THE OHIO PENITENTIARY:
A PICTORIAL AND DESCRIPTIVE TOUR
WITH CONVICT MISCELLANY
FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE SPRING
STREET FACILITY UNTIL JUST AFTER
THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by
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FIELDS OF STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

What follows is not in any way intended to be a thorough chronicle of the Ohio Penitentiary. Such a work is long overdue but unfortunately, as of this writing, has yet to appear. Those seeking a comprehensive history may wish to peruse any of the books from which the succeeding passages have been excerpted as well as the wealth of material in the Archives Library of the Ohio Historical Society.

My intention rather has been to provide an iconographic and narrative portrait of the institution to the turn of the century, conflating images with contemporary commentary that best seems to inform them. In this process my own voice will be restrained and will serve primarily to provide a context. Other voices that saw or experienced the prison firsthand and have far more authority and legitimacy will be speaking.

A diligent attempt has been made to achieve this task in a chronological manner, but it has rarely been a simple or sure one. One difficulty is that the preponderance of the extant visual representations of the penitentiary and its activities seem to date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, a bright spot in this is that these were years of some reform and
transition and constitute for many an era of particular interest. Another challenge was capturing the dynamic character of the institution, not only in terms of its policies but its physical presence as well. Consequently, dates will always accompany both graphic and written material.

A great diversity exists in the style and form of the prose excerpts. Some books were privately printed and at least two published by the penitentiary itself. To preserve the flavor and authenticity of these works, virtually no emendations were made except in the interest of clarity.
PREFACE

During the First World War my father spent some time in the Ohio Penitentiary. Fortunately, his stay there was very brief. He went on a day-long tour with the rest of his third grade class from the Milo Elementary School. Principal John Diebel—whom Dad recalls as a tall, gaunt, humorless man with a distinct resemblance to Abraham Lincoln—apparently felt that a visit to the great penal metropolis would be an edifying experience for the youngsters. Since there were no buses in those days the entourage, including Diebel and the teacher, Miss Corbett, boarded a streetcar at Cleveland Avenue and Third for the trip to the Spring Street prison.

Nearly seventy-five years have erased many of the precise details from my father’s memory, but some still stand out in sharp relief: the small austere cells with fold-down bunks and seatless commodores, men bent double at their work in the shops and mills, noisy massive machinery at the steam generating plant, plain wooden tables and benches and even plainer food in the huge dining hall, a schoolroom where middle-aged students struggled with second grade lessons, pretty grounds and walks, and of course, the annex which served as the death chamber. In short, the things one would expect to make an indelible impression on a child’s mind. Whether John
Diebel was a shrewd educator who knew what such a cautionary experience could exert on callow minds is difficult to determine. I can say that during Dad’s lifetime he has never received a more serious legal reprimand than a traffic fine.

But such tours were not uncommon in those and preceding years for the general population as well. The Ohio Penitentiary was once claimed to be the largest and greatest (and most beautiful) institution of its type in the world, and visits were not only tolerated but encouraged. There was even a visitor’s pavilion where coffee, cake and even ice cream could be purchased, served on the lawn by convict waiters. Anyone with 25c could be entertained by the Pen’s wonders and horrors.
CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

The first structure later to be known as the Ohio Penitentiary was completed in 1815 and located approximately on the site of the present Columbus Cultural Arts Center. The prison was only a fraction of the size of a modern municipal jail, consisting of merely thirteen cells and a small yard. Still, tiny as it was, the original pen by its very existence had already been instrumental in fostering the city that would grow up around it.

The original town fathers, with an eye toward securing their fledgling community as the permanent capital of the state, had made the legislature an offer it could not refuse. In exchange for its concurrence in the deal, they would donate two ten-acre sites and $50,000 in construction money for a state house and a state prison. The legislators did not hesitate. They voted to accept the proposal and secured what would become a new seat of government for themselves and a dungeon for their more felonious and less successful counterparts.

The first guests of the state were John and David Evans, two brothers convicted of assault and battery with intent to murder and
rob. Prior Ohio malefactors were commonly whipped for more serious offenses; however, with the advent of the penitentiary, laws were enacted changing that penalty to imprisonment for various terms. It is interesting to note that these laws would do little or nothing to deter the state and its agents from inflicting a range of punishments, including whipping, on prisoners once they were already incarcerated.

The capacity of the little penitentiary soon proved unequal to the rising tide of prisoners, and just one year after its construction the call was already being heard for a larger facility. In 1818 an expanded prison containing fifty-four cells was completed on the same premises. The new building, at one hundred and fifty feet by thirty, was more than twice as large as its predecessor, and the original structure was then refurbished as the residence of the keeper. The yard too was enlarged and enclosed behind twenty foot-high walls that measured four hundred feet by one hundred and sixty. Setting a precedent for prison labor that would persist for almost a century, workshops were built in the yard.

Figure 1. First Ohio Penitentiary, ca. 1820s. J.H. Matthews, Historical Reminiscences of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: C.M. Cott & Co., 1884
THE OHIO PENITENTIARY

Only a decade or so later the state was again pinched for space. As many as four convicts crowded each cell, and the physical condition of the penitentiary had so deteriorated that prisoners frequently escaped. Perhaps if a few more had slipped away, the governor would not have had to go before the legislature, as he did, and lament being compelled to use his pardon excessively to accommodate new arrivals. The law makers, in turn, bemoaned their disappointment over the lack of revenue from the prison. Unlike other states which gained financially from their penitentiaries, Ohio was losing money, especially since the 1830 fire which destroyed the majority of the work shops.

A wholly new penitentiary seemed to be in order, and after due consideration of several possible locations a site was selected that was then north of Columbus. Experience had by now taught the absolute necessity of a comprehensive and systematic approach to Ohio's growing penal problem. Thus, plans were formulated for a building that, exclusive of walls, would be four hundred feet long and hold seven hundred cells. The residence of the keeper and the guardroom would be at the center, flanked by wings on either side which would contain the cells.
Construction commenced in March of 1833, aided in large part by over one hundred prisoners who were promised commutations if they labored diligently and did not attempt to escape. When completion was announced in 1837, the new facility could even boast of a hospital and a separate facility for women near the end of the east wing.

This was definitely a comprehensive approach to the problem, but what of the system to govern it? The solution appeared to be the new methods in use at the Auburn penitentiary in New York.

The Auburn or "silent" system was a response to the unstated attitude that criminal behavior was learned through association with other criminals. It sought to address the situation by precepts which probably at that time seemed progressive, yet today would be considered Draconian.

DUTIES OF THE PRISONERS.

They are to labor faithfully and diligently, to obey all orders promptly, and to preserve unbroken silence.

They are not to exchange a word with each other, under any pretence, nor to communicate any intelligence to each other in writing; they are not to exchange looks, winks, laugh with each other, nor make use of any signs, except such as are necessary to convey their wants to be waiters.

They must approach their Keepers in the most respectful manner, and be brief in their communications. They are not to speak to them on ordinary topics, nor address them except when it becomes necessary in relation to their work or their wants.
They are not at any time, nor under any pretence, without leave, to speak to any person who does not belong to the institution, nor receive from them any letter, paper, tobacco or other thing whatever.

They are not to leave the place where they are put to work nor the work they are set to do, without the special permission or orders of the proper officer; they are not to suffer their attention to be taken from their work to look at visitors, nor are they to gaze or look at them when unemployed.

Their whole demeanor must be in accordance with the most perfect order and in strict compliance with the rules and regulations of the Prison.

For all wilful violations of the above rules, corporal punishment will certainly be inflicted. (Ohio Annual Report 1834)

To ensure that they did not speak while marching together, a brutish and dehumanizing movement was required. In the excerpts that follow the penitentiary clerk and a newspaper reporter provide a graphic characterization of the infamous lockstep.

The prisoners were placed in close order, say thirty-five in a company—the tallest in front, and the smallest in the rear; the word of command was given, and they shuffled along with a quick short step, and so close and compact did they march, that one would imagine that the movement of their legs were controlled by one will. (M’Ewen p. 61) (1956)

The convicts march with that famous "lock-step," the toes of each foot of one being beside the heels of the corresponding foot of the one in front of him, the abdomen touching his back. The right hand is placed upon the right shoulder of the man ahead and the head is turned to the left, so that there can be no talking. (Simpson, pp. 27, 28) (1883)
As expressed in the Introduction, there is a dearth of images of the prison during the early and middle portions of the nineteenth century. Regrettably, this extends to narrative as well. We must be thankful for any description, however brief, since it is now the sole remnant of an era of the penitentiary that has long since ceased to be. This one gives us a glimpse of what a young prisoner may have felt upon his first encounter with the prison in the 1840s.

The stage arrived at Columbus just after daylight, and turned up the river, to the place of destination. The sheriff remarked, in a good-humored manner, "Hamilton, yonder's the place;" on which he immediately put out his head, and the first glance caused his eyes to suffuse with tears. There stood, looming gigantically in the fog, that imposing structure, with its tiers of iron-bound windows, its massive stone walls, battlemented like some ancient feudal castle, conjuring up, in imagination, the dungeon, keep, turrets, bastions, etc., of one of those baronial strongholds of the middle ages, filling the brain with vague, undefinable feelings of terror and mystery. The stage drew up at the porter's lodge, or gate-house, where there was a guard, with his bright musket convenient; passing through, the prisoner walked, with some alacrity, in advance of his attendants, over the well-worn flags, along whose smooth surface so many unhappy men have trailed their fetters, being about to be ushered into a new life of seclusion, of toil, privation, and degradation, to become painfully and practically acquainted with the secrets of that immense prison-house. (Finley p. 268) (1850)
To the diaries of Clark Guernsey, a visitor from Pennsylvania, we are indebted for betraying a few of the "secrets" alluded to in the foregoing passage. Dillon's recital of what he observed is especially valuable for its detailed depiction of what was then a brand-new facility.

On Tuesday, the 7th of March [1837], having a few hours of time to spare, I concluded to visit the Ohio penitentiary. The building stands about a quarter of a mile north west of the city, upon a level piece of ground, and near the bank of the river, on the east side, above the bridge.

It is built mostly of limestone—is three stories high and about four hundred feet in length, in front, and extends about the same distance back, including the wall. The centre of the building is occupied as a dwelling for the keeper and other officers, and contains the offices. This is built of free-stone. On each side of this is one wing, which contains the cells. The walls enclose the yard containing the work-shops. The whole of the premises covers ground to the extent of six square acres.

We entered the centre building—passed through the office, into the guard room—and, accompanied by an officer, started upon our walk through the prison. Passing through an iron door of immense weight, we turned to the right, and came into the east wing, which contains the sleeping apartments of the prisoners. There are five stories of cells, surrounded on every side by a hall eight or ten feet wide, enclosed by a thick stone wall, which reaches to the roof, and upon which the roof rests. This wall has windows corresponding with the doors of the cells in each story. The cells are about eight feet long, three feet wide, and six feet high, arched over-head. Each one has an iron door, opening on the outside, with holes in them large enough to admit fresh air; and are
furnished with a hammock, and one or more blankets, as the temperature of the weather requires. Every thing about the cells is arranged with such neatness and regularity, as to promote health and comfort.

Figure 2. Prisoners marching to their cells, ca.1840s.
James B. Finley, Memorials of Prison Life.
Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J.H. Power, 1850
From this we turned to the left, and passed along the work-shops. They extend along the eastern and northern sides of the yard, those in each apartment occupied in making different kinds of materials.

Figure 3. Yard, prisoners, and workshops, 1847. Ohio Historical Society SC 763, 1847
The visitor is not allowed to enter the shops; but looks through small holes in the partitions, made expressly for the purpose.

The first shop in rotation contained boot and shoe-makers. In the next they were principally engaged in making the wood work to saddle-trees. In the next they were manufacturing trimmings for coaches and carriages--some spinning the yarn, some quilling it--while others were weaving it into the different widths and figures required. I saw a specimen of their manufacture, which was indeed ingeniously done; and reflect much credit to the overseers.

We next passed through the mess-room, where several long boards are fixed up just high enough for tables, with seats extending the whole length of each. A trencher, and a knife and fork for every prisoner, are laid upon these boards; and on the left side of each trencher are placed one large and one small piece of coarse corn bread. The other victuals are furnished when they sit down to their meals.

Figure 4. Convicts at dinner, ca. 1840s. James B. Finley, Memorials of Prison Life. Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J.H. Power, 1850
Whenever the bell rings, the prisoners leave their work instantly, and, forming themselves into lines, march with the lock step to the table or to their cells; and in returning, perform the same operations, until they reach their destination, when they disperse, and each one pursues his labor as before.

While eating, or at work, they are not allowed to exchange a word, or even to look at one another, under any circumstance whatever; and when they are in want of anything they must make it known to their overseers.

The kitchen and bake-room adjoin the mess-room on the north, all situated on the ground floor. The shop for tailors is over these rooms, and is sometimes used as a summer hospital.

The next and corner room is occupied by blacksmiths, and those also who make cutlery, &c. The first room on the north side contains carpenters; and coopers; the last shop is larger and more open than any of the rest, and contains stone cutters.

The yard was strewn with lumber, stones, and bricks, and other materials for building, which did not add to its beauty; but there will probably be more neatness and regularity when the prison is completed. The west wing of the prison was not finished; but workmen were engaged upon it, and it was calculated to have been finished the ensuing summer. (Dillon pp. 70, 71) (1837)

The perception we take away from this narrative of the prison and the work-shops is essentially a positive one that affirms the system that is in place. The penitentiary evinces all the orderliness and industry of an ant farm. But it is important to remember that some species of ant enslave others to work for them.
Superficially at least, it might seem as if the convicts were engaged in learning and performing useful trades, producing wares for the society they had wronged.
CELLS

There are thirty-five cells in a range, making three hundred and fifty cells in a block. There are three blocks in the old building known as the East, Middle and West Halls. The cells are very small, scarcely high enough to allow a man to stand erect in them. Each cell is furnished with one gas jet which the prisoner is allowed to burn until 9 o'clock each night, when, by a tap of a bell in the Guard Room, they must extinguish the light and immediately retire. The doors are of heavy barred iron; the walls are very thick; the beds are iron frames swung from the wall of the cell. (Matthews pp. 10, 11) (1884)

Figure 5. East Hall block. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
In the East and West Halls are 1050 cells, each of which is three feet three inches wide, six feet three inches high, and seven feet long. In the New Hall are 580 double cells, each of which is four feet six inches wide, eight feet high and seven feet long.
(Fornsholl p. 73) (1903)

Figure 6. West Hall block. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
Not included among these cells described respectively by J.H. Matthews and Marvin Fornshell were a handful which were apparently reserved for preferred or at least special prisoners. While they could in no way compare with those in modern "country club" facilities where the Watergate luminaries and other more recent privileged offenders did their time, such cells were in marked contrast with the accommodations intended for the common horse thief.

The third day I was taken out of my cell and given one of 31 cells that were much more comfortable than any others in the whole prison, and I thought mine was the best suited of them all. It was about six feet broad, nine feet long, and ten feet high, and it had a large latticed door, and the whole front was latticed, and I had a nice bed, and nice gas and heat. A prisoner, for 50 cents a month, took care of my cell. He put in it a carpet, and another prisoner, just as a kindness, brought me a nice table, and I had books and papers and writing apparatus in abundance. (Moore p. 250) (1889)
Many of the prisoners along in the thirty-one cells of the "Banker's Row" that I was in, were there for life, and some of their cells were luxuriously furnished, and had curtains that they drew over their doors and gratings. (Moore p. 254) (1899)

The prisoner who gave us the preceding description was editor of the Blue Grass Blade. The Kentucky journalist had been convicted in his home state but would do his time in Ohio, an arrangement that also accounted for the presence of Sioux braves from the Indian wars and the short story writer, O. Henry, sentenced in Texas of embezzlement. Warden E. G. Coffin was sympathetic to the situation of the elderly newspaperman and confirmed atheist who had been convicted of blasphemy and allowed him a few luxuries.

BERTILLON SYSTEM

Before fingerprinting became the principal method of criminal identification was that originated by the French anthropologist, Dr. Alphonse Bertillon. The Bertillon, or anthropometric system relied upon precise physical measurements of the human body and the recording of these dimensions as well as other observations such as eye color, moles, scars, deformities, peculiarities, and tatoos. The method was grounded in Bertillon's belief that (1) skeletal transformation is negligible after maturity, (2) no two human beings
share precisely the same characteristics in all categories, and (3) these measurements may be taken with ease and exactitude.

Innovator that he was, Bertillon was among the first to recognize the importance of the fingerprint method, but he lacked the vision to see that it would one day largely supplant his system. Fingerprints, he felt, could only be an adjunct to other measurements. Ohio adopted the Bertillon System in 1887.
Figure 7. Bertillon measurements. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
Figure 8. Bertillon measurements. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
Figure 9. Bertillon card (front) 1903. State Archives Series 1002/P-299 (Bertillon cards with photographs, 1887-1923) at The Ohio Historical Society
OHIO STATE PENITENTIARY.

NAME: George Anderson

Alias: 

Race: 

Nationality: 

Occupation: 

Sentence: 1 1/2 Years

Known or Admitted Former Imprisonment: Yes, Purbation Xi. 9/3

Release from: 

MARKS, SCARS AND MOLES.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fat American Hair of head to back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Street Brow and Cheek. Woman long hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Woman with No Dimples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vagina scar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fat American Hair of head to back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stump. Woman had half moon to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Can not identify.</td>
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NOTE: Please follow strictly Book of Instructions, not only as to measurements and general descriptions, but also particularly as to Marks, Scars, etc. See pages 42 to 51. Use abbreviations as given in instructions.

Figure 10. Bertillon card (rear) 1903. State Archives Series 1002/P-299 (Bertillon cards with photographs, 1887-1923) at The Ohio Historical Society
It is regrettable that a judgment on what was once claimed to be the most beautiful prison grounds in the world must rely on prose depictions that neglect fine detail and pictorial representations most of which are halftone and all of which are monochromatic. Those with truly colorful imaginations may be able to fill in the grays of the succeeding photographs with the shades and tints that the old cameras saw but could not record.

There was a beautiful yard in front of the prison outside, about six hundred feet long and one hundred feet wide. (Moore p. 252) (1899)

On entering through the main gate you entered the guard hall and from there through another gate you entered the yard which had probably one of the finest lawns of any prison in the U.S. This lawn was in the form of a square and was surrounded by the Warden house and cell houses, the dining hall, the Hospital, Chapel and Green Houses. The part of the yard contained shops and the streets were numbered or named from 1st St. to 7th St. and running in the other direction 1st Ave. to 7th Ave. and these streets and Avenues contained 77 manufacturing buildings all run under the contract system. (Clark p. 66) (1900)

In front is a large fountain surrounded by flower beds, which in summer presents to the eye a beautiful appearance. On the left front are a number of sycamore trees, planted over thirty years ago by a prisoner of the name of Ferdinand Seitz, who was sent up from Hamilton Co. for murder, Nov. 5th, 1845. (Matthews p. 16) (1864)
Figure 11. 776/P411/1908 Fountain, ca.1908, black and white postcard, Courtesy Columbus Circulating Visual Collection, Biography History and Travel Columbus Metropolitan Library
Back of the cell houses is a spacious yard. It is ornamented with grass plats, brick walks, fountain, and flower gardens, and this is the only green spot of which the convicts catch a glimpse from the time they enter until their discharge. (Simpson p. 13) (1883)
Figure 13. Prison interior (winter). *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
As you pass through the yard, the round, miniature lake will attract attention, for in the summer time, on its surface rides an ingeniously constructed model of a sidewheel river steamer, propelled by a stream of water from a pipe attached to a pivot in the center of the lake, which is connected with the water works. (Jones pp. 23, 24) (1891)

Figure 14. Pavilion, chapel, fountain. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
You behold a snug little park, containing about two acres adorned with trees, shrubbery; in summer flowers, a statue of considerable artistic skill, a greenhouse in charge of a convict who is a skillful florist, and an artificial lake. (Jones p. 24) (1891)

Figure 15. Flower beds, greenhouse (interior and exterior), ancient sycamore. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
DINING

Each company takes its accustomed place in the yard when the whistle blows at noon, and remain there until the Deputy taps his bell, when the guard over each company, in his turn, gives the command—"Forward, march!" It is a peculiar sight to see fifteen or sixteen hundred prisoners in their striped uniforms, approaching from every direction. When the companies have reached their respective places on the parade grounds, they come to a halt and wait for a second tap of the Deputy Warden's bell before entering the dining-room.

(Fornseh, p. 34) (1903)
Here each company takes its accustomed place at the tables; the Deputy taps the dining-room bell and every cap is off in an instant. The clatter of knives and forks may be heard as each prisoner proceeds to eat the food prepared by other prisoners in the great kitchen. (Fornshell p. 34) (1903)

Figure 17. Convicts at dinner, postcard. Private collection of Richard E. Barrett, Columbus, Ohio local historian
Dining Hall

The dining quarters consist of an "L"-shaped room with seating capacity for 2,000 men. Row after row of long tables stretch across the room, and each diner is supplied with knife and fork and plate, also a large bowl for coffee. Although not much of a variety is given the prisoners, an ample amount of good, cleanly-prepared food is supplied. No prison in the country gives more or better. From thirty to thirty-five waiters, assisted by the guards, serve the meals. To see the inmates at dinner is one of the most interesting sights of the institution, and one that is witnessed by thousands of visitors annually. (Fornshell p. 29, 30) (1903)

Figure 18. Dining room, postcard. Private collection of Richard E. Barrett, Columbus, Ohio local historian
A hundred cool, exhilarating currents of air are constantly kept in motion by fans which are arranged directly over the tables in summer, giving much pleasure to the tired and hungry army of men, who are boarders at this big hostelry, both in refreshing coolness and in shoing away the gay and festive fly.
(Jones p. 40) (1903)

Figure 19. Dining room, postcard. Private collection of Richard E. Barrett, Columbus, Ohio local historian
The bill-of-fare for dinner and supper is changed daily. The dinners usually consist of either beef pot-pie, corn beef and cabbage, fried bacon with dried corn and lima beans, beef stew, salt fish with potatoes and gravy, fresh beef and bean soup, corn beef hash, or bacon with hominy and eggs. (Jones p. 40) (1891)

Kitchen

First are the coffee boilers—huge copper kettles two hundred and fifty gallons each. Next the kettles for cooking vegetables—five in number, and each holding an hundred and twenty-five gallons. (Matthews p. 12) (1884)

Figure 20. Prison kitchen. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
In the kitchens (the great culinary department of the prison, where all the food issued to the prisoners is prepared) many improvements have been made in the system of cooking by steam. The happy result is that the food, prepared by experienced cooks (convicts), is now served in a more palatable condition, and in larger quantities than ever before, under any management. For one meal (say dinner) thirty-one bushels of potatoes, or 300 gallons of soup, or 1000 heads of cabbage, 1200 pounds of meat and seventy-five loaves of bread, are required. For breakfast, 200 gallons of coffee, 140 pounds of butter and seventy-five or eighty loaves of bread, weighing twenty-two pounds each are required. (Jones p. 39) (1891)

Bakery

You pass from the kitchen into the Bakery, where the bread for feeding the prisoners is baked. The ovens are mammoth affairs with a revolving center that keeps the bread in motion while baking, to prevent its being burned. There are over fourteen barrels of flour consumed every day. (Matthews p. 13) (1884)
Figure 21. Prison bakery. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899.
It is pleasing to see the bakers receiving the huge twin loaves—Siamese twins, joined at the sides—from the big oven. "The man behind the peel" hands each pan from the deep recesses of the great oven. Another receives them, empties them from the pan into the arms of another who rushes off with the load at a two-minute clip to the bread storage rooms. There is no finer bread baked in the country than that furnished to the inmates of the Ohio Penitentiary. (Fornshell p. 29) (1903)

Food

Substantial improvement in the quantity and quality of the food began under the wardenship of B. F. Dyer. Only a decade earlier a convict could say this of his meals:

(Breakfast) At the table was given each man a bowl of coffee, which, I think, was made from bread crusts; a piece of bread and some fat, boiled pork.

(Supper) A large piece of graham bread, made from the cheapest, or damaged flour, and about an ounce of cheese, with a bowl of tea, or, as the prisoners call it, damaged water was given to each man. (Pettay pp. 44, 48) (1883)

What was the impetus for change? The rationale of the Dyer administration:

It is evident to the management that "Good food and hard labor form an equation that is easily disturbed by false notions in culinary economy. Physical exertion represents its equivalent in food supply. Action and reaction are equal. The waste of muscular power must be supplied from the dining-room. To meet this demand and to preserve
this power, the laws of physiology will not tolerate a stunted supply of substantial though plain food." It may have been the pride of former administrations to "show the minimum cost per capita attached to the feeding of prisoners, but such showing stands in danger of working out false economy with no other result than the cry of "hunger." It is the disposition of the present administration, "engineer-like, to determine, not how little, but how much, fuel is required to run the long train of prison labor." (Jones p. 40) (1891)

A close reading of this purple passage suggests there is less concern for convict welfare behind the policy than there is for the human engine at the head of the train which, deprived of sufficient fuel, might not pull in as much revenue.

Notwithstanding claims and counterclaims regarding the dining hall fare, the preferred eatery inside was the prison restaurant.

The next morning for breakfast I was taken to a place they call "Jericho," where an average of about 75 prisoners ate, and the eating was a good deal better than in the regular place for the other prisoners to eat, and we were not marched into and out of it, and could sit and eat as long as we cared. (Moore p. 249) (1899)

For breakfast you were served beefsteak or pork chops and fried potatoes, good coffee, bread and butter, etc. The dinner and supper were as good. (Clark p. 68) (ca.1900)

HOSPITAL

An improved hospital may have been a reaction to the first cholera epidemic which in 1833 carried off eleven prisoners.
Unfortunately, no measures in that era of rudimentary medicine would have been sufficient to handle the second outbreak which struck in 1849. Two died on June 30, the first day, and by July 9, 396 of the 423 convicts were ill and 21 were dead. While the epidemic lingered into September, the height of its severity occurred on July 10 when 22 died. In all, 116 prisoners succumbed, not to mention Drs. Gard and Lathrop. Many of the guards fled, and all industries came to a halt as workshops were turned into temporary hospitals. Despite the fact that no convict was locked up for 16 days, there were no escapes and order reigned in the penitentiary. For their part in ministering to the sick, 52 prisoners were pardoned.

The early location of the hospital on the east side of the prison was often cited as being less than salubrious. Here it received air from the shops as well as from the cells, where night buckets were still in use. It was also subject to the stench of dead animals rotting on the nearby river flats. In 1874 the hospital was transferred to the third floor of the former chapel where it remained until 1895.2

There is no institution of its kind in this country better equipped for the care of the sick and disabled, than the hospital of the Ohio Penitentiary. It has a dispensary with every recognized specific and surgical appliance known to the healing art. The hospital quarters are in the shape of an L, and divided into two wards, the first of which (the surgical) contains twenty-five beds and is 125 feet long by forty-five feet wide. The second ward (clinical), with twenty beds, has a length of 150, and a width of forty-five feet. Should it become necessary the Hospital
could easily accommodate 150 patients at one time. (Jones p. 47) (1991)

The awkwardness of its third-floor placement and the desire for a much-expanded facility led to the construction of the St. James Hospital in 1895.

On the ground floor of the hospital are three wards, their construction being such that they command the sunlight and air on every side--two medical wards and a surgical ward. A nurse is in charge of each ward at all times, and he is never without a patient. Both medical ward nurses are men skilled in their calling, as the grateful testimony of their fellow-inmates attest, many a poor fellow having been held back from crossing the Styx by the ceaseless and untiring attention of his nurses. In the surgical ward the doctors have a most valuable assistant in their surgical nurse, whose deft fingers bandage and care for the various and many injuries. The surgical ward is never empty, seven or eight patients always being under care there. (Fornshell pp. 36, 37)
THE NEW HOSPITAL FACING WEST ON CAMPUS—STATUE OF OMMIALE ON LEFT.

Figure 22. St. James Hospital. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
Figure 23. Hospital Ward, postcard. Private collection of Richard E. Barrett, Columbus, Ohio local historian.
In connection with the surgical ward is the operating room, which is supplied with all the appliances that the surgeon finds essential to his work. Here everything is surgically clean and polished. In the instrument cases is a glittering array of knives, forceps, etc., and the paraphernalia peculiar to such a room, the names of which would be meaningless to the lay mind. The major part of the operations are of minor importance, but a few very delicate operations have been performed. The imaginings of some of the patients while under the influence of the anaesthetic are as peculiar as they are varied and characteristic; some are laughable and some pathetic.

On the second floor we find three wards and a dining room. One ward is for tubercular patients alone, and the average number there is about five the year round. Next is the convalescent ward, where the patients from the medical wards are sent to convalesce and regain their strength before being discharged. The other ward is for the accommodation of the hospital staff, the nurses, orderlies etc. Above these wards is the culinary department, for all food used in the hospital is prepared separately from that of the rest of the institution. (Fornshell p. 37) (1903)

SCHOOL

When a student first enters the school he is examined by the superintendent and assigned to such class as his knowledge best fits him for. The following branches are taught in the
school: Reading, writing, spelling, United States history, grammar, geography and stenography. The pupils make more rapid progress in these studies than do the scholars of outside schools. This is attributed to the fact that their minds are more able to retain and digest more than are younger pupils. Regular quarterly diversions are given in the way of special exercises, which consist of orations, recitations, essays, songs and instrumental music, all of which are eagerly watched for by the students. (Fornshell p. 35) (1903)

Formal academic instruction, like religious instruction, had a checkered history at the penitentiary, perhaps due in part to the fact that the same person was responsible for both. The obligation for providing such education as was available often fell exclusively to the lot of the prison chaplain until a night school was opened in 1884. Interest in learning seemed to pick up after this point, and by 1898 nearly a third of the 2,424 prisoners were attending.
Figure 24. Prison school. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
LIBRARY

Just at the rear of the chaplain's office will be found the prison library, which comprises nearly seven thousand volumes, from which each prisoner who is in the first or second grade, is entitled to draw one book each week. The library is well stocked with books of fiction, religious works, biographical sketches, historical works and books devoted to scientific research. The number of books sent out each week and the character of books asked for speak well for the intelligence of the average man confined here as prisoner. (Fornshell p. 58)
Figure 25. Prison library. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
The quantity of books in the library fluctuated widely. At one point there might be as many as several thousand, and yet only a few years later, wear would have shrunk that number to mere hundreds. How could this be? First, many of the volumes were donated copies that had seen considerable use before being received at the pen. Second, there were almost no recreational activities open to prisoners after their day's labor, and those convicts who could read probably did so with great voracity.

A glance at the 1884 library catalog bears out the foregoing excerpt's claim to sophisticated convict reading tastes. Sprinkled among what appear to have been the Danielle Steeles and Sidney Sheldons of the nineteenth century are a significant number of authors whose works and reputations have persisted to this day: Geoffrey Chaucer, John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Laurence Sterne, Henry Fielding, Alexander Pope, Walter Scott, J. F. Cooper, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, Wilkie Collins, Jules Verne, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Emile Zola.

Perhaps betraying the prison's ethnic disproportion, there were 186 books in German, the only foreign language listed. In the religious section was a copy of The Koran. There was a Catholic division also, comprising many works from among which were the Life of Pope Pius the IX as well as Household Irish Eloquence and the Wild Irish Girl.

Some amusing titles discovered in the medical books were How Not to be Sick and Insanity and Its Prevention.

CHAPEL

Divine service is performed every Sunday in a loft over one of the shops, very neatly fitted up for the purpose. (Finley p. 281) (1850)

Between the time of this meeting place and the erection of a new chapel in 1874, the location of religious services appeared to shift, indicating temporal concerns had again attained priority with the prison administration. Indeed, no chaplain was even appointed during the period from 1840 to 1845 and from 1859 to 1861 services were suspended altogether when housing demands caused the chapel to be transformed into a dormitory. Spiritual and secular exigencies were finally met in the new structure that, besides seating two thousand persons in its auditorium, served other important functions.

Figure 27. Chapel, postcard. SC 5341 at the Ohio Historical Society
In building the chapel provision was made for needful offices necessary to the business department of the prison. The front or main part of the building is occupied by the chaplain's office, which is situated in the right hand corner facing the front of the building and here is kept the incoming record of every man and woman received in the prison.

The left corner of the building is occupied by the deputy warden's office, while just at the rear of this is situated the office of the assistant deputy warden. In these two offices is transacted all the business pertaining to the discipline of the prison, the assignment of men to work or the transfer of prisoners from one kind of work to another. Here is also kept a complete record of all men confined behind the walls and here, at any time, it is possible to find where a man is at and at what he is employed.

Over the offices named is located the interior office of the Secretary of the institution. In this office is employed a corps of able accountants who keep the business accounts of the entire institution. Here is also kept the time at which each prisoner's sentence will expire and here is the place where the prisoner is made happy when he finds himself on the monthly discharge list.

In the right side of the building and toward the rear are located the piece-price offices, the office of the construction department and sleeping apartments for the firemen. In the left is located the sleeping room for the fire-watch. Here is also to be found the telephone exchange and the officer's barber shop, while beneath the chapel is a large roomy basement which is devoted to many and various purposes. (Fernshell pp. 58, 59) (1903)
Figure 28. Female prisoners. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
FEMALE DEPARTMENT

This is the coziest place of all. The building is three stories high and is situated south of the old East Hall building. It is surrounded by a stone wall of the same height as the one surrounding the prison. On the first floor is the Reception Room, where the female prisoners see their friends, Matrons' Apartments, and the Laundry. On the second floor is the Sewing Room, the Dining Room, and the Dry Room. On the third floor are the Sleeping Apartments. The room is long with cells on the sides; these cells are more homelike in appearance than the mens', many of them being daintily arranged with pictures on the walls, presents from friends outside, arranged on shelves in a very artistic manner. (Matthews pp. 17, 18) (1884)
Figure 30. The Dining Room, Sarah Maria Victor, *Life Story of Sarah M. Victor*. Cleveland: Williams Publishing Co., 1887

Figure 31. Making Chairs, Sarah Maria Victor, *Life Story of Sarah M. Victor*. Cleveland: Williams Publishing Co., 1887
From 1837 until the opening of the Marysville Reformatory in 1913, women were held in the penitentiary. But they were sequestered from the men behind a wall in another building which besides separate dining facilities also had its own hospital. The women's sole contact with male prisoners occurred on Sunday at church where even then they sat in their own section. Like the men, they were required to work, and their employments over the years included broom making, chair caning, making clothing for themselves and male prisoners, and cigar manufacturing. Unlike the men, they were treated with a fair degree of civility. Nettie Marshall, the matron, described her liberal approach in dealing with her charges:

My method of management is something of an innovation to the older inmates of the prison, as I have introduced the home or family plan of government, which the inmates seem to fully appreciate, and which has conducted to the most pleasing results for those in charge. The girls are allowed to talk and act like human beings, instead of being made to feel that a word or a smile would cost them a night in the dungeon. Those who have money are permitted to buy material for needle and fancy work, which work affords them diversion evenings, and when not otherwise employed. When the weather is pleasant, they are allowed to assemble on the lawn for recreation, evenings and Sunday afternoon, which they seem to enjoy very much. We all retire at the same hour and breakfast at the same hour in the morning, the
inmates not being locked up at any-time during the day, as was the custom heretofore. (Jones pp. 46, 47) (1891)

INSANE ASYLUM

The building used for this purpose dates its origin back to the early days of the present prison. It is an old brick structure filled with steel cells or cages, some of which are padded for occupancy by the more violent inmates. The building is about forty feet square, and the thirty odd inmates—and they are odd in more ways than one—are presided over by two guards who have probably the most hazardous position in the prison, for these men, vicious by nature when not mentally unbalanced, are usually much more so when their reasoning powers have become wrecked. This place is known to the rational prisoners as the "bug house;" consequently the "bug house inmates are known as "bugs," and are possessed of all kinds of "buggy" ideas and notions. (Fornshell p. 29) (1903)
Figure 32. Insane Asylum. Marvin E. Forshell, The Historical and Illustrated Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: privately printed, 1903
This is the saddest spectacle about the prison—men with shattered minds and emaciated bodies, who a few years before were in the full strength of vigorous manhood. Most of them are murderers, whose broodings over their horrid crimes have brought them to this pitiable state. Few of them are maniacal, but nearly all are morose and melancholy. They sit quietly and gaze at the visitor with a stare which causes a shudder. (Simpson p. 33) (1883)

PRISON LABOR

An essential tenet of the Auburn system under which the penitentiary had been organized was that prisoners should be engaged in hard labor. And labor they did for an average of ten hours per diem except Sunday (all daylight hours in winter and thirteen hours during summer).

It is difficult not to remark the disturbingly feudal facet of the situation at this point. The convict was not unlike a serf in bondage to his vassal, the warden, whose allegiance, in turn, was to his lord, the governor. If the serf labored hard and well, he might obtain sustenance and freedom from punishment, though these things were never certain. The analogy is further supported by the visual aspect of the penitentiary—fortress-like, with high walls, crenelations, and armed guards. It must also be borne in mind that the warden
then lived at the penitentiary and could use it as his estate and the prisoners as servants to his own considerable advantage:

He had three convicts working for him all the time, for which he never paid one cent to the State.---Absalom Blessing cut and wheeled wood, carried water &c.; George Wilbor attended generally to the horses, cut and wheeled wood and stone coal, and other chores. William Nutley waited upon the family table---was compelled to do the menial offices of the chamber; answer the room bells and wait upon the ladies of the house. Here were three convicts, 365 days each, ten hundred and ninety-five days at forty cents per day, amounts to four hundred and thirty-eight dollars!

All the wood and stone coal which he used from the time he first took possession until I left the Institution, belonged to the State, and for which up to that time (8th March, 1856) he had not paid one cent: The large cooking stove in the front kitchen, will average one cord and a half of wood per week the year round. Charge 100 cords of wood at $250 per cord, amounts to two hundred and fifty dollars---400 bushels of stone coal at twelve cents per bushel, is forty-eight dollars---making two hundred and ninety-eight dollars for the item of fuel alone, a very low estimate.

There was two or three acres of early corn, cabbage, tomatoes, beets, carrots, &c., planted and attended by convicts, from which the Warden supplied his family, without accounting to the State for one cent. It would be a low estimate at fifty dollars.
There were about twenty bushels of good peaches worth seventy-five cents per bushel, which amounts to fifty dollars.

During the administration of Buttles, contracts were given to the lowest bidder for beef, pork, &c., and when the hind quarters of beef was brought by the butcher to the State kitchen, the sirloin and best steaks were cut out for the Warden, charged to him, at or near contract price, and the refuse and bones were fed to the convicts. He made use of about twenty pounds of meat per day on an average—this would be 7300 lbs. per year; this meat cost him 7 1/2 cents less per pound than if he had bought it in market—which makes the snug little item of $532.90.

The Warden rented the large corn field known as the "Neil field," lying near the prison, a small portion of it is cut off by the road leading from the penitentiary to the Whetstone bridge, containing about three acres. This he planted in potatoes, the most of them being taken from the state without pay. In the fall of the year the water in the Scioto covered the patch; and in consequence the potatoes became diseased. As soon as the Warden learned this, he ordered them dug by the convicts in the kitchen—they were taken in, fed to the prisoners, charged to the State, and when good potatoes were bought, the larger ones were picked out and taken by the Warden—bushel for bushel in exchange for his small rotten diseased ones. The amount out of which the State was defrauded in this particular, together with the difference in the price of rice, beans, &c., used by the Warden, I put down at fifty dollars.

The balance of the "Neil field," containing about sixty-eight acres, he planted in corn. It was worked, cut up and husked by convicts, the Warden paying the State at the rate of forty
cents per day for labor—part of the
time there was two guards placed over
the twelve to eighteen men, the State
paying for the guards, thirty-five
dollars per month, each. Some six
weeks prior to the first of November,
1856, the Warden advertised for
supplies for the Ohio Penitentiary.
Among the items numerated were ten
thousand bushels of corn. (M'Ewen pp.
65, 66) (1850)

CONTRACTS

The first contract for prison labor was signed with
Peter Hayden on June 10, 1835, and almost from the first
there was strong opposition to the idea. Besides having
little functional difference from serfdom, the practice
was enormously injurious to free labor. But since
reformation was never the first object of any
administration and significant financial benefits
frequently resulted, contract labor was allowed to
continue with no legislative interference until 1884,
when it was abolished. Even then, it was not the end
because some long-term contracts did not finally expire
until 1913.

Free labor and, somewhat later, trade unions were
especially outspoken opponents of contracts. Real
competition, they asserted, was virtually impossible
since the state furnished the labor and the shop;
contractors were obligated only for their equipment. A
comparison of wages in 1883 shows the great differential in daily rates between free and convict labor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of manufactures</th>
<th>Average rates per convict</th>
<th>Average rates for free labor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bent-wood and carriage bodies</td>
<td>$0.73</td>
<td>$1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperage</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boots and shoes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harness</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Report on Contract Labor) (1884)

When the legislature ultimately acted to curb the inequity it substituted a system that was known as the "piece price plan." The new arrangement promised to give prison officials greater control over the time and labor of the convicts and to protect them from unreasonable demands by contractors—relief that was long overdue:

In every shop is a guard and a foreman. Foremen have various inducements to have the men perform a great amount of labor. They promise them money from the contractors when their term expires, but ever receive a dollar. Again, the foreman will not often allow the guard to have men punished for frivolous things, who are very strong and can and will perform the work of two ordinary men. Now the guards are afraid of the foremen, for if they work not to the foreman's interest, the contractors will have such guards discharged, by complaining to the Board. But why will guards not do their duty and protect the men, regardless of the contractor? Because four fifths of all the guards are paupers, and depend wholly on their little prison offices for what they eat and wear. Guards who have some little
property do ninety per cent. more squarely with the prisoners, for they are not dependent upon the contractors for their bread. Guards are paid monthly $65. Forty-five dollars would hire the same guards, but they would not beat and drive the prisoners to such an extent, perhaps, for the more money they get, the more they fear the contractors, and they will drive the men harder and work them to the death. Each guard is a king; his shop is his kingdom, and about thirty-five men are his subjects. One would not think to read the lying Prison Discipline, that guards were limited in their doings and dealings with prisoners, but to no ancient tyrant was ever given such prerogatives. It is the Warden’s business to enforce the rules made by the Directors to-wit: To enforce the laws governing the guards; that they shall practice morality; treat the prisoners humanely, and see that their necessary wants are supplied. But the Warden is alien to his profession, as the Discipline to the prison. The contractors are, in themselves, the Warden; and about their only instructions to the prison officers is an occasional wink or nod. But every nod weighs heavier on the prisoner, and three successive winks would bring about the "fever," When one is tortured to the extent that he dies in a few hours or a few days, of course he dies of fever. The fever has killed several men "sent up" from Noble county. But, I say again, that men are not killed instantly, and the reason that there are no more deaths in the pen, is, when men are hurt so much that they can live but a short time, the board recommends a pardon, which, every time is granted. (Pettay pp. 53-56) (1883)

But if the introduction of "piece price" afforded some relief to the prisoners it worked against free labor
by giving further advantages to the contractor. Now he could receive goods at a fixed price that were guaranteed free of defects. No longer need he be concerned about damaged merchandise resulting from incompetent or malicious workers.

About this time the penitentiary administration itself, under the guise of disposing of the remaining stock of a failed harness maker, continued the operation, and rather than at least selling in quantity to whole-salers, sold handmade harness by the piece at a price lower than commercial machine-made. Shoes could be purchased by the pair.

Most importantly, prison labor was not even beneficial to the convicts themselves from a vocational standpoint. If they had no legitimate trade when they entered the penitentiary, they usually had none when they left. Rather than being taught a range of useful skills in the shops that would enable them to obtain honest employment when released, prisoners were commonly assigned specific tasks that they performed over and over, day in and day out, until their sentences expired.

About seventy men are employed on the broom contract, and they produce on an average about 60,000 brooms per month. All kinds of "sweepers" are made, from the little whisk up to the largest and heaviest kinds of brooms. The plant is equipped with the most modern machinery, designed and made for the
business, and one of the most interesting sights in the institution is the broom shop. It is a piece-price contract. (Fornshell p. 68) (1903)
About twenty prisoners are employed in the stove foundry, where all the different parts that go to make many kinds of stoves are moulded. However, the various parts are not assembled in the prison any more; but when they were mounted here there would be completed every working day from fifteen to thirty stoves. (Fornshell pp. 60, 71) (1903)

Figure 34. Foundry. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
In the foundry are made hoes, rakes and forks. The various kinds of hoes are known as boy, field, meadow, mortar, planter, and lady, and from forty to forty-five men turn out 1800 hoes, more than 200 rakes and 3200 hay forks per day.

The products of the foundry are carried to the polishing and finishing shops, where they are finished preparatory to being placed on handles. In what is known as the Rake shop there are made all kinds of handles, which are forwarded to the snath shop where they are bent and made ready for the hoes, rakes and forks. Twenty-five men are employed in the rake shop and about fifteen in the snath shop. (Fornshell p. 71) (1903)
Figure 35. Rake and hoe shop. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899.
From seventy to seventy-five men are employed in the Stamp Shop. Huge, powerful machines crush or stamp from solid pieces of iron, nuts and washers of all sizes, pillow plates, harness blinkers and all kinds of articles which are cut out by the stamping process. It is an interesting sight to witness the huge machines forcing their way through thick plates of iron with apparently as much ease and dispatch as you could show in running a sharp knife through a piece of soft butter.

(Fornshell p. 71) (1903)

Figure 36. Stamp Shop. *Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

There were two modes of punishment existing in the Ohio Penitentiary, from the time it was first instituted until the passage of the law by which it is now governed, by the present Legislature. The first, and that which was considered the most mild was "showering." The prisoner was stript of his clothing, and placed against an upright plank, with his feet standing upon a platform fastened to the plank. To this plank he was bound fast, as represented in the foregoing cut, by a kind of leathern halter, one piece passing over the forehead—anther round his chin attached to the one round his forehead, then entering holes in the plank, was buckled fast on the other side. His arms were fastened by a leathern belt which passed round his arms, then across his bowels through the plank, and fastened as above. In this position it is impossible for the stoutest of them to move their head or body. The spout from the tub comes within a short distance of the head, through which the water is forced about fifteen feet with great force, owing to the quantity of water in the tub. I have known prisoners who would rather be "catted" than "showered"—and others could stand unmoved with all they could pour upon them.
Figure 37. Showering. R.S. M’Ewen, *The Mysteries, Miseries, and Rascalities of the Ohio Penitentiary*. Columbus: J. Geary, Son & Co., 1856
I have known fatal and injurious consequences to follow showering. One convict, by the name of James Foley, was ordered to be showered by the Warden for refusing to work—poor fellow, he had been sick and unable to work for several days. He was a man of weak constitution and nervous temperament. His pleadings proved of no avail—he was "showered," and in less than six hours he was a corpse. Another man, whose name I do not now recollect, was showered, and died the same night. (M'Bwen p. 27) (1850)

The other mode of punishment was with the "cat"—an instrument with a short handle; at the small end of which, were attached four strings composed of cat-gut—the ends of the strings for one inch were tightly wrapped with silk cord, and waxed—they were about three feet long, and when applied to the bare back by a skillful hand, would cut through the skin and bury themselves into the flesh a considerable depth. I never used the instrument during the whole time I was Clerk, but I have seen it used frequently, and have seen the red blood flow down the back in streams at every cut—have seen the poor convict fall to his knees at every cut of the "cat," and plead for mercy. Again, I have seen them stand like a stoic, with a curling lip of scorn; not one groan escaped their lips—and through the whole operation they never evinced by their countenance one single pang of anguish or pain. The orders of the Warden were like the laws of the Medes and Persians; unalterable—and when a case was once decided and passed upon, whether guilty or innocent, the accused was forced to submit; the least resistance subjecting him to be immediately shot down.

The most unfeeling and brutal "catting" ever inflicted in the Penitentiary, happened on the 24th of
February, 1854, when the Legislature was in session, on the person of a colored convict, by the name of Toliver Coker.

Figure 38. Whipping of Coker. R.S. M’Ewen, The Mysteries, Miseries, and Rascalities of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: J. Geary, Son & Co., 1856
Coker was tried and convicted at the April term, 1852, of the Court of Common Pleas, Highland county, for the crime of stealing money, and was sentenced to the Ohio Penitentiary for the term of three years. He was a barber, and followed that business in the prison. Near the expiration of his sentence, and for a reward for good conduct, he was placed in the front house to do chores. He had the care of the room of the deputy Warden. The deputy Warden about this time lost some silver and gold coin, which he had placed in his bureau, and Coker was blamed with stealing it.

On March 2, 1854, with the knowledge and consent of Dimmock, John R. Cool punished him, by the order of the Deputy Warden, giving him ten lashes on the bare back—they cut deep into the flesh at each successive blow, bringing Coker upon his knees, where he implored in piteous tones for mercy—exclaiming: "Oh! Lord have mercy—I did not steal that money." He was "catted" twice afterwards, and until his back presented a most shocking and disgusting appearance. Dimmock and the deputy Warden both wished to cat him the fourth time. (M'Ewen pp. 27-29) (1850)

In all, Coker received 25 strokes within six days. He was then placed in solitary confinement on a diet of corn bread and water in an earthen-floored cell with no bedding or covering of any type for nearly three weeks. It was later conclusively determined that the deputy warden's brother had stolen the money.

Catting and the shower bath were not the unlawful excesses of an extraordinarily sadistic warden. Together
with solitary confinement, they were the usual methods of punishment and were even prescribed in the penitentiary's General Rules and Regulations in 1851. In comparison with the other two, solitary might seem almost benign, but only when the term there was of limited duration. Such was not always the case.

The cells being perfectly dark, with nothing to rest on, (no bed) the prisoner was compelled to walk backward and forward or lie down on the cold floor; no nourishment except a quarter ration of bread and water. Thus he would remain brooding over his life of crime, and in many cases longing for death to free him from his life of torture. There is one man now an inmate of the prison who served nearly nine years in solitary confinement, and it seems almost a miracle to know he is yet living, but his days are numbered, he is almost gone with consumption. In conversation with him at one time, he told me the way in which he killed time. He would take a pin and throw it at random in his cell and then search for it; sometimes several days would elapse before he could find it, his cell being so obscurely dark. (Matthews p. 25) (1884)

Corporal punishment was abolished by law in 1856, but it did not really cease unless the term is restricted solely to flogging. Additional forms of torture--some ancient, others relatively advanced for the day--were brought to bear on the bodies of the convicts in a setting that would almost be comically incongruous were not for the suffering inflicted there.
Underneath the Chapel, is a cellar, the mere mention of which, horrifies the unruly prisoners. It is the place of punishment. Court is held here every morning except Sunday, and although it is generally an exparte proceeding, sometimes a "boy" is in luck and is excused by the Deputy Warden who is judge of this curious court.

It is sometimes referred to by some of the "boys" as "Heaven above, but a Hell beneath." (Morgan p. 16) (1993)

Paddling was just what the term suggests and was, by most accounts, a rather mild form of punishment, reserved for minor rules infractions. In contrast, the sweat-box rendered the prisoner unfit for work, being considered by some next to catting in severity.

I shall here state that it was a long box, much in shape of a side-cupboard, just tall enough to admit a man standing, while the depth was such that when the door was closed the prisoner was completely encased; or in other words it was a "neat fit." The only air he could get was admitted through a few holes arranged arranged diamond shape directly in front of his face. After being thus "shut in" the steam was turned on and the poor fellow would in a very short time become thoroughly wilted. They were usually kept in from twenty to thirty minutes.

A prisoner in relating to me the feelings experienced in undergoing this punishment, said--"It would wilt the d-d l himself in less time than it takes me to tell it. (Matthews pp. 147, 148) (1884)
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feet would just reach the floor, but not sufficient to allow him to rest his weight upon them; thereby causing the whole weight of his body to be held by his wrists. (Matthews p. 24) (1884)

The prison administration must have either had a soft spot in its heart for showering or a diabolical obsession with convict hygiene because the practice was brought back in a new form that was even more insidious than the original. In the majority of accounts, it was called the water punishment.

For the last two years and at the present time, the punishment is strangulation. About the hour of 10 A.M. each day, all who have committed offenses are gathered in for punishment. It is remarkably strange if, as the Enquirer says, "all men know the rules and cannot sin through ignorance," that each man at first sight of the guard (who comes daily to the shops for certain ones the shop guard hath ordered punished) stops work to see if he is wanted. Each one waits, trembles and wonders, Is it I?" (A guard once said to me: I am compelled to report about so many men, or Deane will think I'm not doing my duty and I'll lose my situation." But the guard soon motions with his heavy club, to those who are wanted and the others go to work again with a sense of relief. Every day, about the hour of ten, men may be seen from half the shops on their way to "Deane's Hole." This place is underground, beneath the chapel. To enter therein, one must descend a flight of stone steps which lead to the first hole; passing through this, one finds himself in the antechamber to the worst and deepest hell in the catalogue. Here the men
must strip themselves and after being hand-cuffed, one at a time, they are taken before Deane. Now, since he is ancient like and old, his assistant, Mr Parson, or, as he is commonly called, Deane's whelp," will ration each, his torment. But as long as the devil, himself, hath strength, his bony fingers clinch the hose and while he doth administer, a fiendish smile of satisfaction doth light his face and his eyes do glitter like those of an ambushed lion, or nearly preyed snake! The victim is placed or seated in a large tub, I would guess about three feet by six; this is about half full of water, reaching between his waist and shoulders. His head is then fastened back to some object with a strap; his feet are tied together and a stream of cold water from a hose, sufficiently heavy to knock him down, were he standing and not well braced, is forced into his face. He is compelled to gasp, at length, when the stream is forced into his mouth or driven down his throat, (I think in this way, I have swallowed gallons of water.) When one is strangled very nearly to the death, he is taken out; if unconscious, they use means to bring him to. Each punishment is equal to a death from drowning. (Pettay pp. 77-79) (1883)
Figure 39. Water punishment, P 245 (Columbus Dispatch Photograph Collection) Box 2, Folder 27, at The Ohio Historical Society. Credit: Ohio Historical Society/Columbus Dispatch
There was yet another means of dealing with errant 
convicts which literally galvanized them, but more to 
cries of agony than anything else. It is noteworthy not 
so much for the suffering it induced, which must have 
been considerable, as it is as a sort of technological 
steppingstone to the ultimate form of punishment that 
would later be visited on the prisoners.

That Humming Bird

This hummer is a little bird, the worst 
you've ever seen,  
And if you don't believe it make a call 
on Mr. Dean;  
Now when you go to see this "bird" they 
strip you to the skin,  
And down into the little tub they 
gently drop you in.

Your hands are cuffed behind your back, 
your eyes are bandaged tight,  
And When the bird begins to hum you 
yell with all your might;  
When your courage is almost failing and 
your heart begins to flop,  
Then by a sign from some one "sailing" 
this bird will always stop.

This little bird will not let you go 
for money or for love, 
But will pounce right down upon you 
like lightning from above.  
And when this bird begins to hum it 
will almost make you say:  
"Please 'let up,' good little bird, 
make your haste and fly away."

You have heard of the American eagle 
with its loud terrific scream;  
But this little "bird" is the king of 
all, this little bird of Dean's.  
(Matthews pp. 95, 96) (1854)
The offender was placed blind-folded in a small vat of water, and a steam pipe suddenly set to blowing off with a most frightening sound. An electric current was then brought to bear upon his naked body, and in the awful noise of the steam, he concluded that he was being murdered by slow torture. No visitors were allowed to witness this, but the screams for mercy, which could be heard long distances away, told the story of the mental sufferings of the male-factor. Convicts say the first application of this was enough to completely subdue them. They called it the "hummingbird." (Simpson pp. 24, 25) (1883)

When not blindfolded too closely and being touched about the face, I could see blazes or sparks, similar to what may be produced by the stroking of a cat's back in the dark. I have been punished, in this way, perhaps three times in one day. Sometimes, after punishment, I have been almost unconscious, for hours. A few times, I have experienced a kind of numbness that for a time, I could not stand upright on my feet. The pain I have known from this mode of punishment was equal, I think, to a thousand small, keen blades driven into one's flesh to the very bone. (Pettay pp. 75, 76) (1883)

THE ANNEX

In 1885 the east end of the cell block was partitioned off to the depth of five cells by a heavy stone wall, and in the north corridor is the quarters of the condemned men, while in the south corridor is the reception room, through which all must pass to gain access to the Annex proper. At the end of the block between the cage, where the condemned are confined, and
the reception room, is situated the execution room. (Jones p. 133) (1891)

Figure 40. The cage. Charles P. Jones, History of The Ohio Penitentiary, Annex and Prisoners. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
There is but one key to the door seen in the foreground, and that is always in possession of the guard on duty. The fence seen just back of the man with the broom, keeps the curious crowd from coming too close to the condemned men. In order to reach the gallows, the prisoner is brought out through the gate, taken up the first flight of steps at the left, turned to the left and then out onto the scaffold. There is always a guard on duty, whose position is between the railing and the iron lattice-work. The prisoners sleep on cots arranged along the sides of the cage, where they are in full view of the ever vigilant guard. (Jones p. 133) (1891)

The execution room is about twenty by fifteen feet, and is floored with stone flagging. Eight feet above the floor runs a gallery looking for all the world like the bridge of an ocean steamer. In the exact center of this gallery is the fatal trap. Above this is a small space in the ceiling, where an attaching apparatus for the rope is fastened. The trap is composed of two shutter-like doors that drop down when the lever is pulled. They are furnished with cushions to deaden the noise, and are fastened into position when the drop is made, by means of springs. (Jones pp. 133-135) (1891)
Figure 41. Execution room. Charles P. Jones, History of The Ohio Penitentiary, Annex and Prisoners. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
The operation of hanging is as follows: The condemned man is led from the death cell out onto the scaffold, the trap doors are fastened into position, and he steps upon the trap. The noose is adjusted, the black cap drawn down over his eyes, his arms and legs pinioned and all is ready. The signal is given, the lever pulled, and a human being shoots through the trap and into the great beyond, over whose future the black curtain of uncertainty is drawn like a pall. The drop is eight feet, and naturally results in dislocating the criminal's neck. (Jones p. 135) (1891)

Few executions were ever as precise or perfunctory as the one in the preceding description. Valentine Wagner, the first man hanged in the penitentiary (July 31, 1885), was so terrified that he had to be carried to the scaffold and held upright over the trap, all the while pleading for his life. The second, Patrick Hartnett (September 30, 1885), was nearly decapitated by the fall.

Under ideal conditions, a broken neck can produce simultaneous death and loss of consciousness. These ideal conditions were not always present at the time of execution. Situations involving asphyxiation and worse were not so uncommon as one might hope:

The drop fell at 12:05, and for several minutes the terrible struggle lasted, then the sounds from the throat and convulsions of the body grew less frequent. At 12:34 the quivering heart ceased to beat. (Elmer Sharkey – December 18, 1890) (Fogle p. 67)
There is a lull in the storm—the wind without is sighing and sobbing through the great sycamores and Edward Blair is slowly but surely choking to death. For eleven minutes the struggle is fearful to look upon; then the body hangs limp and quiet. Twenty-one minutes after the trap is sprung the last quivering pulsation is felt. (March 17, 1890) (Fogle p. 74)

Three times he sank to the floor while the noose was being adjusted. The attending Guards were compelled each time to assist him to his feet, and finally hold him up by main strength until the rattle of the lever shot his body through the open trap. Being almost in a total state of collapse, the body instead of plunging straight through the opening, pitched forward, striking the side of the door, thus breaking the force of the fall. For this reason the neck was not broken, and death was produced by the slow and harrowing process of strangulation. (William Whaley – June 22, 1894) (Fogle p. 120)

As the body rebounded there was a hissing sound which held the attention of all for a moment, then the blood came down upon the stone flagging in torrents. The doctors who had quickly stepped to the murderer's side were literally drenched with blood. An examination revealed the fact that the head was almost entirely severed from the body. Holding by narrow piece of skin, fearful lest the decapitation should be complete, attendants held the body up until the rope was taken off. (Michael McDonough – June 28, 1895) (Fogle p. 159)

Prison Physician, J.A. Clemmer may have been a visionary or he may have been seeking to avoid another
literal blood bath, but at any rate, he was certainly one of the first proponents of death by electricity. The gibbet at the penitentiary was barely two years old when he penned a vigorous denunciation of it as not necessarily swift, certain, nor painless, Clemmer having been an eyewitness to hanging's gruesome shortcomings. He dismissed as objectionable other forms of execution: drowning, shooting, lethal gas, the guillotine, anesthetics, poison injections, piercing the medulla. At a time when the first execution by electricity was still two years away (in, of all places, Auburn State Prison, birthplace of the Auburn or "silent" system), Clemmer was heralding it as meeting all of the necessary conditions while leaving no trace of bodily mutilation.

Scientists estimate that one-tenth of a second is required to transmit the sensation of bodily pain to the brain, while electricity causes death, as in the case of lightning, in much less time, precluding painful recognition. The practical operations of electricity have been reduced to scientific knowledge. The certainty of causing death by it, under conditions easily arranged and well-known, is attested by all electricians. A thousand volts is the maximum current of electricity which the human system can receive without fatal results, whereas, the wires which feed the lamps with which our streets are lighted, carry a current of 2,300 volts. Such wires, conducted to the execution-room in this institution, from an electric light station, (at a nominal expense), leave nothing but simple details to be
arranged for satisfactory executions. The criminal to be executed could be placed in a chair, with his head resting against a bulb at one end of the wires, and with his bare feet upon a metallic plate, the terminal of the other wire. The pressure of a button or the moving of a switch brings the doomed convict within the circuit of death, which is at once rapid, painless and certain. By means of a mechanical device at the dynamo-rooms it can be determined at all times whether the wires are intact and the current in full force. Thus, at the moment before the time of execution, the fatal conditions are determined. The restraining influence upon the criminal class, by this mode of execution, would be as effective as any other method. The mystery of electricity is called upon to explain strange phenomena, and when made the means of execution would be profoundly impressive. (Ohio Annual Report pp. 1063, 1064) (1886)

Convincing as his argument might seem to be, it would not be sufficient to sway the Ohio legislature to accept electrocution as the means of carrying out death sentences for several years to come. Even the term had yet to be invented. Thomas Edison, another early advocate, proposed ampermort, dynamort, and electromort. Eugene Lewis, a New York attorney, suggested electricide or, in deference to the man whose dynamos would be used to effect the deed, westinghouse.

When, in 1896, the legislature could now longer withstand the onslaught of technological change and at last opted for the chair over the rope, the price of
death still had not gone up. For his steady hand on the switch, the warden would receive the familiar fifty dollars of the old hanging times. And yes, apparently the lights really did dim in the prison when the switch was thrown. The penitentiary had its own generating plant and did not use city power.

The first man to die in the chair was not a man at all, but seventeen-year-old Willie Haas, known as the "boy murderer." Haas was an orphaned, illiterate stable boy who had found a position with a young Cincinnati couple named Brady. Shortly after taking the job, Haas, in a crime of passion, raped and murdered Mrs. Brady and then tried to burn down the house to conceal the act.

Haas' execution and that of the next prisoner, William Wiley, who immediately succeeded him, were uneventful. But the warden's statement that electrocution is quick, certain, and humane may have been premature.

The Warden held his watch in his right hand; with his left he reached for the fatal lever, and as he broke it the body of Schiller shot upward as far as the clamps would allow it to go. There was a low hissing sound, as thee 1,750 volts of electricity went coursing through his body. This was continued for seven seconds, then the current was reduced to 250 volts for the remainder of the minute; then the current was shut off, and the body relaxed.
Dr. Thomas, Chief Physician examined the heart, pulse and eyes; five other physicians did the same thing, and all pronounced him dead. The Warden and the spectators filed out of the room and up the long hallway. The attending Guards loosened the clamps and were in the act of laying him on the cooling board but, oh horrors! a stifled sigh comes from the lips! a gurgling sound emanates from the throat!

A courier was quickly dispatched for the Warden; the crowd reassembled; the straps were quickly readjusted. By this time the poor wretch was breathing quite normally. At this juncture it was discovered that the current had been shut off at the prison power house. A messenger was dispatched posthaste to the plant, a distance of several hundred yards. At last all was once more in readiness. Again the lever shot upward; again the 1.750 volts of electricity went scorching and singeing through the body of Michael Schiller. This time the high voltage was continued for fifteen seconds, then reduced to 250 for the remainder of the minute. This time the doctors made a thorough and careful inspection, and after examining the body for twelve minutes, all declared that he was dead beyond the shadow of a doubt. Once more the crowd dispersed; the body was lifted from the Chair and placed upon the floor to await the coming of the undertaker. The Warden had reached his office, and a majority of the crowd had started home. The attending Guards were just turning to leave the execution room, after placing a sheet over the prostrate form, when a stifled groan was heard from beneath the sheet. The Guards were horror-stricken, and looked in terror at one another. Again, the gurgling sound was heard to come from the throat. O'Brien raised the sheet, and a sickening sight met his gaze. The man was gasping and struggling for breath. Again the
Warden was summoned. This time he and the attending Physicians came alone.

Suffice it to say that the voltage was increased to such an extent that no human being could come in contact with it and live. The increased voltage literally burned the top of the head to a crisp. (Michael Schiller - executed June 17, 1904) (Fogle pp. 196-198)

A hand reached for the lever and 1750 volts of the fiery current was turned into the murderer's body. The form stiffened, the hands clutched, and when the current was turned off they relaxed. An examination by the Physician soon disclosed the fact that the man was still living. Dr. Thomas stepped quickly back, and signaled the Deputy Warden to again turn on the current. This time the current was turned on with such force that sparks of fire flew from the head and lower limbs. This high voltage was continued for four seconds. Again the current was turned off. Chief Physician Thomas again examined the body; the heart was still beating. Again the high voltage was turned on and remained until a sickening odor of burning flesh filled the room. Then after a wait of four minutes the Physician finally pronounced the man dead. (Henry White - executed July 19, 1907) (Fogle p. 264)
Figure 42. Death chamber, postcard. SC763 at The Ohio Historical Society
Figure 43. Electric chair, p. 245 (Columbus Dispatch Photograph Collection) Box 2, Folder 25, at The Ohio Historical Society. Credit: Ohio Historical Society/Columbus Dispatch.
Figure 44. Electrocution scene. Souvenir of the Ohio Penitentiary. Columbus: Ohio Penitentiary, 1899
THE CANES

Probably the most fascinating and macabre incident associated with this institution is that of the infamous canes manufactured at the penitentiary. With justifiable cynicism, the question may be posed as to whether the topic properly belongs in a section by itself or should be included in the one dealing with prison labor and its products. The act, if it occurred (and based on the details provided and the volume and diversity of testimony makes it appear very likely), ranks in infamy and shame with the atrocities of the Final Solution, although on a much smaller scale.
Figure 45. Illustration from Brutality and Barbarism! The Skinning of Dead Convicts in the Ohio Penitentiary. N.p.: n.p. [1886?]
Affidavit of F. W. Nye

State of Ohio, Franklin County, ss.

Personally appeared before me F.W. Nye, who being duly sworn, deposes and says that: On July 5, 1884, I was committed to the hospital of the Ohio Penitentiary, in which place I have remained ever since. About November of 1884, having partially recovered from a complication of troubles under the direction of Dr. C.R. Montgomery, the physician in charge of the hospital, I began to work at my trade, which is that of a cabinet-maker, from time to time as my health would permit, working in a small and private side room in which is placed the clothing of the prisoners who are confined in the hospital, working under the direction of the hospital officials and upon pieces of cabinet work principally for their individual use. During this time I was frequently directed by Doctor Montgomery and Assistant Doctor W.W. Homes, to aid in removing the remains of the deceased prisoners to what is known as the morgue or dead-house, and in the case of many of these prisoners whose remains it was known would not be called for, I was directed by these officials to skin the body and the sides and back for use in making canes or walking-sticks. I took skin from not less than seven or eight different bodies of deceased prisoners under the immediate direction and instructions of Drs. C.R. Montgomery and W.W. Homes.

After so taking the skins I would bring them in a basket to my private work-room (known as "the shed"), where I would cut the skins into strips in order that they might become seasoned quicker than if I left them in the entire piece. I would put these strips of skin into a basket that I would hang
high up on the inside of a narrow, open window in the shed in order that the air circulating through would quickly season and fit them for use in the manufacture of canes. When the skin became seasoned in a degree to allow of their being worked up, I would cut them into small, square pieces and perforate each piece in the center for a steel rod to pass through, after which, by planing and paring, neat walking sticks would be produced, averaging in size from 1/4 of an inch at the bottom to 5/8 of an inch at the top.

In making the canes I would first put five or six pieces of leather on the bottom of the steel rod, next the ferrule, and then add about six pieces of the human skin, alternating about every sixth piece of human skin with one layer of calf skin. In some of the sticks there was more of the calf skin. After fitting about four inches of the skin and leather on the steel rod I would hammer and compress it as much as possible, and so on until the rod was filled. I was at times assisted in this work by other prisoners. In compressing and tightening the skins I would hammer them with a brass block weighing about two pounds that fit over the rod, and in doing this the fat or oily substance would spurt and ooze out, greasing the floor and so sickening me that I was often compelled to quit work; and by by the advice and instructions of the said Montgomery and Homes, I would take strong drinks of whisky, which were furnished by them in six-ounce phials, as a remedy for such sickness. At other times I was compelled to go to bed for days at a time, on account of the offensive character of this work.

Under the directions of the said Montgomery and Homes I made five canes as above described, two of which I delivered to the said Montgomery and two to the said Homes, one remaining in
my possession, and which is hereby surrendered for the Governor, for whom this statement is voluntarily made. The cane surrendered with this statement is composed of skins taken from the body of an Irish prisoner named Joseph McCoy, who was serving a term of imprisonment under sentence from the Stark County Common Pleas court, and who died in October, 1885, and the body of a colored man named John W. Slater, who was serving a term of imprisonment under sentence from the Scioto county Common Pleas court, and who died in November, 1885. As a further evidence of the brutal and inhuman conduct of the said Montgomery, who was the chief prison physician, I desire to say he would frequently remark to me while standing at the bedside of dying prisoners, "I guess he would make a good stick," meaning that the dying prisoner's skin would make a good cane.

Frederick W. Nye

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence by the said Frederick W. Nye, this 20th day of September, 1886.

George A. Beaton
Notary Public, Franklin County, O.
(Brutality and Barbarism p. 2) (1886)

Governor Foraker had the cane made from McCoy and Slater examined by Dr. D. N. Kinsman of Columbus who, after examining pieces of the skin under a microscope, pronounced them to be from "a white person," "a colored person," and "some animal." Nye's statement was corroborated by a deposition from Edward Savanac, night nurse and cook at the penitentiary hospital, who had
observed Nye at his work. Another affidavit was adduced, this time being from the landlord of Dr. Montgomery's office, Joel Skillen, in which Skillen affirms he was present at an autopsy at the prison during which Montgomery removed the skin of the corpse and placed it in a basket. Further statements by a prisoner patient and a former guard attest to the horrible stench in the hospital from Nye's cane works.

Ostensibly Montgomery had even grander plans for one pelt. John Faulhaber, foreman of the Oak Leather Company in Columbus, told in his deposition how Montgomery came to the tannery and implored him to tan the hide of a convict who was to be executed, saying he wanted to mount it and promising to pay liberally. The prison clerk reported that the skinning story frequently circulated around the institution, and a Columbus barber said he had a razor strop apparently made from human skin that he had come by through a young physician at the penitentiary.

When questioned about the matter, Drs. Montgomery and Homes denied the allegations, but gave curiously contradictory statements about the disposition of the bodies of McCoy and Slater. Montgomery said they were buried, while Homes said they went to Columbus medical colleges for anatomy demonstrations.
Conclusion

Our tour is now concluded. But the infamous history of the Ohio Penitentiary did not cease with the advent of the twentieth century. In many ways, some of the greatest horrors (in terms of scale) were yet to occur: severe rioting; the most deadly prison fire in American history, during which 322 inmates would perish; overcrowded conditions that would have a facility that was strained at 2,000 prisoners swell to two and a half times that number; and nearly 300 additional deaths in the electric chair. However, the brutal conditions in the workshops and the fiendish punishments would eventually be swept away and appear now to persist principally in the developing nations of the Third World. But the United States was a developing nation at that point in its history, having recently emerged from the convulsions of an industrial revolution. Perhaps such conditions are an unfortunate phenomenon—a horrible but inevitable side effect of a civilization's rite of passage. Only recently Congress hesitated on whether to
confer most-favored nation trade status on China because of that country’s use of prison labor. If such a phenomenon is unavoidable, let us hope that all civilizations’ evolution is as swift and painless as possible.

Throughout this work, it may have at times appeared as if the author were an apologist for the prisoners or even their advocate, giving short shrift to crimes and placing the blame on the institution. This was not by design. Many of the convicts, especially those sentenced for capital offenses were brutal men who had committed brutal acts. To the author, the curious anomaly was that society in the agency of the penitentiary often seemed to be engaged with these men in a demonic contest of barbarity. While a desire for retribution may be understandable, it is never commendable. As we have often been told, the measure of a society’s greatness consists not so much in its treatment of the best of its citizens but the humanity and compassion extended to the worst.
PITY THE PRISONERS.

God pity the wretched prisoners
In their lonely cells this day;
Whatever the sins that tripped them,
    God pity them still, I say.

Only a gleam of sunshine,
    Cleft by the rusty bars;
Only a patch of azure,
    Only a cluster of stars.

Only a barren future,
    To starve their hopes upon,
Only stinging memories
    Of a past that's better gone.

Only scorn from woman,
    Only hate from man.
Only remorse to whisper
    Of a life that might have been.

Once they were little children;
    Perhaps their untrained feet
Were led by gentle mother
    Towards the "golden street."

Therefore, if in life's forest
    They since have lost their way,
For the sake of her who loved them
    God pity them still, I say.

And you who judge so harshly,
    Are you sure the stumbling stone
That tripped the feet of others
    May not have bruised your own?

Are you sure the sad-faced angel
    Who writes our errors down
Will ascribe to you more honor
    Than him on whom you frown? (Victor p. 53)
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