

A Guide to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Virginia Penitentiary Records, 1798-1869

Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Virginia Penitentiary Records, 1798-1869
1798-1869

A Collection in the Library of Virginia APA 131
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History

Processed by: Renee M. Savits

Title Statement

A Guide to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Virginia Penitentiary Records, 1798-1869

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Collection: APA 131

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Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

APA 131

Language

English

Creator

Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts

Extent

4.2 cu. ft. (9 boxes)

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Transferred from the Auditor of Public Accounts in 1913.

Preferred Citation

Virginia. Auditor of Public Accounts (1776-1928). Virginia Penitentiary Records, 1798-1869. Accession APA 131. State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Biographical Information

On 15 December 1796 the General Assembly approved the purchase of land for the construction of "a gaol and penitentiary house." Thomas Jefferson submitted plans for the institution based on prisons that he had seen in France, but these were not accepted. The General Assembly authorized a design competition and selected Benjamin Henry Latrobe to be the architect. Although inmates first entered the penitentiary in 1800, the structure was not completed until 1804.

In 1823 fire destroyed the interior of the penitentiary. Rebuilding began at once. New buildings were added and a wall was constructed around the perimeter of the facility. In 1833, however, Alexis de Touqueville called the penitentiary "one of the bad prisons of the United States." The physical plant survived the Civil War, although the inmates looted and pillaged it during the Confederate army's evacuation of Richmond on 2-3 April 1865. After the war, new construction began to replace the Latrobe structure, and the last of the old buildings was demolished in 1928.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, inmates labored under a contract system and produced goods for sale by private firms. The penitentiary employed a series of agents across the state whose duties included selling the goods manufactured at the penitentiary and providing travel money to discharged inmates. Not all of the manufactured goods from the penitentiary were sold; clothing and household items of penitentiary manufacture were donated to the state mental hospitals at Williamsburg and Staunton.

Scope and Content

Records, 1798-1869, including accounts, correspondence, receipts, vouchers, and warrants of the Virginia Penitentiary submitted to the Auditor of Public Accounts. The collection is arranged chronologically in nine boxes, with oversize materials arranged at the end. The bulk of the records relate to the purchase of food and supplies for prisoners, the building and expansion of the Penitentiary, and the sale of articles built by inmates.

The records include accounts of rations furnished prisoners; invoices of materials purchased for the penitentiary; salaries paid to employees; bills for prisoner medical care; correspondence from Virginia governors ordering cash advances for discharged prisoners for travelling expenses; reports and resolutions from the Board of Directors; and lists of materials produced at the Penitentiary and sent to state mental hospitals. Also included are accounts of goods manufactured at the penitentiary and sold by agents throughout the state. The inmates made a variety of products for sale including shoes, nails, twine, horse collars, coats, and spikes, among others.

Of note are records, 1798-1800, detailing the costs of building the Penitentiary, from purchasing bricks, lime, and planks, to payments to contractors and construction workers. Included are accounts of payments to Benjamin Henry Latrobe for his travel expenses and salary for designing the structure. Also included are records detailing additions and repairs to the Penitentiary as well as the purchase of furniture for the facility.

For additional records please see: Records of the Virginia Penitentiary, 1796-1991 (bulk 1906-1970), LVA Accession 41558.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged chronologically.

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