

D.P. 2

A MODEL JAIL OF THE OLDEN TIME

DESIGNS FOR "A DEBTORS' GAOL
AND WORK-HOUSE FOR FELONS"
FOR BURLINGTON COUNTY, STATE
OF NEW JERSEY

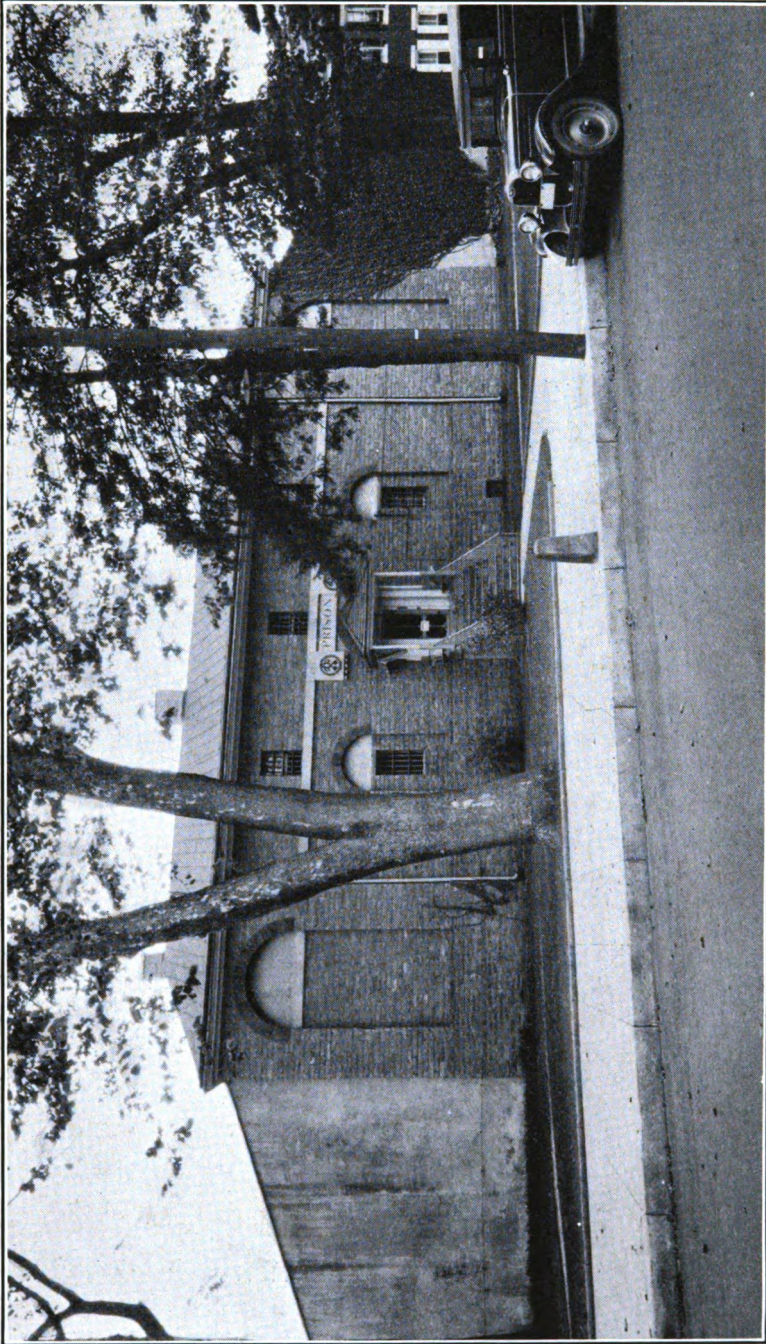
BY
ROBERT MILLS, ARCHITECT
PHILADELPHIA, MAY, 1808

Summarized by
CAPTAIN GEORGE J. GIGER
Director of Inspections, Department of
Institutions and Agencies
State of New Jersey



NEW YORK
RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION
1928

Price, 10 cents



COUNTY JAIL AT BURLINGTON, N. J.

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A MODEL JAIL OF THE OLDEN TIME

RECENTLY the Board of Freeholders of Burlington County, New Jersey, took steps to remodel the ancient county jail, built in 1808. They consulted the Department of Institutions and Agencies, as required by law. I made search through the libraries in different parts of the state to find the plans and records relating to the original construction of this interesting old jail. I finally discovered the original plans made by the architect, Robert Mills, of Philadelphia, in 1808, and also a brief, prepared by Mr. Mills, setting forth his idea of what a county jail ought to be.

I was astonished to discover how nearly this brief and the plans prepared in accordance with it 120 years ago conformed to what are recognized today as the proper standards for a model jail and work-house.

Mr. Mills entitled the proposed institution "A Debtors' Gaol and Work-House for Felons." He makes no mention of prisoners awaiting trial, though it does not appear that any other place was provided for the detention of such prisoners. I suspect that in those days the action of the courts was much more swift than the tardy justice of our day and that the detention of prisoners awaiting trial was probably very brief.

STANDARDS FOR A MODEL JAIL

We have been accustomed to speak of the Declaration of Principles, prepared by Dr. E. C. Wines in 1870, as a remarkable document because of its early declaration of what we consider modern ideas of prison reform, but in this brief, prepared 120 years ago, we have a declaration of principles

of jail construction which approach very nearly to standards which are advocated today in the American Prison Association. I have condensed the brief of Mr. Mills, for the most part in his own words, as follows:

ABSTRACT OF BRIEF ON ORIGINAL PLANS FOR BURLINGTON COUNTY JAIL, BY ROBERT MILLS, ARCHITECT, PHILADELPHIA, 1808

1. A jail should be of fireproof construction, and have as little combustible material as possible.

2. Sleeping rooms or cells should be for the accommodation of only one person each.

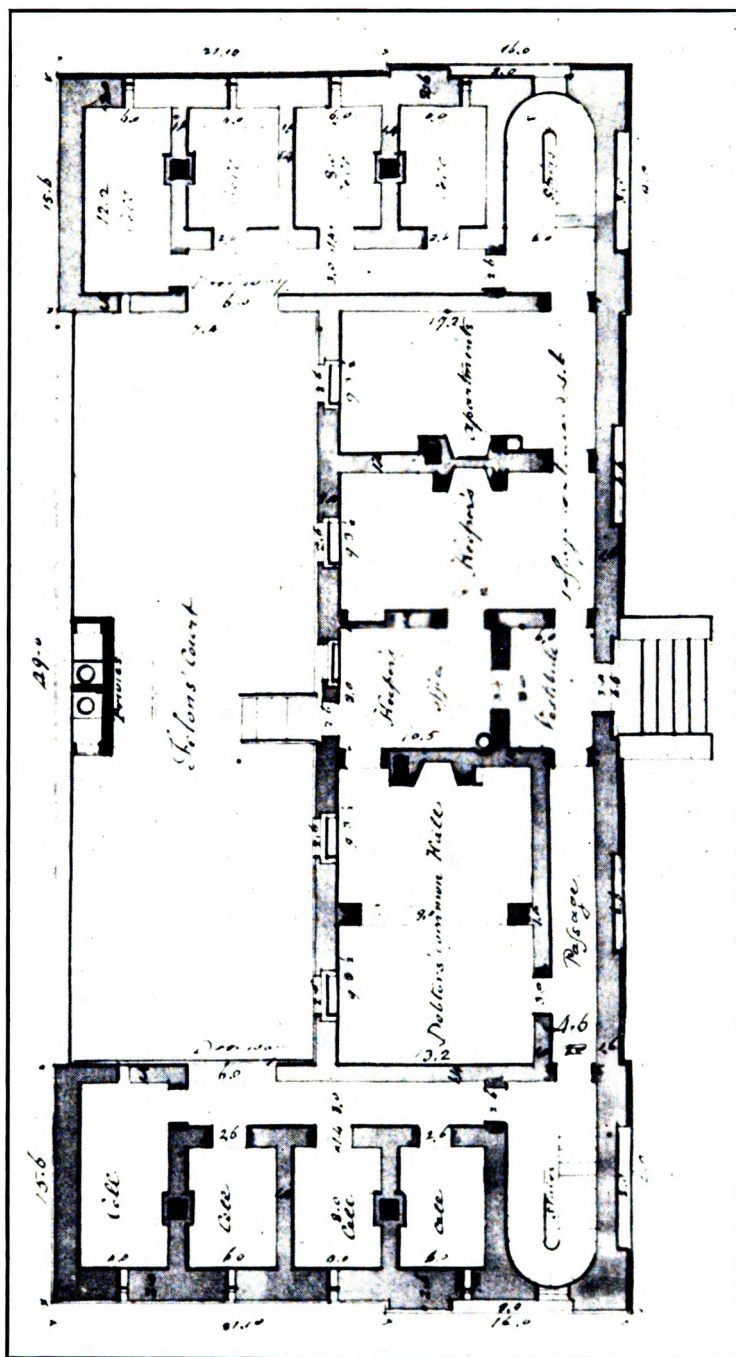
3. Windows and doors should be of a size sufficient for the purposes intended, providing a good free circulation of air throughout the building.

4. Prisoners should be classified or separated according to their moral character. It would be inhuman and unjust to expose the infant in vice to the shocking influence of the veteran in wickedness. This separation should be as much attended to during the day as at night. Rooms or cells accommodating more than two prisoners should be used as a privilege. A complete and distinct separation should be made between debtors and common felons.

5. The location of the keeper's apartments should give him an opportunity of overlooking the most important parts of the building. The passages of communication should be general so that one watch may be sufficient to guard the whole building.

6. Cleanliness is a virtue too amiable and too beneficial in its effects (both in a moral and a physical point of view) to pass unnoticed in any department or situation of life, but more particularly in a prison where a mass of people are collected who from long habits and a natural indolence of disposition joined to their situation are so inclined to negligence. A bath therefore should be constructed for the free use of prisoners, and all should be constrained to use it at least once a week. There should also be constructed an oven for the express purpose of purifying the clothes of such persons as, at their entrance, are suspected of filthiness or infection.

7. Means should be provided for the prisoners to maintain themselves by labor and the rules of the prison should compel them to work, if they were not inclined to it voluntarily. Industry should be taught from experience (as it really is) to be one of the



BURLINGTON COUNTY JAIL, FIRST FLOOR PLAN, WITH CELLS AND DEBTORS' HALL

first virtues. It is a melancholy sight in our debtors' gaols to behold so many persons compelled as it were to spend their time in idleness, nay, not only this, but to be exposed to the snares and temptations of vice in a variety of shapes.

8. On top of the building a belfry is placed; the bell not only to serve as a time regulator for the prison, but also to be used for alarm in case of escapes, fire, and so forth.

9. The architect condemned the construction of dungeons or solitary cells under ground, first, because they were injurious to the prisoners' health, and, second, because, as pointed out by John Howard, escapes from underground dungeons or cells by undermining were frequent.

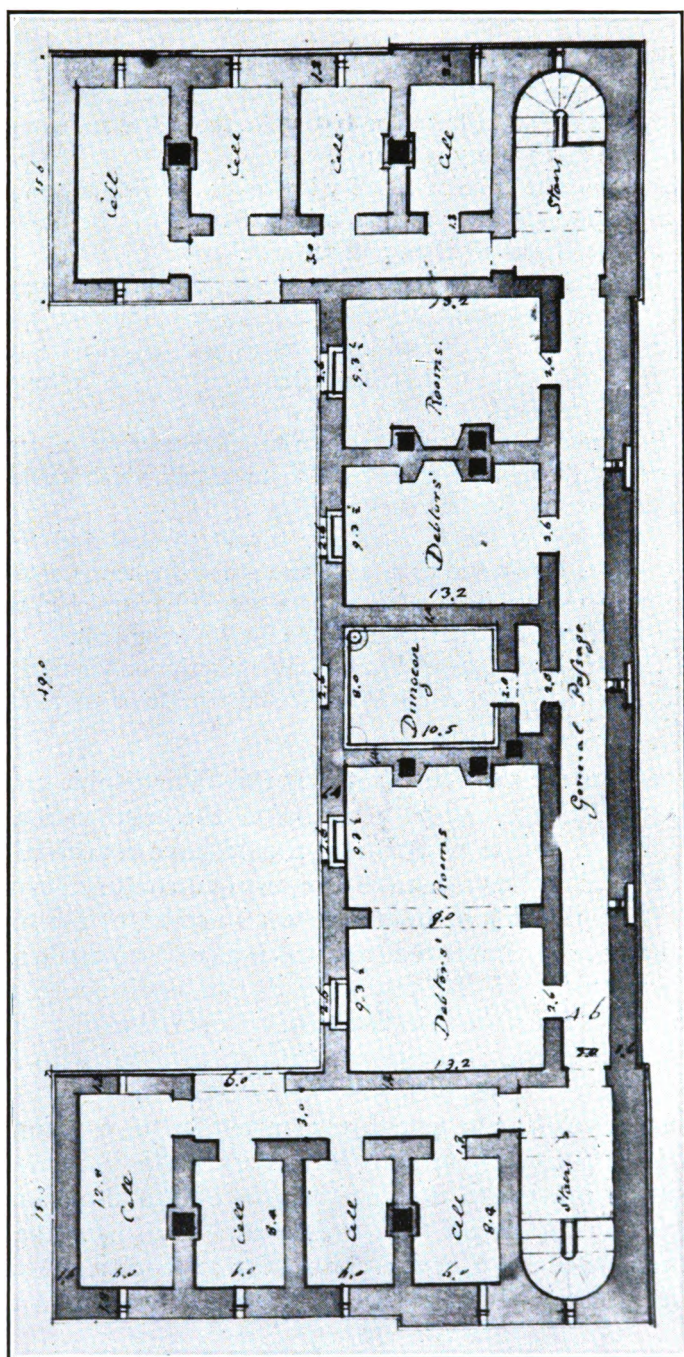
10. Encouragement should be given to religious visits of gospel ministers and the plan provided for a common hall which would be a suitable place for holding such meetings.

11. Unlettered prisoners should be taught to read and write. This should be considered as a favor and granted where a disposition to reform shows itself. Each room should be furnished with some instructive book (particularly the New Testament).

12. The architect suggested as a suitable inscription for a prison, "Justice Which, While It Punishes, Would Endeavor to Reform the Offender."

It seems to me a notable fact that this Philadelphia architect, 120 years ago and 70 years before the organization of the American Prison Association, should have conceived so lofty an ideal, anticipating the progress of a century beyond him. The jail which he built has been in constant use since 1808 and the only improvements which have been made are: the enlargement of the prison yard; an addition to the basement kitchen; the installation of a modern heating plant instead of fireplaces; additional bathing facilities with hot and cold water; toilet facilities; and electric lights.

In recent years a movement was started for the erection of a new jail; but the Board of Freeholders, under pressure of local public sentiment, decided that the old building was a valuable relic and ought to be preserved. Plans have therefore been made by a new architect for an addition which will treble the capacity of the jail, to correspond with the



BURLINGTON COUNTY JAIL, SECOND FLOOR PLAN, WITH DEBTORS' ROOMS, CELLS AND DUNGEON

increase of the population. While the reconstructed jail will not be ideal, it will still be a better prison than many of the jails which have been erected in different parts of the United States within the past twenty years. The jail will make possible the confinement and classification of prisoners in accordance with the principles which have been advocated and promoted by the American Prison Association.

The Committee on Lockups and County Jails brought to the attention of this Congress at its Salt Lake City meeting in 1924, through its Chairman, Dr. Hastings H. Hart, the general evils of county jails, as well as their remedies, and if you will bear with me for a moment I should like to compare this report with the brief that was submitted by Mr. Mills.

DR. HART'S ANALYSIS OF THE EVILS
OF A COUNTY JAIL AND SUGGESTED
REMEDIES—1924

Evil No. 1. Compulsory association of all kinds of prisoners. "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

The Remedies. A complete classification and separation of the innocent and inexperienced from the hardened, vicious and diseased. Provide for women and children in detention homes; for insane and sick persons in hospitals. Send sentenced prisoners to work-houses or county farms.

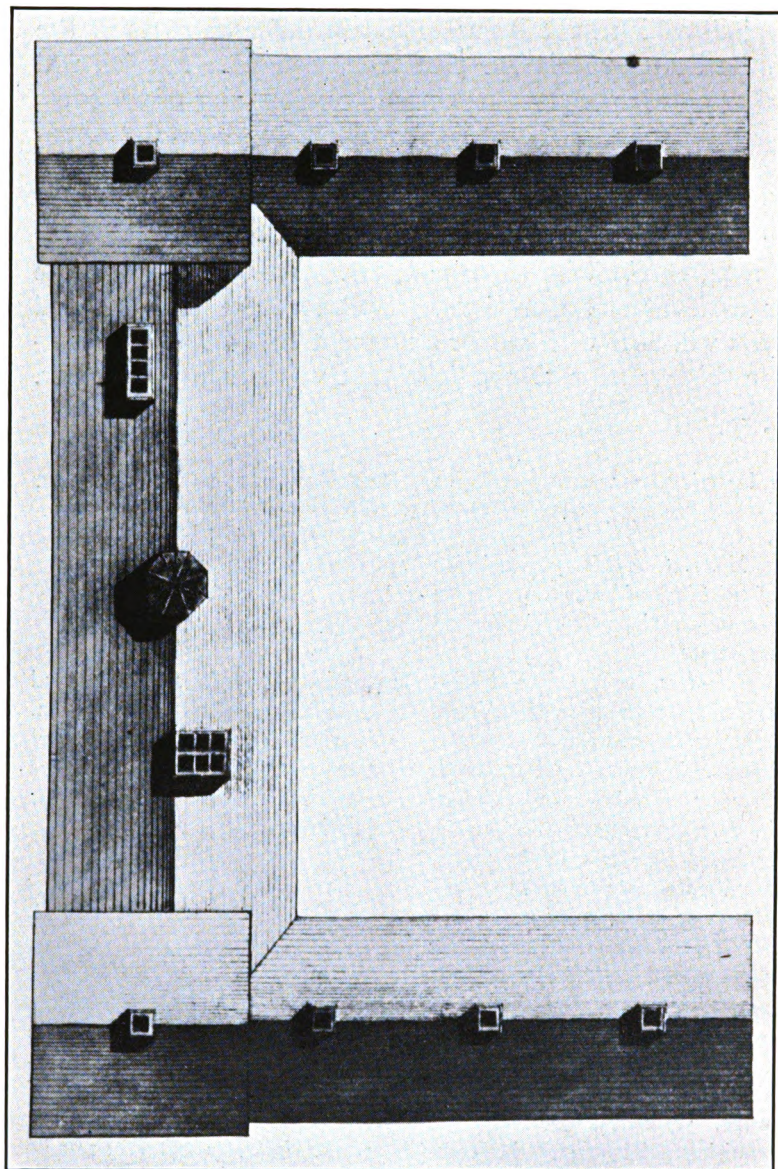
Evil No. 2. Idleness. "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

The Remedies. All inmates physically able, while incarcerated, should be put to some sort of work. While it is true that those awaiting trial cannot be compelled to work, they may be permitted to do the domestic work,

BRIEF SUBMITTED WITH PLANS BY
MR. ROBERT MILLS OF PHILA-
DELPHIA—1808

Provision of cells for separation and classification of men and women. It would be inhuman and unjust to expose the infant in vice to the shocking influence of the veteran in wickedness.

Means should be provided to enable the prisoners to *maintain* themselves by *labor*, and the rules of the prison should compel them to work. *Industry* should be taught by qualified instructors.



ROOF PLAN WITH VENTILATORS, BURLINGTON COUNTY JAIL, ROBERT MILLS, ARCHITECT, 1808

and, in some cases, are very happy to have something to occupy their minds. Work should be mandatory for all prisoners serving sentence.

Evil No. 3. Keeping prisoners two in a cell. A practice which promotes the worst vices of which the human race is capable.

The Remedies. (a) Let the jail construction keep up with the increased population. In nearly every large city in the country very little or no increase in the jail capacity has been made during a long period of years. (b) Remove United States prisoners from overcrowded jails.

Evil No. 4. Deterioration from mental stagnation and degrading influences. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

The Remedies. Schools in jails, with good teachers; a good library and a well-trained librarian.

Evil No. 5. Unsanitary conditions.

The Remedies. Establish hospital standards of cleanliness. Use soap and water and elbow grease instead of disinfectants. Abolish fee system of feeding prisoners. Furnish a balanced dietary under the supervision of a competent dietitian. Establish daily medical ser-

Sleeping rooms of such dimensions as befit them for the accommodation of only one person.

Encouragement should be given to the religious visits of gospel ministers, and each room should be furnished with some instructive book. The privilege of being taught to read and write should also be granted the unlettered prisoners. This should be considered as a favor and granted when a disposition to reform shows itself.

A bath should be constructed for the free use of prisoners, and all should be constrained to use it at least once a week. There should also be constructed an oven for the express purpose of purifying the clothes of such persons as at their entrance are

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vice, with thorough medical inspection, and with efficient treatment for diseased prisoners. Provide sheets and pillow-cases for all prisoners, also a change of underwear. Abolish the practice of requiring prisoners to do their own washing, and provide a prison laundry with frequent changes of bed linen, towels and underwear.

suspected of filthiness or infection. Whitewashing of the walls at least twice in the year should not be neglected.

And, further, there should be provided a bed of clean straw confined in a coarse bag, the straw removed as often as convenient, but at least twice a year; the temperature and the nature of the climate will point out other necessary conveniences.

It will be noted that the capacity of Burlington County Jail, which was constructed in 1808, over 120 years ago, has never been increased.

It is to be regretted that the jail architects of our time have made so little advance upon the plans conceived by Mr. Mills 120 years ago. Every one who is familiar with the county jails of the United States knows that the great majority of our local jails are so constructed as to make it impossible to provide any adequate classification, to give proper care to women and young prisoners, or to enforce or permit the wholesome occupation of prisoners in order to prevent the mischievous effects of enforced idleness.