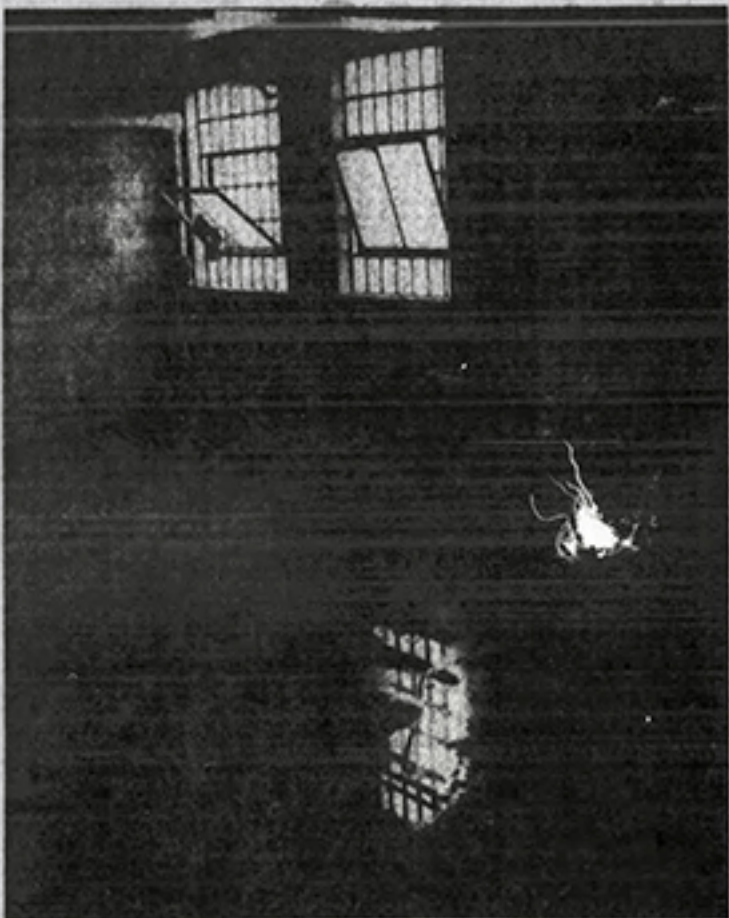


Jail Facelifting?

Finance Panel Votes \$222,000 To Renovate 'Dilapidated' Jail



Staff Photo — Dwight Ross Jr.

Atlanta City Jail: 'Unfit for Human Habitation'

BROKEN PLUMBING, LEAKING ROOF

Atlanta's City Jail: Tour Of a Festering Cesspool

By FREDERICK ALLEN

The holding room on the ground floor is the worst. The air hangs heavy with human odors. There is no ventilation.

There is a single commode, which often backs up, and no water fountain.

This is the first stop on a tour of the Atlanta City Jail, a four concrete edifice behind the police station.

"Normally, these rooms are packed from 5 p.m. on," says Tom Pocock, the administrative officer for the city's Bureau of Corrections.

"We get drunks in here, people who've defecated on themselves and vomited—in with businessmen on their first DUI charge. It's a bad scene," he continues.

The tour comes on the same day that Atlanta's City Council Finance Committee

voted to spend \$222,000 to renovate the jail and bring it into compliance with minimum health and safety standards.

Up one flight are four detention rooms for prisoners awaiting their moment before a city judge. On Thursday, the dank air inside is clogged with cigarette smoke. There is a single commode here as well. Twelve men are lying or slouching in the room.

On one wall a tangle of pipes remains where once there was a sink. "It's out of there because they knocked it down too many times," Pocock explains. "In our proposal there's a lot of tamper-proof equipment."

"No towels, no soap," one prisoner complains as the visitors leave.

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By JIM MERRINER

The City Council Finance Committee Thursday voted to spend \$222,000 to renovate the Atlanta jail after the city corrections director called it "completely dilapidated" and "squalid."

The Decatur Street jail faces state crackdowns unless it is brought up to minimum health and safety standards, said Corrections Bureau Director J. D. Hudson.

Hudson used blunt language to describe the facility as "unfit for human habitation." He did not stress the potential for violence caused by overcrowding and substandard conditions.

However, a corrections bureau study cited "... almost routine, but unreported, occurrences of violence and crime within the detention center. Equally disturbing are the allegations of officer brutality, malfeasance and incompetence which, failing evidence or witnesses, are never satisfactorily resolved."

Included in the jail renovation plan is \$8,625 for a closed circuit television system to monitor prisoners and guards.

"There needs to be improvement in food service, water-toilet facilities, housing, fire safety, space utilization, ventilation, vermin control and wiring in order to be in compliance (with state codes)," a Finance Department study stated.

Councilman Richard Guthman did not quarrel with the need to upgrade the jail, but he argued that jail use should be phased out in favor of heavier use of the city prison farm on Key Road.

Deputy Police Director C. H. Childers has suggested that public drunks be taken directly to Key Road, bypassing the usual processing through the jail, Guthman said. This could lessen demands on the jail and save on renovation costs, he said.

Hudson did not dispute the point, but he insisted that \$222,000 is the minimum needed to meet state standards now. Also, he only recently heard of Childers' suggestion even though he has been discussing the problem with police officials for two years, Hudson said.

The committee approved the jail upgrading funds, except for \$26,000 asked by Hudson for a space utilization study. The funds will be drawn from a previous federal grant.

The spending proposal goes to the full council for first reading Monday.

The proposal would provide \$11,504 for upgrading kitchen facilities, \$26,250 to repair the roof and the ventilation system, \$31,346 for new showers, toilets and waste disposal outlets, \$4,500 for a fire alarm, \$11,000 for an electronic gang-locking system, \$57,000 for elevator repair and \$10,400

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The Lockup

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"I was in here this morning," Pocock says, entering another of the detention rooms. "They had roaches all over—big bomber types."

This room is not in use because the toilet has backed up. There is a powerful stench, but Pocock says, "If we needed it, we would use it."

The jail, built with public service money and prison labor in 1934, is home to some 330 prisoners each day. By federal standards, it should house no more than 140.

In a large day room are the traffic offenders. "Any other jail," Pocock says, "half these guys would be out on recognizance bonds or much smaller bonds. I blame a lot of the overcrowding in traffic and drunks on bonding. There's no excuse to have this many men in here."

Around the corner is the women's area. "We keep all females in here," the administrator says, "whether she be accused of murder or a young kid with drugs. Right in the same open area."

"They'll rob each other, and I'd just about fight any man rather than some of the women they bring in here."

There's an unused fifth floor in the jail—unused because the roof is like a sieve. There are puddles on Thursday afternoon from a rainstorm the day before. Women prisoners could be separated by their alleged crimes, but the floor can't be used.

The women can't use the showers on their own floor, because the floor leaks into a police radio room beneath. So the women must be taken up to the unused fifth floor for showers. As a result, women prisoners bathe only twice a week.

The mattresses, Pocock points out, are the same type which made kindling in a jail fire in Seminole, Fla., recently.

So far on the tour, there hasn't been a single water fountain for the prisoners.

The visitors see their first cockroach skittering along the floor in a storage room. Pocock points out another, hanging from an overhead pipe like a bat. It has wings. "That's one of the bombers," he says.

Next is the third floor, the maximum security area for accused felons and misdemeanants. Most of the cells are 88 square feet—and house four prisoners. On one side of the building, so little light comes in from

the windows that the interior of the cell can't be seen from the hallway.

Ventilation is so bad that many of the windows have been broken for air.

"Two or three weeks ago," Pocock says, "we had a man die in this cell from a seizure."

The men who came for the corpse spent an hour with it, trapped between floors in an antiquated elevator.

The visitors observe a guard taking almost 10 minutes to open a cell door, stymied by a balky key. "That's another problem," Pocock says. "What if you have a fire? It's taking him 20 minutes to open the door."

On the fourth floor are twin drunk tanks. Both have plumbing problems that necessitate the use of buckets under the drinking fountains. One fountain shoots a stream of water about nine inches into the air. The other only about a quarter-inch. "If you want to put your mouth around that one you can," the administrator tells the visitors.

There is no light in the bathroom. The toilet paper is filthy.

There is but a single guard for the whole fourth floor.

In one of the drunk tanks, in a small cell that opens onto the main room, a new arrival is lying on the bare metal straps of his bunk. There are no mattresses in these cells because prisoners often ignite them.

The man, who looks about 50, arises and begins weaving across the room, teetering precariously on a pair of crutches.

A dollar bill is lying on the concrete floor under his bunk. "Hey, you dropped your money," a visitor yells after him.

"Yeah, I got money," the man shouts back in a slurred voice. He begins pulling bills from his pockets. In all, nine dollars land on the floor.

Prisoners are supposed to keep no more than \$5 when they're locked up. This was an oversight.

"They'll roll each other," Pocock explains.

Some of that could be cured with the closed-circuit TV system being requested, Pocock says.

Whatever, the jail may not be Draconian. There is no torture, no one has hanged by his thumbs. But the people in charge want some changes.

Jail

From Page 1-A

for security, including the closed circuit TV system.

According to Hudson, the jail now houses about 60 female suspects even though state standards would allow only 24. Similarly, there are 65 male traffic violators while the state limit is 26; 118 male felony and misdemeanor inmates with a limit of 42; 87 male city ordinance violators with a limit of 48.

The lavatory and toilet facilities are "inferior. . . many of these facilities are permanently out of order because plumbing and fixtures are so obsolete that replacement is virtually impossible," Hudson stated.

"In the female section of the second floor, no showering can be permitted because serious plumbing leakages threaten severe damage to police identification and photographic equipment situated in the rooms beneath," his report continues.

An inspection by the state fire marshal disclosed 12 fire code violations, including the absence of a certificate of occupancy, fire drills and a fire alarm system.

Also, among other hazards, "The small arms ammunition room has a metal door. In event of fire, this storage would present an unusual threat to the lives of firemen," the inspector stated.

Hudson said the prisoners all are awaiting arraignment and are still presumed legally innocent. The "squalid conditions" could impose a "cruel and unusual punishment" as prohibited by the U.S. Constitution, he said.

The jail was built with chain-gang labor in 1934 as a federal Works Project Administration effort.

It was placed under Hudson's jurisdiction last year as part of Mayor Maynard Jackson's city reorganization. The jail was formerly operated under then-Police Chief John Inman's supervision.

Inman

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Highly placed sources at City Hall, however, confirmed that efforts to oust Inman have been under way for at least a month. Private money of an undisclosed sum was being sought to compensate Inman for whatever losses he would incur by stepping down, the sources confirmed.

Involved in the effort were five local bankers who met four weeks ago to discuss how to raise the funds, law enforcement sources said.

Those discussions may now be in limbo and Inman's departure is not considered imminent. A "snag" has developed that is delaying the move, the sources said.

The "snag" may be John Inman himself. Inman said Thursday he had no immediate plans of leaving. "I haven't given my plans that much consideration," he said.

Though Inman declined to name the person who initially contacted him on behalf of City Hall, businessman Munford confirmed that he was the intermediary.

Munford, often at odds with both Jackson and Eaves, recently sent Eaves a letter complimenting him on a fine job. It was against that background that he was asked to approach Inman, he said.

"The interesting thing about it all is that John Inman has got them all stopped right now," Munford said in an interview. "He has flat got them stopped. I was asked to talk to Inman about getting out, as a messenger indirectly from the mayor."

"Did you ask Inman to resign?" Munford was asked.

"Well, yes. And he said, 'Why? I said, 'Damned if I know. To get Eaves out.' Well, he said he thought somebody was going to talk to him one of these days, but no one had gotten around to it, but he figured that if it came from anybody, they'd go through me," Munford replied.

Asked if he didn't feel it odd that any-