

Work House
(Monroe County Penitentiary)
1360 South Avenue
Rochester
Monroe County
New York

HABS No. NY-5643

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

WORK HOUSE (MONROE COUNTY PENITENTIARY)

Location: 1360 South Avenue, southeast of the intersection of South Avenue and Highland Avenue, Rochester, Monroe County, New York

Present Owner: Supervisors of Monroe County, 39 West Main Street, Rochester

Present Occupants: Wards of Monroe County

Present Use: Prison

Statement of Significance: Completed in 1854, at a cost of \$22,707.60, the Work House, with its ninety-two cells, cooperage, barrel store and shoe shops, sought to prepare its inmates for a productive re-entry into the society which they had wronged. At the time of its demolition in 1971, it was the oldest prison building in the area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1853-54.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: "... forty-six acres, one hundred and seven rods, being the southwest part of lot sixty-one in the town of Brighton ... "
 1826 Deed, March 20, 1826, Book 7, p. 85.
 From: Augustus Porter and Jane, his wife, and Peter B. Porter and Latitia, his wife.
 To: Supervisors of Monroe County and their successors in office.
 For: \$605.36.
4. Builder, contractor: Unknown.
5. Original plans: Unknown.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1873 a large, two story, L-shaped, red brick structure was added to the southeast. The addition more than doubled the size of the facility. The addition extended from the east facade of the original structure; then to the south, enclosing an open courtyard facing south. The interior was severely damaged by fires in 1865 and 1868.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Presidents Lincoln and Johnson signed pardons for inmates William H. Knapp, December 1, 1863, and Jacob M. Wood. These papers and other objects relating to prison life of the nineteenth century, including leg irons, handcuffs, leather whips, and glass hand grenade fire extinguishers, were part of the property inventory in 1969. The reform activities of the prison were no longer satisfactory. In 1967, it was criticized by a governor's commission as one of the worst penal institutions in the state.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: An etching of the structure was published in Prof. W. H. McIntosh, History of Monroe County, New York, 1876, plate V.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds, Office of Monroe County Clerk.

b. Secondary and published sources:

McIntosh, Prof. W. H. History of Monroe County, New York. Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign and Everts, 1876.

McKelvey, Blake. "A History of Penal and Correctional Institutions in the Rochester Area." Rochester Public Library Report, Vol. XXXIV, January, 1972.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Records of prison officials, Monroe County Penitentiary.

Records of the Supervisors of Monroe County.

Prepared by Kevin Patrick Harrington
Society for the Preser-
vation of Landmarks
in Western New York
December 2, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The simple, yet well articulated facade illustrates the adaptation of elements of the Tuscan Revival to institutional architecture.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Four hundred and thirty-four feet by two hundred and thirty feet; twenty-nine bay facade; three-and-one-half story units with three single story connectors, each containing four interior tiers; H-shaped plan.
2. Foundations: Dressed stone foundations have a stone water table at the first level. Foundations are completely exposed on the north wing.
3. Wall construction: The red brick walls of the connectors have slightly recessed panels framing the fenestration units.
4. Structural system, framing: The masonry, load bearing walls have wood trusses, joists, floors and roof deck.
5. Chimneys: There are many chimneys for the various fireplaces and heaters now no longer used. A separate power plant to the south provides steam heat.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The central entrance of the original Work House is framed by molded pilasters which support a molded three-part entablature. The entrance way is fitted with a barred security door which gives access to double paneled doors framed by sidelights and toplight.
 - b. Windows: The windows of the original Work House are double hung with six over six light sashes. The long, narrow windows of the cell blocks are fitted with security bars. All windows have flat stone lintels and slightly projecting sills.

7. Roof: The two, three story projecting blocks have low hipped roofs. The main block is finished with overhanging eaves and a simply molded cornice. A large rectangular cupola, five bays by ten bays, has a similar roof treatment. A tall flagpole tops this cupola. The projecting block to the north is finished with overhanging eaves and a molded, denticulated cornice. It is topped by a small octagonal cupola which is fitted with eight double hung windows. The pitched gable roof of the northern wing is finished with a pedimented gable to the north. The central connector and southern wing have low built-up roofs. All are finished with a molded and denticulated cornice. All are fitted with a variety of metal ventilators.
8. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: A six step projecting stair at the main entrance is fitted with a single metal handrail.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The first floor of the old Work House contains an entrance which is flanked by administrative offices. The second floor contains the Superintendent's quarters, living room, dining room, bedroom, kitchen, and bath. This area is furnished, but not in use. The third floor, also not in use, is the large officers' dormitory. The cupola serves as storage for records. The basement is used as the officers' kitchen and mess. The men's wing to the north consists of four hundred and forty-two cells arranged in four tiers. The women's wing to the south consists of seventy-two cells in four tiers. A typical cell is four feet by seven feet by six feet, ten inches. A large central recreation court is flanked by the prison dining area and kitchen to the north and by offices and stores to the east. A guard control tower tops the enclosing wall to the north. Other areas are devoted to an infirmary, tailor shop, maintenance shop, library, bakery and arts and crafts rooms. A slaughter house and butcher shop are not in use.
2. Stairways: The entrance hall of the Work House contains a stairway fitted with turned oak balusters, molded handrail and large newel post which provides access to the second and third floors.
3. Flooring: Floors are generally wood, except stone

flags in the cell blocks.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The administrative corridor and stair hall walls are fitted with a fifty inch high metal dado. The walls are plaster throughout. There are stamped metal ceilings in many areas.
5. Doorways and doors: In the Work House, nine foot paneled wood doors are set in molded doorways. All cell blocks are fitted with steel detention doors.
6. Special decorative features: A mural, painted by a prisoner, is located in the officers' mess.
7. Hardware: All doors in the Work House are fitted with butt hinges, recessed locks and ceramic knobs.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The main block, set on a rise, faces west. A curving entrance drive from South Avenue approaches the main entrance. Angled parking is provided along the center west facade.
2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: To the east are located the farm buildings, two large barns and chicken house. Some years ago the farm, now the site of the new Community College, was operated by the prisoners. Forty cows provided milk for all and two hundred pigs, four or five slaughtered each week, furnished the meat. To the south is located a barn/garage and a greenhouse.
4. Walks: A central stone walk approaching the main entrance is flanked by low chamfered stone corner posts at the east end.

Prepared by George O. Gray
Society for the Pre-
servation of Land-
marks in Western
New York
May, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project of twenty-six selections of historical and architecturally significant Rochester structures was undertaken in 1966, by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc., Mrs. Patrick Harrington, Executive Director, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, James C. Massey, Chief. The project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Senior Historian. Architectural and historical descriptions were contributed by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc. General photographic documentation was undertaken by Hans Padelt, Senior Engineer, Graflex, on a contractual basis with the Historic American Buildings Survey. The final documentation and editing was done by Susan R. Slade in 1978, for transmittal to the Library of Congress and the impending publication of the Historic American Buildings Survey New York State catalogue.