaw's tavern, in Bedminster, to protest against erecting a new court-house and jail at Newtown, and "thereby permanently fix the seat of justice at that place." Not only was the village far from being central, but they said "the roads through it were so unpopular as never to support a sufficient number of public houses to accommodate the many that will be obliged to attend court." A petition was prepared and sent to the Legislature praying for a removal of the county seat to a more convenient location. Similar action was taken at gatherings in Haycock at the house of John Ahlum, in 1808, in Buckingham, and in other neighborhoods. Yielding to the desire expressed by so many, the Assembly passed an Act in 1810, which was approved by the Governor and which provided for the appointment of three "discreet

and disinterested persons, not holding real estate in the county, to select a site for the public buildings, which shall be not more than three miles from Bradshaw's Corner," now styled Pool's Corner. The Governor chose Edward Darlington, of Chester county, Gabriel Hiester, Jr., of Berks, and Nicholas Kern, of Northampton county. They met at Newtown early in May. The Turk, Centreville and other districts were discussed, and they were about deciding upon Pool's Corner, when citizens of Doylestown brought such influences to bear upon them that they yielded to their representations. Nathaniel Shewell, of New Britain, who owned the triangular piece of land between Court and Main streets, in Doylestown, offered to donate nearly three acres to the county, if that site was selected; the owner of the Clear Spring promised unrestricted access to it for county purposes, and another gentleman offered a plot of ground near the spot on which the Catholic church now stands, for a potter's field. This decided the commission in favor of Doylestown, and on May 12, 1810, the land was deeded to the county, which is still the site of the court-house and from which the jail frowned darkly seventy-two years.

The work on the jail was apparently done first; but it was so intermingled with that on the court-house, and, moreover, materials for the two were purchased at the same time, that a separation of the accounts cannot be accurately made. Little was effected toward the erection of the buildings during that year, and 1811 passed without accomplishing more than obtaining lumber and stone; the latter was delivered on the ground for 56 cents a perch, and the privilege was secured of taking loose stone from the quarry of Septimus Evans for 12½ cents a perch. Lime was hauled from Whitemarsh. Levi Bond and Enos Yardley contracted to do the carpenter work at eight shillings and four pence per day, which in Pennsylvania currency amounted to \$1.11, and they were no doubt to board themselves and to work from morning till night without reference to the number of hours. The county was to furnish the whisky at the raisings. The wages were afterwards increased to \$1.25 a day and the number of men employed to 25, as the legislative enactment required that the work should

be completed within three years. The total cost of the buildings was \$38,057, but what proportion of that sum went to the jail it is impossible to determine. It stood north of the court-house and consisted of a rectangular structure facing Court street with two wings, one at each corner of the rear of the main edifice, forming thus three sides of a hollow square, the fourth side being guarded by a high stone wall.

On May 4, 1813, the offices were ready for books and papers appropriate to the several departments, and the jail for the prisoners, and on the 13th, Sheriff Samuel Sellers transferred the culprits from Newtown to their future "durance vile" in Doylestown; and no doubt they enjoyed the ride of fourteen miles under their kind-hearted conductor, and perhaps a song now and then burst from their lips as they passed over hill and dale and through leafy groves on that bright spring morning. It must have been quite a long procession, of which they formed a part, for there were ten wagons filled with public property, among other things, the twelve stone steps of the old court-house. The court-house, old office, jail and jail-yard and public ground thereto appertaining, in Newtown, were sold at public auction to John Hulme for \$1,650, and the new office and lot of ground belonging to it to William Watts for \$900.

The first jail in Doylestown remained in use for more than seventy years, but when it had reached the age of three score and ten, infirmities crept in upon it. The walls were for the most part sound, but the wood-work, floors, window-frames, sash and doors were shrunk and decayed by the lapse of time, and, moreover, it was too small and insecure for the proper detention of prisoners. The inhabitants of the county had multiplied manifold, but the capacity of the prison had not expanded. Many convicts were necessarily confined in one room, involving injury to their health and morals. Repairs often made did not remedy its defects, and it was plainly seen that the termination of its usefulness had been well nigh reached. A new court-house was completed in 1877, at a cost of about \$100,000, and this large outlay had much influence in retarding the construction of a better jail. The same year a fire occurred in the venerable pile, which threatened to destroy everything combus-

tible in it, seeming to portend its approaching downfall. Its antique appearance, too, in contrast with the beautiful temple of justice reared at its side, was sadly against it, and the ground, on which it stood, was wanted to enlarge the park and set off the attraction of its fair neighbor. With a sigh escaping from its iron-bound doors, it quietly made up its mind "to shuffle off this mortal coil" and lie down to endless sleep and pleasant dreams.

In February, 1882, the grand jury unanimously declared it to be their opinion that "the present building used for a jail is entirely unfit for the purpose, and earnestly recommend the construction of a new building." The succeeding grand jury in May and the State Board of Public Charities advanced similar views, and the general opinion of citizens was that the work should be undertaken as soon as the county had liquidated its debt without increasing the rate of taxation.

In January, 1884, the site where the jail now stands was selected by the Board of Public Charities and the county commissioners, Messrs. John Wynkoop, James T. Breisch and Isaac Ryan. It was chosen in preference to the corner of Court and Church streets, because being as desirable in other respects, it was somewhat less elevated and would afford a more liberal supply of water. It was the property of Dr. George T. Harvey, and in February the commissioners bought four acres of him commanding a beautiful prospect toward the south and southeast, and susceptible of perfect drainage. A better location could hardly be desired for any penal institution. Architects Hutton and Ord, of Philadelphia, were employed to draw a plan and supervise its execution, and the contract for the construction of buildings and walls was awarded to Henry D. Livezey, of Doylestown, for \$72,000. The stone, which is an excellent variety of red sandstone, was obtained from a quarry a short distance in the rear of the jail yard. The expense of introducing gas, by which the premises are lighted, was \$4,249, and of steam for heating, washing and cooking \$3,772. The entire cost of the prison was \$83,274, exclusive of a stone stable, which was erected outside the wall in 1885 at an expense of \$1,700, making the whole amount nearly \$85,000. January 3, 1885, eight

months after it was begun, the prison was finished and handed over to the commissioners, who transferred the keys to Sheriff Allen H. Heist.

It is built in the form of the letter T, the part represented by the horizontal bar being the front, in which is the main entrance. From this a corridor, 10 feet wide and 175 feet long, runs to the rear, and a similar corridor crosses it at right angles, each lined by tiers of cells. At the point of the intersection spreads a rotunda, lighted by a dome 28 feet high. The officers standing in this central space occupy a commanding point of observation. The cells are vaulted rooms 8x18 feet and 12 feet high and are lighted from the corridor through the grated door and also by a slot in the top of the arch, 4 inches wide and three feet long, which is directly beneath a skylight. They are well ventilated, are warmed in winter and have abundance of light for working or reading and are ordinarily occupied each by one person. They might be termed luxurious apartments in comparison with the dens and dungeons in which criminals were confined formerly and which prevail now in many parts of the world.

The Marquis de Lafayette, who joined the American army in the Revolution near Hartsville, when Washington was encamped there, some years after his return to Europe was imprisoned at Magdeburg by the enemies of liberty. The cell which he occupied for nearly a year was a space of only 4 feet by 8 feet excavated under the outer ramparts of the castle. It was so damp that the walls were covered with mould and no light entered except through a small opening in the door.

His detention at Olmutz for three years and a half more was in a cell of a similar character. The contrast between such apartments and those which are found in our jail is very great. The present efficient sheriff, J. Johnson Beans, remarked to me not long since that there was no *punishment* in living in the institution under his charge, except the confinement. With plenty of good plain food, light and air, warm in winter and cool in summer, and not obliged to work beyond their strength, the inmates pass their days in comfort. They only suffer from deprivation of their liberty. If they are insubordinate a diet of

bread and water and no communication with any one usually subdues the most refractory in a short time. Recourse is never had to corporeal punishment.

Three objects should be sought in penal discipline, the maintenance of the supremacy of the law, the prevention of crime and the reformation of the criminal. While the first two are most important, the last should not be forgotten. It is extremely desirable that every convict should not only pay the penalty for his offense, as an example to others, but that such an impression should be made upon his mind and heart that his character will be improved; and that he will be less inclined to wrong-doing when he emerges from the prison. With this most commendable aim, religious services have been held in the present jail on Sunday afternoons, for a number of years past, under the leadership of George W. Hunt, a citizen of Doylestown.

The services are conducted in the rotunda with seats provided for all the inmates who choose to be present, the attendance though voluntary is nearly universal. The singing is generally done by the prisoners. The Bucks County Bible Society also has, by request, several times within a few years past gratuitously supplied the men with Testaments, which they could keep as their own property.

The annals of crime have been darkened by the perpetration of but few murders within the limits of our county. The first execution, probably the first in the State, took place in July, 1693, when Derrick Johnson, alias Closson, was hung in Falls township after a fair trial and after every effort possible had been made to secure his pardon or the commutation of his sentence. It is related that he was confined in the old jail at the Falls, which was dilapidated and insecure, and it was hoped by the authorities that he would break out and escape; but as he failed to do this, they were obliged to carry out the mandate of the law.

In 1831 Dr. William Chapman, of Bensalem, was poisoned by Mina, a Spaniard, who came to his house representing himself to be unfortunate, ingratiated himself with Mrs. Chapman and took the life of his benefactor. She is supposed to have

been an accomplice, as after the death of her husband she married the foreigner. This, and other circumstances, fastened suspicion upon the couple; they were arrested and lodged in jail at Doylestown. After a long trial she was acquitted for lack of sufficient evidence. Mina was convicted and hung.

Executions were public in those days and on June 26, 1832, he was taken in a dearborn wagon to a field on the almhouse property attended by fourteen companies of volunteer infantry and six of cavalry from this and neighboring counties. No equal gathering of the stalwart yeomen and fair women of this region had ever been witnessed before. Perhaps the tragic scene in which he suffered for his crime, may have had its proper effect upon the multitudes looking on, increasing their reverence for the law and their desire to walk in the ways of virtue and innocence.

On April 18, 1867 Albert Teuffel was hung in the jail-yard in Doylestown for killing James Wiley the captain of a canal-boat near the Narrowsville lock in Nockamixon township. His motives seem to have been robbery and revenge. On February 15, 1856 Jacob Armbruster of Nockamixon township was executed at Doylestown for taking the life of his wife, that he might gain possession of a house and lot, which she owned. On August 14, 1835 Josiah Blundy paid a like forfeit to justice for the murder of Aaron Cuttlehow. No one of the fair sex, so far as I have learned, has ever been within our prison walls pronounced guilty of murder. It is doubtful whether any other than these five just mentioned have been convicted of that crime within our bounds. The smallness of the number during the two hundred years that have elapsed since the organization of our county, speaks well for the sobriety and self-restraint of our people. Various other offenses have been committed as the years have rolled on, and our jail has probably always had more or less occupants varying in numbers up to 40 or 50. Would that we could say it was without a tenant; that Sheriff Beans reigned in solitary grandeur there, a king without subjects. and that there was no one among all our population, who deserved to be there.