

# SURVEY OF FLORIDA COUNTY JAILS

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# SURVEY OF FLORIDA COUNTY JAILS \*

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A study of 30 of the 52 county jails in Florida, found in equal numbers in the northern and southern parts of the state, forms the basis for this report. In North Florida, the oldest part of the state, one might naturally expect to find a number of antiquated, poorly kept jails, considered largely a place of safekeeping for bad Negroes, and in the younger counties of South Florida newer and consequently more up-to-date jails. It was found, however, that about half of the jails in North Florida have been built since 1909, and South Florida has about the same record. Nine of the jails were built before the Spanish-American War, four of these being in South Florida and five in North Florida. The oldest jail reported is in Tampa, built in 1887, while the jail at DeFuniak Springs was built a year later. Therefore, as far as the age of the jail itself is concerned, and consequently in the possibility of taking advantage of modern architecture in order properly to house and handle prisoners, North and South Florida are about on an equal basis.

It is interesting to note, however, that in North Florida the jails are smaller, and all but two are built of brick, four of which are not fireproof, while in South Florida eight of the jails examined are made of concrete and only one is not fireproof.

There is a tendency toward larger grounds in North Florida, probably due to the fact that they are more easily kept up and land is cheaper. Tallahassee has the largest plot of ground, which is more than three acres. Naturally, the cities have much less ground—Tampa and Pensacola have only a half a block.

Half of the North Florida jails have unsightly plank walls around them, while South Florida has a larger number of walls—

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about 50 per cent more, but many of these are concrete and we have some not unsightly iron fences. The investigation shows that 75 per cent of the jails are equipped with living rooms for the jailer or sheriff, and adjoin some of our court-house buildings which in themselves are beautiful. All of this is given in order that we may visualize the Florida county jail from the outside.

On the interior we found that, with the exception of one or two instances, the cage system is used in all the jails examined. The cells vary in size, and the majority are fairly well lighted from plenty of large windows during the day and electric lights at night—Crestview alone uses lamps.

Most of the jails could be properly ventilated, but no one regulates the windows in hot weather, cold weather, or rainy weather, and many of the undesirable conditions found are due to this fact. The Tampa jail has 26 windows, yet the ventilation is very poor and it is extremely hot in summer. Pensacola is the only jail reporting exhaust fans in the cell blocks, and Live Oak the only one with a ventilator in the roof. In spite of the prevalence of the malaria mosquito, only half of the jails have any screens.

As expected, the other sanitary conditions of the jails vary greatly, probably being the worst in the older buildings. The walls are reported as being in good shape in most instances, and Quincy and Pensacola have whitewashed walls. The jail floors are kept clean by prison labor, and we find them in fair condition, except for a few outstanding cases, like Starke and Blountstown, where they are said to be scrubbed only twice a year. On the other hand, at Dade City they scrub every morning, and more than half of the jails are scrubbed once a week.

Prisoners are not forced to take a bath; only 8 counties of the 30 furnish prisoners with any underclothing; and in a great majority of cases prisoners have to do the washing. It is said that at Marianna the blankets are never washed, and clothing is never furnished to prisoners. At Starke blankets are washed twice a year; at Brooksville, only once a year. We can imagine what the beds are like, in spite of the fact that the sheets are supposed to be washed once a week at both Starke and Brooksville. On the other hand, both blankets and sheets are washed once a week at Crestview, and incoming prisoners are given clean blankets and fresh cotton mattress covers. At Tallahassee blankets are kept clean, but they have no sheets or mattresses and sleep on steel

bunks. In fact, only 13 jails studied supply sheets, and most of the blankets are washed, "when needed," by the prisoners, together with their clothes. This work, in the majority of cases, is done in the bath-tubs, except at Brooksville, Crestview, and Ocala, where they send the soiled bedclothes and clothing to the laundry once a week. In a large number of places mattresses are seldom, if ever, washed or renewed.

With this condition it was surprising to find that only 30 per cent of the jails had parasites. Roaches and lice naturally come and go. Ft. Myers' prisoners reported rats, while the Pensacola jail is rat proof. Tampa and Titusville alone showed evidence of bedbugs.

The opinion seems to prevail among our jailers that, regardless of the condition of the clothing of the prisoner or the bed, disinfectant will kill the parasites, and in many instances it is used every morning; consequently, 20 per cent of our jails smell so strongly of disinfectant that it kills all other odors that might exist. Fourteen of the newer jails have no offensive odors. Arcadia reports "odor good enough for a jail," making it impossible to determine whether they mean that they believe the odor to be good for a jail or that any odor is good enough for a jail, or whether there is practically no odor.

Since many odors can be attributed to the dampness of the jails, it is well to note that there is some odor at Pensacola, due to dampness, in spite of the exhaust fans; and the citizens have asked for a new jail at Brooksville because of its damp condition. Tampa has a serious situation to face. The jail is old, and much of the older portion is below the street level. There are open sewers in the corridors into which the water backs up and overflows the jail floor at high tide; and during the recent storm the prisoners had literally to bail themselves out.

Of the 30 jails studied, only two had open sewers in corridors. Four have toilets in the corridors. All the rest, 24 in number, have running water and toilet facilities in each cell.

A little thought is given to the physical comfort of the prisoners during cold weather, and some kind of coal and wood stoves are found throughout North Florida, except at Live Oak and Brooksville, where they have oil stoves. Blountstown has a fireplace, Quincy a hot-air furnace, but Perry furnishes no heat at all and has no place to take her sick prisoners. There are six steam-



heated jails in this section. In South Florida, where some jails do not have any heat, Bradentown has a hot-air furnace and Ft. Myers heats the jail by electricity.

The prisoner himself is probably as much interested in his food as anything else, and we are glad that the prisoners feel that they get plenty of good, wholesome food, with the exception of Ft. Lauderdale, where they do not seem to get enough; and at West Palm Beach, where it is frequently served in dirty bread pans containing remnants of the last meal. Most of the jailers serve the meals on tin plates. Quincy serves them in a tin bucket with a pewter spoon. Tampa and Miami use enamel, and Ft. Myers, china plates. Jasper prisoners get the same food on the same kind of dishes used by the sheriff's family.

Practically every county allows 65 cents a day for maintenance. St. Augustine allows \$5.25 a week, which is the most for any jail studied, while Panama City, Pensacola, and Tampa have only \$3.50 a week. Twelve jails give no supper. Tampa and Pensacola are included among these where meals are served at 8 A. M. and 4 P. M., and 9 A. M. and 3 P. M. respectively. The meals in practically every instance are furnished by the jailer or the sheriff, and the almost universal menu consists of grits, white bacon, gravy, biscuit, syrup, coffee for breakfast; and beans or peas, pork or stew, corn bread, sometimes rice or hominy, make up the rest of the day's ration. Brooksville gives her prisoners steak and eggs frequently, while Crestview gives chicken and beef twice a week each to the prisoners who work. It is the universal rule that the prisoners who work get supper. There may be plenty of well-cooked food on the average Florida jail menu, but any dietitian will agree that it does not contain enough green vegetables and is not otherwise well balanced.

In all of our jails the races and sexes are properly separated, except in rare cases; however, in only six towns do we find that boys under sixteen are not put in jail, and in only seven towns are they kept separate. In most instances convicted prisoners are not kept separate from those awaiting trial, and consequently inexperienced prisoners and hardened criminals are thrown together with all the attending dangers and evils. Unfortunately, Florida counties do not pay any particular attention to women prisoners. As a rule, no matrons are provided; however, in a few places, like Bartow, DeFuniak Springs, Ft. Lauderdale, Ft.

Myers, and Starke, the jailer's wife assumes some responsibility for and interests herself in the women prisoners. Arcadia alone pays a matron, and her salary is only \$25.00 a month. In a majority of cases the women prisoners have privacy, but in only 15 per cent of the jails do we find that no one has access to the women's cells after dark.

Rules governing the prisoners are made in every instance by the sheriff or jailer, except at St. Augustine, where the Board of County Commissioners makes the rules. There is usually no punishment for infraction of rules except in about 25 per cent of the jails, where the prisoners are locked up. In two cases, Key West and Quincy, they are given bread and water for three days. In another, they are placed in a dungeon for some offenses. At Ft. Lauderdale they are given no food and receive a whipping or beating. The Kangaroo Court is allowed in only three jails: Jacksonville, Titusville, and Blountstown. In Miami they have the court, but the prisoners do not punish the offender. They only fine him or turn him over to the sheriff with recommendations for punishment.

Prisoners are employed in keeping the interior of all jails clean, and at Pensacola, Key West, and a few other places work around the building, washing windows, keeping up the yard, etc. At Ft. Lauderdale the prisoners are said to work on the sheriff's farm; while at Key West they raise a garden, where the committee seemed to get the impression that the prisoners have the benefit of the lettuce, radishes, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, and cabbage which they raise, although cabbage is the only one of these found on their menu.

Half of our jails allow the prisoners to circulate freely in the corridor. At Ft. Lauderdale they allow the Negroes the freedom of the corridors, but keep the whites locked up. A third of the jails make no provision for exercise; however, at Crestview the "prisoners get their exercise working on the roads." DeFuniak Springs allows the trustees the freedom of the halls and porch. No gambling is permitted in any of the jails, and no outstanding recreational facilities are provided except at Miami. Libraries are found in Miami, Pensacola, and Ocala. Books and magazines are sent in by the people at Bartow, and the jailer at Jasper provides reading matter for the prisoners.

Physical examinations are given upon entrance in only 10 jails.

Seventeen have no hospital provisions whatsoever. Five use city hospitals. Pensacola has a clinic and hospital ward, and Miami a splendid hospital. Only two towns report padded cells for insane patients; two take care of them outside the jail, while the rest have no special provision.

Sixteen of the jails studied never have any religious services. At Pensacola the Salvation Army and Sisters of Charity come in occasionally. At Titusville the prisoners hold services themselves. At Miami they have regular services every Sunday. At most other places they have services at greater intervals, or only occasionally, or when someone is dying, the ministers visit the jail. No regular weekly religious services are held in 29 of the 30 jails, and at no place has there been a real effort made to encourage and help young and inexperienced prisoners who might be reformed. This is certainly quite a reflection upon the citizens, especially the ministers, in our county-seat towns.

Without the power to make prisoners take a bath or provision for properly laundering clothing and bedclothes, our greatest problem seems to be the personal hygiene of prisoners and some dirty beds. On the whole, however, Florida jails are in fair condition, as far as jails go; and I am sure that most of the other undesirable features found are due to the old buildings, or to untrained workers, and only in a few instances to wilful neglect and maliciousness. In North Florida Pensacola undoubtedly has one of the best jails, and Marianna probably the worst. In South Florida the people of Tampa recognize that the old jail is overcrowded and unsanitary, and will remedy conditions as soon as possible. At Ft. Lauderdale we find good physical equipment and a fair sanitary condition, but undoubtedly the worst jail in the state, as far as the treatment and morals of the prisoners are concerned; and according to a report upon which appears the names of six prominent women, "the condition of the jail is vile." The Committee also states that the prisoners work on the sheriff's own farm and are punished for infractions of the rules by being deprived of food and being severely whipped or beaten. No recreation of any kind is provided. They state further, "to our careful observation no pastor of Ft. Lauderdale or Broward County has held religious services or visited the jail for months."

Contrast this situation with Miami, where the jail is in first-class physical condition, where they give medical examination and

have good hospital facilities; where the food is excellent, the prisoners classified, and women prisoners are given every consideration; where games, such as checkers and dominoes, are provided; where a library is available; where a victrola and player piano are furnished for the prisoners' entertainment; where a motion picture show of four reels is given every Thursday night; where regular religious services are held every Sunday by the jail chaplain, and where the prisoners are in good spirits and encouraged and inclined to "brace up."