

History of Detention in Brooklyn

In 1686, exactly 270 years ago, a small unpretentious building was erected in Flatbush as the first county jail and courthouse. This building, together with the second Flatbush county jail and courthouse, erected in 1758, was an example of the punitive attitude of the community toward prisoners. Although it was larger and more pretentious, the second jail was, penologically speaking, no improvement over the first. It was two stories high; the lower floor being the jail, with the court room on the second story.

The jail itself was grim and gloomy, lighted only by two grated windows opening into the street or common. Something between a dungeon and a blockhouse, it was constructed of heavy oak planks, fastened to solid timbers of the same by heavy wrought-iron spikes driven a few inches apart. The floor was made of heavy oak timbers, about five inches thick; the planks running diagonally, and defended by heavy



At the old Brooklyn House of Detention for Men (Raymond Street Jail) the overcrowded conditions make it necessary to house two adult trial prisoners in a cell originally planned for one. Adolescents are housed one man to an individual cell.



The "Yard-walk" at the old Brooklyn House of Detention for Men (Raymond Street Jail). Only during clement weather can the adult and adolescent offenders use the open yard area (at different hours and separate from each other) for limited periods of time. Indoor recreation areas are limited to the "flats" of the various cell block corridors.

iron bars, running horizontally across the door. Towards the top of the door was a diamond-shaped opening, about eight inches in area, strongly bound by iron. The hinges and lock were very heavy; taken together, the door was a massive unwieldy affair.

Prisoners were herded into this dungeon with no thought of the misery they would endure and with no recognition of the fact that these same ponderous doors would some day open to readmit them to the community worsened and embittered by their experience.

These prison outcasts were held in so little human regard that during the Revolutionary War while the British were in possession of Long Island, the upstairs court room above the jail was converted into a ballroom. Here for several years elegant English officers, with their wives, daughters, and the wives and daughters of their Tory friends, joined to trip the light fantastic with no thought of the prisoners below.

In 1793 this building was replaced by the third courthouse and jail at Flatbush. The new building, much larger than its predecessor, in keeping with the increased wealth and population of the county, was built on much the same philosophy. It had a double pitch or curved roof, and was surmounted by a small