

**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS CONVICT
RECORD FROM THE WALLS (WETUMPKA PENITENTIARY),
1888-1896**

Finding aid

Call number: GR-COR-50

Extent: 0.18 cubic ft. (1 volume)

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

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS CONVICT RECORD FROM THE WALLS, 1888-1896

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 meant to be self-sufficient with the additional support of taxpayers, the production of farming tools and materials failed to garner the necessary revenue for maintaining the penitentiary. This led to passage of an Act on February 4, 1846 permitting individuals to privately lease the prison's inmates and facilities. The first person to do so was J. G. Graham who held the new title of Private Sector Warden. This practice continued until 1862, when Private Sector Warden Dr. Ambrose Burrows was murdered by a convict and the state resumed control of the prison, appointing Dr. M. G. Moore as Warden. Moore utilized the labor of inmates to support the Confederacy in the Civil War, and during this time a majority of the convicts housed at the Walls received pardons to participate in the war. After the war, Governor Robert M. Patton again legalized the leasing of convicts outside of prison facilities to assist with Reconstruction work, namely with rebuilding the railroad system. Following the completion of the railroad system, the practice of companies and individuals utilizing inmate labor came to be known as the Convict-Lease System and was employed by farms, lumberyards, and coal and iron mines.

The Convict-Lease System saved state funds by providing housing and food for the prisoners it leased from the Walls. However, it did not begin to produce revenue for the state until 1875 when, in response to a fiscal crisis, Warden John G. Bass implemented a policy in which companies and individuals leasing inmates from the prison made monthly payments to the

state. These payments were determined by the physical capabilities and skills of the prisoners being leased, who were organized into three categories based on these criteria. The attempt to generate revenue was successful, and the state made between eleven thousand and twelve thousand dollars throughout the policy's first year of implementation. Eventually, in 1883, Warden John Hollis Bankhead approved a plan which limited the Convict-Lease System to only a few companies where leased prisoners would be housed instead of within the state prison, unless they were deemed unfit for labor. These companies included the Pratt Coal and Iron Company; the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company; and the Sloss Iron and Steel Company.

On February 14, 1885, the passing of the Coleman Law moved the main office of the prison system from Wetumpka to Montgomery. This law also changed the hierarchical organization of the prison system which was renamed from the Board of Inspectors of the Penitentiary to the Board of Inspectors of Convicts. 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.

On January 23, 1931, a fire destroyed a section of the Wetumpka State Penitentiary, but the facility was fully operational again after forty days. At this point, the Walls was a co-correctional facility, with male and female convicts housed in separate quarters of the prison. Over time the prison's population began to lean heavily female as male convicts were sent to other facilities, such as Kilby Prison. Wetumpka State 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.

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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 (1895-1896), contains a record of convicts housed at the Wetumpka State Penitentiary, or “the Walls,” from the years of 1888 through 1896. The volume is organized into sections alphabetically by the inmates’ last names. For each section of the record, the inmates are listed in the order of the date they were received by the prison. Listed with each convict’s name in the record is the county the prisoner is from; the prisoner’s race and sex; the crime the prisoner has been tried for; the date of the prisoner’s sentence; the length of the prisoner’s sentence; the date the prisoner was received by the Wetumpka State Penitentiary; from where the prisoner was received; the date the prisoner was discharged; and how the prisoner was discharged.

The volume is pre-organized into designated sections for each letter of the alphabet, with each section being bookmarked by a labeled tab attached to the first page of the section for easy accessibility. The record allots between 8 and 10 pages for each letter of the alphabet, but no section of the record is filled out in its entirety. At the beginning of the volume, there is a page dedicated to summarizing the quantitative contents of the record. With every entry into the record there is a section for any additional remarks on each convict. This space notes a variety of issues such as if the inmate has escaped and the date of their death, or if the inmate has had any prior convictions. However, this space is usually left blank.

**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS CONVICT RECORD FROM THE
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CONTAINER LISTING**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Description</u>
SG024878A	Convict record from the Walls, 1888-1896