

Photo of the Month

Rogers City Jail



1894 City Jail Cells Being Removed from the Rogers Police Department in 1979
Rogers City Hall, 214 West Elm Street
Photo Courtesy Dennis Patton

In 1957 the Everly Brothers sang, "I'm not in your town to stay and I'll soon be on my way, I'm just here to get my baby out of jail." In Rogers during those years, the town's "lock-up" that some people were probably eager to get out of was located in City Hall on West Elm Street and managed by the Police Department. From 1930 until 1979, the cells served the community at this location by temporarily holding individuals on various charges, which often ranged from public intoxication to disturbing the peace. The photograph at right illustrates the cells being removed from City Hall as part of the 1979 Police Department renovation.

These cells have a much longer history of use by the city though, which extends back to the early years of the town. The Rogers City Council minutes of February 7, 1894 recorded a proposal for building an addition to the original City Hall building on North First Street for a calaboose. A calaboose is usually identified as a small, local jail in the Southern and Western regions of the country. However, this proposal was rejected. A motion was made, though, to refer the possibility of purchasing two cells to be placed in City Hall to the Committee on Public Buildings.

The Committee appeared to have quickly reached a decision in their search for an appropriate jail. On March 7, 1894 the Council instructed the Recorder to draw a warrant to pay the freight on two calaboose cells in the amount of \$19.20. The following week, the bills read and allowed in the Council minutes included line items for the Pauly Jail Building and Manufacturing Company in the amount of \$210.80 and for W.D. Baker for work done on the cells in the amount of \$8.75.

For thirty-six years, then, these cells stood in the original Rogers City Hall. But their service to the city did not come to an end even as the new A.O. Clarke designed City Hall on West Elm Street was completed in 1930. The physical evidence of the cells indicates that they were cut apart in three sections, moved to the new building, and welded back together.

The jail is approximately 6 feet 7 inches across, 6 feet 7 inches high, and 9 feet long. The two cells are divided by a boiler plate wall with a boiler plate ceiling. Each of the cells has a meal tray and slot in the end wall, two bunk beds, and a heavy door with a boiler plate barrier behind the latch. The latches consist of heavy rods that bolt down to a fastener and require a pad lock. The meal trays and boiler plate attachments to the doors were modifications made to the cells over the years. This must have been a very confining experience!

During the renovation of the Police Department, museum commissioner Jerry Hiatt saved the cells and stored them on behalf of the museum until 2010. In June 2010, they were brought back to the museum for restoration and use in the Benton County Crime Stories exhibit, which is scheduled to open in October 2011. The cells are an important aspect of the history of Rogers and one of the most interesting, if not largest objects in the collection of the Rogers Historical Museum.