

Photo of the Month

Benton County Jail



**Benton County Law Enforcement Officers
At Benton County Court House in 1951
Courtesy Gary Black**

Pictured above is a gathering of all Benton County law enforcement officers on May 1, 1951 in front of the county jail building in Bentonville. From left to right, Hugh D. Black, Bentonville Chief of Police; Joe Brewer, Bentonville Police Department; Dick Hoback, Bentonville Police Department; Bill Gamble, Siloam Springs Chief of Police; B. Miller, Siloam Springs Police Department; John Campbell, Siloam Springs Police Department; Leonard Jones, Arkansas State Police; John M. Black, Sheriff of Benton County; Sid Jackson, Deputy Sheriff; Earl Rife, Deputy Sheriff; Wallace Parnell, Arkansas State Police; Walter Dean, Rogers Chief of Police; Bill Dunson, Rogers Police Department; Quant Morrison, Rogers Police Department. At that time, there were 14 law enforcement officers and seven police vehicles in Benton County.

The center of Benton County law enforcement was the county jail and the history of the county jail began in 1837. At that time, under the first Sheriff of Benton County Gideon G. Pace, the first Benton County Jail was built of logs and located 60 yards east of the northeast corner of the town square in Bentonville. By 1848, John Galbreath was serving as Sheriff and this structure was deemed not worthy of repair. In August of that year, the second county jail was constructed in the same general location as the first jail. The jail was located in this three story structure until 1874 when it moved to the third floor of the new Benton County Courthouse, which was erected on the southeast corner of the block just northwest of the square. Sheriff J.W. Simmons began his term of office during this year.

The 1886 Sandborn Map of the Bentonville square shows the location of the city's calaboose. It is interesting to note that the calaboose was located in the same area east from the northeast corner of the square. Although this information is not fully researched, it seems possible that the calaboose may have been the 1848 county jail used by the city after the county jail moved into the 1874 Courthouse.

A fourth county jail was built in 1889 during the term of Sheriff F.P. Galbreath. Constructed of stone, brick, and steel at a cost of \$7,500, this massive one-story structure stood in the northwest corner of the 1874 Courthouse yard. The contracts were let in 1888 for stone masonry, brick work, carpentry, iron work, etc. The steel cages of the jail were provided by the Pauly Jail Building & Manufacturing Company of St. Louis, Missouri. The building was forty-two feet by thirty-two feet in size. It had a hall that circled the inside of the building and surrounded a thirteen square foot space for prisoners, which contained two cells that were each six and a half feet square. This area was placed about three feet below ground level, with a six feet wide space around it. The designers intended to limit contact between the jailer and prisoners with this arrangement.

A fire in this building on March 4, 1905 resulted in the deaths of two prisoners identified as Dan Reaves of Siloam Springs and Henry Crow. Four other prisoners who were being held in the jail at the time escaped injury, but were unable to help Reaves and Crow. Reaves was serving time for petty larceny and Crow was originally arrested on a charge of insanity. Crow had been released for good behavior and given a small sum of money to help him get back on his feet, but promptly spent the money at the hardware store for files, which he distributed among his former inmates. He was back in jail following his arrest for this incident.

Reaves attempted to extinguish the flames, but was unable to do so after Crow reportedly clung to him in terror. Both men were overcome by smoke from the fire, which was believed to have been started by one of the men smoking in bed. Neither the Jailer nor the Sheriff, who was James Hickman at the time, lived in the jail, so they were unable to arrive early enough to rescue the men. Tragically, neither neighbors of the jail nor the fire department were able to put out the fire before the men died. A lawsuit was brought against the county by the survivors of the inmates, but it failed. The court ruled that since the county did not provide quarters for the Sheriff or Jailer, they were liable for staying at the jail around the clock. After this incident, it became common for officers to live in the jail buildings in this area.

A temporary jail was used until the fifth jail was built in 1911 on Main Street just north of the square. This jail was constructed by the county during the term of Sheriff A.J. Russell and the design of the building was provided by the prestigious architectural firm of Clarke and Matthew. Local builder Lon Pace did most of the construction work, with Steward Iron Works, Co. providing the steel work. The Sheriff's Office was also located in this building.

This building served the county until 1975 during James Pearson's term as Sheriff, when an addition to

the 1928 Courthouse on the east side of the square was completed for use as a jail. The newest jail facility was constructed in 1999 under Sheriff Andy Lee. It is over 100,000 square feet in size, located on S.W. 14th Street in Bentonville, and can hold 508 inmates.