
APPENDICES

REPORTS OF SELECT COMMITTEES.

REPORT OF SELECT COMMITTEE

ON VICTORIA GAOL

To the Hon. the Speaker and Legislative Assembly:—

Your Committee, appointed to visit and inspect the Victoria Gaol, met on Saturday, the 28th ultimo, and proceeded to the Gaol for that purpose.

They were cordially received by Messrs. Muldoon and Miles, First and Second Gaolers in charge, Mr. Hutcheson, the principal officer, being temporarily absent on account of ill health.

Your Committee made a general inspection of the premises, and beg leave to report as follows:—

The whole Gaol is as clean and tidy as possible under the circumstances, and considering the cramped condition of the premises, great credit is due to the officers in charge.

The Gaol is, to all outward appearance, in much the same condition as it was in 1873, but little alterations having been made since that date; but upon a closer inspection it was found that the ravages of time have told fearfully against it. The fence enclosing the grounds is in a very unsafe condition, the posts are completely rotted off at their base, and the fact that so few have ever made their escape is due more to the vigilance of the officers in charge than to the security of the institution itself. The sleepers and timbers in the lower part of the outer wall of the wooden or inner building are in a very unsound condition, and to this fact may be traced the escape of two prisoners very recently. The baseboard on the south end of the Gaol was easily pried off and used as a lean-to, by which means the prisoners were enabled to reach the top of the fence and make good their escape. For some reason (providentially, no doubt) they were not fired upon, and were subsequently captured without injury. Had the guard exercised his prerogative and fired upon them, the result would have been a melancholy one, in which it is quite possible that the death of two human beings might have resulted through the rottenness of the premises designed for their personal security and safety. Since then the outer fence has been raised an additional four feet in height. This will render escape more difficult, while the fence stands, but it will also be subject to a greater strain and be more likely to topple over in the event of unusual pressure by storms or otherwise.

The Gaol kitchen is very conveniently arranged and is kept exceedingly clean and tidy, and everything is conducted in a most orderly manner. A fine cooking range is provided, to which is attached a steam chest, with pipes, &c., to supply hot water for bathing purposes.

The provisions are good, the supply bountiful, and no complaint is made by the prisoners. There are 16 cells in all, averaging about 12 feet long, 6½ feet wide, and 8 feet high. As many as seven persons are sometimes confined and sleep in each of these cells.

The highest number of prisoners confined in the Gaol at any one time during the past year was 81, but as many as 100 have sometimes been confined there. At present there are but 52, of whom 3 are females, 10 are Chinamen, and 8 are Indians. The greatest number of Chinamen confined at any one time was 40; the general average is about 20. Their principal crime is larceny. There are three lunatics confined in the Gaol at the present time, one of whom, a Mr. Johnson, has been there for some years. These poor unfortunate people should be provided with more comfortable quarters at the earliest possible moment.

Of the 52 prisoners undergoing sentence at the present time, 13 are sailors belonging to the mercantile marine, and were convicted by the resident Magistrate at Esquimalt. The extraordinary circumstance of 13 men, including the mate, being committed from one ship for refusing duty, and when, as your Committee were informed, some considerable money was due to them, suggests to your Committee the advisability of instituting further inquiry in the matter, especially as your Committee are given to understand that the incarceration of sailors convicted by Mr. Justice Fisher is of constant occurrence.

Your Committee would especially call your attention to the case of Sow Fow and Ah Sin, two Chinamen who, apparently, have decided to remain forever in gaol. They are no sooner out than they commit some trivial offence, evidently for the purpose of being taken in again. Your Committee would recommend that the prison discipline be made more stringent in their behalf, if possible, and, if not, that they be sent out of the country.

Sixteen prisoners, at the present time, constitute the chain-gang. They are usually employed at Government House and Government Buildings, and occasionally at the Public School Grounds. Prisoners are not usually sent to the chain-gang for the first offence. When

not on the gang, they are employed picking oakum, cutting wood, washing and other incidentals for prison use.

The health of the institution is zealously cared for. Four bath-tubs have been provided, and the prisoners are required to take a bath and change their clothes regularly once a week. The Medical Attendant visits the Gaol regularly three times a week, and at other times when called upon. There is no sickness reported, except that before referred to.

The rules of the Gaol provide that, when a prisoner has been sentenced, his civilian dress is to be removed and laid away in a room provided for that purpose, where they are all properly marked and numbered and restored to the prisoner on his discharge. The hair is cropped to a uniform length of one inch, and a prison uniform substituted for the one discarded. The rule in regard to hair-cutting is rigidly enforced in all cases except in regard to Chinese prisoners, who, for some unknown cause, have not been subject to this rule for some years. Formerly no distinction was made, and your Committee see no reason why this distinction should not be discontinued. It not infrequently happens that Chinese prisoners are brought in in the most filthy state, and covered with vermin, and sometimes their clothes have to be burned, as the only means of extermination. Nor is this state of affairs confined to new-comers, and the officers have to be continually on their guard to ensure cleanliness, which is rendered more difficult in the case of the Chinese, in consequence of their exemption from full prison discipline.

The officers of the Gaol are: First, Second and Third Gaoler, Superintendent of the Chain-gang, Balcony Guard, and one Guard. Three officers sleep on the premises. Their salaries are: First, Second and Third Gaolers, \$100, \$76 and \$60 a month, respectively; First, Second and Third Convict Guards, \$80, \$60 and \$60, respectively, per month. Some of the above officials are sometimes required to perform outside duty, and, although this usually occurs during their own time, no extra pay is allowed. Your Committee were informed that the City Police are paid at the rate of \$75 a month, and, in addition thereto, two suits of clothes, including shoes, are allowed, and whenever their services are required beyond the city limits, they receive extra pay.

The City of Victoria should have a lock-up of its own, as much annoyance is caused to the regular occupants of the Gaol, in consequence of the noise and other disturbances created by the continual admittance of prisoners that are brought in during all hours of the night.

So far as your Committee could learn, the City of Victoria pays 75 cents a day each for the board of all city prisoners until convicted or committed for trial, but nothing for other accommodation.

The privies are arranged with draw-boxes, and are emptied twice a week in summer and once a week in winter. The drainage is all that can be desired.

A two-inch pipe has been connected with the City Water Works, for convenience in case of fire. There are about 80 feet of two-inch hose attached; but in case of a fire taking place at the back of the Gaol, or in front of the main building, this would be insufficient; at least 80 feet more should be supplied.

A separate drying-room in the winter-time is an urgent necessity, and if it were not that the Government contemplate building a new Gaol, should be provided at once. The one used at present is also used as a chapel, and, when required, as a debtors' prison. Your Committee suggest that the old Court Room, which at present is but little occupied, might be utilized either as a drying-room or as a chapel and debtors' prison.

Separate accommodation for female prisoners is an urgent necessity, as the officers experience great trouble in keeping them from the other prisoners, and the result is, they are not allowed as much outdoor freedom as could be desired.

There is very little insubordination among the prisoners, and no complaint is charged against officials. Vague rumors, however, have been heard in regard to insobriety, but your Committee have been unable to trace them to a reliable source.

Great credit is due to Mr. and Mrs. Spencer of Victoria City, who are the only persons that take an active interest in the spiritual welfare of the prisoners. These worthy people are regular in their attendance on the Sabbath day, and are untiring in their administrations to the spiritual wants and comforts of the prison inmates.

The roof of the main building requires considerable repairs, but your Committee recommend that as little outlay be incurred at present as possible, consistently with the public safety, and that no time be lost in providing new and more suitable premises.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

S. DUCK, *Chairman Committee.*