

**HOW BROOKLYN HOUSE OF DETENTION FOR MEN  
CAME TO OPEN AS NYC'S CENTRALIZED  
ADOLESCENT REMAND SHELTER 55 YEARS AGO**



**AS SEEN IN DOC ANNUAL REPORTS 1948 - 1957 &  
OTHER DOCUMENTS REVIEWED UPON  
THE OCCASION OF THE JAIL'S REOPENING IN 2012**



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Originally intended to replace the ancient and thoroughly inadequate Raymond Street Jail as the holding facility for all unbailed male defendants awaiting adjudication in Kings County criminal cases, the much-needed but long-delayed Brooklyn House of Detention for Men (BkHDM) was used instead as a remand shelter for adolescents from all five New York City boroughs during its first 11 years and eight months of operation -- from January 1957 into September 1968.

Before its actual construction in the mid-1950s, BkHDM existed years earlier on paper in various reports, capital budgets, blueprints, newspaper accounts, et al and existed in the minds of those involved in bringing about the related paper work. This limited study of some of that paper work illustrates how a jail construction project can undergo zigzags before, during and even after it is built. The case in point: how a borough House of Detention for Men became the city's Adolescent Remand Shelter.

**1st of Many Plan 'Modifications'**

Among the earliest recorded BkHDM references found in NYC Department of Correction (DOC) annual reports is a brief paragraph that appeared in Commissioner Albert Williams' Jan. 1, 1949 cover letter formally submitting to Mayor William O'Dwyer the agency's review of its operations during 1948 :

**I am also pleased to report that the plans for the proposed City Prison Brooklyn and Remand Shelter are now approximately 95 percent completed. As a result of constant study, we have been able to modify the original plans, thereby realizing a considerable savings for the city. [1948 DOC annual report, Page 2]**

Additional details why modifications became necessary emerges in the Capital Program section of the 1948 report:

**The Capital Budget Program of the Department of Correction has taken a pronounced step forward with the continued planning for the new City Prison Brooklyn and Remand Shelter -- estimated cost: \$6,600,000. Due to conditions beyond our control, a change of site was ordered. This change materially increased the functional value of the project. Final drawings are now underway, and the architect expects to file completed plans and specifications for the job by the end of February. [1948 DOC annual report, Page 18.]**

What change of site? A *New York Times* story of Nov. 25, 1947 makes clear that originally the plans called for constructing the new jail on Boerum Place between State and Schemerhorn Streets about block away from its eventual location on Atlantic Avenue between Boerum Place and Smith Street. Also the structure originally was to stand 12 stories, not 11.

All but \$52,500 of the agency's Capital Budget for 1948 -- \$280,896 -- went into furthering the "New City Prison Brooklyn and Remand Shelter."

### **From Moving Forward to Marching in Place**

The following year's annual report likewise spoke optimistically about the project's progress. Commissioner Williams' Jan. 1, 1950 transmittal letter covering the 1949 report's submission to the mayor declared:

**I am further pleased to report that on October 1, 1949, the architect completed final contract drawings and specifications for the erection of the New City Prison Brooklyn and Remand Shelter. Demolition of existing buildings on the site is almost completed and construction should commence next spring. [1949 DOC annual report, Page 3.]**

The report's Bureau of Engineering section provided additional details:

**The final contracts, plans and specifications for the erection of the New City Prison for Male Adults and Remand Shelter, Brooklyn, have been submitted**

**for the approval of the Board of Estimate by the Department of Public Works. The site has been purchased, demolition contracts awarded, and clearance of the site practically completed. Construction of the new prison is scheduled to start in the early part of 1950. [1949 DOC annual report, Page 22.]**

Of the \$3,287,604 allocated in the 1949 Capital Budget for the estimated \$6.6 million project, only \$476,438 was actually expended in 1949. But only six months after Commissioner Williams' Jan. 1, 1950 expression of optimism that BkHDM construction would begin soon an event took place half way around the globe that put the project on hold.

The Cold War turned hot with the invasion of South Korea by North Koreans, backed by Communist China and the Soviet Union. Led by the U.S., the United Nations came to South Korea's defense. In addition to the tragic human toll (lives lost, injuries suffered, families devastated), that war/police action also resulted in vast governmental disruptions of different kinds -- some major, some minor -- throughout the world. One such disruption was postponement of BkHDM.

DOC's 1950 annual report, submitted to Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri by Commissioner Williams Jan. 1, 1951, declared:

**Final plans, specifications, proposed contracts and estimates of costs have been approved by the Board of Estimate for the erection of the new City Prison Brooklyn for Male Adults and Remand Shelter. The site for this construction has been cleared and operations were scheduled to start in the early part of 1950. However, in view of the National Defense situation, this project has been held in abeyance and tentatively postponed. When complete this new City Prison will symbolize "Modern Penology in Action." [1950 DOC annual report, Page 6.]**

The very next sentences in the report dealt with establishment of a Civil Defense Unit within the Department.

Further on in the report, the Capital Budget section noted, referring to City Prison Brooklyn, aka C-58:

This project adopted by the City Planning Commission for 1950 has been tentatively postponed for the 1952 Capital Budget because of the National Defense situation. The estimated costs have been revised upward, based on bids received. *[1950 DOC annual report, Page 22.]*

The total estimated cost for C-58 rose from \$6,370,755 to \$7,181,240. Appropriated as of Dec. 27, 1950: \$511,239 city funds; \$216,000 federal funds. Actual expenditure 1950: \$15,500.

Concerning BkHDM, nothing was notable in DOC's 1951 annual report -- quite literally. A zero -- 0 -- sat in the 1951 Capital Budget column on the Project C-58 line on Page 22 in that report submitted to Mayor Impellitteri by Commissioner Williams Jan. 1, 1952.

Ten days later the Commissioner issued yet another department document, somewhat similar in style to the annual reports. But this one covered his heading DOC since Dec. 26, 1946. Williams entitled this opus "Five Years of Progress."

## **2 Commissioners, 2 Different Views**

Interestingly, the only mention of the postponed BkHDM was buried on Page 66 of the 70-page document that Williams described in his Foreword as "a record of achievement of the Department of Correction under the administration of the present Commissioner."

The one paragraph reference to BkHDM reviewed the project's history up that point and expressed the "hope that national conditions will improve sufficiently to permit resumption of the necessary [construction] work."

In the 1952 annual report, submitted Jan. 1, 1953, Williams happily declared:

However, we were fortunate during the year in having this [BkHDM] project restored to the 1953 Capital Budget of the Department. This gives indication that work on this greatly need-

ed project will commence during 1953. The new institution, estimated to cost \$9,666,214 will replace the century-old "Raymond Street Jail" which is a relic of the era when prisons functioned as houses of retribution.

It will include all features of modern prison construction, being the result of long and careful study and planning, and will accommodate 817 prisoners awaiting court action, with possibilities of further expansion should the need arise. *[1952 DOC annual report, Page 2.]*

Anna M. Kross (AMK) took quite a different view of the planning which had gone into BkHDM project. In the 1953 annual report, submitted to Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. Jan. 1, 1954, the first of a dozen during her long tenure, AMK wrote:

Overcrowding will, to some extent, be ameliorated when the new City Prisons in Brooklyn and in Queens are completed. It should be stressed, however, that the original plans for these institutions, neither took adequate cognizance of the rising trend of crime and commitment to prisons, nor even the normal prison population increase concomitant with the increase in the population.

We are asking, therefore, that the plans for both prisons -- that for Brooklyn prison within the limits imposed by the late stage of its construction planning -- and that for the Queens prison, be reconsidered in every aspect as regards to capacity, costs as affected by maximum security cellular construction, and provision for inmate education, recreation and occupation . . . .

We are requesting inclusion in the Capital Outlay of two new projects, a remand shelter for adolescents from all courts in all Boroughs, in order to remove them from the jails for adults and to make possible the initiation of a program of rehabilitation from the first day of their incarceration, and an institution for sentenced women, to remove them from the overcrowded House of Detention for Women. *[1953 DOC annual report, Page iv.]*

The report, in a Capital Outlay Projects section paragraph tagged "In Progress," noted concerning New City Prison for Male Adults and Remand Shelter, Brooklyn, that:

The contract for the foundations and structural steel was let for the sum of \$1,049,497. The date set for commencement of this work was Dec. 15, 1953 . . . It represents some advances in penal architecture but makes no provision for relieving idleness among prisoners awaiting trial and sentence. Plans for the unit were too far advanced by January 1, 1954, to permit inclusion of "all" necessary modifications deemed important by this Administration. This Administration is concerned with the high proportion of maximum security cell construction planned with its consequent high costs and is reviewing this aspect of the architectural plans. *[1953 DOC annual report, Page 8.]*

To appreciate more fully the striking contrast between Commissioner Williams' 1953 remarks praising the BkHDM project's plans and Commissioner Kross' highly critical comments concerning its plans, mention must be made of the larger political context.

Williams' wrote his comments in 1953, the year Mayor Impellitteri was seeking re-election, again as an independent candidate backed by neither major party. His Tammany Hall-backed Democratic Party opponent Wagner eventually won.

Kross, as Wagner's appointee to head DOC, therefore had the freedom from Day 1 as Commissioner (Jan. 1, 1954) to criticize the prior city administration's planning of her agency's facilities already on the drawing boards and in contract. The 1953 annual report, on which she signed off Jan.1, 1954, evidently after much personal in-put, covered the last year Williams served as Correction Commissioner under Impellitteri.

### **Adolescents a Top Priority with AMK**

The annual report for 1954 which Kross submitted to Mayor Wagner on Jan. 1, 1955, covered her first full year as commissioner. Her letter of transmittal called attention to that fact:

**When we took office on January 1, 1954 the problems facing us seemed complex and difficult, but it was only as time went on that the full meaning of the situation became apparent . . . The physical facilities of the Department had been permitted to deteriorate to a dangerous stage . . . there must be . . . provision of adequate and proper facilities for detention and rehabilitation. [1954 DOC annual report digest, Page 3.]**

Two of the five numbered priority goals -- Numbers 2 and 3 -- that her 1954 report listed under "New Program Services" envisioned the agency having new centralized facilities for adolescent inmates:

- 2. The need of a separate remand shelter for detained adolescents, to obviate the necessity of detaining them in inadequate adult city prisons. and to provide for their diagnostic study.**

classification and constructive activity while awaiting court action.

3. The need of a new training school for adolescents to be located in the metropolitan area, in place of the separation of adolescent programs between the Reformatory at Hampton Farms. N. Y. and the Penitentiary. [1954 DOC annual report digest, Page 8.]

Included in her 1954 report was a reprint of a three-part *New York Times* series (Dec. 27-29, 1954) by Russell Porter focused on her efforts to deal with overcrowding in DOC facilities and its adverse impact on the agency's ability to be also correctional, not just custodial.

He wrote in the December 28th article:

**She also has asked the city to provide funds for a new remand shelter for all adolescents from all courts and all boroughs of the city. Her plan here is to separate all adolescents from the adult detention prisons and their danger of moral contamination and further education in crime. The remand shelter also would be in an area with sufficient indoor and outdoor space to provide rehabilitation for adolescents from the beginning of their incarceration. Petty casual offenders and first offenders among adolescents would also be kept separate from teenage criminals and repeaters.**

**Removal of the adolescents would relieve some of the pressure on the detention prisons where inmates are held to await court action, such as indictment, trial and sentence. Little has been done to solve the overcrowding problem among these prisoners except to pack them in tighter and tighter.**

**"About all we can do now," Commissioner Kross has said, "is to make a daily check of the census, and when the overcrowding is bad, send adolescents to Rikers Island. No inmates under 21 years of age are doubled up in cells. But we have to double up adults at Rikers Island to provide a special cell block for adolescents."**

**The Commissioner is pressing for completion of the new City Prison, Brooklyn, now under construction and scheduled to open in 1956. It will have a capacity of 817, compared with 465 in the old Raymond Street Jail it will replace. [1954 DOC annual report digest, Pages vi & vii.]**

The reporter's reference to Kross pushing the BkHDM project to completion comes immediately after his four paragraphs about her seeking a separate adolescent remand shelter for all teen detainees. But his story (and therefore presumably her comments to him also) stopped short of connecting (a) her goal of opening a centralized adolescent detention center with (b) the Brooklyn facility under construction.



The two -- the BkHDM project and the goal of having citywide teen detainee facility -- also remained unconnected in her 1954 report. The report's reference to jail's construction taking place was relatively brief:

**NEW INSTITUTION:** Scheduled to replace the old Raymond Street Jail is the new City Prison and Remand Shelter now in process of construction. The new facility, estimated to cost \$10,848,000, should be completed during the early part of 1956.

**MODIFICATION OF PLANS:** The letting of contracts and actual construction were well under way when this [administration] took office in January 1954. Certain modifications, that still could be effected in the new institution, have now been made by the Department, such as restricting maximum physical security features to selected groups of cases, with consequent economies. Quarters, originally set aside for a warden's residence, have been designated as office space for borough social service agencies serving prisoners and their families. A laundry, originally omitted from the plans was restored. [1954 DOC annual report digest, Page 39.]

With regard to the BkHDM project and the goal of a single remand shelter for the city's adolescent detainees, Kross' 1955 annual report, submitted to Wagner Jan. 1, 1956, followed in some respects the same pattern as the previous year's report.

### **BkHDM, Central Remand Shelter Still Unconnected**

AMK again bemoaned the planning that the prior administration had done on the design of the new facility being built to replace the ancient Raymond Street Jail, her contention being that it had neither sufficient inmate housing capacity nor sufficient inmate rehabilitation programs space. She again noted the project had been too far advanced for her to make any more than a few relatively minor modifications.

Kross again had the annual report reprint a series of articles by a major daily newspaper about the lack of adequate and appropriate facilities and programs for the city's jailed population, particularly women and adolescents. This time the publication was the *World Telegram & Sun*, the by-lined writer was Alan Keller, and the five articles ran Feb. 7 through Feb. 11, 1955. In the last article of the series, Keller noted that a few weeks earlier Mrs. Kross had obtained funding

. . . . from the Board of Estimate for initial planning for the building of a new facility for adolescents. Later she was given \$109,000 from the regular expense budget to hire personnel and initiate better rehabilitation work. *[1955 DOC annual report, Page xxii.]*

Kross' 1955 report showed, under Capital Outlay Budget, some \$310,000 allocated to "Project C-74 Adolescent Remand Shelters, including sites," with an overall projected price tag of \$9,970,000. The Commissioner explained:

**Project C-74:** It is planned to build a new Adolescent Remand in the Bronx. The major portion of land for this Shelter has been acquired and the Department of Public Works has asked this department to submit its recommendations for planning . . . . .

This Shelter will provide suitable detention facilities for male adolescents 16 - 21 awaiting action of the courts, and will make it possible to segregate them from adult inmates in our prison system.

At the present time, rehabilitative assistance for young people in detention is inadequate largely because of limitations of physical facilities . . . . . The plan for a remand shelter for young offenders is a major plank in our program for prison rehabilitation and treatment. *[1955 DOC annual report, Page 16.]*

### **AMK's Fascinating Bifurcated 1956 Report**

Kross' 1956 annual report, submitted to Wagner on Jan. 1, 1957, is a fascinating bifurcated document in the way it treats the completion of BkHDM construction and the pending opening of it as the city's centralized Adolescent Remand Shelter.

One can read the entire **12**-page section (Pages 34 through 45) devoted to the completion of its construction, the history of Brooklyn detention facilities that preceded it, a virtual tour of its various floors via text, drawings and photos but find none of the sharp criticisms that Kross had aired in annual reports 1953, 1954 and 1955 about the prior administration's poor planning of it. Nor can the reader detect in those **12** pages that the building constructed to be the Brooklyn House of Detention for Men would not open as such.

But when one turns to the next section of the 1956 report, five pages (46 through 50) devoted to “The Adolescent in Detention,” the 180 degree turn-around emerges full force, complete with a tic-tock daily schedule of morning, afternoon and evening activities for the young inmates, including diagnostic and counseling services.

All **17** pages just mentioned appear as part of this New York Correction History Society (NYCHS) presentation’s web version.

A shorter version of the justification appears on page 52 of the 1956 report under “1957 Departmental Capital Budget Projects:”

**Capital Budget Project C-58  
Brooklyn House of Detention for Men**

The new Brooklyn House of Detention for Men at 275 Atlantic Avenue is the first project to be completed under this ten year plan. The actual construction of this institution was well under way when this administration took office in January 1954 . It was dedicated on December 4, 1956. and is scheduled to be opened at the beginning of 1957.

This new detention institution is now in the stage of final completion and initial occupation by our maintenance and operatilig staff took place on December 17, 1956. Before official occupancy, equipment will be tested, operated and balanced by our personnel who operate and maintain this plaint in the future.

<b>1957 Capital Budget</b>	
<b>Total Estimated Cost . . . .</b>	<b>\$10.641.722.75</b>
<b>1957 Capital Budget . . . . .</b>	<b>50.000.00</b>

The new Bronx Adolescent Remand Shelter (Capital Budget Project C-74), which is still in the formative stage,will not be available for use by this department for several years.

In the interim, in view of the prevailing adolescent problem throughout our

various institutions, the department proposes to centralize the rehabilitation activities of the various city detention institutions under one roof at the new Brooklyn House of Detention for Men. This centralization of rehabilitation activities for adolescents in detention will enable us to make more effective use of our existing professional staff and will permit us to take advantage of the modern facilities 28 day rooms, 2 gymnasiums, a library, study hall, 2 recreation roofs, and an auditorium with chapel accoutrements.

A detailed description of the new Brooklyn House of Detention for Men and an account of the program activities planned there will be found in another section of this report specifically referring to this institution. *[1956 DOC annual report, Page 52.]*

Kross' 1957 annual report, submitted to the mayor Jan. 1, 1958, devoted seven pages (59 through 65) to "The Brooklyn House of Detention for Men; Interim Remand Shelter for Adolescents (16-21)." The section began with an aerial photo whose caption included the information that "it received its first prisoners Jan. 21, 1957."

### **'Interim' Period Lasted Nearly a Dozen Years**

The Adolescent Remand Shelter's "interim" stay at the BkHDM building lasted 11 years and eight months. It ended the weekend of Sept. 20 - 23, 1968, during the administration of Mayor John V. Lindsay. The story of that ending has been on the NYCHS web site for more than a decade as part of the history of C-76, now known as the Eric M. Taylor Center. Here are excerpts from that web page:

The late 1968 issue of *Correction Sidelights*, the DOC newsletter, carried a full-page story on the name and mission change that was part of a much larger re-shuffling of facility functions and populations . . . . Here are excerpts from the 1968 newsletter story:

#### **4,180 Prisoners Transferred**

The largest transfer of prisoners in the City's history occurred over the weekend of September 20 to September 23 [1968] when 4,180 prisoners were transported by prison vans, buses and cars between and among 8 of the 9 major correctional institutions. No advance announcement of the mass transfer was made for security reasons.

The Commissioner [George F. McGrath] designated the New York City Correctional Institution for Men as the Adolescent Remand Shelter pending the construction of this institution on Rikers Island in approximately three years. With the unprecedented overcrowding in the detention institutions, the Department felt it expedient to house the adolescent (16 - 21) inmate population all in one central location: The detention adolescent at the New York City Correctional Institution for Men and the sentenced adolescent at the New York City Reformatory, both on Rikers Island.

The adult Brooklyn detention cases, which had been scattered throughout the City of New York creating a departmental transportation problem, were returned to the Brooklyn House of Detention for Men in the County of original jurisdiction of their cases.

The scattering of these prisoners throughout the City in the past 11 years has occasioned much complaint from visiting relatives and friends, attorneys and the courts.

Another distinctive advantage is the fact that the Rikers Island institution is much better suited for the custody, care and rehabilitation of the adolescent accused of crime, than is the Brooklyn House of Detention for Men. It was not designed to provide programs for an adolescent detention population. . . .

What becomes readily apparent from this very cursory study of documents associated with the BkHDM project is that different municipal administrations and different DOC commissioners often revise and even reverse facility use plans of their predecessors as they devise different responses to much the same challenges that continue from one year to the next, one decade to the next.

A passing observer might argue that Commissioner McGrath's restoration of BkHDM to its originally intended mission and his centralizing adolescent detention in one of Rikers' existing facilities while a permanent ado-

lescent detention center was being built on the island made more sense than Kross' scattering Brooklyn's adult male detainees throughout DOC's other facilities around the city. However, such an observation would reflect overlooking a few important facts.

The Rikers facility into which McGrath moved the teen inmates from the Brooklyn House did not exist when Kross made her decision in 1956. But AMK did oversee its construction to completion in the early 1960s. So she did not have as many options available to her as her successor had available to him 11 years and eight months later.

Additionally, unlike McGrath she did not have a bridge to Rikers that would facilitate many matters related to centralizing adolescent detention on the island. But as with C-76, she oversaw construction of the bridge to virtual completion. In a sense, Kross made possible the move McGrath made.

Finally, AMK set a priority on adolescent detainees, especially first offenders. She saw them as representing society's best chance for nipping lives of crime at their budding and its best hope of instead redirecting youth along constructive channels. Without apology, she gave adolescents preference in planning the uses to which she put the facilities, programs and services at her command.

-- Thomas C. McCarthy  
-- [www.correctionhistory.org](http://www.correctionhistory.org) webmaster  
February, 2012