Towards a Public History of the Ohio State Reformatory

Veronica Bagley
University of Akron, vrb8@zips.uakron.edu

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Towards a Public History of the Ohio State Reformatory

Veronica Bagley

The University of Akron

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

This Honors Project is a combination of a written Honors Thesis and my own work for The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site (OSRHS), and is being submitted to The University of Akron in pursuit of an undergraduate degree in history. I completed archival work for my internship at OSRHS as a part of my Certificate in Museum and Archive Studies. The written thesis for the Honors Project is titled “Towards a Public History of the Ohio State Reformatory” and contains two parts: Part I: A History of The Ohio State Reformatory (OSR), which contains a history of the Mansfield, OH institution and its efforts to reform; and Part II: Building the Archival Collection, which contains details about the archival records I located to supplement the records at OSR and my contributions to OSR’s archives.
Introduction

The history of the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield, Ohio began with the laying of the corner stone in 1886. A massive celebration was held at the site, including performances by the American Military Band and remarks from former President Rutherford B. Hayes. The building officially opened to its first one-hundred-fifty inmates in 1896. It signified a new era in Ohio penal institutions, with a goal to emphasize both reform and punishment of its inmates. It opened as an intermediate between reform schools and penitentiaries, designed to house men aged 16-30 who were experiencing state prison for the first time. By the 1960’s, however, it was a maximum-security facility experiencing overcrowding and declining conditions for inmates. It officially closed on December 31, 1990, when the last staff and inmates were moved to the new Mansfield Correctional Institution. The remaining building is now a significant public history site, offering guided tours to the public. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is currently preserved by the non-profit Mansfield Reformatory Preservation Society.

Part I of this thesis provides a chronological history of The Ohio State Reformatory from the time construction began in 1886 to the day it closed on December 31, 1990. It sets the history of the OSR within larger social and political contexts that influenced its conception, design, and operation. Part I focuses especially on the idea and practice of “reform” for inmates at the OSR during its operation. I utilized the limited available written records for the OSR and supplemented these with oral histories available in the OSR archives. As part of the internship, I also conducted additional interviews with a former inmate and a former visitor of the OSR. The oral histories span from the late 1940’s to the time the institution closed in 1990, though inmate
experiences documented in these accounts come mainly from the end of OSR’s existence in the 1970’s and 1980’s.

At the time of writing this thesis, there is little up-to-date scholarly treatment of the OSR in publication. I reference theses by Martin Wappner and Robert Titko which discuss the OSR; these were published in 1949 and 1962 respectively. I also reference Nancy Darbey’s 2016 publication, *The Ohio State Reformatory (Images of America)*. Her work provides a history of the Reformatory through images, and includes details about the building, its construction, and its use over time. I hope that this thesis can provide an additional perspective by including not only scholarly treatment of The Ohio State Reformatory’s history as it is depicted in official state and institution documents, but also history as it was experienced by inmates and employees during the last fifty years of operation. It will also examine the concept of reform at The Ohio State Reformatory, both as a unique institution and as a part of Ohio’s penal system. Finally, it will discuss the significance of The Ohio State Reformatory as a public history site.

Part II will explain my work at The Ohio State Reformatory, the resources I created for the archives at OSR, the resources I located at the Ohio History Connection which supplement the collection at OSR, and suggestions for future research. In February of 2017, I started work as a volunteer for The Mansfield Reformatory Preservation Society, the non-profit group that now operates The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site. In the summer of 2017, I completed an internship in the OSRHS Archives. In May, while I was completing my internship, I began work as a Tour Guide and continue in this position today. Though my internship is complete, I have continued archival work by conducting new interviews to add to the collection. I hope that my research for this thesis paper, as well as my contributions to the oral history accounts, will aid future research projects as well as contribute to the staff’s knowledge of OSR’s history.
When referencing oral history interviews of inmates, employees, or visitors, names will be removed to keep interviewees anonymous. The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site secured releases from interviewees stating that interviews may be made public, but it is their practice to leave anonymous the names of interviewees. Therefore, inmates will be cited or referred to as “Inmate 1,” “Inmate 2,” etc. to differentiate between accounts. The same will apply to employees and visitors.
Part 1: History of the Ohio State Reformatory

1886-1896: Construction and Opening

On Thursday, November 4th, 1886, a ceremony was held in the city of Mansfield to celebrate the laying of the corner stone of the Intermediate Penitentiary at Mansfield, Ohio. An invitation letter to the event reads:

*For more than thirty years the necessity of an additional Penitentiary has been the subject of frequent consideration by the General Assembly of the State, but the War of the Rebellion and various other pressing events, postponed action until 1884, when, by act of the General Assembly, on the 14th day of April, of that year, the erection of an intermediate Penitentiary was authorized, and under which it has been located at Mansfield, and is now in the process of construction. Now, that the foundations of the new Penitentiary are about to be completed, and in view of the fact that the erection of this institution marks a new era in our methods of dealing with criminal classes in Ohio, it has been deemed desirable to commemorate the event with suitable ceremonies*¹

Joseph B. Foraker, Governor of Ohio, was scheduled to present at the ceremony, along with members of the General Assembly of Ohio, other State Officers, and representatives of local and county organizations. Leading prison experts from all over the country, as well as the National Prison Congress were also invited to participate in the ceremonies. The program included a procession, music by the American Military Band, an address by Governor Foraker, and remarks from former President Rutherford B. Hayes. That evening, former President Hayes also presided

over a meeting at the Congregational Church. The event, which had an estimated attendance of 15,000 people, was expected to be “a memorable one in the history of Prison Reform, and worthy of remembrance by all who may attend.”

After nearly a decade of construction, on September 17, 1896, the name was changed from Intermediate Penitentiary to the Ohio State Reformatory. The next day, September 18, 1896, the Ohio State Reformatory officially opened, and the Newark Daily Advocate read “First Batch of Prisoners Successfully Transferred from Columbus.” One-hundred-fifty convicts were removed from the Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio, and became the first one-hundred-fifty inmates at the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield, Ohio. The transfer went “without incident,” according to the article. The day of the transfer drew so much public interest that large crowds gathered in Columbus to watch the men march from the Penitentiary to the train station. People who lined the route of the march handed cigars to the inmates. The train was then greeted by a large crowd in Galion before arriving at its destination in Mansfield, where there were crowds along the tracks outside the OSR. Onlookers watched the prisoners unload into the northwest corner of the prison, where the inmates then went directly into cells.

As of November 15, 1896, the estimated cost of the building, excluding the purchase of land, was $1,326,769. The architect responsible for the building was Levi T. Scofield. Scofield was a Cleveland architect specializing in schools, asylums, and prisons. He was known for

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2 Cornerstone Documents.
4 Cornerstone Documents.
5 T. C. Jenkins, The Ohio State Reformatory, Mansfield, Ohio, 1896-1934 (Mansfield, Ohio: Ohio State Reformatory, 1934), 56.
6 "First Batch of Prisoners Successfully Transferred from Columbus." Newark Daily Advocate, September 18, 1896.
7 Inmates Speak Out.
creating large, imposing institutions, and his design of the Ohio State Reformatory was intended
to create a “sense of spirituality within the inmates.” 9 Though the OSR took nearly a decade of
construction to open its walls to the first 150 inmates, it was still unfinished upon opening due to
funding problems and construction delays. The first inmates were assigned to work on the sewer
system, and they built the twenty-five-foot stone wall that surrounded the institution and its
fifteen-acre complex. 10 Brick outbuildings and the steel cellblocks of the East Block of the OSR
were also constructed using inmate labor. 11 The East Cell Block was completed in 1908. 12

Superintendent T.C. Jenkins referred to the OSR as a “walled in city.” It included two
cell blocks, the East Cell Block and the West Cell Block; correction cells, or Solitary
Confinement; two outside dormitories, E- Dorm (housed 300) and J-Dorm (housed 250); a
central guard room; multiple chapels and various factories where inmates worked including but
not limited to the following: Furniture Factory, Clothing Factory, Shoe Factory, Printing Shop,
Machine Shop, Power Plant, and Identification Department. There was also a library,
gymnasium, yard, hospital, and living quarters for the warden, assistant warden, and chaplain.
Outside was also an honor farm, which produced much of the food for the Reformatory. With all
of the industries on site, The Ohio State Reformatory was a self-sufficient institution. 13 It is
important to note, however, that these parts of the OSR change locations over time. Over the
OSR’s existence, new buildings were added, and wings of the prison changed purposes. For
example, correctional cells or solitary confinement was housed in several different locations or

10 Inmates Speak Out.
11 T. C. Jenkins, The Ohio State Reformatory, 56.
12 Inmates Speak Out.
13 The description of the buildings and cell blocks of the institution come from a combination of Jenkins’ The Ohio
State Reformatory and Ike Webb Speaks Out.
added on to throughout OSR’s existence. In many instances, it is unclear the exact time these changes were made.

A description of the cell blocks and solitary confinement is necessary in order to understand the living conditions for inmates within this institution. The West Cell Block is the original incarceration block of the prison. It is five tiers, or levels, high, with 360 cells for a total capacity of 750 inmates. Each cell holds two men, apart from the last four cells per range which are four-man cells. It is constructed of steel and stone. The East Cell Block was completed in 1908. It is six tiers high, with approximately 600 cells, and housed approximately 1,200 inmates. The cells on the east side are smaller than those on the west side, measuring 6 feet by 8 feet, and include: two steel bunks anchored to the wall, one small sink, a toilet, a small table with drawers, and a stool. They were intended for only one person, but due to overcrowding housed two inmates each by 1934. In both cell blocks, windows could be opened in the summer for air flow, but the upper tiers would remain hottest. In winter the building was heated, but because of its size and the doors being opened and closed all day, it was difficult to keep warm and the lower tiers were the coldest.\footnote{14}

In a 1934 publication intended for the public, titled \textit{The Ohio State Reformatory Mansfield, OH: 1896-1934}, Superintendent Jenkins does not specify the location of the correction cells, but does state that they were the most severe form of punishment used at the OSR.\footnote{15} Former Captain of the Guards Ike Webb, who worked at the OSR from 1954-1966, states in his work titled \textit{Ike Webb Speaks Out} that in the 1950’s the correction cells were located below the west wing of the guard room. There are two floors, with twenty cells each. These cells

\footnote{14}{The description of the cell blocks of the institution come from a combination of Jenkins’ \textit{The Ohio State Reformatory} and \textit{Ike Webb Speaks Out}.}

\footnote{15}{T. C. Jenkins, \textit{The Ohio State Reformatory}, 40.}
contained just a sink and toilet; there were no beds and no lights. According to Webb, it was kept at a constant ninety degrees Fahrenheit. These cells still exist in this location today, and are also sometimes referred to as solitary confinement cells. Inmates were usually celled alone, but had cell mates if needed. For example, in 1957 there was a riot which resulted in one-hundred-twenty men being held in the solitary confinement block for over thirty days. They ate in the cell, slept on the cement floor, and showered once a week. Upon being sent to a correction cell, inmates were stripped of their regular clothes and issued coveralls and cloth booties. During Webb’s time at the institution, 1954-1966, they were fed two slices of bread for breakfast, soup for dinner, and on the third day a full meal was provided. From former inmate and employee testimony, it appears that the additions in the front of the west wing solitary cells were constructed in around the 1970’s. These include cells with solid steel doors and cots.

1896-1920: The Reformatory, An Intermediate Between Reform Schools and Penitentiaries

As the invitation to the corner stone ceremony noted, the new Intermediate Penitentiary signified “a new era” in prison reform. An article in the Mansfield Daily Herald titled “Corner Stone Day” describes the goals of the new reformatory to the public. It says that The Ohio State Reformatory was built to serve as an intermediate between two other institutions in Ohio: the reform school in Lancaster, and the Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus. The goal was to incorporate and develop principles of both reformation and punishment for the criminals who would be incarcerated there. According to the Annual Report from 1896, inmates were limited to “male persons between the ages of 16 and 30 years, who are not known to have been previously

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17 Oral History Collection. The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site Archives. MRPS.
18 Cornerstone Documents.
Inmates coming to The Ohio State Reformatory, then, were experiencing state prison for the first time. Crimes that men were sent to the Reformatory for in 1896 included but were not limited to burglary, larceny, horse stealing, robbery, pocket picking, forgery, fighting, and rape. Manslaughter appears in the records as well, but is very rare in the first several years of the prison’s operation.

In his 1934 publication, Superintendent Jenkins described the work of The Ohio State Reformatory from its opening to the time of publication. According to Jenkins, although constant change in population, size, methods, and staff has taken place within the institution, the one thing that remained permanent was “the need for reclamation of misdirected lives.” In this publication, Jenkins reaffirms the original intent of the OSR as it was stated in the “Corner Stone Day” article, in that it is an intermediate step between reform schools and penitentiaries, seeking not only to discipline, but also to reform men who are incarcerated there. Throughout the publication, he reiterates that the objective of the institution is reform rather than punishment. Perhaps he and other officials believed that since these men had committed their first crime, they had potential to be reformed. Hardened criminals, to them, should be housed separately at the Penitentiary in Columbus where the focus was on discipline.

The superintendent is described as being “as fair with his prisoners as with his guards and officers.” To support this point, the publication describes an incident in which an altercation

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20 Thirteenth Annual Report, 15.
21 Collection. Historical conduct record (admissions) [microform], 1896-1968. [State Archives Series 1706]. This is not a comprehensive analysis of the records. This data comes from my exploration of the Historical Conduct Records for The Ohio State Reformatory at the Ohio History Connection archives.
22 T. C. Jenkins, The Ohio State Reformatory, 2.
23 Ibid, 4.
24 Ibid, 15.
occurred between a guard and inmates, but upon investigation the superintendent found the guard to be responsible. He punished the guard rather than the inmates in this case.26 Jenkins believed that force and punishment should be used only when necessary, because “the more force you use the more you have to use.”27 He claimed the most severe form of punishment used at the OSR were the correction cells, in which inmates were isolated for a number of days.

To meet the objective of reform rather than punishment, the OSR offered several programs for men and boys entering the institution to better themselves, or in Jenkins’ words, to “furnish the incentive for the individual to direct his activities in a new and worth-while line.” Education was one of these major programs and was very comprehensive. Trades classes included work in the factories at the OSR, for example the Furniture Factory or the Machine Shop. Basic education courses available included “reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, geography, history, and in addition, civics, English, algebra, economy, and fundamentals of agriculture.”28 There were also extracurriculars including debate and musical programs.29 Though Jenkins acknowledged that every inmate that comes through the Reformatory may not leave a reformed character, he would have at least received an education and usually also a practical trade, and therefore would be “better prepared to fight his battle than before.”30 Religion was also a mandatory component of the reform system at OSR. The institution offered several different services, including Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Christian

26 T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*, 7.
27 Ibid, 40.
28 Ibid, 15.
29 Ibid.
Science, and other sects, though most of the inmates at the time Jenkins was superintendent were Protestants.\(^{31}\)

Jenkins’ views and the programs of the OSR reflected national trends in criminal justice at the time. In an article titled “At Hard Labor: Rediscovering the 19\(^{th}\) Century Prison,” originally published in *Issues of Criminology* in 1974, Martin B. Miller writes that “the construction of reformatories in the United States during this period (1890-1910) served to siphon off the under-thirty prison population, and was an important regulating force in prison population growth.”\(^{32}\) The Ohio State Reformatory fits with this trend, as it was constructed during the late 1800s and had an original population of boys and men ages sixteen to thirty. According to Miller, institutions during this time saw prisoners as social defectives, who could be corrected or treated through reform methods. The penology of the Progressive Era (1900-1915) implied that a criminal would be classified and measured, and would then receive individualized treatment based on his own needs and the needs of society. Penologists saw deviances as treatable, and institutions therefore attempted to remold and reconstitute inmates through reform.\(^{33}\) At the Ohio State Reformatory, Superintendent Jenkins described how inmates are reconstituted through reform by means of education, trades classes, extracurriculars, and religion.\(^{34}\)

David J. Rothman, Professor of History at Columbia University, writes that penitentiaries served as a place free of corruption, dedicated to training inmates. Penitentiaries established a disciplined routine, and removed the inmate from temptation. There was also a focus on

\(^{31}\) T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*, 36.


\(^{33}\) Ibid, 511.

\(^{34}\) T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*. 
separation and isolation from other inmates. Rothman demonstrates here that the purpose of penitentiaries, like the Ohio Penitentiary, was to establish discipline and isolate hardened criminals, where reformatories, like the OSR, served as a way to correct behavior. According to Rothman, penologists in the 1800s thought that “deviancy was primarily the result of the corruptions pervading the community, and that organizations like the family and the church were not counterbalancing them.”

Though the Ohio State Reformatory did not focus on isolation of inmates, it did implement programs, including religious programs, in attempt to retrain inmates and prepare them for life upon release.

The Ohio State Reformatory also implemented the State-Use System. This system made it possible for prisoners to manufacture certain goods, for example clothing or furniture, for the use of the prison and other state agencies. Superintendent Jenkins mentions the State-Use System in the publication *The Ohio State Reformatory Mansfield, OH: 1896-1934* when referencing the trades available for inmates to learn. Records show that industries at OSR, including furniture, clothing, shoe, printing, and machine shops operated under the State-Use System as of November 15, 1912. Previously, the factories were called “Contract Shops,” which were operated by private companies that sold products on the open market. The State-Use-System abolished contract labor in Ohio penal institutions, and replaced it with a system that by 1912 allowed inmates to produce products that would be manufactured and sold only to other institutions and organizations supported by taxation. The products could not be sold to any person or company who was not supported by taxation.

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36 T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*.
38 T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*, 17.
continued to fight for legislation to reform the prison system in Ohio during his first term from 1913 to 1915. He passed laws that mandated the convicts engage in healthful labor for the state, and emphasized rehabilitation in Ohio’s prison system.39

1920-1960: Prohibition, Overcrowding, and New Developments

A noticeable trend in the 1920’s revolved around Prohibition. Nationally, the 1920’s saw a rise in corruption and criminal activity associated with liquor trafficking.40 This led to prison overcrowding in institutions across the country. Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania had three to four prisoners to a cell designed for one inmate in 1922. Virginia’s prison population doubled between 1923 and 1931. North Carolina’s imprisonment rate tripled during the Prohibition Era. San Quentin in California housed 6,062 inmates in 1920, almost twice its capacity. Between 1920 and 1930, the average population in federal prisons tripled nationwide.41 Reflective of this national trend, the Ohio State Reformatory was also suffering from overcrowding, placing two men per cell in the East Cell Block where the cells were designed for only one inmate.42 It had an average yearly population of 3,500 men from the time it opened to 1934.43

The end of Prohibition, however, did not bring an immediate decline in incarceration. The OSR was still overcrowded into the 1930’s, though the crimes committed by inmates incarcerated at the OSR had not changed significantly from its opening in 1896. The leading crimes in 1933 were robbery (1047 occurrences), burglary/larceny (404 occurrences), and auto-

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40 Ibid, 367.
42 T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*, 37.
43 Ibid, 4.
stealing (394 occurrences). Manslaughter was still the least common, at 59 occurrences. Other crimes included assault with intent to rob, operating a motor vehicle without owner’s consent, grand larceny, breaking and entering, forgery, and “miscellaneous.”

The Ohio Penitentiary, the maximum-security institution in Columbus, OH, was also suffering from massive prison overcrowding by 1930, though there was concern about crowded conditions in the prison for over twenty years prior. On April 21, 1930, the nation’s worst prison fire occurred at the Ohio Penitentiary, where 322 inmates died. The source of the fire was a candle that ignited some oily rags left on the roof of the West Cell Block of the Penitentiary. It became noticeable after prisoners were locked into their cells for the evening. Many died from the flames, but others died from the inhaling poisonous smoke. Thomas Watkinson, the guard in the cell blocks where inmates burned to death, was suspended following the incident for having refused to turn over his key to the cell ranges to the other guards so that they may free inmates. Prison officials claimed the fire was set by three inmates in attempt to create a diversion so they could escape. They claimed that the inmates set up a rig to catch fire and create a distraction during dinner time while the cell block was empty so that they could escape, but it took longer to burn than they anticipated and caught fire after most inmates were locked in for the night. Others believe it was a tragic accident, and felt administrators were placing the blame on inmates to divert attention from the administration’s poor handling of the incident. Two of the three accused inmates committed suicide following the fire.

44 T. C. Jenkins, *The Ohio State Reformatory*, 36.  
47 “Ohio Penitentiary Fire.” Ohio History Central.  
49 “Ohio Penitentiary Fire.” Ohio History Central.
Though there was debate over the fire’s origin, there was no debate that the Penitentiary’s overcrowded conditions would eventually lead to disaster. The Ohio Penitentiary was built in 1834, intended to hold a maximum of 1,500 inmates. At the time of the fire, the population was twice its original capacity. As a result of the incident, prison administration transferred several hundred inmates to a prison farm in London, Ohio. According to a recent article about The Ohio State Reformatory in the *Mansfield News-Journal*, more than 200 surviving prisoners of the fire at the Ohio Penitentiary were transferred to The Ohio State Reformatory.  

Other sources state that prisoners who survived the fire demanded removal of the warden for his poor handling of the situation. Some led a rebellion, ultimately taking over four cell blocks. Inmates involved in the rebellion were said to have either been placed in solitary confinement, or transferred to other prisons, but no specific prisons are mentioned. A *Newark Advocate* article published at the time of the fire states that about 600 inmates were transferred out of the Ohio Penitentiary to “various other state institutions.” Regardless, it is clear that surviving inmates were moved out of the Ohio Penitentiary and into other Ohio institutions following the incident. This was likely a contributing factor to the overcrowding at the OSR.

The disaster at the Ohio Penitentiary served as a turning point for both that institution and other Ohio correctional institutions. Between 1920 and 1930, the average population in federal prisons tripled nationwide most likely due to Prohibition, but between 1930 and 1940, it nearly

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50 “It’s Christmastime at the Ohio State Reformatory.” *Mansfield News-Journal*. December 5, 2016. This article is a recent article published by the *Mansfield News-Journal* about Christmas Tours at OSR, so it is not a peer-reviewed source. There is no specific source cited for the information about the transferred inmates, other than that the author learned this information on a tour. The article states that the transferred inmates were kept in “a small storage attic,” probably referring to the West Attic. Tour guides at the OSR today do speak about the West Attic being used as dormitory around the time of the Penitentiary Fire, but I have not yet found a source that states specifically that Penitentiary inmates were housed there. It does appear that inmates were housed there at some point, as there are inmate names and numbers written on the walls. An oral history account from someone who taught at the OSR in 1973 also states that the West Attic was used as overflow housing.


doubled again. This led to an increase in federal prisons, with 14 federal prisons in 1930, and 24 federal prisons by 1940.\textsuperscript{53} Ohio’s population, however, decreased from 19,964 inmates in 1930 to 17,941 inmates in 1935, partially due to the release of thousands of inmates by the Ohio Board of Parole following the incident at the Ohio Penitentiary. In an attempt to address issues of overcrowding, in 1931 the General Assembly established the new Ohio Board of Parole, which eventually released these inmates.\textsuperscript{54}

In addition to the release of inmates following the Penitentiary fire, institutions throughout Ohio implemented safety measures to prevent another incident like this from happening. \textit{The Mansfield News} published an article the day after the fire titled, “What Happened At State Pen Could Easily Happen Here At O.S.R., Local Officials Say.” Service-Safety Director A. D. Rowlands and Fire Chief Frank May planned to create a method for better fire protection at the OSR. At the time, the Reformatory had no connection with the city mains, and therefore had no source of water large enough to fight a fire of that capacity. Fire Chief May asserted that “in practically all fires to reformatory property in the past, the buildings have burned down because there was no water,” justifying the need for a better fire protection system.\textsuperscript{55} The Ohio Penitentiary Fire also led to a change in the way prisons were constructed, including new locking mechanisms that would allow cell doors to be opened more easily in an emergency.\textsuperscript{56}

Despite these changes, by 1940 Ohio’s prison population aligned with the increasing national trend with a population that increased again to 19,525.\textsuperscript{57} This increase may be due to

\textsuperscript{53} Lisa McGirr. \textit{The War on Alcohol}, 202-204.
\textsuperscript{54} "Ohio Penitentiary Fire." Ohio History Central.
\textsuperscript{56} "Fire at the Ohio Pen." Ohio Memory.
\textsuperscript{57} United States, Department of Public Welfare, Division of Corrections, \textit{Ohio's Correctional Program}, by John A. Lamneck and Arthur L. Glattke (Printed at the Ohio State Reformatory, estimated 1950).
The Great Depression’s effects on crime. In a publication titled “The Effect of the Depression on Prison Commitments and Sentences,” author Leon Stern theorizes that the severity of sentencing increases during an economic crisis. He makes the argument that “when times are good and the temptation to crime is light, there is less need for force; but when the unemployed are tempted to exchange freedom for good humane treatment in penal and correctional institutions, these institutions must be made forbidding and penalties in general more severe.”

He asserts that with the characteristics of the depression in the United States, including mass unemployment, came an enormous increase in crime and overcrowding in prisons. Others theorize that in challenging economic circumstances and unemployment people may turn to illicit means of income, and an increase in crime would lead to an increase in incarceration.

Though prison populations continued to increase, the Ohio State Reformatory continued its efforts to reform inmates. As evidence that inmates were affected by their reform at The Ohio State Reformatory, a 1949 survey by Martin Wappner says that of 16,464 inmates admitted between 1930 and 1941, 68.2% received their final parole, meaning “they lived out their parole in a satisfactory manner.” About 15% of those paroled returned on parole violations. Only about 2% committed new crimes. Others included those who died, were cancelled from the record, or where records were lost. The reform program of the 1940’s was significantly expanded from the program described by Superintendent Jenkins. It included general classroom work, a vocational training division, religious education, recreation, amusement, and discipline.

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61 Ibid.
Education remained a significant part of the reform program at the OSR. A survey by the OSR in 1940-1941 found that the average inmate had less than a fifth-grade education upon entrance, though inmates tended to self-report their levels of education as higher. One goal of the educational program was to “bridge this gap” between inmates’ stated education and actual ability by offering education rather than only incarceration.\(^63\) This continued to support the original goal of the institution: to be a place that incorporates principles of both reform and punishment. Though the educational program focused on trades classes when the OSR opened,\(^64\) it expanded its curriculum to include classes comparable to those offered in public school over time. The curriculum during the 1930’s and 1940’s offered courses in civics, English, mathematics, social studies, health, and business. The educational program within the institution was generally the same as in public schools; however, inmates who could not read or write upon entrance were provided with simplified textbooks with age-appropriate content. Not all inmates were required to go to school, but if they had not reached the eighth grade and were deemed to have the capacity to learn, they were assigned to school for a trial or probation period. If there was no advancement during their trial, they had the opportunity to either enter a vocational activity or go to work. School was in session five days a week for twelve months of the year by 1941,\(^65\) but at the time Superintendent Jenkins published \textit{The Ohio State Reformatory Mansfield}, \textit{OH: 1896-1934}, the majority of men were given only a half day in classrooms due to overcrowding.\(^66\)

The vocational training program at the OSR was also significantly expanded from programs Jenkins discusses in 1934. The reformatory had commercial schools, which included

\(^63\) Ibid, 6-8
\(^64\) T. C. Jenkins, \textit{The Ohio State Reformatory}, 30.
\(^65\) Martin W Wapner. \textit{A Survey of the Educational Program at the Ohio State Reformatory}, 36-37.
\(^66\) T. C. Jenkins, \textit{The Ohio State Reformatory}, 15.
bookkeeping, filing, shorthand, and typing. It also had trade schools, which included engineering, mechanical drawing, engineering drawing, blueprint work, drafting, barbering, painting, and cooking. Some inmates were also able to work as trustees, who were assigned to work in offices, residences, and the honor camps outside the walls. Trade classes allowed inmates who were not able to continue their academic work an opportunity to acquire a skill that could secure employment upon their release. Health classes also offered a few inmates the opportunity to work in the hospital as nurses or lab techs. The OSR continued to be self-sufficient, with the shops for trade schools providing the resources used by the institution. It actually provided all of its own services, with the exception of artificial gas. Other public institutions throughout Ohio, including schools, used materials produced at The Ohio State Reformatory. The principle behind the vocational program was that it could reward the inmate with a sense of accomplishment and increased confidence, leading to a desire to use his newly acquired skills upon release.

Religious education continued to be a required part of inmate reform. Bibles, prayer books, and religious literature were available to inmates, and the library had devotional literature. The Reformatory held chapel services regularly on Sundays, with four different chapels. The Protestant Chaplain was the only resident minister, but Catholic Priests, Rabbis, and Christian Sciences Readers visited weekly. Apart from possibly expanded services, this part of the reform program at OSR does not appear to be significantly changed from those offered in the earlier 1900’s.

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67 Martin W. Wappner. *A Survey of the Educational Program at the Ohio State Reformatory*, 43.
68 Ibid, 43-47.
69 Martin W. Wappner. *A Survey of the Educational Program at the Ohio State Reformatory*, 51-52.
Recreation and amusement also became important aspects of the reform program at The Ohio State Reformatory. Sports including baseball, basketball, and boxing were options in addition to yard privileges. On occasion, basketball and baseball teams from outside the prison came for competition against the inmate teams. Yard Day activities included softball, hardball, horseshoe pitching, tennis, volleyball, and shuffleboard. All inmates also practiced military drills. For amusement or entertainment, radio was available. In addition, the Reformatory showed movies once a week and on holidays. Occasionally, the warden could bring in outside talent to perform plays, musicals, or orchestra recitals. The principle behind recreation and amusement at OSR was that through play, inmates learn to cooperate.\(^70\)

Even with an emphasis on reform, discipline remained a part of the system at the OSR. Wappner lists six discipline methods practiced at The Ohio State Reformatory at the time of his study. First, incarceration itself was considered a form of discipline, as it regulates the inmate’s day. Second, the Prevention Method set objectives for accepted social standards with emphasis on obedience to officers and “the need of each one’s minding his own business.”\(^71\) Third was the Corrective Method, in which the prison assigned inmates to routine or monotonous work, such as cleaning or coal pile work, to correct deviant behavior. The fourth method was to develop inner control with a rigid routine. Fifth was Isolation, in which inmates could be denied the privilege of eating with others, and sometimes had no contact with other inmates at all. This included loss of privileges such as Yard Day, shows, and radio. The sixth and last method of reform was extra time, which could be added to an inmate’s sentence for violation of rules.\(^72\) It is unclear as to

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\(^{70}\) Ibid, 54-57.

\(^{71}\) Ibid, 59.

\(^{72}\) Martin W Wappner. *A Survey of the Educational Program at the Ohio State Reformatory*. pgs. 59-61
how this differs, if at all, from Jenkins’ methods of discipline, but Wappner’s survey provides a much more detailed account of the discipline program than Jenkins’ publication.

With the start of World War II, there was close to no growth in the United States Federal Prison Population.\textsuperscript{73} Ohio’s correctional institution population decreased during this time, from 19,525 in 1940 to 17,220 by 1946. By 1949, the population had increased again slightly to 17,802.\textsuperscript{74} Some of the decrease of Ohio’s inmate population during World War II can be attributed to the large amount of the population serving in the war effort.\textsuperscript{75} The reason for the increase again by 1949 is unclear. The reform program outlined in Wappner’s survey continued to be utilized by The Ohio State Reformatory. A publication titled \textit{Ohio’s Correction Program} from around 1950 continues to reiterate the goal to rehabilitate, educate, and treat, as well as punish inmates throughout Ohio’s correctional facilities.\textsuperscript{76}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} Lisa McGirr. \textit{The War on Alcohol}, 240.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ohio’s Correctional Program.
\item \textsuperscript{75} “Great Depression and World War II.” Ohio History Central. Accessed May 04, 2018. http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Category:Great_Depression_and_World_War_II.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ohio’s Correctional Program.
\end{itemize}
1960-1990: Transformation to Maximum Security, Poor Conditions, and Closing

Ohio’s prison population as a whole decreased during the 1960’s, though there is no clear explanation for the change. The inmate population at the OSR specifically decreased from 2,486 men in 1961 to 2,193 in 1970. Though the population decreased, sometime during the 1960’s security at the reformatory became a higher priority, as it was referred to as a “maximum security” institution by the early 1960’s. It is difficult to make clear distinctions between maximum, medium, and minimum-security facilities, as the classifications vary by state and time period. Generally, though, medium-security facilities in the United States tended to embody ideals of reform, implementing programs to rehabilitate inmates. They were designed to confine inmates, but also offer recreation and entertainment facilities, social services, industries, and education. Housing varies from dormitories to private rooms. Maximum security prisons in the United States featured high walls, rigid security, restriction of inmate movement, cage-like cells, sweat shops, and little recreation space. Maximum security facilities also generally kept the public out. The OSR aligns with the housing style of maximum security facilities with its cells rather than dormitory housing, yet they did continue incorporating recreation into their reform program up to their closing in 1990. Inmates were also allowed visitors, though security was increased in the 1960’s through the addition of the “A” building, where visitors were thoroughly searched before entering the main building of the OSR. Though the reform program continued

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77 Ohio's Adult Corrections System, 3-18.
80 Nancy K. Darbey, The Ohio State Reformatory, 33.
to be offered at the OSR despite the institution’s increased security, it was no longer mandatory for inmates to go to school, learn a trade, or attend religious services.\textsuperscript{81}

At the time of writing this thesis, it is unclear as to why this security designation was made at the OSR, or the exact date that this changed. However, it may be reasonable to attribute the change to the increased arrests in the state of Ohio in crimes such as murder, non-negligent manslaughter, rape, weapons charges, and violation of narcotic drug laws. The increase in these crimes during the 1960’s is significantly larger than the increase in crimes including burglary, fraud, or robbery. In 1969, the OSR was also housing inmates on charges of first and second-degree murder, both of which had minimum sentences of life in prison. Though only ten inmates were at OSR on these charges at this time, housing these inmates goes against the original principle of the reformatory as a place where inmates can be reformed and returned society. The most common crimes at the OSR, however, remained similar to those of the 1930’s, with the majority having committed burglary or robbery.\textsuperscript{82}

Though the distinction can be made between medium and maximum-security correctional facilities, during the time the OSR was in operation Ohio classified its institutions as “reformatories” versus “penitentiaries.” Though the OSR’s security was increased, it still remained a “reformatory” by name. The Ohio Division of Correction classified reformatories as institutions housing first-commitment offenders aged 16-30, where penitentiaries housed older felons and those with prior felonies. In the 1970’s, all offenders in the reformatory class were sent to the OSR to be tested, interviewed, and instructed. Then they were assigned either to the local population at the OSR, or moved to the other Ohio reformatory, the Lebanon Correctional

\textsuperscript{82} Ohio’s Adult Correction System, 3-19.
The Ohio Penitentiary served as the receiving institution for offenders falling into the penitentiary class. Long-term or higher risk inmates were retained at the Ohio Penitentiary, but others could be sent to the Marion Correctional Institution, Chillicothe Correctional Institution, or the London Correctional Institution. Female felons were sent to the Ohio Reformatory for Women.  

According to a study published in 1962, the OSR still required inmates to be between the ages of 16 and 30, with no previous adult felonies that resulted in incarceration in a penal institution. This meant that it still housed first time offenders, but someone who was convicted of felonious acts and given probation, someone who was sentenced to a workhouse, or someone who served as a juvenile would still be eligible for admittance into The Ohio State Reformatory.  

Though the age range officially stated was between 16 and 30, there were exceptions in which inmates who were above this age range were admitted. There also must have been exceptions to the rule that men admitted to the institution would have no previous felonies resulting in incarceration, because some of the men interviewed by the OSRHS whose oral history accounts exist in the archives were incarcerated at The Ohio State Reformatory more than once. One visitor to OSR who was there during law school to interview inmates in 1982 said that he was surprised at the crimes inmates he interviewed committed. He said,

_I remember talking to people about the level of security of that facility. I was a little surprised that people who had committed that serious of a felony were there, because I would have thought they’d have been down in Lucasville. But in the early 80’s, there was_
a lot of prison overcrowding, there were a lot of lawsuits at the time, so I think they were sticking prisoners anywhere they could put them.\textsuperscript{87}

In the 1980’s, there was indeed massive prison overcrowding in the state of Ohio. In 1974, the total Ohio prison population was 7,717. By 1990, when the OSR closed, Ohio’s prison population had reached 30,300. This could be due, in part, to implementation of mandatory sentencing, especially for drug offences.\textsuperscript{88} This overcrowding may be one of the reasons the OSR, an institution built for first time offenders, was housing inmates who committed serious felonies and even repeat offenders.

Despite overcrowding and increased security, the OSR was still a reformatory and continued to offer reform programs similar to those outlined by Wappner in the 1940’s. Though reform was encouraged, it was no longer mandatory for inmates. The \textit{Inmate’s Handbook} from approximately 1967-1970 stated:

\begin{quote}
The administration can and will offer you the opportunity to attend religious services, but it cannot make you devout in your worship. The administration can give you fine academic and vocational courses but cannot make you learn unless you are willing to learn. They can set up desirable work habits and, in some instances, give you on-the-job training that can help you develop skills that will qualify you for similar jobs in outside industry; however, they cannot make you a good worker without cooperation.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

The handbook stated that inmates should select one of three choices for education: trade science (for example: auto mechanic, barber science, carpentry, etc.), related subjects (for example:

\textsuperscript{87} Interview of [Visitor 1]. Oral History Collection. The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site Archives. MRPS.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Inmate’s Handbook}, 1-2.
business science, mathematics, English, etc.), or High School at Fields High School. Religious services were voluntary, though an Officer’s Handbook from 1970 listed religious services as “a very definite part of the Reformatory’s rehabilitation program.” The handbook suggested that inmates select a job assignment as well. The OSR was emphasized as a place where men can be reformed and rehabilitated, but also as a place where discipline remained an essential part of the institution’s operation. The handbook stated the discipline was a necessary part of life at The Ohio State Reformatory, both for personal protection and for protection of society.

You are in confinement here because of a lack of proper discipline and respect for authority. Whatever your goal, you must learn to discipline yourself and respect authority. The first step is to learn to take orders cheerfully and to carry them out to the best of your ability.

The handbook continues to list several pages of guides to proper conduct, followed by the court process for disciplinary action if these guides to conduct are broken. It also includes information about entertainment and recreation, which continued to be a part of the reform system at The Ohio State Reformatory. Sports and field events continued to be offered, and motion pictures were still shown weekly. Though the OSR’s security was increased, its stated goals and outlooks appear to stay the same.

Though academic education and trades classes were no longer mandatory, many inmates still chose to attend and earn either a diploma or college credit. Former inmates who were

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91 Ibid, 1-5.
94 Ibid, 9.
95 Ibid, 28-30.
interviewed by The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site had a variety of jobs within the prison, including in the tailor shop, furniture shop, kitchen, commissary, newspaper, identification, and mail room.\textsuperscript{96} Some inmates also attended school. When asked whether he attended school, Inmate 9, who as at OSR between 1966 and 1969 said:

\begin{quote}
I had to take one class, an English class, a 9th grade English class, to get my diploma. Somehow I had missed that, but my schooling was one semester inside, one semester outside, and from different institutions. But yeah, I got my high school diploma. And then Ashland college started sending in professors, so I said, yeah! Give me some college! And I completed a year before I got out.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

This man most likely earned his high school diploma from Fields High School, the school within the Reformatory. In 1965, the first graduating class from Fields High School received diplomas in the Ohio State Reformatory Chapel and Gymnasium, becoming the first class to graduate from a state-certified high school within the walls of a penal institution. There were thirty-four inmates present at the ceremony, plus thirteen others who had already been released from the institution.\textsuperscript{98}

Like education and trades classes, religious services were no longer mandatory at The Ohio State Reformatory, but some inmates still chose to attend. Some attended because of their strong faith; Inmate 4, who was at OSR from 1974 to 1976, considered religion to be an extremely important part of his reform, as he worked in the chaplain’s office.\textsuperscript{99} Some inmates cited other reasons for attending church; Inmate 3, who was at OSR from 1973 to 1974 said he

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{96} Oral History Collection.
\textsuperscript{97} Interview of [Inmate 9]. Oral History Collection.
\textsuperscript{99} Interview of [Inmate 4]. Oral History Collection.
\end{footnotes}
attended because, “what else would you do?” Several of the inmates who were interviewed chose not to attend church; Inmate 9 said he may have attended church at some point, but felt that “church, uh, was mainly 50% worship and 50%, uh, other.” The Ohio State Reformatory did, however, continue to offer services to inmates who wanted to attend. There was also a group called “Cons for Christ,” which met in the yard to discuss the Bible and their faith.

Though official publications such as inmate and officer handbooks and reports stated the goals of the Reformatory as being a place for rehabilitation, some inmate experiences differed. Here especially, the oral history accounts add to our knowledge of the OSR. For many of the men who were interviewed, rehabilitation was made extremely difficult in the declining state of the institution. Living conditions at The Ohio State Reformatory were in decline, with overcrowding and outdated facilities. Inmate 2, who was at OSR from 1980 to 1984 remembers winter being extremely cold because of broken windows that were never replaced in the cell blocks. He said some inmates would actually burn things in their cells to stay warm. The prison also had a cockroach problem; he said he would put toilet paper in his ears, nose, and mouth to keep out roaches. Inmate 7, who was at OSR from 1986-1990, also remembered roach infestations. He also said in the summer, it was so hot that it was “hard to breathe and you sweat at night.”

Though one of the codes of conduct listed in a 1970 Officer’s Handbook was “Maintaining Discipline,” inmates who were inside The Ohio State Reformatory during the time this handbook was distributed have said that some guards did the opposite. Maintaining

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100 Interview of [Inmate 3]. Oral History Collection.
101 Interview of [Inmate 9]. Oral History Collection.
102 Interview of [Inmate 4]. Oral History Collection.
103 Interview of [Inmate 2]. Oral History Collection.
104 Interview of [Inmate 7]. Oral History Collection.
discipline, according to the handbook, included application of penalty or punishment, as well as
the development of morals. The Inmate Handbook (1967-1970) stated that discipline “refers to
the orderly conduct of the institution and its internal affairs.” Some inmates, however, felt that
guards ignored issues that were occurring amongst inmates and in the prison. Inmate 1, who was
at OSR in 1972, remembers hearing stories about men being pushed off the railing in the West
Cell Block, but guards did nothing about it or did not pay attention. He felt that their attitude
was, “just another inmate.” Inmate 2 remembers guards doing nothing about the screaming he
heard from the cell blocks at night. Inmate 8, who was at OSR in 1950 remembers that guards
“beat them awful bad in there.” He remembered a specific guard who everyone called “Holy
Cross,” who was rumored to have killed five inmates.

From the oral history accounts, it is also clear that the forms of punishment in practice at
the OSR do not always align with the officially stated records. Forms of punishment also change
over time. In 1934, Superintendent Jenkins said that the most severe form of punishment used at
the Reformatory was the correction cells. During the time he was Superintendent, he said
“incorrigibles” could be sentenced for a certain amount of days, isolated from other inmates, and
served one full meal a day with the other two meals being bread and water. He does not mention
the location of these cells. In the 1950’s, Former Captain of the Guards Ike Webb states that
the correction cells, now referred to as Solitary Confinement, were located below the west wing
of the guard room. There are two floors, with twenty cells each. These cells contained just a sink
and toilet; there were no beds and no lights. They were kept at a constant ninety degrees

105 Officer’s Handbook.
106 Inmate’s Handbook.
107 Interview of [Inmate 1]. Oral History Collection.
108 Interview of [Inmate 2]. Oral History Collection.
109 Interview of [Inmate 8]. Oral History Collection.
110 T. C. Jenkins, The Ohio State Reformatory, 40.
Fahrenheit. The correction cells, as Jenkins said, were intended for isolating inmates. Though inmates usually continued to be celled alone when Ike Webb was there, there were instances where inmates shared these cells.\textsuperscript{111} From former inmate and employee testimony, it appears that the additions in the front of the west wing solitary cells were constructed in around the 1970’s. These include cells with solid steel doors and cots.\textsuperscript{112} At some point, cots were added to the other solitary confinement cells, as they are still present today. During the 1960’s and 1970’s, inmates who experienced solitary confinement or correction cells called it “the hole.”\textsuperscript{113}

Though the correction cells Webb describes are the two floors of cells located in the west diagonal, former inmates who were interviewed recall an area beneath the barber shop being used for confinement as well. The barbershop was located on the two floors of the east diagonal. Underneath the two floors of cells in the west diagonal is a basement, which is accessible presently by a staircase in the front of the solitary cells. This basement does continue underneath the middle of the building, into the basement of the east diagonal. Presently, there are remains of what may have been a bathroom in this area. It would be reasonable, then, to say that the interviewees who spoke of the space under the barber shop are correct to say this area was used as a place for inmates. The \textit{Inmate Handbook} does not mention this area being used for punishment. Inmate 9 referred to it as “the old hole.” After speaking about a fight with another inmate that sent him to solitary confinement, he was asked if that was the only time he had been sent there. He replied, “No, I was in a few fights. I was in the old hole first time.”\textsuperscript{114} When asked which one that was, he recalled the following:

\textsuperscript{111} Ike Webb, \textit{Ike Webb Speaks Out}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{112} Oral History Collection.
\textsuperscript{113} Oral History Collection.
\textsuperscript{114} Interview of [Inmate 9]. Oral History Collection.
I’m trying, I think, it was under the barbershop. I remember it, I just didn’t like that place. I have very little recollection of it. It just was like uh, one light bulb. That’s all I can remember of that. And then I was in the new hole probably about, I think three times. That was no picnic either, but we had clothes, we had a t-shirt, pair of pants, no belt. There was a toilet, I don’t remember if there was a sink. There was no bed, you slept on the floor. You got bread and water for your, say you went in the afternoon, you got bread and water for dinner. The next morning you got bread and water, next lunch you got bread and water, next dinner you got bread and water, the next breakfast you got bread and water, the next lunch you got a sandwich. You got a tray of food, whatever was being served, you got it. Except the desert and the milk, you didn’t get the milk. I was crazy in that place. It’s hard to entertain yourself in there.115

According to interviewer notes from an interview with a previous guard who worked at the reformatory in the 1940’s, he “recalls going through the barbershop and going down some stairs. Once you descended the stairs the cells were off to the right. The cells were four by four and there were solid walls between the cells.”116 Inmate 3 also referred to “blind cells,” which were four by four feet. He did not believe they were used often, but knew of someone who was sent there.117 This is likely the same area Inmate 9 referred to as “the old hole.” The area he called “the new hole” is the area in the west diagonal that Webb referred to as the correction cells.

Inmate 9’s account of “the new hole” is similar to Webb’s description of the correction cells, in that he remembers being given bread and water for meals, and one meal with a sandwich. Inmate 5, who was at OSR twice between 1959 and 1963 referred to the correction cells.

115 Interview of [Inmate 9]. Oral History Collection.
116 Interview of [Guard 1]. Oral History Collection.
117 Interview of [Inmate 3]. Oral History Collection.
cells as “the starvation hole,” because inmates were fed only broth and bread. He said most inmates used the bread as a pillow because there were no bunks, and sometimes inmates were sent in naked. Inmate 8 (1986-1990) also remembered having to lay on the concrete floors, and said he was given a slice of bread twice a day and drank water from the sink in his cell. He said every three days he was given peas, half a potato, and a slice of bread, and he remembers the guard opening the door every two hours and saying “are you dead yet?” Though the Inmate Handbook focuses on reform through academic education, trade classes, and religion, stating that “This institution is no longer solely a place for punishment; it is now a place where young men are reformed, rehabilitated, and reclaimed,” it is evident by these inmates’ recollections that punishment still had a role at the institution.

Conditions in the last 30 years of operation had not changed significantly from those in the 1940’s. The Ohio administration of the 1960’s did very little to improve conditions and programs in correctional facilities. It also made no significant changes or improvements to reform programs of adult correctional institutions. The changes in reform that did occur during this time focused largely on juvenile corrections. Though the prison population of the OSR consisted of inmates who had committed more serious crimes, and the security level was increased, it does not appear that the reform program was adapted to these other changes. It seems as though there was a shift away from the focus on reform with the shift into a maximum-security facility. The primary change that occurred in the reform program at the OSR was that it was no longer mandatory, though it seems from inmate testimony many still participated in the

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118 Interview of [Inmate 5]. Oral History Collection.
119 Interview of [Inmate 8]. Oral History Collection.
120 Inmate’s Handbook.
program. Though official records and publications from the OSR continue to state the goals of the institution as a reformatory, inmate testimony exposes the reality that the written records shielded. Reform continued to be a goal of the institution, but poor conditions, overcrowding, and perhaps also extreme use of punishment in the cases of some of these inmates who provided their testimony, show that there was a lesser focus on reform as there had been in previous decades.

In 1978, a group called the Counsel for Human Dignity filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of approximately 2,400 inmates at the prison. The West Cell Block was intended to house 750 inmates, including multiple men per cell. The East Cell Block was intended to house only one man per cell, for a total of 600 inmates. Adding in the population of the two outside dormitories at the OSR, the total capacity would be 1,900. The lawsuit filed by the Counsel for Human Dignity claimed that prisoners’ constitutional rights were being violated, because they were being forced to live in “brutalizing and inhumane conditions.” A consent decree was agreed upon in 1983, ending the lawsuit. The decree required that prison officials improve conditions while preparing to close the institution by December 31, 1986.

It was determined that closing and demolishing the facility was the best option because of the outdated and deteriorating state of the building. Eric Dahlberg, warden of the Ohio State Reformatory at its time of closing, is quoted as saying, “There is nothing in the infrastructure of that building that is useful. That’s the bottom line.” The closing date was extended due to construction delays of the Mansfield Correctional Institution (MANCI), the new maximum-

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122 Nancy K. Darbey, *The Ohio State Reformatory.*
123 *Inmates Speak Out.*
124 Ibid.
security facility that would replace The Ohio State Reformatory. On September 27, 1990, MANCI began accepting inmates from OSR. On December 31, 1990, The Ohio State Reformatory officially closed when the last staff and inmates were moved to MANCI.¹²⁶

Conclusion

The Ohio State Reformatory opened in 1896 as an institution that would signify a “new era” in prison reform. The goal of the institution was to serve as an intermediate between reform schools and penitentiaries, incorporating principles of both reform and punishment. It sought to reform men through academic education, religious education, and practical skills from learning a trade. Prohibition led to issues of prison overcrowding, and even after the end of Prohibition overcrowding continued. The fire at the Ohio Penitentiary was a turning point in Ohio’s correction history, as it led to the establishment of legislation that addressed overcrowding. The Ohio State Reformatory, as well as other institutions throughout the State of Ohio continued efforts toward prison reform which emphasized classroom work, vocational training, recreation, and religious education in addition to discipline. These methods of reform, however, were no longer mandatory once The Ohio State Reformatory became a maximum-security facility.

Though OSR’s opening was surrounded in celebration, its closing was surrounded in controversy due to a lawsuit claiming that inmates were being subjected to “brutalizing and inhumane conditions.” Inmate accounts of the conditions in the prison provide evidence that punishment was severe, and living conditions were poor. Though official publications from the institution emphasized reform, inmate testimony often emphasized the poor conditions that existed in the overcrowded institution. One inmate even said in his interview, “For me it was a

¹²⁶ Inmates Speak Out.
prison, even though it was called a reformatory.”

From inmate experience, it seems as though the concept of reform was overshadowed by the poor conditions and treatment of inmates within the institution.

The building as it remains today is preserved by a non-profit group called The Mansfield Reformatory Preservation Society (MRPS). The preservation society was formed in 1992. In 1995, Ohio leased the land to the city of Mansfield, which then leased the land to MRPS. 1996 marked the first tour season, and in 2000, legislation turning ownership of the property from the State of Ohio to MRPS was finalized. The mission of the preservation society today is to maintain, restore, preserve, and showcase the Ohio State Reformatory as a historic site.

**Towards a Public History of OSR**

The National Council of Public History defines public history as the “many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world.” In *Recording Oral History, A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Valerie Yow defines public history as “history that is intended to engage especially the public rather than scholars; it is usually focused on a particular community.” She says that the ultimate purpose in researching and writing public history is to “help people look at their past again and learn something valuable for them in the present.”

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127 Interview of [Inmate 2]. Oral History Collection.
128 *Inmates Speak Out.*
For researchers, public history allows us to learn about our collective past and present. Informing the public of research is of crucial importance to public history.\textsuperscript{133}

The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site (OSRHS) is an important public history site because it engages the public on a daily basis by providing public tours of the building. Tour guides share the history of the building, including information from historical sources and information from the oral history accounts preserved in the OSRHS Archives. By sharing stories from previous inmates, and educating guests about the history of the institution, tour guides facilitate the act of looking into the past of the institution. Guests are immersed in the experience, as they have the opportunity to see the inside of the facility while they are learning about how the different areas on the tour route were used. Occasionally, a previous inmate may be on a tour and may share his experience at the institution with the tour guide. The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site also offers, on occasion, tours led by a former inmate of the institution.

By preserving the physical building, in addition to preserving the stories from people who spent part of their lives in the institution, the history and memory of The Ohio State Reformatory as an institution is also being preserved. The history of this particular institution is important because it provides an example of transformation over time. The Ohio State Reformatory was in operation for nearly 100 years. When it opened it signified a positive change in the correction system, focusing on reform rather than only punishment. It closed as a very different institution, one that was suffering from outdated facilities and signified the negative effects of prison overcrowding. This is especially relevant today, as prison overcrowding is still a relevant issue in the state of Ohio and the United States as a whole.

\textsuperscript{133} Valerie Raleigh Yow, \textit{Recording Oral History}, 235.
Yow also discusses local history, which studies communities and usually focuses on particular group or place. Local history allows us to understand how nationwide or even worldwide events affect a community.\textsuperscript{134} I have attempted to show with this paper how The Ohio State Reformatory fits in to the broader history of correctional institutions in Ohio, and to some extent in the United States. Historical events such as Prohibition affected correctional institutions throughout the United States, but by focusing on the local history of The Ohio State Reformatory, we can understand how nationwide events affected one institution.

\textsuperscript{134} Valerie Raleigh Yow, \textit{Recording Oral History}, 216
Part 2: Building the Archival Collection

Physical Records

An important question for any historic site is whether or not records exist to tell the site’s history. During my time at OSR, I heard from other tour guides and some staff that they were not aware of where records from the Reformatory were. I heard from some people that the majority of them were missing, that some were housed in the OSR Archives, and from our archivist I heard that some were currently at the Ohio History Connection (OHC) Library and Archives. To locate additional resources both to write this paper and to build the OSRHS archives, I went to the OHC Archives to see what was there, and discovered that they had a large amount of OSR records including the following: conduct records beginning in 1896; inmate records stating the inmate’s serial number, name, crime, and in some cases race; population records; inmate and guard handbooks; and Bertillion photograph books. There are sections from the records, especially the Bertillion photograph books, that are missing; however, there is a wealth of information present in these collections.

The conduct records include information about the inmate, his crime, and his family. For example, a conduct record of Inmate 8 from the year 1954 includes the following: inmate’s name and alias if applicable, serial number, date received, county received from, case number, crime committed, minimum and maximum sentences, inmate’s birthplace and date of birth, inmate’s age, inmate’s race, inmate’s marital status, inmate’s family address, previous imprisonment or arrest, circumstances of present arrest, inmate’s physical condition and habits (such as drugs or alcohol), and notes of the inmate’s time in prison and his parole. The conduct record also includes the inmate’s parents’ names, birthplace, education, habits, marital status, health
I located four conduct records for three of the previous inmates that have been interviewed for OSRHS’s oral history accounts; one of those inmates was imprisoned at OSR twice and both conduct records were located. To keep these inmates anonymous, I will not name them here. However, I scanned copies of these records so that they may serve as resources to OSRHS’s archival collection. The table of contents I created for the Oral History Collection notes if records of an inmate who was interviewed are available. In order to find these records, the serial number of an inmate is necessary as the conduct records are organized numerically. However, there are parts of the record that are missing. Though most inmates provided a serial number during their interview, only four records could be located. The other serial numbers are amongst the parts of the record that are missing. Some inmates did not provide their number during the interview. It is possible to find their number by locating their name in the index, but the index is organized chronologically, and the names listed are not in perfect alphabetical order. Locating the serial numbers for inmates who did not provide one would be a time intensive project. Nonetheless, the records I located are useful in that they can confirm the dates that these inmates were incarcerated, and provide additional information about the man’s background.

Additionally, the inmate records available at OHC provide valuable insight into the demographics of inmates at OSR throughout its history. The index of inmates lists the date he entered the Reformatory, his name, his age upon entrance, his race (or referred to as “color” in some records), his crime, county convicted in, and date of release. These records can be used to validate, or invalidate, information tour guides use at OSR. For example, different tour guides

concerns, church membership, military involvement, and other children (including their names and ages). Conduct records differ over time, including varying amounts of information with different formatting.
have heard different information as to what ages and what types of inmates The Ohio State Reformatory housed. From the time I spent skimming these records from 1896 to 1938, the youngest I found was a fifteen-year-old in 1900, and the oldest I found was a forty-nine-year-old in 1912. These were the exceptions, however. Most were between the ages of sixteen and thirty, as most publications from The Ohio State Reformatory state. I was not able to perform a comprehensive examination of the records, but my work suggests great potential for future scholars.

**Oral History**

The Archives Department at the Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site has been collecting oral history interviews from previous inmates, employees, and visitors of the prison. To date, there are a total of twenty-three interviews consisting of twelve inmate interviews, eight employee interviews, and three visitor interviews. The time periods covered in the inmate interviews span from 1940 to 1990. The employee interviews span from 1947 to 1986. The visitor interviews span from approximately 1940’s to 1982.

The two interviews I conducted have been directly transcribed from an audio recording and added to the collection. The interviews that previously existed in the collection are in the form of typed interview notes. Some contain direct quotes from the interviewee, but are mostly composed of summarized notes from the interviewer. Though oral history accounts are generally in the form of audio recordings, these interview notes are still useful for learning about the experiences of people who either lived in, worked in, or visited the building while it was in operation as a correctional facility. It is important to take into consideration, however, that those

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135 This is not a comprehensive analysis of the records. From Collection. Historical conduct record (admissions) [microform], 1896-1968. [State Archives Series 1706].
interviews are not necessarily word-for-word from the interviewee. We do not know the original order of the questions asked or the exact words of the interviewee in some cases, so it is important to note in this paper that these are not direct transcriptions. The only accounts cited in this paper that are directly transcribed in their entirety from an interview I personally conducted are those of Inmate 9 and Visitor 1. The other citations are from the accounts previously existing in the archives. For all accounts, The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site secured signed documentation that the accounts they provide may be used, without compensation, for future publication, public affairs releases, recruitment material, broadcast public service advertising, OSR Web pages, or other endeavors.

Though not all of the oral history accounts are directly transcribed accounts, they still provide insight into the institution, especially during a time period for which there are few records. Valerie Yow states one of the uses for oral history interviews as a way to preserve a historical record in which documents or physical remains no longer exist. Though official documentation and conduct records may be missing for some of the inmates interviewed, their personal accounts are a way to preserve their experiences at OSR. These interviews also provide insight into the institution that is not published in other sources. For example, several interviewees mention the area under the barbershop as a place being used for punishment, yet official documentation and published testimony of former Captain of the Guards does not mention it. The inmate testimony also allows us to see that inmate experience of “reform” does not necessarily match the stated goals of the institution.

136 Valerie Raleigh Yow, Recording Oral History, 10.
When using oral history as a source, memory is also a concern to be taken into consideration. Researchers have to evaluate evidence from oral history accounts to determine whether it is trustworthy. Memory can be fallible; people may purposefully forget or forget due to aging. People also remember things selectively. Yow point out that “people, whether young or old, remember what is important to them.”¹³⁷ False memories, or memories of events that did not actually occur, are also an issue. The brain registers not only what people actually see, but also what people imagine seeing.¹³⁸ With these interviews, it is difficult to verify the accuracy of the memories of these inmates, employees, and visitors. One way in which I attempted to evaluate inmate testimony was by locating official records. By doing so, I can verify aspects of their testimony such as the years they were at The Ohio State Reformatory and their crimes committed.

During my internship at The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site, I created an index for these interviews to make them more easily accessible. I first organized the interviews into three categories: Inmates, Employees, and Visitors. Next, I read through the notes or transcriptions of these interviews and made note of the different parts of the prison that were mentioned, or themes in the interviews such as violence or education. After doing some reading and research on the building, I was able to compile a list of terms, places, and themes mentioned in the interviews and made an index with that list. I selected the terms for the index keeping in mind what would be useful to researchers or tour guides. For example, someone researching the building may be looking for mentions of certain areas like the East Cell Block or the Mess Hall, so I made sure to use these terms. I also looked for mention of themes such as violence,

¹³⁷ Valerie Raleigh Yow, Recording Oral History, 45
¹³⁸ Ibid, 55
education, and recreation. The index contains these terms in alphabetical order with coordinating page number. There is a separate index for each section of the accounts: Inmates, Employees, and Visitors.

The oral histories are valuable to The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site because they provide insight into the daily lives of inmates, and how the institution operated over the span of about fifty years of its history. When the Mansfield Reformatory Preservation Society was given access to the building, several areas were boarded over or closed off, and it was unclear as to what certain areas were used for. From the oral history accounts, tour guides can now show guests what certain areas were used for and provide insight into what life was like inside the institution. The script for tour guides at OSRHS today has been compiled based from information in these accounts, in addition to other sources such as newspaper articles or publications from the prison during its time of operation. Since I have been working at OSRHS, I have interviewed two other people: one previous inmate and one previous visitor. These interviews have added to our knowledge of the building, and I have been utilizing this knowledge in my guided tours since. I have also been able to share information from the accounts with other tour guides, so that they may share the information I have located in archives or that we have learned from the people I interviewed on their tours as well. I also plan to present my research at The Ohio State Reformatory Historic Site to other staff members and volunteers.
Honors Thesis submitted to The University of Akron History Department.

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Thanks to those who provided accounts of their experiences at The Ohio State Reformatory.

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Appendix I: Images. All photographs taken by the author, Veronica Bagley.

Figure 1 The East Cell Block today.
Figure 2 The OSR Chapel today.
Figure 3 The West Cell Block today.
Figure 4 An East Cell Block cell today.
Figure 5 West Diagonal Correction Cells, or Solitary Confinement, today.
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