



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

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The Jails at Havilah and Bakersfield

1866-1963

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In 1866 Thomas B. Stuart erected a jail at Havilah for the new County of Kern.¹

The two-story, 16- by 20-feet, three-cell lockup was built of foot-square timbers, and the cell doors were made of half-inch iron strapping. On the floor above, the sheriff had his desk.² The jail's cost was \$1,600. For \$800 county supervisors bought a site for a courthouse, and a millwright named T. H. Binnex of South Fork Valley built it for \$2,200.³

Travel between Havilah and Baker's Field, as it was then called, was miles and miles over rough wagon road. By 1872 Bakersfield had grown to about 600

¹ "The county of Kern was created by an act of the legislature approved April 2, 1866, out of territory formerly included in the counties of Tulare and Los Angeles, chiefly the former. The act fixed the county seat at Havilah; provided for a county judge to be appointed by the governor, ordered an election to be held on the second Thursday in July, 1866, to select a clerk who should be also a recorder, a sheriff who should be tax collector as well, a district attorney, an assessor and collector of poll taxes, treasurer, surveyor, coroner and public administrator, superintendent of schools and three super-visors." (Wallace Melvin Morgan, *History of Kern County, California*. Historic Record Company, Los Angeles, California, 1914

² Edith Dane, *Kernland Tales*, transcribed and edited by Larry Peahl, (2006) Jul 20, 1950, Serial 50.085. This is a collection Dane's historical articles published in the Taft Daily Midway Driller from 1949 to 1956. A copy is held by Kern County Library, McGuire Local History Room.

³ Eugene Burmeister, *The Golden Empire, Kern County, California*. Autograph Press, Beverly Hills, California, 1977, p 98. "The latter building [*the courthouse*] served until the county seat was moved to Bakersfield, when it was taken down and the lumber sold to P. T. Colby, who put it together again in the form of a residence just south of the Kern Valley bank on Chester avenue in Bakersfield." (Morgan, op. cit.)

residents, and for them the trip to Havilah was an annoyance.⁴ Bakersfield incorporated in May 1873,⁵ but a year passed before it was voted the county seat, and in the months before that election, opinions were nearly split down the middle. One objection was the cost of erecting a new courthouse and a jail, but John Hewlett and Julius Chester addressed that by offering to lease the Bakersfield Town Hall⁶ to the county for a dollar a year for five years, or at least until a new courthouse was built.⁷



Bakersfield Town Hall

Next, Morris Jacoby, Ferdinand A. Tracy, and Solomon Jewett offered to build a brick jail for the county and lease it without cost for five years.⁸ The result of balloting to change the county seat was challenged several times, but when finally counted on January 26, 1874, Bakersfield's majority of twenty-two votes made it the county seat.⁹ Town hall became a temporary courthouse, and Nathaniel R.

⁴⁴ "When the county was organized in 1866 there was no settlement in all the territory embraced that could put forward a rival claim against Havilah for the county seat." (Morgan, op. cit.)

⁵ See *Marshal Alex Mills and Bakersfield's Disincorporation of 1876* at www.gilbertgia.com/articlePages/crime1.html

⁶ Town hall was at the northwest corner of today's 17th Street and Chester Avenue.

⁷ Morgan, op. cit.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. Bakersfield had one polling place. The other 10 were in mountain settlements. (Morgan, op. cit.)

Wilkinson -- who was both Kern County Recorder and Bakersfield Justice of the Peace --started work posting town rules.¹⁰

Jacoby, Tracy, and Jewett were not mentioned that spring when the Kern County Board of Supervisors accepted N. R. Wilkinson's bid to build a 12- x 18-foot temporary jail.¹¹ Julius Chester donated the lot for it in his deed dated April 18, 1874, which granted the county the *North One-Half of Lot One and Lot Two in Block One-North, Range One-West* – today the northwest corner of Truxtun and Chester Avenues, the site of the Kern County Hall of Records. ¹²

Few details are known about the temporary lockup. One report said that three months after it opened several prisoners escaped. The Kern County Courier explained, "No blame was attached to the officers, because the jail is an exceedingly weak and temporary structure and exposed to assistance from the outside if left unwatched. All were caught almost immediately."¹³ In winter 1874 the jail was arsoned, and for that crime James "Happy Jack" Talman got six years in state prison. ¹⁴ The temporary jail was still in use two years later when a newspaper deemed it filthy, unwholesome, crowded and "insufficient for the

¹⁰ Kern County Weekly Courier, Feb 21, 1874. Credit: Lynn Hay Rudy private database of early Bakersfield newspapers. In 1874 Bakersfield was not an incorporated town and thus lacked a formal city government.

¹¹ Kern County Weekly Courier, Mar 7, 1874, p 2. The cost was \$453. Apr 24, 1874. Oct 1874. Bakersfield disincorporated on April 13, 1876. On May 20th the temporary jail was moved to Sumner for use as a courthouse. (Kern County Weekly Courier, May 20, 1876). See

¹² Southern Californian, Kern County Weekly Courier, Feb 14, 1878. George was Julius Chester's brother. Per agreement with the county, George Chester's property was later reconvened to him.

¹³ Kern County Weekly Courier, Sep 19, 1874. Credit: Rudy, op. cit. A detailed description of the courthouse appeared in the Southern [Bakersfield] Californian, Mar 23, 1876.

¹⁴ Sacramento Daily Union, Nov 9, 1874

purposes."¹⁵ But most readers knew the county was about to build a permanent jail and courthouse.¹⁶

A lot for the jail was provided by George B. Chester, who was Julius Chester's brother. It was on the southwest corner of today's Chester Avenue and Truxtun Avenue, which today is the location of Bakersfield City Hall and Bakersfield Police Department.¹⁷ On April 3, 1876¹⁸ supervisors voted to build a combined courthouse-jail and in May approved architectural plans drawn by Albert A. Bennett¹⁹ that showed a 30- by 50-foot, two-story, iron-reinforced brick building with 17-inch-thick walls resting on a stone foundation. The floor plan showed a courtroom, district attorney's office, clerk's office, treasurer's office with vault, assessor's office, and a recorder's office. The jail, which occupied the west side of the building, had six iron cells, each separated from the outside wall by an interior corridor. The jail also housed a sheriff's office and a sleeping room.²⁰

¹⁵ Southern Californian - Kern County Weekly Courier, Jan 13, 1876

¹⁶ The temporary jail was moved to Sumner and became a court house. (Kern County Weekly Courier, May 20, 1876)

¹⁷ Southern Californian - Kern County Weekly Courier, Feb 14, 1878. Per agreement with the county, George Chester's property was later reconvened to him.

¹⁸ Wallace Melvin Morgan, History of Kern County, California. Historic Record Company, Los Angeles, California, 1914, p 75

¹⁹ See biography of Albert A. Bennett (1825-1890) by John Edward Powell at <http://www.historicfresno.org/>

²⁰ Committee members were J. A. Riley, N. R. Wilkinson, E. H. Dumble, and P. A. Stine. See Appendix for listing of Kern County sheriffs 1865-1955.



Courthouse-Jail of 1876
(William Harland Boyd, Lower Kern River Country, 1850-1950)

Building cost was estimated at \$25,000, bonds were secured,²¹ and the county awarded the job to A. W. Burrell of the California Bridge & Building Company on a bid of \$29,999.²² When the rafters were in place, the Oddfellows (I.O.O.F) and Masons (F.&A.M.) conducted a cornerstone ceremony.²³ Boxed and entombed in an outside corner that day was a copy of the Holy Bible, a history of the organization of the county, official seals of the court and the county, copies of eight newspapers, U.S. currency, miscellaneous coins, a map of Bakersfield, and the organizational histories of Kern Island Lodge 222 (I.O.O.F) and Bakersfield Lodge

²¹ Kern County Weekly Courier, May 23, 1874, p 1. The [Bakersfield] Californian of May 20, 1893 listed the California Bridge Company bid as \$33,910.

²² Bakersfield Californian, Aug 31, 1917. One supervisor refused to accept the bid as it exceeded the amount of the bond (Morgan, op. cit.). The Jun 20, 1893 Californian shows the bid of Californian Bridge Company as \$33,910.

²³ The rafters were still exposed according to the Southern Californian of Oct 28, 1875

224 (F.&A.M.).²⁴ A month later the box was stolen. When replaced four weeks later, it held various small U.S. coins and currency and a Confederate \$50 note.²⁵

A reporter who examined the building in March 1876 wrote, "The helmeted stature of Minerva or Themis, six feet high, with a sword at guard in the right hand and a shield in the left, keeps her vigil on the summit of the dome."²⁶ Today's understanding of construction suggests that the courthouse was then nearly finished, but it was not. A month later A.W. Burrell posted notice asking if anyone in town was willing to take on the plumbing work.²⁷

In spring 1877 a convicted murderer named James Hayes stood with a rope around his neck on a newly-built scaffold behind the courthouse. Two hundred gawkers had gathered by 1:00 PM, and about two dozen more waited inside the jail yard to witness Kern County's first legal hanging.²⁸ Approximately 400 yards to the east was Railroad Avenue School, and a second-floor window afforded a view of the jail yard. Officials probably knew about the school's vantage point because Hayes was hanged on a Saturday.²⁹

²⁴ Southern Californian - Kern County Weekly Courier, Aug 3, 1875

²⁵ Southern Californian, Sep 9 and Oct 7, 1875

²⁶ Southern Californian, Mar 23, 1876. The Californian described the courthouse in detail. Los Angeles Herald, Jul 14, 1876. Bakersfield Californian, Aug 31, 1917)

²⁷ The Southern Californian, Apr 1, 1875

²⁸ Southern Californian-Kern County Weekly Courier, March 31, 1877. This issue details Hayes' hanging and death.

²⁹ Edmund Ross Harrington, *History of the Organization and Administration of Kern County Schools*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1963, p 321. The Kern County Superintendent of Schools holds a copy.

By 1880 the courthouse had become inadequate for county needs.³⁰ Could a new jail be built behind the courthouse, thus allowing the old jail to be converted to office space?³¹ In 1882 a bond measure was brought before voters to build a hospital, hall of records, and jail, but it did not pass.³² That summer the lockup held three prisoners.³³

On New Year's Day 1887, a Mr. and Mrs. Al Morgan provided a Christmas-like dinner for nine prisoners. The couple's motivation might have been for any number of reasons, including jail conditions,³⁴ but questions about the jail's shortcomings were answered after an escape in early 1889. That day several prisoners got out by tearing up the floor.³⁵

In mid-1889, a \$250,000 bond was passed for highway improvements, a new county hospital, expansion of the court house, and a new jail.³⁶ Courthouse plans were drawn by Charles Barnett McDougall³⁷ and the jail's by J.N. Preston & Sons of Los Angeles, which showed a freestanding, three-floor jail with 24-inch-thick walls.³⁸ A reporter who inspected the drawings wrote,

³⁰ Morgan, op. cit. May 21, 1874. The Yoakum brothers were lynched in this jail in 1879. See *Lynchings at the Kern County Jail, 1879*. www.gilbertgia.com/articlePages/crime1.html

³¹ Kern County Californian, Jan 15, 1880

³² Morning Echo, Jan 27, 1882 as noted in the Morning Echo, Jan 27, 1904. The Morning Echo started publication about 1882, but today there are no extant copies before 1886.

³³ Morning Echo, Jan 27, 1882 as noted in Morning Echo of Jan 27, 1904. Prisoners-- one for murder, one for assault, and one for horse theft.

³⁴ Kern County Californian, Jan 1, 1887. There is no evidence that the county was indifferent to prisoner needs, but there is evidence that it was responsive to administrative needs. Telephone service came to Bakersfield in spring 1888, and that October the county jail was listed among its 29 customers. (Bakersfield Californian, Apr 2, 1888 as noted in Bakersfield Californian, Apr 2, 1966, p 7a)

³⁵ Kern County Californian, Jan 5, 1889 (Credit: Rudy, op. cit.)

³⁶ Morgan, op. cit., May 13, 1889. The vote was 852 to 281.

³⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 31, 1917

³⁸ This jail occupied the space behind today's Bakersfield Police department at 1603 Truxtun Avenue.

“Behind this, directly in the rear, [*behind the courthouse*] is the building to contain the cells, 38-feet 9-inches deep and 35-feet 9-inches wide. The vestibule, in the center of the [*word unclear*] is 9-feet wide and 14-feet deep. It has a tile floor and two doors, one opening into a room at the left 17-feet deep and 17-feet 6-inches wide. This room has two other doors. At the right is a door into the sheriff’s office, the same size as its mate across the vestibule. From this room, entrance is had into the guard room, so to get into the cells, enter the vestibule to the right into the sheriff’s office, to the left into the guard room, to the left again into the guard’s lobby, and then to the right to the cells. There is no other way of exit or entrance, so it will be seen that it would be hard indeed to force a passage.”³⁹

“The second floor of this part contains a [*word unclear*] cell, an insane cell fitted with a protected passageway, and a hospital cell equal in length to both the others, and with top, bottom, and sides of steel. The ground floor is 14-feet high in the clear and the upper story 12-feet. The cell building has a two-story feature built of chrome steel divided into 16 cells. On three sides of these cages there is a corridor 4-feet wide hemmed in with steel gratings, which will serve on occasion for lesser criminals, and between the cells and the main building is an alleyway 6-feet wide. A lever box in this space allows all the cells to be locked or unlocked while safely away from the prisoners.”⁴⁰

“The kitchen and pantry open from the guard’s lobby into the main building. Every appliance of present knowledge for safety, convenience, and comfort is to be used in this structure. The cell building is to be completely fire proof, nothing but brick, iron, and steel entering into its construction. The rafters of the main structure will be of wood, but will be covered with slate.”⁴¹

“The Norman order of architecture has been adopted with such modifications as were needed with the result that the building will be an ornament to the town, and if aesthetic culture can avail, will really help to make good citizens out of the awfully-bad insiders. The building is to follow plans and specifications made by J.N. Preston & Sons of Los Angeles as furnished by George H. Potter.”⁴²

The old courthouse-jail was still being used in December 1891 when the Kern County Grand Jury skewered the Board of Supervisors with what it already knew: The hospital, courthouse and jail were inadequate and overcrowded and had to be

³⁹ Kern County Californian, Feb 14, 1889

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. J.N. Preston & Sons, Architects, 41 South Spring Street, Los Angeles (Los Angeles Herald, Sep 24, 1888 “Notice To Contractors”). The new jail was “to be erected in the northwest corner of the courthouse square.” (Daily Californian of Feb 16, 1893) Maps and photographs, however, show it was built in the southwest quadrant of the courthouse grounds. The jail’s entrance was at 16th Street and I Street.

replaced.⁴³ In September 1893 supervisors approved a bid of \$27,055 to build the new jail, but by then nearly five years had passed since passage of the bond election. Perhaps because of that, and perhaps because of abysmal jail conditions, supervisors specified that the work be completed before February 2, 1894.⁴⁴

In December the brick walls were five feet above the basement,⁴⁵ and the steel plate was being installed.⁴⁶ Two months later, citizens marveled at a construction method never before seen in Bakersfield.

“Those who have watched the process of erecting the new jail have invariably tackled the artificial-stone floors and ceilings like doubting Thomases, only in the end to be convinced that the Ransome process⁴⁷ is a wonderful advance in the line of fire-proof architecture. The apparently slender layer of cement, which has hardened to stone, turns out ably to support any weight that can possibly be placed upon it and is as unyielding as natural rock.”⁴⁸

“Take the case of the stairway; a wooden frame is at first put up, upon which the prepared cement is shaped into place and left from 10 days to two weeks to solidify. Then all of the wooden frame and props are knocked out and the staircase stands firm in the air, supported only by the hold that the inside of it has upon the adjacent wall. It would seem as though the stairway would fall, but, on the other hand, it is firm as a rock and cannot be broken down.”⁴⁹

“The leading feature of the Ransome patent is the iron with which floors, ceilings and stairways are interlaced. Square iron is used, but before being placed in the cement it is twisted from one end into a spiral shape like a carpenter’s bit or the thread of a screw. This twisted iron being laid one way and crossways, and then the cement firmly set all around it, there is no chance for either iron or cement to give. Each holds the other firm, and the result is something to be seen, doubted, and finally believed in. Go to the new jail and examined the remarkable

⁴³ The Californian, Dec 16, 1891

⁴⁴ The Californian, Sep 19, 1893.

⁴⁵ Daily Californian, Nov 10, 1893

⁴⁶ Iron and steel merchant. P.D.N. Little of Los Angeles was the contractor. Bars for the second-floor cells were set aside, perhaps for later need (Daily Californian, Dec 13, 1893). As this work was underway, 12 “visitors” from Delano were registered at the old jail, which made the prisoner population 62 (Daily Californian, Jan 12, 1894). Daily Californian, Jan 20, 1894.

⁴⁷ See Appendix for notes on the Ransome Process.

⁴⁸ Daily Californian, Feb 1, 1894 “At the new jail” The “artificial stone” was concrete.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

combination of strengthening forces, and you will wonder that as the thing is so simple that you, or I, or some other one had not thought of it long, long ago.”⁵⁰

When the jail was nearly finished, a newspaper panned its exterior finish:

“It seems a pity that the builders of the new jail decided to have the semicircle which contains the cells coated on the outside with plaster. The bricks of which it is built should have been let alone so as to correspond with the rest of the building, which is very handsome. As it is now, the contrast between the two parts is as startling and incongruous as a red woman in a green dress, or vice versa.”⁵¹

The faux-wood finish applied to paneling in the first courthouse had been an admired feature, and the same technique was used again in the new jail. “Some of the graining now being done at the new jail is very handsome work. The doors are especially worth seeing.”⁵² Weeks later the Californian again praised the wood finishes that so completely mimicked oak, walnut and cherry.⁵³ As construction continued, gas lighting and electrical connections were installed, and soon afterward, “in accordance with a suggestion made by the Californian,” the board of supervisors cordially invited the public to inspect the new jail.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Daily Californian, Mar 6, 1894 “A Mistake”

⁵² Daily Californian, Mar 31, 1894.

⁵³ (Daily Californian, Apr 17, 1894)

⁵⁴ Daily Californian, Apr 17, Apr 28, May 8, 1894



The Kern County Jail of 1894

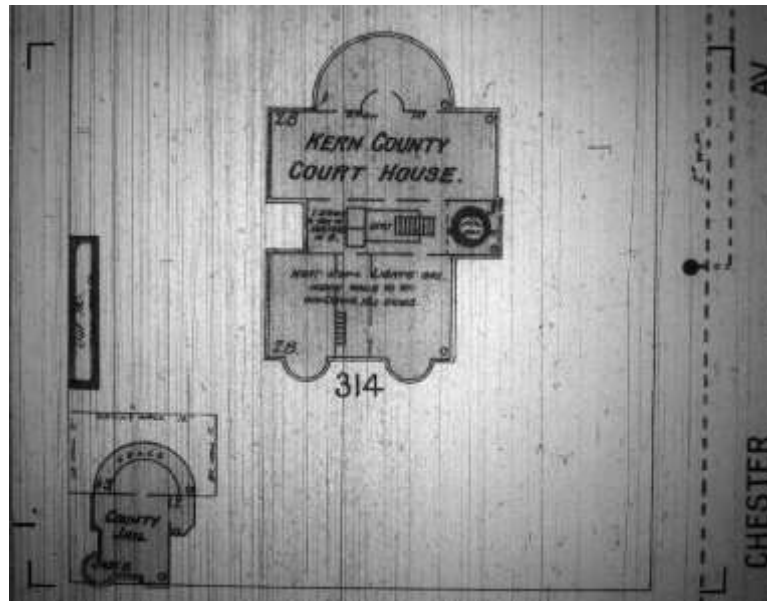


The jail (left) and courthouse (right) built in 1894--southwest view
(Eugene Burmeister, *The Golden Empire, Kern County, California*, Autograph Press, Beverly Hills, California. Stockton Trade Press, Norwalk, California, 1977)

In following weeks contractor Charles Lindgren built a brick wall “a sufficient distance from the building to form a jail yard” so prisoners could exercise and enjoy fresh air.⁵⁵ In building the wall had the board of supervisors anticipated

⁵⁵ Daily Californian, Aug 11, 1894

increased use of the jail? In 1890 the combined population of Bakersfield and Kern City [East Bakersfield] was 2,637, and that same year a newspaper predicted that by 1900 more than 23,000 people would reside in this area. ⁵⁶ Use of the jail in 1895 did reflect population growth: In April, 160 individuals were booked and 127 were released.⁵⁷



New jail (lower right) and courthouse of 1894
The brick enclosure is shown as a rectangle around the jail.
(Sanborn Fire Map, 1899)

In spring of 1895 the combination courthouse-jail built in 1876 was incorporated a part of the new courthouse. Contractor David Kilpatrick salvaged steel plate from the now-vacant jail for use in the walls of the new auditor's and assessor's

⁵⁶ Kern County Californian, Jul 12, 1890. The population of Kern County in the 1900 US Census was 16,480. In 1910 it was 37,715

⁵⁷ Daily Californian, Jul 1, 1895. (Credit, Rudy, op. cit.)

offices,⁵⁸ and some months later he removed more for construction of the tax collector's vault.⁵⁹ The old lock up was probably no longer recognizable as a jail by winter of 1895.

The new, free-standing jail looked sturdy on paper, but it was not escape proof. Sheriff Borgwardt⁶⁰ said very little for several days after E.M. Woolford escaped in late 1897. Weeks before that, a Mrs. Terry was allowed to visit Woolford daily in his second-floor cell -- separate from the jail's regular holding tank, --and bring him meals from a downtown restaurant. Days after his escape, Sheriff Borgwardt explained that on one of her visits she made an impression of the door lock and from that had a key made. He had accepted that explanation, but he did not figure out how Woolford escaped after unlocking the door.⁶¹

The courthouse had problems during construction. After the basement was dug, it was found that the resulting headspace was two feet shy for the new furnace. The county had to pay Kilpatrick extra to make the basement deeper.⁶² In another case, in April 1895, someone noticed that a new wall on the northeast corner had settled. Kilpatrick was paid extra to demolish it and build a new wall that would withstand the weight of the courthouse's new tower.⁶³

Woolford's escape in 1897 foreshadowed the jail's structural problems, which did not become completely public until 1900, but after that the press was

⁵⁸ Daily Californian, Apr 8, 1895

⁵⁹ Daily Californian, Aug 9, 1895

⁶⁰ Kern Count Sheriff Henry L. Borgwardt, Jr. served 1891-1893. He served again 1896-1903.

⁶¹ San Francisco Call, Nov 18, 1897, "Kern's Sheriff Loses A Guest"

⁶² Daily Californian, Feb 5, 1895

⁶³ Daily Californian, Apr 8, 1895

unrelentingly critical. On December 20th the Kern County Grand Jury christened the six-year-old building "an old Spanish dungeon." ⁶⁴ Days later 14 prisoners broke out by filing off bars.⁶⁵

Jail conditions must have made prisoners desperate. The jail's water supply also provided landscape irrigation, and when an outside hose was turned on, water pressure to the jail fell to zero. The gardener often forgot to shut off the valve, and on one occasion prisoners had no water for almost 24 hours.⁶⁶ Another failure of the jail was revealed in spring 1903 when three men escaped via a side door later thought to have been opened from the outside by a prisoner released some days earlier.⁶⁷ In 1904 a prisoner named Al Hulse posted rules for inmates and from his cell conducted "kangaroo court."⁶⁸ Prisoners on "trial" were the recently arrested, and all of them inevitably broke his rules. In May 1904 a reporter found Hulse and his friends "in a bad way" because they had no "live ones," and they had "only 25¢ in the treasury and a \$2.50 order for tobacco with the jailer."⁶⁹ For the next two decades Kern County grand juries regularly slammed the jail's "wretched conditions" -- its vermin, cobweb-covered windows , stinking sewer pipes, and absence of hot water for prisoners to wash themselves and their clothes.⁷⁰

Some months earlier, a state official had visited and issued this report:

"The county jail of Kern County was inspected January 26, 1912. It held at that time seventy-three male and two female prisoners, total seventy-five. I was

⁶⁴ Daily Californian, Dec 21, 1900. (Credit, Rudy, op. cit.)

⁶⁵ Daily Californian, Jan 1-3, 1901 (Credit, Rudy, op. cit.)

⁶⁶ Daily Californian, May 29, 1901

⁶⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 7, 1903. Los Angeles Herald, Mar 8, 1903.

⁶⁸ An assembly that blatantly disregards standards of justice. It also could refer to the pouch of a kangaroo, meaning the court is in someone's pocket.

⁶⁹ Bakersfield Californian, May 12, 1904. (Credit, Rudy, op. cit.). Aug 19, 1905

⁷⁰ Morning Echo, Sep 28, 1913

informed by the jailer that he had had at one time in this jail this winter 120 prisoners. I found thirty-four men occupying nine cells about 6 x 8' in size, or nearly four men for each cell. A cell 6 x 8' in size should hold but one man, and never more than two."⁷¹

"To put four men in such a cell is a crime against humanity, and should be reached by law."⁷² In addition to the overcrowded condition, this jail is very dark, poorly ventilated, and generally unsanitary. Some of the floors are in bad condition, the plumbing not in good order, and the sewer occasionally backs up and floods the lower floor. Owing to the dark and crowded conditions, the jail cannot be kept clean. It is not possible to maintain proper discipline. At present each department disciplines itself by a 'kangaroo court.' A prisoner is elected 'judge,' and through him is maintained such discipline as now exists."⁷³

"The food is cooked in a very small and poorly-arranged kitchen, none too clean, and carried to the cell room in old 5 gallon kerosene oil cans, after they have been discarded as oil cans. It is then dipped out into basins, each prisoner being provided with two, the 'judge' attending to the distribution. The basins are washed in this crowded cage and kept there from meal to meal."⁷⁴

"There are no laundry facilities. Each prisoner must wash his own clothing in a bathtub inside of the cage and dry it as best he can. In many instances he goes without clothing until his laundry dries out. The bathtubs are old iron and badly rusted."⁷⁵

"The conditions existing in this jail are such that no prisoner can be made better. If a good man remains there long he is bound to come out a physical and moral wreck. The citizens of Kern County should not permit this jail to stand longer than it takes to build a new one."⁷⁶

"I understand the Board of Supervisors have already taken steps toward building. People should support them. The present building, even now, is not half large enough. Its original plan of construction was very faulty. Its unsanitary conditions probably cannot be removed. The only remedy for these conditions, which certainly reflect discredit upon the County, is a new jail. -W.A. Gates, Secretary, State Board of Charities and Corrections."⁷⁷

⁷¹ California Bulletin of Charities and Corrections, Issue No. 1, p. 20. Superintendent of State Printing, (Sacramento) 1911. The report stated that the Bakersfield visit was on January 26, 1912.

⁷² "reached" is transcribed verbatim

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

In September 1913 The Morning Echo interviewed a speaker at the Congress of Reforms about her inspection of the jail.

"Like all visitors to the jail, Mrs. Griffith spoke especially of the stench from the cells and said that she believed she would have fainted if she remained ten minutes longer in one of the tanks. She said that she had visited jails and penitentiaries from on end of the Pacific coast to the other, an in all her 25 years' experience she never had seen anything to equal it for filth and lack of light and air. 'Talk about stench,' said Mrs. Griffith, 'I don't believe that in all states you could find such a hell-hole as this jail you have over here.'"

Gouging of the county treasury was also a complaint. In 1916 when the county was considering a new jail, the Morning Echo wrote,

"For more than a decade Kern County had the rankest, foul-smelling, disease-breeding jail in California. Grand juries condemned it, street orators roasted the powers that be that controlled it, and the public generally was indignant that such a liability on the community was permitted to be filled to bursting with unfortunates while the county government paid out at the rate of \$5,000-\$10,000 a year for boarding prisoners, which permitted a huge profit."⁷⁸

"It is recalled that the county and city in former days packed the jail with 'bread and water' prisoners and at the same time allowed the Sheriff to collect hundreds of dollars monthly, a large percentage of it profit for boarding the men who were not charged with serious crimes: Men without a home but willing to work were arrested and given bread crusts."⁷⁹

"Mr. Morgan, city manager for more than a decade, was one of the citizens who called attention to the unsavory county jail and who has done more in a single stroke of the pen toward ameliorating conditions for the unfortunate jobless than a hostile journal, condoning jail conditions that cried to heaven for adjustment, has accomplished in a lifetime."⁸⁰

City Manager Morgan was a sparkplug in promoting the new jail, and he also might have been active in seeking a location southeast of the court house. But that

⁷⁸ Morning Echo, Jan 6, 1916 "Our Glorious Jail History." The county reimbursed the sheriff for feeding prisoners.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid. This reference says that by January 1916 Wallace M. Morgan had been City Manager of Bakersfield for more than a decade. He wrote *History of Kern County, California*, Historic Record Company, Los Angeles, California, 1914. The *hostile journal* mentioned was the Bakersfield Californian. The two newspapers had an ongoing, years-long feud.

search for jail property ended in December 1911 when the county bought a block of land at Truxtun Avenue and P Street.⁸¹ The owner was Celsus Brower, and the county paid \$8,500. ⁸²

In fall of 1913 a Los Angeles newspaper wrote that Kern County awaited voter approval for jail bonds, ⁸³ but weeks later when a Bakersfield newspaper mentioned the same thing, supervisors replied that no election was necessary.⁸⁴ In fact, an election was held, and voters approved bonds for a new jail and courthouse.⁸⁵

⁸¹ The jail site is now historically identified as the northwest corner of Truxtun Avenue and Q Street. In 1911 a portion of Mill Pond occupied today's Q Street between 17th Street and Truxtun Avenue. Eighteenth Street between Q Street and Union Avenue was not opened to Union Avenue until after 1919.(Bakersfield Californian, Jul 16, 1919)

⁸² Bakersfield Californian, Jul 13, 1911. Credit, Rudy, op. cit. Bakersfield Californian, Dec 6, 1911. City trustees declared the alley through the block closed. (Bakersfield Californian, Jul 24, 1914 “ The country work on the new county jail will start next Monday”)

⁸³ Los Angeles Times, Aug 14, 1913

⁸⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 8, 1913. Oct 12, 1913 (Credit Rudy, op. cit.)

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Left: County courthouse built 1913 on the former park at the southeast corner of Chester and Truxtun. Right: Bakersfield City Hall, formerly the county courthouse. The jail built in 1894 appears behind it.

Plans for the new jail at Truxtun Avenue and Q Street were drawn by local architect Orville Lee Clark.⁸⁶ In later years he designed several other major buildings in Bakersfield, but the jail job was his first big one, and in later years he and his wife recalled it fondly.⁸⁷ After being selected architect, he and Lucy Dee Brown got married. In later years Lucy joked they were married on jail money.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ See Appendix for biographical notes on Clark

⁸⁷ William Harland Boyd Binder Collection, v. 131, McGuire Local History Room, Beale Memorial Library, Bakersfield California. Bakersfield Californian, Oct 10, 1913, p. 1, 5-7

⁸⁸ Gilbert Gia interview in 2003 with Mary Elizabeth Clark Lee (1918-2008)



Kern County Jail built in 1913

"MODERN JAIL TO BE ERECTED SOON ON TRUXTUN AVENUE"

Bakersfield Californian, October 10, 1913

"The Kern County Board of Supervisors this morning accepted the plans of Orville L. Clark, the local architect, for the building of the proposed new \$150,000 county jail. Thomas B. Wiseman was awarded the second prize of \$250 as having submitted the second-best plans. The third prize of \$125 went to Dolliver of San Francisco."⁸⁹

"A *Class A Building*. The new Kern County jail will be a Class A building, having a concrete foundation, brick exterior walls faced with terra-cotta, floors and roof of reinforced concrete, which is supported by complete steel frame. The structure will be the finest type of jail building in the entire West and is a building that Kern County can well be proud of, as she is of her new courthouse."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 10, 1913, p. 1, 5-7. "Supervisors Select Clark Plans For The New Jail"

⁹⁰ Ibid.

“Mr. Clark explained: The prisoners are brought into the building from the rear, either by automobile or otherwise, the first entering into a room known as the prisoners’ entrance.⁹¹ From this room they are taken by means of an electric passenger elevator to either the first, mezzanine, or second floor. This elevator is for the accommodation of the prisoners only, as it opens to the guards’ corridor on each of the floors. The jail portion of the building consists of two wings which open into a main guard’s corridor, from which the guard can have complete view of all prisoners. From the main guard’s corridor one passes through to steel doors, one of which is made from steel plate, the other of steel bars. This enables the guard to enter the main cell portions of either wing with great safety; having first to open the steel-plate door and then the doors made of bars. This affords great safety, for he can look either way before entering the cell portion of the building. Through the center of either of these wings is provided an exercise corridor for prisoner. The cells which are in two rows, one row on either side of the exercise corridor, are within five feet of the exterior walls in which are provided large windows for lighting. These cells are built of plate steel and bars; they also have a positive automatic locking device for controlling all cell doors. This locking device is so arranged that from the guard’s corridor any number of the cell doors can be opened singly or in series. When the prisoner is once placed in the cell, the door of the cell can be opened to allow the prisoner to enter the exercise corridor without the guard exposing himself. ”⁹²

“*In the Basement.* In the basement to the right is provided a large storage room, drunk cells, fumigating room and showers. In the central portion of the building is the garage, workshop, armory, prisoners’ entrance and the passenger elevator. At the left is the boiler and engine room and the engineer’s room. The portion under the two wings not excavated is used for all plumbing and heating pipes.”⁹³

“The first floor consists of the general offices, consultation rooms, sheriff’s private office with vault, and additional private office, three undersheriffs’ rooms, which are provided with folding beds and large closets; bathrooms, etc. On the mezzanine floor is provided the same number of cells as on the first floor.”⁹⁴

“*Convenient Accessories.* On the second floor on the wing to the left of the kitchen, is the pantry, dining room for trustees, a laundry and a steam drying room, also cells and bath room for detained witnesses; also a men’s hospital department. The kitchen and laundry rooms are so located that the trusties are confined to the second story of the left wing. There they can do all the work for the entire building, such work as is done by trusties, this wing being under the control and charge of the guard of the second floor.

⁹¹ Entrance was at basement level. Access was via a, concrete automobile ramp on the north side of the jail.

⁹² Daily Californian, Sep 10, 1913 “Modern Jail to Be Erected Soon on Truxtun Avenue”

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

"The Female Ward. In the wing to the right is provided the female wards which consist of three large cells, exercise corridors and baths, the matron's apartment and hospital beds."⁹⁵

"The second floor of the main portion of the building leading from the corridor is the juvenile department, the insane ward, property room, and to the right the sheriff's living apartments, consisting of one guest room with bath, living room, dining room, kitchen and pantry and three bedrooms with bath."⁹⁶

"Lighting and Ventilation. All cells and all rooms throughout the building are well lighted. The mechanical ventilating system is such that the air in all rooms and cells will be change every fifteen or twenty minutes."⁹⁷

"All the plumbing throughout the entire building is the most modern plumbing, installed in the most modern and up-to-date manner. In the jail portion of the building on the end of the exercise corridor is a high pressure steam line, which will be used for the sterilizing of all cells."⁹⁸

County coffers swelled after the discovery of oil in 1899 on the Kern River Field. By 1913 the county had an excess of \$250,000 in local banks, about the same in the county treasury, and \$125,000 received from the city in the sale of the old courthouse and jail -- all of which far exceeded the county's financial needs.⁹⁹

After the voters approved \$2,500,000 in bond indebtedness, the county was in such robust fiscal shape that it bought almost ten percent of its own bonds.¹⁰⁰ At a meeting held in September 1913, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Henry Alexander Jastro advised assembled bond buyers that Kern was in a class by itself

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid. A mezzanine is usually defined as a balcony overlooking the floor below it. The jail's mezzanine occupied the rear half the the building with the cells.

⁹⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 10, 1913, p. 1, 5-7. "Supervisors Select Clark Plans For The New Jail"

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ The county's undesignated reserve in 2016 dollars was about \$25,000,000.

¹⁰⁰ According to the Bakersfield Californian, the county could clear 3% by loaning itself funds that would be paid back over time by taxpayers.

when it came to having cash on hand.¹⁰¹ That excess was probably why Clark was able to include two monumental lion statues in his jail plans.¹⁰²

Supervisors approved a \$97,476 bid from general contractor F.G. Caldwell & Sons to build the jail.¹⁰³ In late July 1914, Walters & Smith Company had its pipe on the site and was putting up a tool shack.¹⁰⁴ Ground excavation started, and building materials arrived daily. Weeks later G. Zarri, who was representative for General Building Work Company of San Francisco, started the brick, concrete and steel work.¹⁰⁵

Jail costs grew, eventually ballooning to \$160,000, and at that point it earned a new name: Jastro's Folly.¹⁰⁶ A criticism much more surprising had to do less with cost than with decline in crime. The Californian explained,

“When the old crib district¹⁰⁷ was placed under court injunction, that was another decided slump in lawlessness as evidenced by the criminal records. Crimes of violence have become so scarce as to be a rarity in the news of the day, whereas in the old days they were so common that the reporters on the police beats used to be ashamed to write the daily record. And in the future, instead of taxing ourselves to build the finest jails in the state and to harvest the crop of criminals to occupy it, we may invest our public funds more freely in providing the most

¹⁰¹ Jastro also said that Kern's tax rate was nearly as low or just as low as the tax rate of any county in California. (Los Angeles Times, Sep 10, 1913 by wire from Bakersfield Sep 9). Bakersfield Californian, Feb 14, 1914. “Sheriff Boone Newell plans to move into county jail on Sunday.” See Jastro biography *Henry A. Jastro, Commodore of Kern County, Biography, Kinships, Politics, 1848-1925* at <http://www.gilbertgia.com/articlePages/business1.html>

¹⁰² See Appendix for notes on the lion statues.

¹⁰³ In Aug 1913 the Los Angeles Times reported the cost of construction at \$150,000. The \$97,276 figure appeared in the Morning Echo, May 12, 1914, p. 8 (Credit, John Edward Powell).

¹⁰⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 24, 1914

¹⁰⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 24, 1914, Aug 13, 1914, p 3, c 1. Julius Zarri was president of General Building Work Company. (*San Francisco City Directory, 1915*). William Harland Boyd historical citations, Binder No. 5. McGuire Local History Room, Beale Library, Bakersfield, California

¹⁰⁶ This cannot presently be documented but will be when I find it. (Gilbert P. Gia)

¹⁰⁷ *Crib district* referred to an area east of Chester Avenue in downtown Bakersfield that was associated with crime and prostitution. See *Mme. Brignaudy in the Bakersfield Tenderloin, 1905-1933* at www.gilbertgia.com/articlePages/crime1.html

completely efficient industrial training schools, the best school gardens and playgrounds, the best school workshops, the best public concerts and educational entertainments. We hope that after the election, the people of Bakersfield may be able to turn their backs upon the jails and the police courts as institutions demanding no further public attention save such as city officials may trusted to give them as a matter of course, and to turn their faces to the pleasant task of building parks, equipping playgrounds, setting up workshops where the boys may learn the use of tools, teaching the children the pleasures and profit of industry, promoting wholesome public entertainments, beautifying the city with trees and flowers and making Bakersfield the best home city in the state."¹⁰⁸

Construction was well underway when a Kern County labor journal printed this challenging headline -- which apparently had little effect on the council.

TEAR THE OLD JAIL DOWN

"There is talk of the old rattle trap in the corner of the city hall yard being cobbled up to do service as a city prison. When this big white palace of human misery was built it was no doubt in the minds of the members of the board of supervisors that a part of it would be used for a city prison. It was very naturally expected that the plan which has obtained for years of placing city prisoners in the county jail would continue. Now, if any one has any serious intentions of trying to continue to use as a city prison that iconic powder-perfumed den in the corner of the city hall park that idea should be speedily removed. We have new jail enough, and to spare. Tear down the filthy old jail. Let's removed it from sight and forget that such a miserable prison as it ever existed in a civilized community."¹⁰⁹

The county's new jail opened in the third week of December 1915, and about that time the Californian interviewed Orville Clark.

"The new jail is one of the most complete and modern in the state. It is equipped with every known safety device for keeping its inmates safely, is absolutely fireproof and with all is one of the most beautiful buildings to be seeing any place. It looks more like home than a prison. Sheriff Newell will have some quarters for his own family in the second story. There will be only one entrance so that the privacy of his family cannot be disturbed. The deputies will each have their own rooms, well furnished, with baths and showers installed conveniently."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Apr 2, 1915

¹⁰⁹ Union Labor Journal editorial reprinted by the Morning Echo on Aug 26, 1915

¹¹⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Dec 14, 1915, p 8, c 1 "New Jail Building Approved By Supervisors." Contractors: Caldwell & Sons, general contractor; Burman Plumbing Company, heating and ventilating; Walters & Smith,

“One of the best features of the building is the ventilation. The whole place will be kept full of clean wholesome air by mechanical ventilation. Even the cells have been made so that foul air cannot accumulate. The cells are built in rows of nine and surrounded by bars of steel, and build each with two banks. Either can be folded against the wall. Each row of cells has a corridor for exercise 7 by 54 feet and each is equipped with dining tables, toilet and with drinking fountain.”¹¹¹

“Between rows of cells all the plumbing is in a utility corner all within easy reach and fixed so that any tools could not be secured by prisoners if any were left around by mechanics. Elevators carry food from the kitchen down to the various floors which are made so that a prisoner could not get away through them.”¹¹²

“Upstairs there is another row of cells, cells for the jail hospital, for insane prisoners, for women, and for convicted prisoners. These cells are all of like-colored metal, nothing at all in the whole building is dark-colored and was made so that healthful and not forbidding atmosphere will be possible. In the kitchen everything convenient will be found. Most of the equipment is already in the building and is first-class.”¹¹³

“Laundry is well fixed. There is a steam cleaner and dryer and everything that will make things pleasant. The heat and light is all controlled from the basement, and engineers who have examined the equipment say it is the best that could be found. Two-hundred-sixteen prisoners can be taken care of in the building with comfort to all. Water and lighting systems are excellent and the ventilation perfect. Orville L Clark, the supervising architect, is well pleased with the results of his efforts and takes delight in showing the details of a building that adds much to the city’s appearance. It looks more like a home than a prison.”¹¹⁴

Several months after it opened, the Morning Echo questioned its need in light of changing moral behavior and criticized the waste of money on marble and lion statues.

“It is indeed timely that a new jail is to be occupied, but with the changing of public sentiment towards saloons and jails, there was never a good reason for

plumbing; Van Dorn Iron Works, cell work. (Morning Echo, Dec 14, 1915 “New Jail Formerly Accepted by County”). The Caldwell & Son completion date was Dec 13, 1915 (Kern County Hall of Records, Misc. Recorded Documents, Book 0017 (0352-4).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

building a jail with more rooms than our largest hotel. After the saloons are voted out there will never come a time when the new jail will be called upon to furnish cells for more than a sixth of its capacity. Half the money expended on the new jail is mere waste of public funds, unless it be that it was used in purchasing marble lions and cornerstones.”¹¹⁵

The City of Bakersfield used the new jail to house its prisoners, and four months after it opened, the Morning Echo told the city what it should do with its relic of bygone days: eradicate it, lock, stock and barrel.

“Through the purchase of the City Hall property [*the old county courthouse*], the city of Bakersfield has come into possession of an ancient landmark, used for 20 years to house the men and women who came at cross-purposes with the law. With the occupation of the new jail, the city now has this old, unsightly, brick and steel ‘castle’ on its hands.”¹¹⁶

“It has been suggested that the building be transformed into a home for the Board of Trade, office quarters for the Chamber of Commerce, and also for use as a police headquarters¹¹⁷ and club room. For none of these purposes is the old structure serviceable. At a cost of probably \$5,000 or \$10,000 it might be remodeled. But the expense does not justify devoting the money. For no matter how well glossed over, recanted and revamped, the building will always be known as the old jail. And with the city contemplating the purchase of additional lands adjoining the city hall for a central park, it would never do, we believe, to have in our midst a constant reminder of the days when more than 100 persons were herded in the county prison, and which was condemned by a score of grand juries as a breeding place for disease and unfit for human habitation.”¹¹⁸

“Your jail has served its purpose. It was a magnificent piece of architecture when the supervisors built it and was the first concrete building in the city. But that was his only ‘honor.’ We advised the city to wreck it or salvage it to some junkman. We protest against its being made over into a municipal institution of any sort. After the old jail is gone the city will have but one jail, and that a monumental piece of penal construction, large enough to meet all demands for generations to come. The county can stand one jail, but it would never do now for the city of Bakersfield to cling to the memories of the bygone days by retaining a daily reminder of what

¹¹⁵ Morning Echo, Jan 6, 1916 “Our Glorious Jail History” Kern County reimbursed the Sheriff for feeding prisoners.

¹¹⁶ Morning Echo, Apr 14, 1916 “Raze Relic of Bygone Days”

¹¹⁷ The police department and the fire department shared the Fire House at 20th and K Streets. (Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jun 16, 1919)

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

will never again be."¹¹⁹

Approximately 18 months later, in mid-1917, the county denied the city use of the new jail, which meant the city had to book arrestees in the old jail. Councilman Benson's answer to jail crowding was to give "drunks" a small amount of bread and a tin cup of coffee in the morning "to sober up on," and if necessary put them out in the jail's walled yard. In answer to What should be done if any of them escape? Benson replied, "Let 'em go." It was then moved and passed that councilmen Howard, James, and Baughman inspect the old jail.¹²⁰

The Californian also wanted the old jail gone and encouraged the city to proceed with demolition. "The public has come to regard the building as an offense to the eye and the mind, and presumably the work of demolition will go on to the end,"¹²¹ but the council could not do that until the city regained use of the county jail. Until then the judge's room at city hall was not the place to be when drunks were brought in for booking, or so suggested the court reporter who described the "near-nightly enjoyment of having a drunk spew all over its floor."¹²²

So for a yet-undetermined time the old jail would have to "rust and must and moulder some more."¹²³ The Echo explained, "The city council has refused to furnish quarters for the prisoners [*at the new jail*] until the city attorney gets a decision on appeal in the matter of the county jail accepting prisoners. The sheriff refuses to accept city prisoners without warrants, and the police judge refuses to

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 14, 1917 "Committee to Inspect Old Jail."

¹²¹ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 31, 1917

¹²² Morning Echo, Nov 6, 1917 "Reject Bids for Wrecking Jail"

¹²³ Ibid.

issue warrants after office hours.”¹²⁴ Accordingly, the city appointed a committee of three “to investigate rumors as to friction existing between the police department and the police court.”¹²⁵

Six months passed. In spring 1918 it seemed that the jail problem had been resolved because a Mr. Frazer appeared before the city council and offered to tear down the old jail for its salvage value. He and the city signed a contract,¹²⁶ and when demolition was finished, all that was left of the jail was a foundation and bare floor.¹²⁷ In April the city council conferred with the county board of supervisors about transferring police identification bureau records to the county jail.¹²⁸

In June 1919, 18 cells were available for city use,¹²⁹ but the city soon found out that it had been hasty in demolishing the old jail: Once again the county denied the city use of the new jail.

Where could the city put its prisoners? Councilman Baughman moved and Gilchrist seconded that a jail be built on the site of the old jail. The vote was three Ayes, Four Nays. Motion failed. Next, Baughman moved and Gilchrist seconded that the city building inspector draw up plans for prisoners to be housed in the city hall assembly room. That proposal was also defeated. It was then moved that the Fire

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jan 14, 1918

¹²⁶ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Mar 25, 1918

¹²⁷ Bakersfield Californian Jun 28, 1921. Some brick was stored in the city corporation yard. In 1921 it was donated to City Commercial Organization for use at an auto campground on North Chester Avenue. (Bakersfield Californian, Jan 10, 1934)

¹²⁸ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Apr 22, 1918. The city retained oversight. In April, Police Judge F.W. Bunnell resigned his position. (Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Apr 22, 1918, p 102)

¹²⁹ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jun 16, 1919. Bakersfield Californian, Jun 31, 1919, p 7, c 7

House at 20th and K Streets be altered to accommodate prisoners. That also failed. Immediately, Mr. Hougham moved that prisoners be placed in the basement of city hall, but the motion lost for want of a second.¹³⁰ The where-to-put-prisoners question was tabled for the next meeting of the council.

At that session it was ordered that the city building inspector prepare two, separate sets of jail plans: One for the site of the old jail and the other for the Fire House at 20th and K Streets.¹³¹ At the next meeting the council chose the plans for old jail site and instructed the city inspector to find out how much it would cost the city,¹³² but the problem became moot after the county and city agreed on use of the county jail. The city would not have to build its own jail.

In 1920 a Peter J. Forthhoffer escaped by picking a lock with a fork,¹³³ but he might not have had it so easy in 1924 when "the city jail, which consist mainly of the 'booze cage' of the county jail" installed a heavy steel screen door between it and the county's part of the building.¹³⁴

For the next 14 years the foundation and cement floor of the old jail was used as a speakers' platform and bandstand,¹³⁵ but that ended in January 1934 when 24 CWA¹³⁶ workers successfully demolished what remained of it.¹³⁷ A month was

¹³⁰ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jun 30, 1919

¹³¹ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jul 7, 1919

¹³² Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jul 16, 1919

¹³³ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 16, 1937, p 9

¹³⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 6, 1924 "New City Jail Now Ready to Be Dedicated"

¹³⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 12, 1934 "City Jail Being Raised by a Crew of Twenty-Four Laborers."

¹³⁶ "The CWA was a project created under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). The CWA created construction jobs, mainly improving or constructing buildings and bridges. It ended on March 31, 1934, after spending \$200 million a month and giving jobs to four million people." Wikipedia

¹³⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 12, 1934 "City Jail Being Raised by a Crew of Twenty-Four Laborers."

thought enough for the job, but the reinforced concrete did not give up easily.¹³⁸

When workers resorted to dynamite, chunks of brick and mortar were hurled across 16th Street and shattered windows at La Granada Ballroom.¹³⁹ But the old jail was now gone.

La Granada Ballroom behind city hall



For 37 years the county jail at Truxtun Avenue and Q Street housed the famous and the infamous, and it saw deaths, escapes, and overcrowding, but its quietus was started by the first earthquake of 1952. That year Sheriff Tom Kelly had to move 50 tons of files to the basement to relieve weight on the damaged upper floors, and he later had to relocate offices to Bakersfield City Hall. In summer 1963 the jail was completely razed and passed into history.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 29, 1934. Demolition continued longer than expected. In May, dynamiting sent pieces of brick into the ballroom's plate glass windows. (Bakersfield Californian, May 1, 1934)

¹⁴⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 3, 1963. La Granada Ballroom occupied Haberfelde Ford warehouse space. (Gilbert Gia interview with Don Suverkrop, 2016)

Appendix

Sheriffs of Kern County, 1865-1967

William B. Ross, July 1866-April 1868
Redmond B. Sagely, 1868-1870
William H. Coons, 1870-1874
William R. Bower, 1874-1876 (first of three terms)
Madison P. Wells, 1876-1878
William R. Bower, 1878-1887 (second term)
Dallas McCord, 1887-1889
W.J. Graham, 1889-1891
Henry L. Borgwardt, Jr., 1891-1893, (first of two terms)
William R. Bower 1893-1895 (third term)
Henry L. Borgwardt, Jr., 1895 -1903 (second term)
John W. Kelly, 1903-1910
Tomas A. Baker, 1911-1915
Dan Boone Newell, 1915-1923
John Caswell Walser, 1923-1935
Edward Champness, 1935-1939
John E. Loustalot, 1939-1951
Tom Kelly, 1951-1955
LeRoy F. Galyen, 1955-1967

The Ransome Process

The Ransome Process was named for inventor and builder Ernest L. Ransome (1844-1917) who in 1884 patented the Ransome System for reinforced concrete construction, but from the early 1890s until 1906 few reinforced concrete buildings were erected north of Los Angeles. One reason might have been because construction unions, as well as businesses selling materials that competed with concrete, might have opposed that type of construction. The absence of reinforced concrete construction in those years might also be attributed to the national depression of the mid-1890s. (Sara E. Wermiel, *California Concrete, 1876-1906: Jackson, Percy, and the Beginnings of Reinforced Concrete Construction in the United States* in Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Construction History, Cottbus, May 2009. Boston Architectural College, Boston, Massachusetts)

Orville Lee Clark

Architectural historian John Edward Powell wrote, "Orville Lee Clark did his collegiate-level studies at the New Lyme Institute in Ashtabula, Ohio that was a precursor to the two-year junior college concept and at the time that Clark attended was competing to become a normal school. The Institute lost its bid when the selection committee went elsewhere to establish what became Kent State. Clark worked in the trades and apprenticed in Ashtabula under an architect named White before moving to Los Angeles, then Bakersfield. His educational path was common in the advancement of architects in those days."¹⁴¹

The Bakersfield Morning Echo reported in early 1914, "The marriage of Miss Lucy Dee Brown¹⁴² and Orville L. Clark will be celebrated this morning in Porterville at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry G. Stuart. The Rev. A. L. Wood, rector of St. John's Episcopal church [*sic*], will read the service which will be witnessed by Mr. and Mrs. Stuart and Miss Hornbuckle, an intimate friend of the bride. Miss Brown is from Warrensburg, Missouri, and is a graduate of the state normal there. She has been in Bakersfield as a teacher in the Washington school [*sic*] for two years and is counted as one of the best teachers on the staff in the city. She made her home with Mr. and Mrs. Stuart during her first year here and has made many friends throughout her residence in Bakersfield who will be greatly pleased to welcome her as a permanent citizen in the bride of Mr. Clark. Mr. Clark has lived in Bakersfield about three years during which time he has built up an enviable reputation as an architect and has added favor in the social world to his [*sic, his*] business successes. He is a member of the Bakersfield Club, the Assembly Club and the Elks. Immediately after the ceremony this morning Mrs. Stuart will serve a breakfast for the wedding party after which Mr. Clark and his bride will leave for a wedding journey to San Francisco. Upon their return to Bakersfield they will be at home in one of the Brown cottages on the corner of Truxtun and F street [*sic*]." ¹⁴³

The Lion Statues

Details suggest that the jail's 5- by 12-foot lion statues were manufactured by Gladding-McBean & Company, which today still manufactures ornamental terracotta.¹⁴⁴ Kern County historian Joe Brooks recalled talking with a carpenter named Leonard Moon who worked on the jail construction in 1913, and Moon told him the statues came from an Italian firm in San Francisco.¹⁴⁵ In 1913 Gladding-McBean

¹⁴¹ Email between Gilbert Gia and John Edward Powell, 2016. Orville Lee Clark, March 10, 1884 - April 27, 1940. Obituary: Bakersfield Californian, Apr 27, 1940, p 9

¹⁴² Lucy Dee Brown Clark, Jan 5, 1890, Missouri – Oct 25, 1980, Kern County, California

¹⁴³ Morning Echo, Jan 25, 1914, p 9 "Current Events in Women's World." Transcription courtesy of John Edward Powell

¹⁴⁴ The Gladding-McBean plant is 120 miles northeast of San Francisco at Lincoln, California. See Huell Howser Archive about Gladding-McBean at [https://blogs.chapman.edu/huell-howser-archives/California's Gold - Terra Cotta](https://blogs.chapman.edu/huell-howser-archives/California's%20Gold%20-%20Terra%20Cotta) (Episode 412, Dec 10, 1993).

¹⁴⁵ Gilbert P. Gia interview with Joe Brooks, 2004 and 2010

maintained a sales office on Market Street in San Francisco, and the style and modeling of the statues correspond to the high-quality work of the company. ¹⁴⁶
However, research into the Gladding-McBean connection came to an end after the company said it had no such lion molds in its collection. ¹⁴⁷



Kern County Jail, c. 1950-1960

When the Truxtun Avenue and Q Street jail was undergoing demolition in 1962, the lion statues were moved to the county yard on Golden State Avenue. Nanawale Estates of Bakersfield made an early offer of \$100 for the pair, but the county was unable to sell the statues because all salvaged items had to go to complete bidding. In October 1962, the statues went across the auction block with desks, sinks, light fixtures, doors, hinges, prison bars, and locks. ¹⁴⁸ **Maude Wonacott of Tehachapi opened bidding on the statues at \$86, but the gavel finally came down on the bid of \$175 from Nevada Chapter, Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE), which is a**

¹⁴⁶ In 1909 the company hired Florentine sculptor and modeler Pio Oscar Tognelli, and in 1912 he became head of its clay-modeling department. “Born in Pietra Santa, Italy on May 15, 1880, Tognelli studied at Academia delle Belle Arti in Florence before immigrating to northern California at the turn of the century. Settling in Lincoln, he was head of the art department at Gladding-McBean Company until moving to San Francisco about 1921. Tognelli died in San Francisco on Nov. 14, 1942.” (Edan Hughes, *Artists in California, 1786-1940*). A photograph of Pio Tognelli with other Italian sculpturers appears in *Lincoln*, Lincoln Area Archives Museum, Arcadia Publishing, 2014

¹⁴⁷ Email from Gladding-McBean to Gilbert P. Gia, July, Aug 2016

¹⁴⁸ Kern County also profited from the sale of marble recovered from the demolished jail. (Lynn Hay Rudy, *Grandad: Hugh Blodget in Early Bakersfield* (privately printed, 1999)

fraternity at the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR).¹⁴⁹ Bakersfield City Manager Gunn remarked that the fraternity faced a challenge moving the lions to Nevada without breaking them.

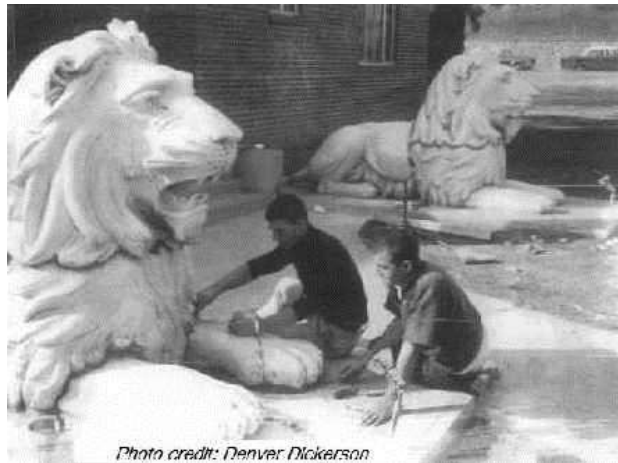
The statues might have stayed here if an SAE alumnus by the name Clyde Biglieri had not been in Bakersfield on business during the week of the auction. SAE's fraternal symbol is the lion, and Biglieri thought the statues would make a nice addition to the Reno House. He called Rowell Smith who was SAE at the University of Washington, and Smith and others agreed to pony-up for the lions.¹⁵⁰ Biglieri and Smith made arrangements to move the lions to Reno.

When the truck showed up in November, city manager Gunn clicked his tongue and muttered again, and he was right. The statues arrived in Reno in pieces, and those pieces wound up on the fraternity's back porch. Twenty-two year old Denver Dickerson first saw the lions from the window of his room. He recalled, "They were lying there in a pile, broken. When I went out and examined them I could tell that a master craftsman made them. Each piece was honeycombed where the artist had used his wire in places to remove unneeded clay, and where he had left clay for those areas that needed support. Over the time I worked on them I gained a great respect for the artist."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 31, 1962 "City to Sell a Pair of Lions to Fraternity." Gunn erred when he said they were made of concrete.

¹⁵⁰ Email between Gilbert P. Gia and John Edward Powell, Oct 3, 2003

¹⁵¹ Sep-Oct, 2003 telephone conversations between Gilbert Gia and Denver Dickerson Dickerson was alumni president of Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity (Reno Chapter), is a member of the Nevada Inventors Association, and is a Reno real estate broker.



Denver Dickerson, left

"My house knew I had building experience, and the guys wanted me to do it, so it fell to me to fix the lions. I started by epoxying together a few pieces. That worked. Then we decided they'd fit in front of the house so I dug two 18-inch trenches and brought in rebar. We used well-drilling tools and yards of concrete and mortar, both to fill the foundations and to fill the inside of the statues. With all that weight nobody could say that they weren't going to be part of SAE."¹⁵²

"Over the years they've been a great source of interest, and rival fraternities have damaged them. I've made Fiberglass prosthesis for the whiskers, and once I had to fix some teeth that were knocked out. The weather, too, is hard on them. In the winter they crack from freezing and thawing. I've done epoxy work over the years. We use the fraternity's novitiates to refurbish the lions. I get a crew of two or three new guys, fix them up with goggles and rubber gloves, and it takes us about four days to strip, repair and paint them. They have a few nicks now, but they've also taken on a nice glassy finish, and they're still handsome. It has been a matter of pride to me to maintain them."¹⁵³ Since 1963 the statues have guarded Sigma Alpha Epsilon at 835 Evans Street, and considering the way the lions were installed, they won't be going anywhere soon."¹⁵⁴

Who owns the statues now? Years ago Clyde Biglieri and others formed a corporation to control rights to reproduce the lions, and Denver Dickerson, in turn,

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Letter from Denver Dickerson to Gilbert P. Gia, February 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

bought the rights and the molds from the corporation. Dickerson is waiting. He tells me he wouldn't want the lions to go anywhere but Bakersfield.¹⁵⁵

A different line of research arose from the recollections of Orville Clark's daughter Mary Elizabeth Clark Lee. "I think my father told me the lions came from the Pomona Tile and Ceramic Works of Los Angeles. My father said he rejected the first pair of lions the company sent, and those went to the Lion Farm, an attraction out east of Los Angeles.¹⁵⁶ My father accepted the second shipment that was sent."¹⁵⁷

The Pomona Tile Manufacturing Company¹⁵⁸ was near the Lion Farm, which was owned by a Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gay. In 1914 Charles Gay worked in Hollywood as a lion trainer for the film industry,¹⁵⁹ and about 1919-1920 he bought five acres east of Los Angeles near El Monte. There he and his wife established Lion Farm, which eventually housed about 200 lions¹⁶⁰ and was a popular attraction in the 15 years before World War II.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Charles and Muriel Gay were Anglo-French circus performers who arrived in Los Angeles in 1914. They established an attraction in MacArthur Park (then known as Westlake Park) where the public could watch Charles Gay working with three adult lions. Gay trained them as animal actors in the burgeoning motion picture industry. In 1925 Gay established a large plot of un-zoned property in El Monte, east of Los Angeles, where they opened Gay's Lion Farm, a public attraction dedicated to the breeding, training and exhibition of African lions. Wikipedia

¹⁵⁷ Gilbert P. Gia interview in 2003 with Mary Elizabeth Clark Lee (1918-2008)

¹⁵⁸ Los Angeles Times, Sep 9, 1923. The business did not appear to advertise regionally before 1923

¹⁵⁹ Frank Bostock's name appeared prominently in connection with travelling menageries in 19th and 20th Century Europe and America.

¹⁶⁰ See Charles Gay, "How I Breed Lions" Popular Science Monthly, April, 1931 pp 58 -59, 148

¹⁶¹ Milwaukee Journal, Jan 29, 1943). The farm was not reopened.



In 1925 El Monte High School – which was less than a mile from the farm -- chose “The Lions” as name for their school team, and after that, Gay regularly brought one of his lions to home games. The Gays sold their lions in 1943, and probably about then they donated the lion statue to El Monte High School.



Photograph taken in the 1920s at Lion Farm shows the statue of a resting lion.

Today, Jackie the Lion, as it is called, guards the entrance to the school auditorium. This lion statue is supposedly made of bronze, but in size, shape, and modeling it is an exact match to the lions that flank the entrance to Sigma Alpha Epsilon House in Reno.



El Monte High School's Lion



None of the above proves who made the statues. In spite of Gladding-McBean's message that it has no molds of the statues, the next step in research is to visit the Architecture and Design Collection, University of California at Santa Barbara.¹⁶² The answer might lie there.

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¹⁶² *Finding Aid for the Gladding, McBean & Company records, circa 1875-circa 1970.* Identifier/Call Number: 0000202 0000202. "2.0 Linear feet (1 record storage box)" The collection also contains a disbound [portion of a book removed from a bound volume] large format scrapbook filled with: an alphabetical list of projects and their corresponding year, as well as black-and-white photographs of building exteriors with some pencil notations of building/project name. Architecture and Design Collection/ Art, Design & Architecture Museum/ Arts Building, Room 1434, University of California, Santa Barbara/ Santa Barbara, California.