

# THE CITY RECORD.

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## DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION.

Report for the Quarter ending March 31, 1896.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, No. 66 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, April 10, 1896. Hon. WILLIAM L. STRONG, Mayor of New York:  
DEAR SIR—In pursuance of section 27, chapter 335, Laws of 1873, I have the honor to transmit the following report of the operations and transactions of the Department of Correction for the three months ending March 31, 1896.  
Yours, very respectfully,  
ROBERT J. WRIGHT, Commissioner.  
Census Report for Quarter ending March 31, 1896.

INSTITUTIONS	Remaind. Dec. 31	Admitted	Dis- charged	Trans- ferred	Returned	Died	Es- cap'd	Par- doned	Remaind. Mar. 31
City Prison	455	4,443	2,307	1,938	...	...	...	...	463
District Prisons	176	10,272	4,263	5,665	...	...	...	...	199
Penitentiary	1,019	4,133	2,653	...	...	1	1	3	1,139
Workhouse	960	6,073	3,516	2,360	...	10	2	...	1,135
	2,650	21,031	10,474	10,264	...	11	3	3	2,926

NOTE.—In above report number given as "Transferred" from Workhouse means those inmates working at institutions of Department of Public Charities, under the care and supervision of Workhouse Keepers, and those detailed for labor at City Prisons.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, 66 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, March 10, 1896.



DOC's first report in 1896 City Record detailed inmate count.

## Ch.912 Redefined Roles For Charities, Correction

(Continued from Page 1) the penitentiary and to other prisons and institutions under the direction of the department of correction." The chapter gave the Correction Department commissioner "all the authority concerning the care, custody and disposition of all criminals and misdemeanants in the city and county of New York which the commissioners of public charities and correction now have ...



Blackwell's Island inmate workshops

"He shall have the general charge and direction of all prisons and other institutions for the care and custody of criminals and misdemeanants which belong or shall belong to the city and county of New York.

"Said department shall be authorized to demand and receive all fines imposed for intoxication and disorderly conduct ... "

The law authorized the Correction Commissioner to arrange to provide inmate labor for the service needs of the Charities Department institutions' "grounds and buildings" but not "in any ward of any hospital."

It required the city to devise a plan for dividing properties and personnel of the combined department between the two emerging departments:

"In such plan the city prisons, the penitentiary and the workhouse, with the grounds thereto appertaining, and the stone quarry on Blackwell's island, and Riker's island, shall be assigned to the department of correction."

Among assignments to Public Charities were "the hospitals and asylums on Blackwell's island, Ward's island and Randall's island, the branch lunatic asylum on Hart's island and the farm at Central Islip, Long Island."

Further sections of the chapter provided for the eventual realignment of island properties so that Blackwell's island would become, in effect, more Charities Department territory while Rikers and Hart's islands would become more Correction Department territory.

## DOC Ran Both Penitentiary & Workhouse

As far back as 1796, the State Legislature mandated two state prisons: one in Albany; the other, in New York City. The first such New York City-operated state prison was Newgate, opened 1797 in Greenwich Village. In 1816, Newgate was replaced by a penitentiary near Bellevue Hospital. In 1832, the main building of the Blackwell's Penitentiary was erected. In 1848 the Bellevue complex was divided, one reason being the intent to move all its inmates to Blackwell's. A decade later, the north wing was added to Blackwell's Penitentiary.

The complete facility housed nearly a thousand inmates, most serving misdemeanor sentences but all were required to perform some daily labor, the tasks varying according to inmate skills and strengths.

The Blackwell's Workhouse was built in 1852 to replace a century-old similar facility at Bellevue. Containing



Steamboats ferried Blackwell's inmates.

221 cells arranged in tiers along the three-story walls of granite, the building functioned as an institution for punishment of petty violators, many of whom were classified as habitual "drunks and disorderlies," including several who virtually became permanent residents even though the usual stays were counted in days. Most workhouse inmates were assigned work either in the workhouse shops or at other city institutions. However, the DOC-creation law of 1895 specifically declared that workhouse inmates may work on Public Charities grounds and buildings, under the "oversight and direction of keepers, but no inmate of the workhouse shall be employed in any ward of any hospital."



The Workhouse on Blackwell's Island.

## Before Rikers, Blackwell's Was DOC's Island Home

Before Rikers Island became Correction's chief island base, Blackwell's Island filled that role. Blackwell's was the name that for nearly two centuries identified what is now known as Roosevelt Island, whose aerial tramway cable-cars gliding over the East River can be seen from the Queensborough Bridge. The cigar-shaped 120-acre isle beneath the bridge extends 1.75 miles and is 750 feet across at its widest point.

Gov. Van Twiler reported obtaining it for New Amsterdam from native tribal leaders in 1637. Then the Dutch settlers put their pigs to pasture there, generating its early Colonial name of Hog Island. In 1652, a man named Flynn acquired the island but 16 years later a British military captain, John Manning, bought it. Unhappily for him, he presided over the surrender and brief return of the city to Dutch rule in 1673. For this, his sword was later symbolically broken in a City Hall ceremony of disgrace. Afterwards, Manning retired to his island refuge. His stepdaughter married Robert Blackwell who took title to it in 1717.

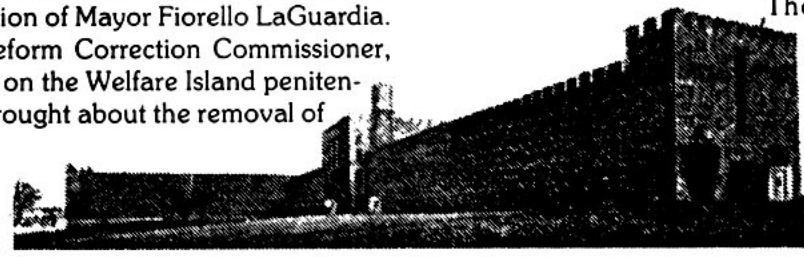
New York City acquired the island on July 19, 1828, through a foreclosure -- later ruled to have been illegal. Total final price: \$52,500. The facilities the city constructed on Blackwell's -- the Charity Hospital, Penitentiary, Alms House, Hospital for Incurables, Workhouse, Asylum for the Insane, among others -- were built of granite in the fortress style from feudal times. All were erected with convict labor as was the seawall around the island.

About the time DOC became a separate agency, Blackwell's housed a population of approximately 7,000 -- inmates and patients. Visitors needed agency permits to come across by the ferry that made the round trip from East 26th St. twice daily. Department steamboats transported inmates between the Tombs and Blackwell's Island.

The Penitentiary stood 600 feet long with a projecting wing on the north side. The main building was constructed with gray stone taken from island quarries. It rose four stories high in a castle-like design and had 800 cells in four tiers back-to-back in the center of the structure.

Scandals in the early 1900s, involving charges of inmate overcrowding, drug-dealing, and favoritism, prompted surface "reforms," including a change made by Aldermen on April 12, 1921, to a more pleasant-sounding name: Welfare Island.

Nevertheless, the Penitentiary remained in place even though the language of the law creating DOC clearly had sought eventual removal of inmates from Blackwell's to Rikers and Hart Islands. That transfer didn't happen in earnest until scandals in the 1930s led to real reform during the administration of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. In January 1934, LaGuardia's reform Correction Commissioner, Austin H. MacCormick, led a raid on the Welfare Island penitentiary to expose conditions. This brought about the removal of all inmates to Rikers Island, where new facilities were just being completed. Welfare Island was turned over exclusively to the care of the aged and the ill.



The Penitentiary on Blackwell's Island.

## Inmate count In 1895: 2,650

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dalls Island, Harlem, Infants, and Metropolitan Hospitals, the Insane Asylums, and Alms-house. Other facilities where inmates worked under Keeper supervision included the Steamboat Department, the Storehouse, Stable, Bakery, City Cemetery, Gashouse, Fire Department, and the Branch Workhouse. Inmate labor gangs worked at various locations unloading coal and manure.  
Mechanical labor, as distinguished from "ordinary labor," also was detailed. For example: The Barge for Homeless Men, carpenters and painters; Almshouse, carpenters, painters, masons and bricklayers; Metropolitan Hospital, carpenters, masons, bricklayers and engineers.

## Reform's Reasons Focused on Patients

(Continued From Page 1)  
the State Charities Aid Association whose leaders made clear their concerns at a hearing held by Mayor Strong Tuesday, May 7, 1895, in City Hall.

They noted the campaign for separation had begun a dozen years earlier with introduction of proposed legislation and that reports by panels probing problems at the Ward's Island Insane Asylum called for just such a division.

Leading social reformer, Mrs. Charles Russell Lowell, said: "Unfortunate men, women and children who, through accident or disease, are thrown upon city charity, should be relieved from the stigma and contamination of association with criminals." Prof. Charles F. Chandler pointed out that the bill did not go as far as reformers wanted in removing inmate work details from the charity institutions, but at least "it does not permit them to be employed as nurses in the hospital. Their employment has always been a crying evil."

Association official, Charles S. Fairchild noted that in all other cities in the state, jails and charitable institutions were operated separately, usually by sheriffs and superintendents of the poor. Fellow association official Carl Schurz declared, "It's a sign of barbarism when jails and almshouses are thrown together under one management; the effort to separate them is a sign of civilization."