

THE CITY RECORD.

OFFICIAL JOURNAL.

Vol. XXIV

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MAY 2, 1896.

NUMBER 6,497.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION.

Report for the Quarter ending March 31, 1896.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, No. 66 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, April 10, 1896. Hon. WILLIAM L. STRONG, Mayor of New York:

THAT SIR—In pursuance of section 27, chapter 333, 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.

CHIEF REPORT FOR QUARTER ENDING MARCH 31, 1896.

INMATE TOTALS	RECEIPTS		DISBURSMENTS		RETIRED	DEPARTED	RECEIVED	RECEIVED
	Admitted	Discharged	Discharged	Retired				
City Prisons	457	4,842	2,707	1,928	11	3	3	493
District Prisons	128	10,923	4,181	5,465	1	1	1	1,199
Penitentiary	7,049	87,713	3,153	8,236	1	1	1	1,139
Workhouse	906	4,062	3,216	2,390	1	1	1	1,135
TOTAL	8,540	32,640	13,257	18,019	4	6	6	8,826

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, May 2, 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 ...

"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.



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 is 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 Twiller 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.

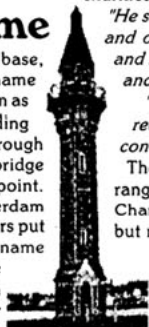
New York City acquired the island on July 19, 1828, through a foreclosure -- later ruled to have been illegal. Total final price: \$52,500. The facilities the city constructed on Blackwell's -- the Charity Hospital, Penitentiary, Alms House, Hospital for Incurables, Workhouse, Asylum for the Insane, 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.



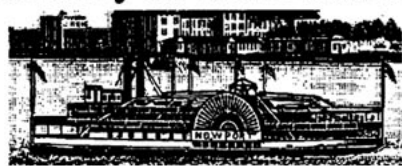
Blackwell's Lighthouse & Warden's House



The Penitentiary on Blackwell's Island.



Blackwell's Island inmate workshops



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."