

**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS REWARD
NOTICES, 1888-1905**

Finding aid

Call number: GR-COR-51

Extent: 0.11 cubic ft. (1 volume)

**Alabama Department of Archives and History,
624 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36130
www.archives.alabama.gov**

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS REWARD NOTICES, 1888-1905

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

The Alabama Department of Corrections was established in 1983 and is the newest iteration of a series of previously established Boards tasked with operating Alabama's state prison system. The agencies it succeeds include the Board of Inspectors of the Penitentiary (1841-1885); the Board of Inspectors of Convicts (1885-1893); the Board of Managers of Convicts (1893-1895); the Board of Inspectors of Convicts (1895-1919); the State Board of Control and Economy (1919-1923); the State Board of Convict Supervisors (1923); the State Board of Administration (1923-1939); the Department of Corrections and Institutions (1939-1953); and the Board of Corrections (1953-1979). The establishment of the Board of Inspectors of the Penitentiary coincided with the opening of Alabama's first state-operated prison, the Wetumpka State Penitentiary, in 1841. Established approximately twenty years after Alabama became a state, the state prison system replaced the practice of handling criminal offenses at a strictly local level, often publicly. Prior to the end of the Civil War, the demographics of the Wetumpka State Penitentiary skewed heavily white at ninety-nine percent with only one percent of the prison's population comprising free Black people. This was due to laws that stated enslaved Black people were to be punished for alleged legal offenses by those who held them in slavery. However, following the abolishment of slavery in 1865, the population of the prison drastically changed to ninety percent Black and ten percent white.

Wetumpka State Penitentiary nicknamed "the Walls of Alabama" or simply "the Walls," received its first male prisoner in 1842, who was sentenced to twenty years for housing a runaway enslaved person. The penitentiary would receive its first female inmate in 1850, who was sentenced to ten years for murder. While the prison was originally intended to be self-sufficient, the system turned to leasing the prison's facilities and inmates to individuals to maintain the institution. The first person to do so was J. G. Graham who held the new title of Private Sector Warden. However, the practice ended when a convict murdered Warden Dr. Ambrose Burrows in 1862. The prison returned to state control, where appointed Warden Dr. M. G. Moore focused the labor efforts of the inmates into producing materials to support the Confederacy in the Civil War. After the war, Governor Robert M. Patton legalized convict leasing to assist with Reconstruction work, namely with rebuilding the railroad system. Once the railroad system had been completed, these prisoners were leased to farms, lumberyards, and coal mines. This became known as the Convict-Lease System, which generated revenue for the state when Warden John G. Bass established a system in which companies leasing prisoners made monthly payments to the state. As the state began producing revenue from the Convict-Lease System, county prisons also leased their inmates for a profit.

In 1883, Warden John Hollis Bankhead instituted a plan to limit the leasing of inmates to only a few companies, including the Pratt Coal and Iron Company; the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company; and the Sloss Iron and Steel Company. These companies built and operated prisons out of their mining sites, which were to be overseen by a Board of Inspectors tasked with assuring the prisoners were treated well and worked and lived under safe conditions. However, these Inspectors rarely oversaw the convicts' conditions, resulting in a high mortality rate among inmates leased to these companies. The Coleman Law of 1885 moved the main office of the

prison system from Wetumpka to Montgomery and changed the hierarchy of the Alabama prison system. Reginald H. Dawson took control and attempted to mediate tensions between contractors and inmates as well as improve the conditions for inmates leased to the mining companies. Convicts leased by both the state and county prison systems worked and lived under extremely poor conditions, often being overworked in an unsafe environment. Many inmates had their sentences extended due to falsified bad conduct reports intended to maintain the companies' cheap source of labor for longer. The largely Black population of the prison system began referring to convict leasing as a "new form of slavery." Despite efforts by some to improve working and living conditions for these inmates, little would change until the end of the Convict-Lease System.

The new hierarchy instituted by the Coleman Law would not be in place for long. Less than ten years later, on February 14, 1893, a new law created the Board of Managers to implement a "New System." This law sought to end the contracts with companies leasing convicts and return the inmates to the state prison. The "New System" law was repealed after the state failed to remove the inmates from the companies' prison quarters by the deadline of February 1895. The Convict-Lease System persisted until Alabama became the last state to end the system in 1928. With the construction and operation of newer prisons such as Kilby, Wetumpka State Penitentiary's co-correctional facilities began to skew heavily female in population. The penitentiary changed its name to the Julia Tutwiler Prison in 1941, named after the well-known advocate for educational opportunities in prisons and general reform to the prison system, and moved to a new facility less than a mile north of the old one in 1942.

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS REWARD NOTICES, 1888-1905
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This volume assembled by the Alabama Department of Corrections then known as the Board of Inspectors of Convicts (1888-1893), Board of Managers of Convicts (1893-1895), and the Board of Inspectors of Convicts (1895-1905), contains a series of reward notices for escaped convicts from between the years of 1888 and 1905. The volume includes templates for reward notices, with blank spaces to be filled out with certain information, as well as templates to fill out if an escaped convict has been recaptured. Each template is completed and signed by the President of the Board of Inspectors of Convicts, and requires the escaped prisoner's name, county, reward amount, date of conviction, location of sentencing, crime committed, length of sentence, date of escape, name of contractor, and date of reward issuing. The template completed following the prisoner's recapture requires the date of the prisoner's recapture, as well as the name of the individual receiving the promised reward.

The beginning of the volume includes a table of contents which is organized sectionally by the alphabet but does not follow an alphabetical order under each section. Inmates with multiple escapes and, therefore, multiple reward notices are either listed in the table of contents multiple times or have multiple page numbers listed by their name. The volume is organized chronologically by the date the rewards were issued. Throughout the volume, the position of the President of the Board of Inspectors of Convicts changes three times, beginning with R. H. Dawson, changing over to S. B. Trapp on page 135, and then changing over again to J. M. Carmichael on page 180.

While the template itself is thorough in the information it requires for completion, the reward notices are often left incomplete with certain spaces for information left blank. Spaces that require repeating information input earlier in the notice are also frequently left blank. While there is no specific space in the template for the President of the Board of Inspectors to leave additional remarks, pages occasionally contain additional notes in the margins of the volume about the prisoners, often concerning whether the prisoner has escaped in the past or if they have escaped again since recapture. While the template for recapture and issuing the promised reward is present at the bottom of each notice, it is often left blank or only half completed, usually missing the name of the individual receiving the reward.

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS REWARD NOTICES, 1888-1905
CONTAINER LISTING

<u>Box</u>	<u>Description</u>
SG024878B	Reward notices, 1888-1905