(Board of Commissioners for the Territorial Prison)

Administrative History

Under the Territorial laws of Nevada enacted in 1861 the Board of Prison Commissioners was comprised of the Governor, the Secretary of the Territory, and the Surveyor-General. The Board was empowered to "lease, purchase, or build, at the expense of the Territory, a suitable building, for the use of the Territory as a territorial prison" and to report to the next session of the legislative assembly, what property it advised to purchase for a territorial prison. In 1864 the composition of the Board was changed to the Secretary of the Territory, the Territorial Auditor, and the Territorial Treasurer. The Commission continued to function after statehood and the composition of the board then included the Governor, Secretary of State, and the Attorney General.

The Territorial Commissioners initially entered into a contract with Abraham Curry to act as the prison warden and to secure a safe place in which to house prisoners. In 1862 for $6,000 a year, Curry supplied stone prison buildings and provided room, board, and clothing for up to 18 prisoners. The following year the Commissioners recommended to the Legislature that they purchase Curry’s facility, and in 1864 the transaction was authorized and completed. The Territory procured Curry’s property, including the stone buildings, for $80,000, payable in $20,000 installments over 4 years at 10% per annum. This facility was the basis for the current Nevada State Prison on East 5th Street in Carson City.

Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Territorial Prison

The records of the Prison Commissioners include documentation related to the contracts with Abraham Curry to first operate and then sell the prison to the Territory; claims for purchases of supplies approved by the Board; a report from Curry which includes a list of prisoners as of January, 1864; and prison case files. The Curry materials include individual contracts to operate the prison, to lease the prison, and to sell the prison; and a minute book recording Commissioner meetings from Feb-Aug. 1864, which document the agreements in narrative form. The prisoner case files, dating from 1863-1864, are only five in number. All but one consists solely of petitions and letters requesting pardons; the other case file contains a record of the findings of the Washoe County Court and sentence.

Item: TERR-0001 Date: 1864
Old #: T/V/A2/6
Type: Volume
Remarks: Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners for the Territorial Prison, Feb.-Aug.
Agency: Territory, Nevada
Division: Prison Commissioners, Board of

Item: TERR-0137 Date: 1862-1864
Old #:
Type: Records
Remarks: Contracts, claims
Agency: Territory, Nevada
Division: Prison Commissioners, Board of

Item: TERR-0002 Date: 1864
Old #: T/V/A2/7
Type: Volume
Remarks: Cash book, Mar.-May
Agency: Territory, Nevada
Division: Prison Commissioners, Board of

Item: NSP-0001 Date: 1863-1864
Old #:
Type: Records
Remarks: Prisoner case files
Agency: Territory, Nevada

Division: Prison Commissioners, Board of

Photo credit: Warm Springs Hotel, site of the first Nevada State Prison. Courtesy of the Nevada State Archives.