DISCARDED TREASURES OF AN INFELICITOUS PAST: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE OF JAILS THROUGH THE EXAMPLE OF THE HISTORIC YORK COUNTY JAIL

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THROUGH THE EXAMPLE OF THE HISTORIC YORK COUNTY JAIL

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to generate a set of standards for the preservation and adaptive reuse of Progressive Era Jails (roughly 1880s-1930s) in the United States. It looks briefly at the history of penal reforms, providing the reader with a basic knowledge of the penal system in order to better understand the findings and recommendations presented. Adaptive reuse cases of jails are discussed, followed by a detailed look at Progressive Era jails and their character-defining features, program layout, circulation and supervision components, and structural integrity. Based on these four basic principles, preservation recommendations are given and implemented into a design for the adaptive reuse of the 1906 York County Jail in York County, Pennsylvania.
INTRODUCTION

Jails and prisons commonly represent an aspect of society that Americans try to avoid – a place associated with abuse, corruption, and grief. Yet, these facilities are meant to be places of reformation and repentance. There is a significant interest in the penal system and its built fabric, as historic jails around the country are being destroyed due to their abandonment and negative associations. However, despite their associations with negative social history in America, these structures are essential to the built fabric of the country and are a physical reminder of the social reforms that shaped the penal system used today.

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of preservation by developing a design methodology for the appropriate reuse of this architectural typology. It will first give a brief overview of the prominent penal reforms in America and implications for the architecture of jail design. After looking at adaptive reuse applications of other historic jails, this thesis will propose the adaptive reuse of the abandoned 1906 York County Jail with the objective of bringing the community together through shared values, providing economic growth, and increasing tourism for the town of York, Pennsylvania. Demographic issues, economic rationale, community planning initiatives, and structural implications of the building will be discussed and an architectural design proposal created.
CHAPTER I - THE AMERICAN PENAL SYSTEM

Figure 1 - New Castle County Jail, Delaware, 1897, Whipping Post and Stocks
(Source: wikipedia.com)
It is important to note at the beginning the difference between a jail and a prison. While the terms are often used interchangeably, a jail is a short-term holding facility for, typically, thirty days to a year as well as a place for individuals still awaiting trial. Historically, jails functioned in any space that was available and secure; not necessarily a facility built with the purpose of detention. A prison is a place for criminals who have been convicted to a sentence of over a year and is a structure built specifically for punishment.¹ This thesis will focus on jail construction during the Progressive Era of penal reform in the United States because this was the point at which prisons were becoming the more prevalent means of criminal punishment, though great importance was still being placed on the design and construction of local jails.

While the basic concept of imprisonment can be traced back to the 11th century throughout many countries, and the development of each justice system has changed and advanced in numerous ways, this thesis will explore exclusively the system in the United States, with emphasis on the built environment. This examination of the built fabric will inherently reflect the ideals of each system but will not provide a detailed description of the moral policy of each. A brief history is given in order to equip the reader with the necessary background knowledge of penal reform in order to better understand the preservation initiatives and design scheme applied to the case study in York County, Pennsylvania.

HISTORY

The penal system of the United States during the colonial period, while modeled upon the English legal code, was not as brutal and inhumane. Corporal punishment was mainly used with the belief that public humiliation and bodily harm were the most effective means of condemnation. Capital punishment was still widely used and believed to be the most effective form of retribution for severe crimes. Each colony implemented variants on the English legal code, known throughout the colonies as the American Puritan codes, and each determined capital crimes individually. New York, for example, instituted the Duke of York’s laws, which included eleven capital offenses, and Connecticut enacted the “Blue Laws”, which included fourteen capital offenses. These codes, while intended to deter people from committing crimes altogether, often paradoxically increased the

severity of crimes when they were committed.\(^2\) For instance, theft and murder were both grounds for the death penalty, so thieves had no inhibitions against murdering witnesses of their crime since the punishment would be the same for either act if they were prosecuted.\(^3\)

Jails existed for those convicted of less severe crimes, such as political or religious offenders and debtors, and were a detention center for those awaiting trial. These institutions are known to have been filthy, inhumane places where prisoners would hardly be fed and contracted diseases easily. This environment existed partly because of the political nature of the position of the sheriff. The sheriff would commonly hire friends and family to serve as his staff in the jails instead of more qualified, trained individuals. In addition, these appointed jailers were often not paid a salary and prisoners were encouraged to bribe them, with any means possible, for better living conditions.\(^4\)

Although reform had been evolving in other countries for almost a century, it wasn't until John Howard, a prominent figure in English penal reform, traveled through the colonies from 1773 to 1790, visiting jails and other penal institutions and writing about their construction and administration, that reform was initiated in North America. This change in the way criminals were punished began right after the American Revolution, spreading from Philadelphia throughout the other colonies.

It is because of Howard's travel and descriptive writings that several groups were formed in Philadelphia aimed at prison reform, including The Philadelphia Society for Assisting Distressed Prisoners, The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, and the Society of Friends. Through these organizations, a number of prominent Philadelphia citizens, under the leadership of Benjamin Franklin, advocated for the reduction in the number of capital crimes and the abolition of the death penalty. The New Jersey and Pennsylvania Quaker communities were notably more humane in criminal punishment than other colonies. The Quakers believed only murder to be a legitimate reason for such a harsh sentence as the death penalty. The contributions

\(^2\) Ruddell, American jails: a retrospective examination.


of these groups were the first to influence the idea of substituting imprisonment for corporal
punishment, incarceration as the primary means of criminal penalty and as a place for hard labor,
not idleness, and alleviating the physical sufferings of the prisoners. With the development of the
idea of separation by cells, this system began influencing the importance of the relationship between
prison discipline and prison architecture.

This reform movement, heavily influenced by the Quaker community along with the advocacy organizations of Philadelphia, led to the development of the Pennsylvania System, also known as the separate system. The code began with the reform of the criminal law, that imprisonment combined with hard labor should be substituted for the existing methods of corporal punishment. Jails began to be built specifically for the purpose of incarceration and were thoughtfully planned with regard to the welfare of those imprisoned. In these institutions, prisoners were placed in solitary confinement with no communication with anyone other than prison staff, ministers, and representatives from the societies that were fighting for prison reform. Prisoners were expected to sit in isolation, reflecting on their actions, seeking penance from God in a place where there was “no escape from their cells, their thoughts, their God.” Solitary confinement was “immeasurably worse than any torture of the body” according to Charles Dickens.

The Act of April 22, 1774, adopted by the Pennsylvania System, declared the abolition of the death penalty for all crimes except murder in the first degree, and substituted imprisonment or fines for all other offenses. Harry Elmer Barnes, an American historian with a PhD in History from Columbia University with a focus on the history of the American penal system, wrote,

This code marked the first important American break with contemporary juristic savagery, was the forerunner of the reform of the codes of other American states, and was the essential basis of Pennsylvania criminal jurisprudence until the next systematic revision in 1860.

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5 Barnes."Historical Origin of the Prison System in America." 35-60.
8 Ibid., 25.
9 Barnes "Historical Origin of the Prison System in America." 38.
CHAPTER I - THE AMERICAN PENAL SYSTEM

With imprisonment now being the main method of punishment and the colonies coming together in confederation after the Revolutionary War, it became imperative to establish a proper, widely adopted prison system. The first prisons were opened but through many years of trying to adapt existing jails into successful prisons and failing, the Pennsylvania System Acts of March 3, 1818 and March 20, 1821 provided the framework for the construction of Eastern and Western State penitentiaries. Controversies from 1826 to 1829 finally led to the legal establishment of the Pennsylvania system and a program based on solitary confinement with hard labor. The erection of the new penitentiaries and the creation of the separate system saw increased benefits for the prisoners, including “abundance of light, air, and warmth.”

During the same time, other states were developing their own formal systems of imprisonment and abandoning corporal and capital punishments. The most significant system, other than that of Pennsylvania, was the Auburn System of New York, also known as the congregate system. While there are major similarities between the two, the success of the Auburn system lies in the provision for group labor. Prisoners slept in solitary cells but were allowed to congregate for work and meals, though kept in complete silence. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political thinker and historian known best for his book Democracy in America, stated, “They are united, but no moral connection exists between them. They see without knowing each other. They are in a society without [social] discourse.” The days of the prisoners were spent in silence with the intent of repentance and reflection on their actions, similar to those in the Pennsylvania System. However, the labor aspect of the Auburn System provided more economic gain for the institution, and thus this system

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10 Barnes "Historical Origin of the Prison System in America." 50.
11 Johnson "The American Prison in Historical Perspective: Race, Gender, and Adjustment." 25.
became more widely adopted throughout the states.12

The next major movement in prison reform took place in 1870 and was based on principles adopted by the National Prison Association. Best known for its application at the Elmira Reformatory in New York, this movement was based on a military regimen, usually for younger, less hardened offenders, but the basic principle of inmate reformation was still prevalent. It also marked the opening of the first women’s prison, promoting reformation of women to fulfill their stereotypical domestic roles of the times. The system featured indeterminate sentences based on the belief that satisfactory proof of reform was more successful than a mere lapse of time, placing the prisoner’s destiny, theoretically, in his or her own hands. With this movement, the first use of parole or early release for good behavior was implemented, and it aimed at creating “upright and industrious free men, rather than orderly and obedient prisoners.” It was recognized that the use of brute force created good prisoners, but moral training created upstanding citizens.13

The Progressive Era in the United States from the 1890s to the 1930s saw more change. It was a time of urbanization, industrialization, and technological change in society, which spurred a new faith in science to find answers to crime, criminal behavior, and punishment as well as the new belief in government action to eliminate social problems. These “Progressives” advocated “treatment according to the needs of the offender, not punishment according to severity of the crime” and attacked big business, industry, and urban society for excesses that were emerging and contributing to crime. This reform sought to improve general social and economic conditions that were known to breed crime and aimed to rehabilitate inmates. Similar to the Reformatory Era, the Progressives advocated for probation, indeterminate sentencing, and parole.14

The 1930s through the 1960s saw the implementation of the Medical Model in correctional facilities. This was the first serious effort to implement medical strategies aimed at scientifically classifying, treating, and rehabilitating prisoners. It was based on the belief that criminal behavior was caused by social, psychological, or biological deficiencies that required

12 Johnson “The American Prison in Historical Perspective: Race, Gender, and Adjustment.” 22-42.
14 Ibid.
Responding to public concern about rising crime rates in the 1960s, the Crime Control Model became the prevalent system used throughout the United States. This system was based on the belief that crime was better controlled by more incarceration and strict supervision, and has since dominated modern American systems.\footnote{Clear, Todd R., and George F. Cole. American Corrections. 8th ed. Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1990.}

ARCHITECTURAL CONSEQUENCES

Before any of the aforementioned reform movements, the simple architectural expression of the American penal system was a direct reflection of the lack of a distinct program or purpose other than detainment. Fear was evoked in prisoners by the use of heavy, massive walls made of cold stone and metal, and, usually, cells were grouped together with no systematic reasoning or classification among prisoners; women and children were detained with men, thieves and debtors detained with murderers.\footnote{Ibid.}

With the reform movements came the desire for a well-ordered environment that was logically planned and would more effectively regulate the inmates. It was with these reforms that architects became involved with the intentional design of these institutions. However, in order for an architect to successfully design a building, he or she must understand its programmatic purpose. This is difficult in the case of jail design since most architects have never had an intimate interaction with one.\footnote{Wener, Richard E.. The Environmental Psychology of Prisons and Jails. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Cambridge Books Online.Web. 18 February 2014. \url{http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511979682}. 12-42.} But the most basic principle of incarceration was easily understood and had persisted through the reformations: keeping those dangerous citizens who lacked a moral compass segregated and safely away from the public. This standard provided the foundation for important architectural features found in the building’s design: the use of heavily barred windows and doors and tall walls surrounding the jail site, often in conjunction with watch towers on all corners to ensure that no activity goes unseen. Thus, despite the influence of the reformers, architecturally, jail construction still greatly resembled that of earlier eras and advances were made only with respect to overall size,\footnote{Thomas. The History of Prison Architecture.}
interior layout, and installation of modern conveniences. Interestingly, by the 1930s, it was shown that only 30% of prisoners were considered even to be a threat of escaping, but prime importance was (and still is) placed on security.¹⁹

Many theories about detention and detention were developed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and are reflected in the designs of these institutions by prominent architects, improving on previous designs or experimenting with new methods that fit the ideals of the system. While there was great diversity in architectural style, each design is generally a derivation of simple rectangular or radial plans. Cells were separated according to classification of crime and gender by means of completely separate buildings, detached hallways off a central corridor, or different levels of a multi-level structure. The basic categories of design reflect nothing on aesthetics but simply the various concepts on how these institutions should function and the nature of their security strategies.

These early structures were suitable for many decades for their original purpose, but they are now are facing limitations on adaptability to modern prison management principles and population. In large part because of the baby-boom generation reaching adolescence and

adulthood, prison population grew rapidly in the 1960s, placing different architectural demands on modern prison design. Facilities needed to be built rapidly, lending to structures with less architectural significance. The new structures are often placed in isolated locations with limited public access, denying the need for the monumental, symbolic appearance of earlier, more urban, institutions. Consequently, these early iconic structures have fallen into disuse and been forgotten as the prisoners have been moved to new facilities outside of city centers. Many of these early models, however, still have significant influence today and are important relics that reveal the history of social and penal reform in America.
CHAPTER II - THE ARCHITECTURAL FATE OF JAILS

Figure 5 - Historic York County Jail, York, PA (Source: Chelsea Brandt; January 13, 2014)
CHAPTER II - THE ARCHITECTURAL FATE OF JAILS

As these obsolete jails become abandoned, the adaptive reuse of this building type is becoming more prevalent. However, it is rare to find these buildings used for a purpose other than a museum, which freezes the building in the time and state in which it was found. Unfortunately, due to the lack of documentation within the penal system during the early twentieth century, it is difficult to find concrete data on the stock of jails that were built, how many remain, and in what state of disrepair or for what purpose they have been reused. Because of developments in the census process over the last century, however, jails are more accountable today for reporting the conditions, both physically and socially, within the jail. While the scope of an investigation of these remaining historic structures warrants an entirely separate thesis, it can still be inferred through the paucity of successful or creative case studies in this area that many decommissioned jails are no longer in existence or properly reused. The success of each of these projects in preserving the historic character of the buildings varies.

ADAPTIVE REUSE CASE STUDIES

Somerset County, Skowhegan, ME

This county jail, located in the downtown of Skowhegan, Maine, provides a creative adaptive reuse solution, responding to economic and social needs of the community. The three-story, 14,000 square foot jail has been converted into a grain mill, known as the Somerset Grist Mill. Since the mid 1800s, when a large portion of the grain production industry moved to the west, farmers in the northeast have been brainstorming ways of reinvigorating the industry in New England. In 2007, Skowhegan experienced low median incomes, extremely high rates of obesity, and a lack of jobs. With growing concern and ambition to help the community, Amber Lambke and Michael Scholz, co-founding partners of the annual

Figure 6 - Historic Somerset County Jail, Skowhegan, ME after Repurposing (Source: Google Images)
Kneading Conference, purchased the abandoned jail in downtown Skowhegan with the vision of creating more jobs and providing healthy eating choices. With funding assistance from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, the $1.6M project was completed in 2012 and has provided at least twelve new jobs and a place for start-up companies to rent space. Little remains of the historic programmatic elements of the building, as the interior was completely removed in order to insert the necessary machinery for grain production, and all bars were removed from the windows. While this jail has lost its historic character associated with its original purpose, its redesign fulfills the goal of preservation and sustainability by reusing an existing structure to the benefit of the community at large.20

Allegany County, Pittsburgh, PA

The Alleghany County Jail, designed by Henry Hobson Richardson in 1885, presents a successful example of the adaptive reuse of a Progressive Era jail. This locally landmarked five-story Romanesque Revival structure, with heavy stone walls and dramatic arches, was repurposed in 2001 for the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas by the architectural firm IKM, Inc. of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Many proposals were presented for the reuse of the building, including a shopping mall and hotel, but ultimately the family court vocalized their urgent need for a more unified, updated facility. Sam Taylor, principal architect of the project stated, “Our main goal was to create a facility that was more humane to the public.” While the exterior remains largely intact with its original façade from 1885, the interior was radically changed due to the fact that the interior was not protected under the landmark designation. The architectural team was challenged with creating a family-friendly

in a space that was once meant to be dark and frightening.\footnote{Morgan, Luciana Danner. "Jail No More." Proquest Historical. \textit{Building Design and Construction}. October 2011; Volume 42, Issue 10. Pages 30-32.}

The self-supporting cell structure found on the upper levels provided an opportunity for IKM to design a “building within a building.” Initially proposing a new steel structure inside, the firm ultimately designed a new post-tensioned concrete floor system in which the concrete was poured over a series of cables, which were then tensioned; allowing for a very thin floor structure.

The new interior program contains offices, waiting areas, court and hearing rooms, holding areas, secure corridors for transfer of felons, and judges’ chambers. Public access was enhanced through the inclusion of a café linked to an exterior courtyard. The adaptive reuse of the interior is detailed in a way in which there is a clear visual separation between the old and new with central focus on the original semi-Gothic octagonal dome in the center from which four wings radiate.

Historical integrity of the building was consciously maintained throughout the design process. Granite from the original quarry in Connecticut was used in the project to weave the old and new spaces together. A new entry arch was installed, matching the size and style of the previous entry and utilizing the surplus of existing stone from the exterior that had been removed. The project allowed for historic artifacts from the interior of the jail to be removed and placed in museums. One unfortunate failure of the reuse was replacement of the historic wood windows with aluminum windows, aiding in sustainability but compromising the reading of the structure’s past.

\textit{Charles Street Jail, Boston, MA}

Constructed in 1851 by local architect Gridley James Fox Bryant, the Charles...
Street Jail in Boston, Massachusetts held accused criminals awaiting trial for over 100 years until a new facility was opened in 1990 due to increases in inmate population and the desire to move the facility out of the city. The National Register-listed jail was sold by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to Massachusetts General Hospital in 1991, and the hospital pledged to preserve the building’s critical historic elements. They spent over a decade conducting elaborate studies to determine the best programmatic reuse of the structure, ultimately deciding in 2000 that the jail would be adapted into a hotel for hospital patients and their families, as well as regular guests.

Cambridge Seven Associates, a local firm, was chosen for the redesign and restoration of the jail. The structure had been abandoned for over ten years when the rehabilitation began, and principal architect on the project, Gary Johnson, noted, “the roof was leaking badly, pigeons were perched inside, all the cells and the bars were still intact ... It was pretty unkempt.”

Johnson revealed that one of the biggest challenges faced by the firm involved restructuring the cells into hotel rooms. The cells measured just eight feet by ten feet and were placed in the center of each of the five floors, away from the windows and supported the roof. The solution was an elaborate engineering scheme by which a temporary external truss system was installed to support the roof. Cell blocks were then removed from the top down, installing new beams and trusses on the interior to support the new guest room floors.

The reuse called for a dramatic shift in programming from its historic purpose. Jails were designed to keep people in and the public out, but hotels are meant to be welcoming to all. It needs to be open and inviting, yet still respect the history of the building. The architects successfully addressed this issue of preservation versus innovation in a careful, thought-out plan. Bars were retained on the exterior over select windows on the west wall and the cell bars and doors were repurposed as the decor in the jail-themed restaurant, programmed into the building. It was

Figure 9 - Historic Charles Street Jail, The Liberty Hotel, Boston, MA
important to the client and the architect to preserve the jail elements but also to create a high-end hotel and restaurant establishment. Johnson believes, “At the end of the day, I think we’ve struck a very good balance.” After a $150 million project including restoration and construction of an annex building, the 298-room Liberty Hotel opened in September 2007 and has been a successful destination for tourists and locals alike.\(^{22}\)

CHAPTER III - PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

Figure 10 - Existing Condition of Historic York County Jail, York, PA
(Source: opacity.com, 2005)
The twentieth century saw great change in the theories and methods of enforcing the law and an expression of these ideals can be seen in the architecture of jails. Because architects were now involved in their design, the structure and circulation system of these buildings tended to be thoughtfully arranged and developed with modern technological advancements of the early twentieth century, while still retaining characteristic features and basic programmatic functions that have prevailed for centuries.

After analyzing the architectural designs of jails, there are four areas of significance that should be heavily considered for preservation in the adaptive reuse of these structures. Analyzing the character-defining features, structural integrity, circulation system, and original programming of each jail is integral to a successful reuse project.

**CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES**

Defining features of a building vary with its period of design, purpose and public perception. These characteristics will vary on a case-to-case basis, but overall, three features are prominent in jail design and should be preserved, if possible, in any adaptive reuse project.

The use of bars over the windows and doors is the most prominent symbol of the penal system. This is an architectural device physically meant to keep people in, but psychologically, it is a symbol to the public of the government’s commitment to controlling crime in the community. Bars over the windows help the public to recognize the internal purpose of the structure. Without this iconic architectural detail, these jails could easily be mistaken for a public school, office building, or library. Today, this outward expression of the internal programming provides a clear understanding of the historic use of the building.

Individual cells within a larger cellblock physically define the purpose of the jail and are a significant defining feature. This element laid the foundations for how the jail functioned and the social interactions that occurred internally. The average size of cells during the beginning of the twentieth century was 4.5 feet wide by 8 feet long and 8 feet tall. Reformers, who were advocating for inmates’ rights to light and air, recommended that each cell contain at least 350 cubic feet of
volume,$^{23}$ but the average cell of the time was less than 290 cubic feet. Ideally, cells would hold one or two inmates, but as the crime rate increased, it was common for these cells to become over-populated. Sanitation thus became a prevalent issue in the reform movements.

To combat poor sanitation, a common solution was the application of white ceramic tiles on the interior corridor walls of the jails. Tile was becoming prominent in the domestic design of bathrooms and kitchens, which reflects a common concern for sanitary design. Local architects from the county were designing homes and apartment buildings as well, in jails, implementing this new technology in domestic applications and in civic designs alike. The walls could be easily hosed or wiped down by staff, and the water would run into drains purposely designed into the floor structure.

![Figure 11 - Section drawings of Sing-Sing, Ossing, NY (Source: Davidson. "Prison Architecture", 1.)](image)

**STRUCTURE**

Directly related to the evolving ideals about cell design and sanitation, the structural system for these jails is fairly simple, but forward thinking. Economically, it was found that building a tall structure, rather than many low buildings spread across a site was more efficient; utilities were cheaper and prisoners more easily managed. This was an early concept that spurred development of the *Cell Block* within a *Cell House* concept. The evolving building sections of Sing-Sing Prison in Ossining, New York show that over the course of more than one hundred years of reform, the welfare of the prisoners became more of a concern, with importance placed on light and air quality in the

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$^{23}$ Thomas. The History of Prison Architecture.
CHAPTER III - PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

space and the implementation of personal plumbing. Cells became larger, windows more integral, and individualized plumbing built through the internal corridor between cellblocks. This corridor, while integral for sanitation, also allowed for supervision of the inmates from another angle.\(^{24}\) Developments in fire codes recommended that cell houses not contain more than four levels of prison cells.\(^ {25}\)

Placement of cells at the interior of the building, as opposed to the exterior enhanced security in the building and lowered the chance of escape.\(^ {26}\)

The shell of the building was usually a masonry structure with traditional concrete footings and foundation, steel floor beams for the main floor and a traditional roof truss system to secure the building laterally. Cellblock floors, though, commonly utilized a self-supporting structural system in which each floor is made up of a metal frame of columns and beams, and the cells are then inserted like pods into the system. This was an early implementation of modular building techniques and provided efficient construction, giving the jail much flexibility in terms of future expansion. Additional cellblocks could be added in phases as need arose in the jail. This structural system can also be seen in the design of libraries of the time, in the construction of the book stacks. Seen in the construction photograph of the Library of Congress, the exterior façade is erected and the modular system is assembled in place before the roof is completed. The similarity in sections and plans between the jails and libraries of the Progressive Era further strengthens the relationship of the local architects and engineers to

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\(^{24}\) Thomas. The History of Prison Architecture.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Davison. "Prison Architecture."
civic architectural design. Instead of storing books, though, these county jails stored inmates.

**CIRCULATION**

Circulation is another important factor, especially when dealing with adaptive reuse because, in buildings of this time, it is rare to find a building that meets modern egress codes. As evident in the original architectural drawings located within Appendix I, these structures can be seen to have one central staircase which bisects the building laterally, and a main corridor running longitudinally on the main floor. The stairs were usually made of steel, tying into the modular cell floors, and contained “double-piped” railings which are also identified in specifications for library stack railings, providing yet future evidence of the relationship between jails and civic architecture.

On the upper cellblock floors, circulation was reflected from below but had an added element of circulation for supervision. The stair continues the central corridor through the cellblocks, and the utility corridor between cells creates a longitudinal corridor that allows for guards to see into the rear of each cell. On the exterior of the cells, two more corridors were created. These differ slightly throughout jails of the time but are still distinct in their purpose. In cases such as Sing-Sing, the corridor is a balcony that serves as inmate circulation as well as guard supervision. Because all the cells in the cell house operate with separate locking mechanisms, a guard could individually control the movement of inmates in an orderly manner. In York County however, due to the fact that all the cells on this block operate on one locking system, there is an interior “prisoner’s” corridor, where the prisoners were held before being escorted into the surrounding hall, or “guard’s” corridor. The “prisoner’s” corridor served for the supervision by the guards, whereas the “guard’s” corridor provided normal circulation.

![Cellblock Floor Plan, York County Jail, 1906](Source: York County Archives)
PROGRAMMING

The zoning created by the internal corridors defines the rigid symmetry of the building, internally and externally. Because of this strict balance, a pattern emerges in the programming of spaces within the jail. The first floor contains space for inmate processing and holding, visitation space, medical services, and an apartment for the warden and his family. The separation created by the central corridor and staircase creates the separation needed between the warden’s apartment on one side of the building and administrative spaces of the jail on the other. The upper floors, as previously discussed, contain the cellblocks, and were programmed identically, segregating the inmates into cells within cellblocks. The original programming of the spaces, while in most cases will not be wholly preserved in an adaptive reuse project, should be thoughtfully considered in any new program arrangement.
CHAPTER IV - DESIGN PROPOSAL: HISTORIC YORK COUNTY JAIL, YORK COUNTY, PA

Figure 15 - Historic York County Jail, York, PA (Source: Chelsea Brandt; January 13, 2014)
SITE HISTORY

Founded in 1749, York County has played an important role in the history and development of Pennsylvania and the United States. Located about one hundred miles west of Philadelphia, between Gettysburg and Lancaster County, York was a prominent site during the American Revolution. Known in the 18th century as York Town, the town was the location of meetings of the Continental Congress, at which the Articles of Confederation were drafted from September 1777 to June 1778. Also while in York, the Continental Congress declared the first Thanksgiving celebration.

The City of York has grown and changed in many ways since it was first laid out in 1741 along the banks of the Codorus Creek, as can be seen directly its architecture. Constant development throughout centuries is reflected in the diverse buildings of the downtown. The majority of extant buildings were constructed during the late Victorian time period (about 1870 to 1910) when the town had begun to develop into a prosperous industrial city.

It was during the Colonial Times in 1750 that the first official jail of York was constructed in the town center. Although this structure was designed as a temporary jail, it wasn’t until 1768 that a more permanent, three and a half story jail with a gabled roof and limestone facade, was constructed.

This location and structure lasted for over a hundred years until the growing city no longer desired the jail to be a focal point on the town square. In 1853, during the Victorian era, a new jail was constructed on what was then the outskirts of town, adjacent to the York County Almshouse, seen in the historic map in Appendix II. This structure, designed by local architect Edward Haviland, son of the architect of Eastern State Penitentiary John Haviland, was characterized by a high style
Gothic Revival structure as the main building, with an attached vernacular extension in the back. Made of heavy stone with few windows, foreboding walls and little interior organization, this structure exemplifies the ideals of imprisonment just before the major reforms in the 19th century.

Due to the growth in prison population as well as the influence of the reform movements, the Gothic Revival portion of the 1853 building was demolished and, in 1906, a new six-story brick and stone jail was erected. Designed by local architect B.F. Willis, this French Beaux Arts style jail, which still stands on the site today, measures roughly 128' long by 55' wide. A two-story brick passageway connected the monumental new structure to the vernacular limestone rear building, which remained from the previous structure. The new six-story structure housed the administration space, warden’s apartment, and cell blocks. Recreational facilities as well as a large cafeteria were contained within the rear building.

As seen in the original set of drawings from 1906 in Appendix I, the programming is similar to that discussed in Chapter III. The “Administration Floor”, was the main floor, which contained the commitment room, hospital rooms, dispensary, padded cell, and the warden’s apartment. At the rear of the first floor central corridor was a trap door designed for hangings, but because of the lack of reliable documentation of the time, it is unclear if the trap door was ever utilized. In the original section, it can be seen that the structure contains a raised basement in order for natural light to enter those spaces allotted to the kitchen, laundry, storage, and mechanical systems. The cell floors above also exhibit the layout and structure previously discussed. A total of three cell floors were built, each with twenty-eight cells for inmates, seven feet by eight feet in dimension, for inmates and four cells along the central corridor for bathing.

BUILDING CONDITIONS

The increase of prison population in the 1960s caused the overcrowding of the York County Jail and the need again for a larger, more modern facility, resulting in a new jail that opened in December 1979. The historic building and its lot of 2.9 acres on Chestnut Street was sold to John and Joyce Gearhart in 1981 for $51,500, and they continue to hold ownership today. Since the

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Gearharts acquired the site, the remaining portion of the 1853 structure was allowed to deteriorate until it was completely removed in the late 1990s.

The site has been vacant since the inmates were removed in 1979 and the building has suffered much deterioration. Most of the exterior failure is found in the cornice stone due to natural weathering. On the interior, the paint is severely peeling and intruders have vandalized some areas. Structurally, however, the building is sound, allowing for the potential of reuse without major structural issues.

SITE CONDITIONS

Included in one of the largest Historic Districts in the country, the historic jail is located within a rich context. While it is not individually listed as a local or national landmark, it is a contributing building to the York National Historic District. Light industrial factories and warehouses occupy the area to northwest of the site, separated by multiple active railroad tracks. To the northeast is an elementary school, separated from the site by a creek, known as Poor House Run, and a neighborhood to the south, also separated by a railroad track is made up of distinctive late nineteenth century rowhouses. However, as seen in the demographic maps in Appendix II, the neighborhood, simply known as the Northeast Neighborhood because of its position in relation to downtown York, exhibits high vacancy rates due to the low income rates of its African American and Latino population.

There are today several city-wide plans aimed at bringing more tourism to the area through rehabilitating these neighborhoods and reusing historic structures. Of these plans, the York County Strategic Comprehensive Plan for 2030, compiled in 2009, is the most inclusive and information. The 2030 vision is “to build a strong, attractive and economically thriving
community consisting of a regionally recognized center of commerce, socially and economically diverse neighborhoods, traditional residential neighborhoods, employment and education centers, community facilities, health care facilities and recreational spaces designed to give a sense of place.” The plan includes comprehensive studies of York County that analyze demographics for economic development, transportation issues, historic preservation initiatives, and neighborhood revitalization. Of the nine goals set forth in the plan, three are directly relevant to the adaptive reuse of the historic jail on Chestnut Street. The county strives to “create tourism, cultural, social and recreational opportunities to attract visitors”, “preserve architectural integrity”, and “provide an economy offering desired goods and services to sustain the neighborhood.”

The Economic Development Policy of the Strategic Plan is concerned with establishing new businesses that might provide new employment opportunities to the community and create a destination place for social, recreational, and tourist activities. Creating open green spaces to revitalize neighborhoods is a top priority of the plan, which hopes to increase homeownership and pride in the community. Neighborhood Revitalization outlines ideals of reducing blight and deterioration through preserving the historic and architectural qualities of each defined neighborhood. This policy expects that by addressing these issues, residential neighborhoods will improve in the physical and structural appearance of the properties, increasing property values in the long-term. The Northeast Neighborhood Association, while not focused on the built aspects of their neighborhood, provides a local resource center for the neighborhood in times of emergency with clothing, food, and shelter, as well as brings the community together for yearly events and volunteer opportunities.

Another aspect stressed in the 2030 Strategic Plan for the county is the issue of transportation. A greenway strategy set forth focuses on developing a coordinated city-wide greenway and open space system of trails that link major activity areas around the city, reducing the number of personal cars on the roads, supporting alternate means of transportation and

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29 Ibid., 13, 14.
increase public transit participation.\textsuperscript{31} This aspect has already been successfully integrated through the York County Heritage Rail Trail, which consists of 25.5 miles of trails along an abandoned railroad line with six more miles currently planned for construction. The park attracts about a half-million visitors a year and has an economic value estimated between $4 to 6 million annually.\textsuperscript{32} There has also been a revitalization plan implemented along the Codorus Creek waterfront. This plan seeks to clean up the waterfront areas and provide design policies for a waterfront boardwalk and business opportunities.

The Future Land Use Plan recognizes the stock of abandoned and deteriorating structures and sees the opportunities that exist in redevelopment, renovation, and adaptive reuse. These ideals are directly connected to the Historic Preservation Plan also outlined in the Strategic Plan in which the goal is to preserve cultural and historic resources of the community to create a sense of place. These reuse cases are seen as opportunities for tourism and increased property values, contributing to the sustainability of the county.\textsuperscript{33} Since 1970, the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) of York County has been the authority which “regulates the erection, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, demolition or razing of buildings within the local historic districts.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{SUSTAINABILITY}

Also included in the Strategic Plan for 2030 is a land use policy that encourages recognizing opportunity sites, preservation areas and development and redevelopment areas. The way land is reused directly effects the sustainability of the area environmentally, economically, and socially. “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without

\textsuperscript{31} “Reaching for a Better Tomorrow.” Pg. 7, 8.
\textsuperscript{33} “Reaching for a Better Tomorrow.” Pg. 2-4.
compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Environmentally, the adaptive reuse of the historic 1906 jail is a prime example of a sustainable adaptive reuse project. With the sound structural integrity and modular cell design, it is possible for the reuse of much of the original fabric without extreme interventions. The United States Energy Information Administration has shown that commercial buildings that were constructed before 1920 generally use less energy per square foot than buildings from any other decade because of the design standards of the times, construction methods, use of quality materials, passive heating and cooling systems, and the window-to-wall ratios. These buildings are more efficient and ideal for reuse rather than demolition. However, there is still not a substantial amount of information available to prove that adaptive reuse is more sustainable in all cases, due to the amount of variables that exist, including rapid changes in technology, various climates, occupant usage and maintenance, etc. With the building stock consuming a third of the total global greenhouse gas emissions, it is imperative that drastic changes be made in this sector.

In this case, reuse of the existing jail would entail substantial energy savings over demolition and new construction.

**DESIGN PROPOSAL**

With a nearly three-acre site, great opportunity exists for implementation of these policy plans and the creation of a place that benefits the community, socially, economically, and culturally. With the implementation of a boutique hotel in combination with a brewpub inside this historic jail, this site would become a welcoming destination rather than a place of fear and abandonment. The large site also provides potential for expansion of programming with the inclusion of a new structure. This design proposal suggests the creation of a craft beer market in a supplemental building, in which local brewers could market their beer and sell it on a small scale. This programming would attract a wide range of producers and consumers and would provide a space for the beer community to share ideas and methods of brewing. Located less than a mile

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35 “Reaching for a Better Tomorrow.” Section 3.1 page 11.
from the historic downtown, this revitalization would provide an extension of the Downtown Entertainment Cultural district.

Craft beer is a popular and growing trend throughout the United States, and of the total 2,538 total breweries, 2,483 are specifically craft breweries. A craft brewer is an independent hobbyist using traditional techniques and local types of grains to produce beer, with an annual production of six million barrels or less. A majority of Americans live within ten miles of a microbrewery and may not even be aware of it because most of these facilities are small-scale private ventures. Beer is known for reflecting a culture and attracts tourism. In York County, beer production has been a staple to the community for decades. Two prominent breweries once defined the York skyline of the 1800s. The Helb Keystone Brewery, operated by Theodore Helb, son of the first chief burgess of the county, opened in 1873. From the six-story domed building in downtown York, Keystone was shipping its product across the nation by the turn of the century. Prohibition eventually closed the brewery. While it was reopened in 1933, the brewery was permanently closed in 1950 and the building was demolished two years later. York Brewery, opened in 1893, was Keystone's main competition in town and was also lost to demolition. Today, tourism is infused with this history of beer making with the inclusion of nine breweries and wineries as a part of the official "Factory Tour" promoted by the York County Convention and Visitors Bureau. The tour reflects the change York County has experienced from the large manufacturing breweries of the early 20th century to the widespread microbreweries that now exist. The York County Heritage Trust’s Microbrew Fest celebrated its 16th annual event in June of 2013 and is scheduled to host

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an event in June of 2014 called “History Untapped: An Artisan Beer Affair”. The York County tourism website prominently displays the importance of beer heritage in the region and promotes multiple brewery tours and tasting locations. Similarly, a “Pub of York Walking Tour” attracts many tourists.

The reuse of part of the historic jail with the implementation of a microbrewery will increase the strength of beer tourism in the area, provide a place where people can participate in the beer-making process, and support the local economy with the creation of jobs and marketing of craft beer. With the expected increase in tourism in the county presented in the Strategic Plan, there is a demand for more hotel services in the historic downtown, within walking distance of historic sites and recreational areas. There are already successful examples of microbreweries and hotels being jointly implemented in historic structures but no examples exist within an old jail. McMenamins is a large chain of hotel-brewery combinations within revitalized schools, an historic poor house, a large Queen Anne style home, just to recognize a few examples. They offer a wide range of services based on the location with a variety of room styles and sizes.

In keeping with the historic symmetry of the building, the iconic central staircase will divide the new programming within the building. The brewpub and bar on the first floor, accommodating about 70 patrons, will occupy what once was the administration side of the first floor, and the basement will house the barrels and appropriate machinery for the brewery. A larger pub will be added on the roof of the building, providing views over the downtown of York City to the south and the Codorus Creek to the west. The new boutique hotel component of this reuse design will occupy the previous warden’s apartment on the first floor, with service functions in the basement, and hotel rooms on the original cellblock floors. The central corridor will be preserved, and each hotel room will take up the width of two cells, reaching to the exterior wall in order for the room to receive natural light. Each floor will have ten standard size guest rooms and two larger suites for a total of thirty standard rooms and six suites within three floors. The aesthetics of these floors will retain much of the original cell fabric. Due to its original, modular construction, pieces of

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the cells can be easily removed, cleaned, and integrated into the new design in order to retain the floors’ historic character.

In order to accommodate modern fire codes, two sets of stairs will be constructed in the corners of the floors, seen in the architectural drawings in Appendix III. Two elevators for hotel guests and restaurant patrons will be placed at the rear of the building, attaching to each floor via a bridge and interior lobby space. A service elevator is also necessary for hotel cleaning and moving large products to the brewpub on the roof. With this elevator location, the needed overhead will not be seen from the historic front façade of the building, retaining the original character, an ideal greatly prioritized in the Historic Preservation Policy of the 2030 Strategic Plan. The addition will be aesthetically different from the original building in order to differentiate clearly the historic fabric with the new.
CONCLUSION

“...the historical and cultural foundations of the nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people.”

-National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

All aspects of history are not positive, but even the negative history of the United States is significant to our evolution as a society. Progressive Era jails, as demonstrated by this thesis, are architecturally significant structures worthy of preservation. The innovative structural systems, advances in sanitation, and complex circulation principles revealed in these structures is a direct reflection of the ideals of the American society of the early twentieth century. The recommendations presented, while they should be judged on a case-by-case basis, should be thoughtfully considered in the future reuse of these jails. Careful consideration to the character-defining features, programmatic issues, circulation principles, and structural components must be addressed in order to successfully preserve the historic integrity of these facilities.

The adaptive reuse of the historic 1906 York County Jail not only drives economic development and sustainability within the neighborhood but also, while not erasing history, relieves the site of its negative associations as a place of confinement. By bringing tourists and community members together in a place where they can share in common cultural ideals, a new positive history will be created for the building while still remembering its past. The building will no longer be a place that people try to avoid but a place to which people are drawn.
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Vacant Property
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Legend
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- Site - 319 Chestnut Street
- White Population
- African American Population
- Latino Population

0 0.375 0.75 1.5 2.25 3 Miles

Days Inn & Suites
Yorketowne Hotel
EconoLodge
319 Chestnut Street

Site - 319 Chestnut Street
White Population
African American Population
Latino Population
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Poor House
Run Creek
Stillmeadow Church
Auto Body Shop
WAREHOUSES AND LIGHT INDUSTRIAL
Chestnut Street
Northeast Neighborhood
York Street

MILLING
S
W
N
E
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