

Donald Price Medium Security Facility  
20 Goddard Drive  
Cranston  
Providence County  
Rhode Island

RIHRA No. CRNS-0009



WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

PHOTOGRAPHS

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL RESOURCES ARCHIVE  
**DONALD PRICE MEDIUM SECURITY FACILITY**  
(FORMERLY THE STATE REFORMATORY FOR MEN)  
RIHRA No. CRNS-0009

- Location:** 20 Goddard Drive  
City of Cranston, Providence County,  
Rhode Island
- USGS Providence, Rhode Island Quadrangle  
Latitude: 41.7438  
Longitude: 71.4495
- Owner:** The State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations,  
Department of Administration (RIDOA)
- Current Use:** Vacant. (The building was closed in 2011 due to agency budget cuts. It cannot be used in any functional capacity because code deficiencies exist throughout that make the building unsafe and substandard.)
- Significance:** The Building was designed in 1931 by the State Institutions Engineering Department for the Rhode Island Public Welfare Commission and completed in 1933 as the State Reformatory for Men. It was originally used to house youthful offenders.
- In the 1920s the "New Penology," as it was known, believed that people were sent to prison for treatment, not retribution. Classification of prisoners was made more precise in order to assess their capabilities so they could be properly trained in preparation for release. The State developed an industrial training program that was netting the State \$90,000 a year by selling prison-manufactured textile goods in 1930, when a federal law prohibited interstate traffic of prison-made goods. "Reformatories" were erected across the country to house first offenders and segregate them from hardened criminals. Rhode Island's Reformatory for Men was completed in 1933 but never lived up to its promise. Because of overcrowding in the Providence County Jail, ninety-eight inmates from that institution were transferred to the new facility, thereby undermining the planned separation of new and recidivist offenders. (RIHPC 1980 Cranston Survey)

The facility closed in 1992 per mandate of the General Assembly in light of the State's fiscal situation and its inmates were moved to other facilities, primarily to the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility on the Howard Campus. It reopened in 1997 as the Donald Price Facility, in memory of a security officer who was stabbed to death by one of the prisoners in 1973. (RIDOC)

According to the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), the building is not listed on the State Register or the National Register of Historic Places.

**Historical Background:**

The great majority of State-built structures reflect the State's role in the social welfare, health, and education of its citizens. In the late nineteenth century, State government began to assume responsibilities which localities were no longer able or willing to support and which welfare and penal authorities in Rhode Island viewed as needing reform.

The vast Howard complex (now called the Pastore Center) in Cranston provides one of the most vivid illustrations of the expanding role of state government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Howard was originally conceived after the Civil War as a state farm, on which the poor, the criminal, and the sick would live and work under controlled conditions in the wholesome environment of rural life away from the social problems and unsanitary conditions of the cities.

Among the earliest buildings remaining at Howard are the Eastman House, built in 1870, the Providence County Jail and State Prison (now Maximum Security), built in 1874-78, and the Center Building, originally constructed in 1888-90 as the State Almshouse. Through the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the 1930s, the building complex at Howard continued to expand.

The establishment and expansion of State facilities at Howard offered major opportunities for Rhode Island architects, among them the firm of Stone, Carpenter and Willson, which was responsible for the buildings of the Sockanosset Boys School, the Center Building, and the State Prison. The Victorian styles favored in the nineteenth century gave way in the twentieth century to the

Georgian and Colonial Revivals. A number of important architects contributed to this later stylistic phase, including the firm of Martin and Hall prior to World War I, and Howe and Church, Edward O. Ekman, Albert Harkness, Franklin R. Hindle, and others during the Public Works Administration construction program of the 1930s.

The evolution of the Howard complex at Cranston, in which the Department of Corrections and Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals share jurisdiction, represents an important chapter in the social history of Rhode Island and illustrates the increasing responsibilities of State government during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The complex includes significant examples of institutional architecture dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the recent past.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Howard complex was significantly upgraded and enlarged. Through the efforts of Governor Theodore Francis Green, the state appropriated large sums for modern equipment, new buildings with improved treatment facilities, and expanded hospital services. Between 1933 and 1938, grants through the Public Works Administration made possible the construction of a noteworthy group of Georgian Revival buildings that remain in use today. Twenty-five buildings were erected for the State Hospital for Mental Diseases, three for the State Infirmary, and three for the Sockanosset School. (RIHPHC 1980).

Since 1950, State bond issues and federal funding have facilitated further additions and improvements at Howard, and today the complex [now named the Pastore Center] provides a full range of custodial and curative services. Other state agencies have also constructed buildings on the property, including the Division of Motor Vehicles and the Office of the Attorney General. The continued improvement and use of historic buildings associated with Howard's developmental history resulted in the conservation, to a significant extent, of the institution's architectural history through the 1970s, and a few buildings have undergone significant rehabilitations since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as state offices and agencies have relocated, been replaced, or grown too large for the historic buildings at the Howard campus, neglect and demolition has resulted in some significant losses since 2000 and

continues to threaten some buildings and the complex's overall historic character.

**Descriptive Information:** The Donald Price Facility is conveniently oriented to the cardinal compass points. The long front elevation, set back about 250 feet from Goddard Drive, faces west and the east elevation faces the exercise yard, overlooking the Pawtuxet River and Interstate 95 beyond.

### **Site**

The building is situated prominently on a 16.74-acre parcel of land (Plat 13, Lot 39) on the east side of Pontiac Avenue, once part of a much larger area of land called the Howard and Brayton Farms purchased by the State of Rhode Island between 1868 and 1872. It is the only remaining land parcel east of Pontiac Avenue still owned by the state.

When the building was constructed in the early 1930s, it appeared as a solitary monumental structure on a plateau surrounded by acres of open space. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, the land between Pontiac Avenue and the Pawtuxet River was subdivided and rezoned for private industrial development, except the twenty acres retained by the state for the medium security facility.

A rectangular portion of the land behind the building on the east side, approximately 400 feet by 370 feet in area, was fenced in with two rows of chain-linked fences laced with coiled razor wire. The land was generally flat, covered with grass and wildflowers, and featuring a basketball court, a picnic area, and concrete steps to negotiate a slight grade change. Guard towers were constructed outside the four corners of the exercise yard. These square towers, varying in height depending upon the terrain, were constructed of painted concrete block, a metal viewing platform with pipe railings encircling the tower high above the exercise yard, and capped with a hip roof with asphalt shingles. A flush steel door provided access to an internal metal staircase to a square room with slanted tinted glass panes on three sides. At the southwest corner of the exercise yard, a 24,000 SF detached windowless Butler-type metal structure

was erected within the yard for inmate recreational and vocational activities.

### **General**

The overall design of the building was likely inspired by the prevailing Georgian Revival style used on numerous government buildings during the 1920s and 1930s, especially those being constructed on the Howard campus by eminent local architects of the day.

The symmetrical 3-story structure, nearly 385 feet long, is dominated by a central pedimented cross-gable pavilion flanked by 12-bay wings extending north and south. Both wings are 42 feet wide, with no interior columns or load-bearing walls. The total gross square footage of the building is about 90,000 GSF (four floor levels of equal area plus the attic space in the pavilion).

The entire building is of non-combustible, fire-proof construction, with concrete footings, foundation walls, floor slabs, and roof slabs, structurally framed in wide-flange steel beams and columns with clear span steel roof trusses at 12 feet on center over the wings. Steel columns were concealed in solid masonry walls. Steel beams were encased with three-coat plaster and metal lath. The building envelope is devoid of any insulation.

Overall, the building's structural integrity appears to be sound and stable. Water damage has occurred in localized areas as a result of deferred maintenance and random pipe leaks in recent years.

### **Exterior**

The exterior is clad with common red brick with splayed limestone lintels and projecting sills at most of the windows. Brick veneer and limestone components were fully bonded to structural concrete block back-up. On the wings along the first floor level, the brick surface is set back to create a round arched recess at each window. Most of the windows are constructed of welded steel T-bars in a grid consisting of 56 panes of glass in the first floor windows and 63 glass panes in the upper floor windows. Each window was fitted with two in-swinging hopper panels for ventilation. Some of the

windows were later altered for the installation of window air conditioners encased with heavy duty metal screening.

The main entrance façade of the central pavilion exhibits a monumental neo-classical composition of four flat Ionic pilasters supporting an entablature inscribed with the words “STATE REFORMATORY FOR MEN” in its fascia. Within the triangular pediment above, the circular limestone State Seal carved in relief is set in a field of red brick. Between the pilasters, the brick field is punched with pairs of rectangular multi-pane steel-framed windows at each floor, fitted with steel security bars.

Flanking the projecting west wall of the pavilion are extensions of the central block, eight feet wide and set back two feet, capped with a flat roof behind a parapet wall above the limestone cornice. Flush limestone quoin blocks accentuate the outside corners.

The main entrance in the center of the façade features a handsome ornate limestone portal with intricately carved brackets, swags on a convex frieze, and a pine cone atop the cornice flanked by scrolls. The incongruous aluminum storefront entrance is a later alteration, probably undertaken at the same time that a concrete ramp with steel pipe railing was introduced. The broad concrete staircase leading up to the main entrance is framed by low curved walls terminating in a raised circular base for modern light stanchions. (The original 1931 plans called for curved “granite steps and limestone buttresses” similar in plan to the current configuration.)

The basement windows in each bay in the north and south wings repeat the bay arrangement of the building and are about the same size as the upper story windows. Concrete areaways or light wells provide natural light and ventilation. A limestone water table at the first floor level runs along the entire perimeter of the building.

At the rear or east elevation of the wings, the fenestration retains the general opening characteristics of the west side of the building with recessed round arches on the first floor and limestone lintels and sills.

Exterior steel stairs enclosed with metal screening were constructed on the east side (as later additions), one bay in from

the north and south ends of the building to provide emergency egress from each level. Date of construction of these fire escapes is unknown.

The projecting east elevation of the pavilion is treated in a somewhat austere manner with flat brick surfaces, flush splayed soldier coursing over the square window openings, and shallow eave cornices at the gable end. Also on the east side of the pavilion are a concrete loading platform and steps and a service entrance to the kitchen protected by a wood canopy.

The wings are capped by hipped roofs with copper eyebrow vents facing north and south. The gable and hip roofs have a 5/12 slope and are covered with slate shingles in a state of disrepair. Glazed copper skylights were placed over the two exit stair towers on the east, flanking the central pavilion. A large skylight, no longer extant, provided daylight over the central staircase serving all five levels. Roof drainage was accommodated by built-in copper gutters and rain leaders with conductor heads. These are all in a state of disrepair, including the painted wood cornices supporting the gutters.

### **Interior Layout**

Architectural floor plans from 1931 illustrate the original layout, space usage, general construction materials, and some finishes. Lacking a contemporary account of the building's design intentions, the original plans presumably reveal a concept of accommodating functions and activities in response to the 'New Penology' for first-time youthful offenders.

On the basement or lower level, the central core of the building provided utility rooms, toilet and shower rooms, three stair halls, storage rooms, and an elevator to the kitchen above. The north and south wings were designated as workshops.

On the main or first floor level, the center block housed the main entrance lobby, offices, a lawyer's room, a chaplain's room, a visitor's room, a commercial-grade kitchen, food storage rooms, and a guards' dining room. The long open space of the north wing terminating with a raised stage flanked by dressing rooms provided

entertainment and daily dining for detainees. The south wing was partitioned into 17 guard rooms (with a common toilet facility) and a recreation room at the far end.

On the second floor, the center block included a library/school room, an occupational room, private offices for a psychologist and a psychiatrist, a large communal toilet room, and storage rooms. The north wing was a dormitory with a 'Day Room'. The south wing was split into two sections divided by toilet facilities. The room nearest the center block had 48 cubicles. The room at the far end of the south wing had 16 cells with a utility corridor dividing them.

On the third floor, the center block included a sick ward, a doctor's room, dentistry, a treatment room, and two large communal toilet rooms. Both wings were used as dormitories with day rooms.

Since 1933, the building has been adapted to functioning as a medium security prison until 2011, when it was closed. Major changes included the conversion of the workshops in the basement into a dormitory and a cluster of individual cells, and the elimination of the stage and subdivision of the north wing on the first floor for multiple purposes.

### **Interior Finishes**

Most of the rooms were finished with durable, washable materials, with glazed tile walls, 'cement' floors, flat plaster ceilings, and linoleum flooring in certain spaces. There is no notable decorative treatment in any of the spaces. The three stair halls, lined with glazed tile walls, have steel-framed flights of stairs with simple steel balusters and newel posts and concrete treads and landings. Doors are mostly flush Kalamein (solid wood with metal cladding) and steel security doors and gates with hollow metal frames and obscure glass panels.

### **Systems**

The steam heating system is serviced by underground steam pipes from the central heating plant in the Pastore Center complex hundreds of yards to the west and entering the building in the

basement (under the main entrance). Cast iron radiators were installed in recesses below the windows, fed by steam pipes embedded in the walls and floors. Condensate piping was installed in an exposed manner sometime later when repairs and alterations were made.

The heating system was later supplemented by a ducted air handling system, probably in the 1990s, that also provided fresh air intake and ventilation in certain areas of the building. There is no cooling system.

The building is believed to be energized by a 400-amp, 3-phase electrical service, which appears to have been upgraded in recent times.

The building is also protected by a municipally-connected fire alarm and detection system, installed in recent times, and stand pipes in the central block.

The building's plumbing system and fixtures, renovated over time, served an 'operational facility capacity' of 324 inmates at the time of its closing in 2011. Based on the original floor plans, more than 250 plumbing fixtures were installed in the building.

**Sources:**

Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission  
[RIHPHC]  
1989 *Rhode Island: State-owned Historic Properties*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission  
[RIHPHC]  
1980 *Cranston Rhode Island State Wide Historic Preservation Report P-C-1*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence.

Jordy, William H.  
2004 *Buildings of Rhode Island*. Society of Architectural Historians, Oxford University Press, New York.

Murphy, T.H., and Richardson, L.D.

1935 *Historic Plan of the Howard Campus*, compiled and corrected 1935 by the state public welfare commission engineering department. Original plan on file, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence.

Website: [lostinnewenglanddotcom.wordpress.com](http://lostinnewenglanddotcom.wordpress.com) (See The Story of Donald Price and anonymous photographs of building and grounds taken in 2014)

Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC)  
Scanned floor plans of the original 1931 set of construction drawings

Prints of Dormitory 'F' Ventilation System Renovations by Creative Environment Corporation issued in 1997 for RIDOC (3 prints found in maintenance room in basement of building)

City of Cranston website to access Tax Assessor's property cards and Tax Assessor's Map.

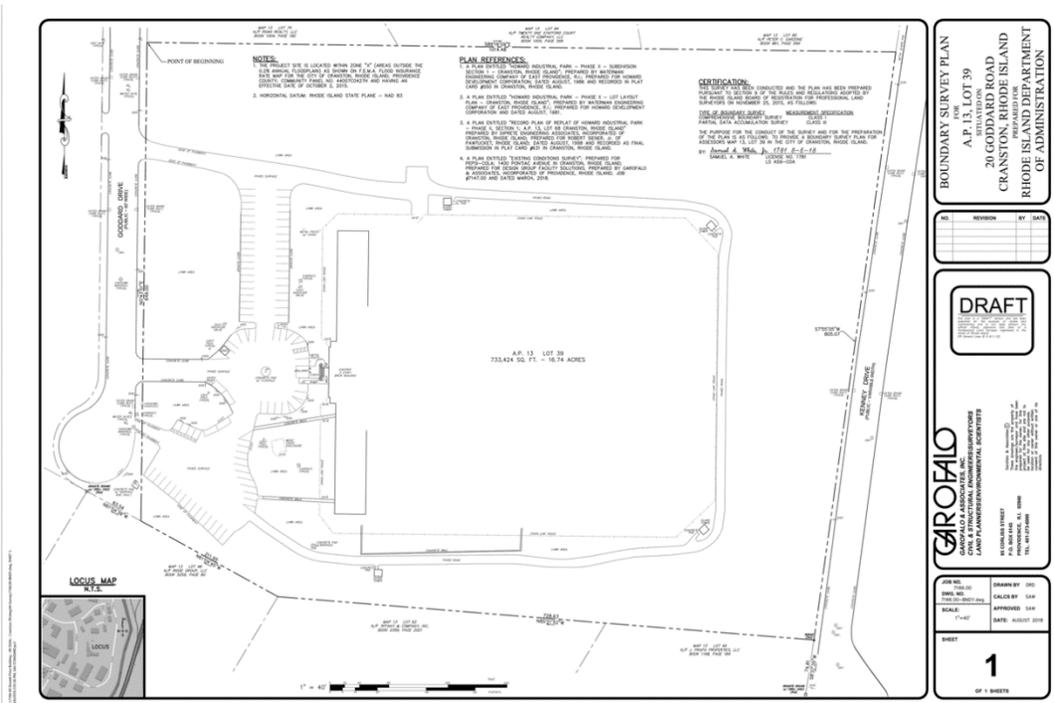
**Author:**

Cornelis Johannes de Boer AIA, Principal  
Haynes / de Boer Architecture+Preservation  
Providence, RI

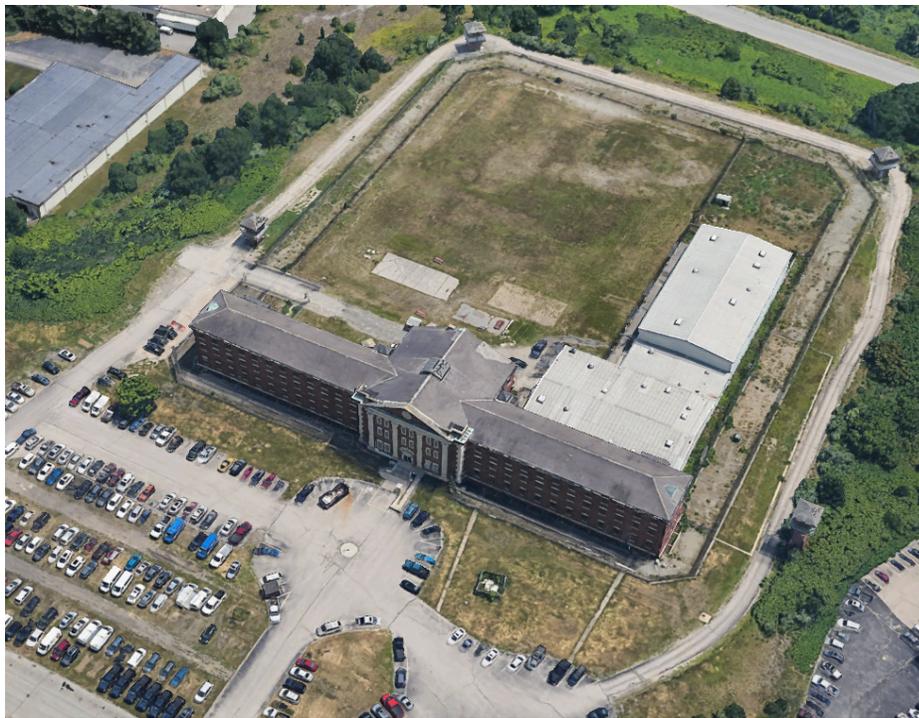
August 1, 2020

**Reviewer:**

Jeffrey D. Emidy  
Deputy Director  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission



Site Survey (Draft) by Garofalo and Associates (2018)



Bird's Eye View of Property Looking East  
 source: Google Earth



2014 View of Main Entrance, West Façade  
source: <https://lostinnewenglanddotcom.wordpress.com>



2014 View of Dormitory, Second Floor, North Wing  
source: <https://lostinnewenglanddotcom.wordpress.com>



CRNS-0009-1 West Façade of Central Pavilion Looking East



CRNS-0009-2 Main Entrance, West Side



CRNS-0009-3 Limestone Portal at Main Entrance



CRNS-0009-4 State Seal in Pediment of Pavilion, West Side



CRNS-0009-5 Typical First Floor Window



CRNS-0009-6 Detail of Southwest Corner of Pavilion. Note damage to gutter and main cornice.



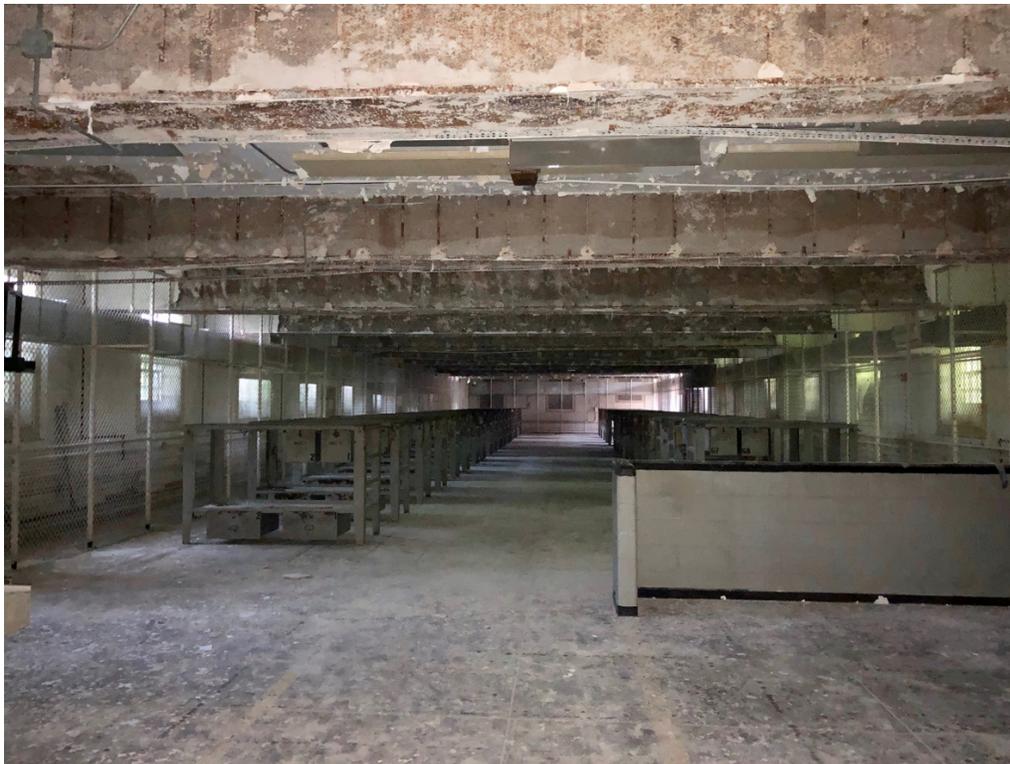
CRNS-0009-7 View of East Façade from Exercise Yard



CRNS-0009-8 View of Fire Escape on East Side, North Wing



CRNS-0009-9 Main Entrance Lobby, First Floor



CRNS-0009-10 Dormitory, North Wing, Basement Level



CRNS-0009-11 Boiler Room, Basement, Center Block



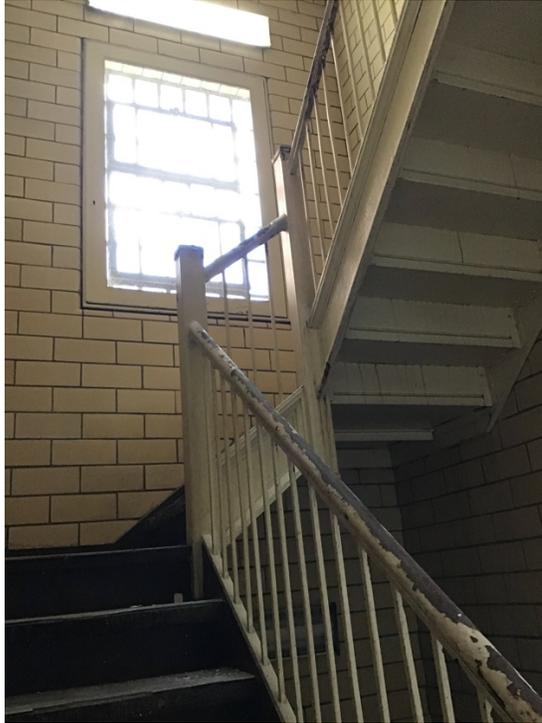
CRNS-0009-12 Multi-purpose Room, North Wing, First Floor, Looking North



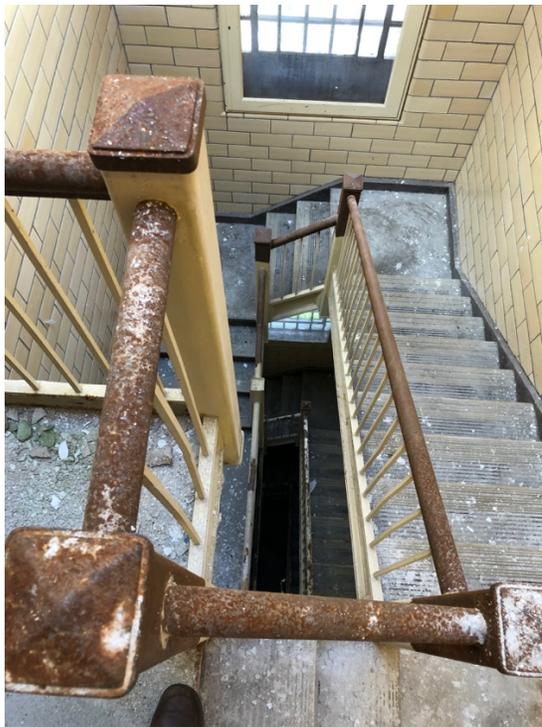
CRNS-0009-13 Central Corridor to Guard Rooms, First Floor, South Wing, Looking South



CRNS-0009-14 Kitchen, Center Block, First Floor, Looking East



CRNS-0009-15 SE Stair Hall



CRNS-0009-16 SE Stair Hall



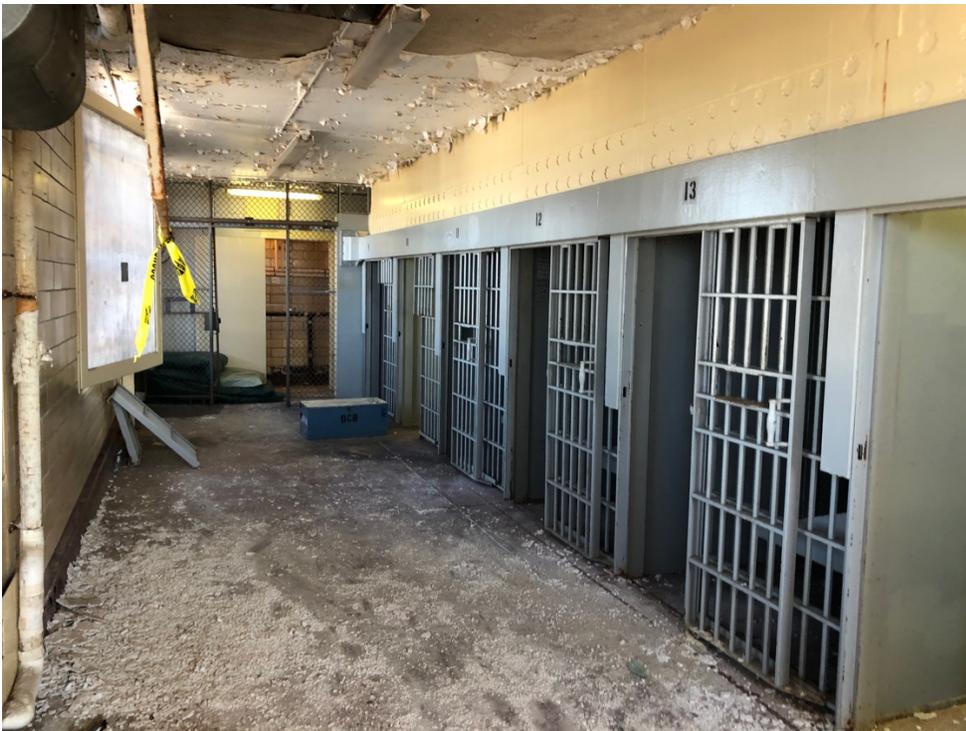
CRNS-0009-17 Second Floor Communal Toilet Room, Looking East



CRNS-0009-18 Dormitory, Second Floor, North Wing, Looking North



CRNS-0009-19 Dormitory, Second Floor, South Wing, Looking South



CRNS-0009-20 Cells, Second Floor, South Wing (East Side), Looking South



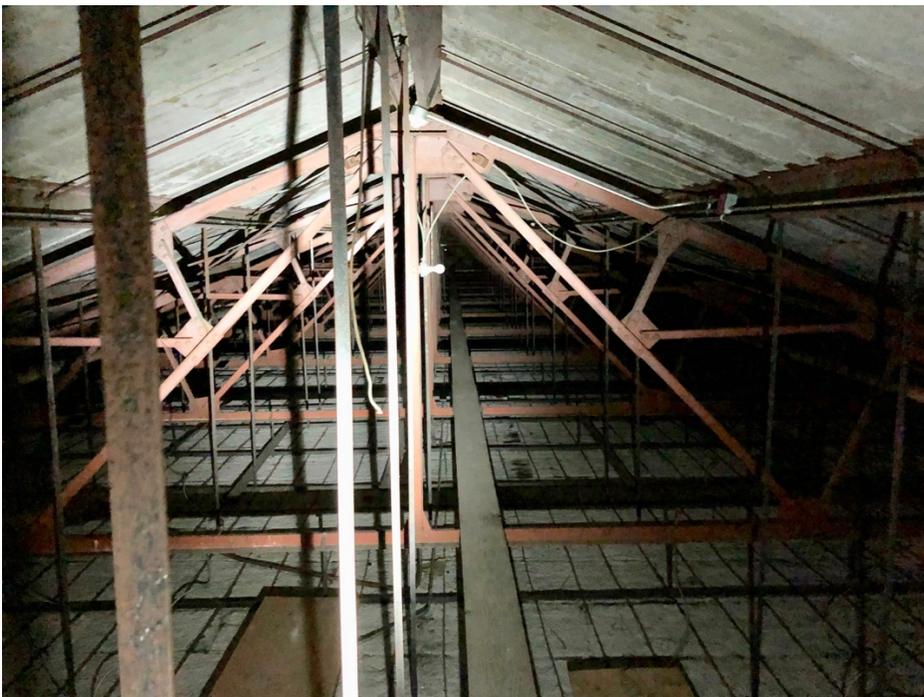
CRNS-0009-21 Dormitory, Third Floor, South Wing, Looking South



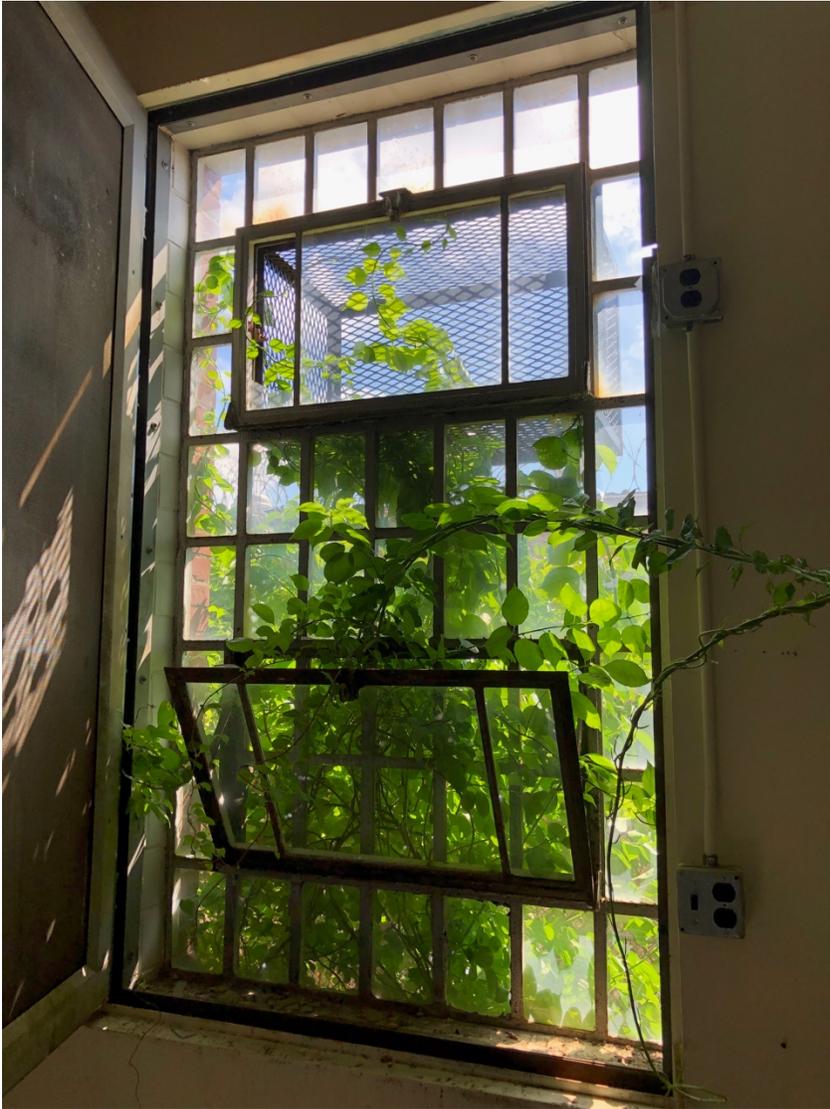
CRNS-0009-22 Dormitory, Third Floor, North Wing, Looking North



CRNS-0009-23 Attic Storage, Fourth Floor, Center Block, Looking East



CRNS-0009-24 Attic, North Wing, Looking North



CRNS-0009-25 Typical First Floor Window



CRNS-0009-26 Guard Tower at SW Corner of Property



CRNS-0009-27 Guard Tower at SE Corner of Property



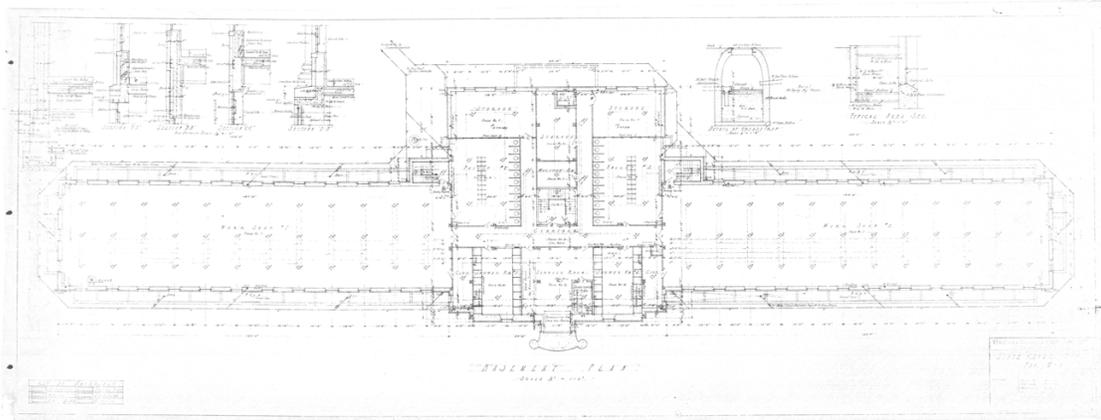
CRNS-0009-28 Metal Shed off Exercise Yard Looking Southeast



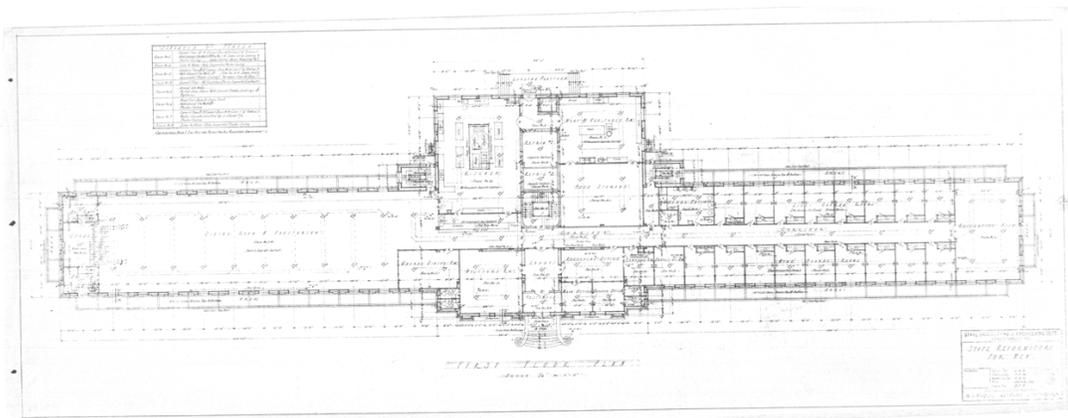
CRNS-0009-29 Metal Shed Looking South from Exercise Yard

CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS DATED JULY 31, 1931

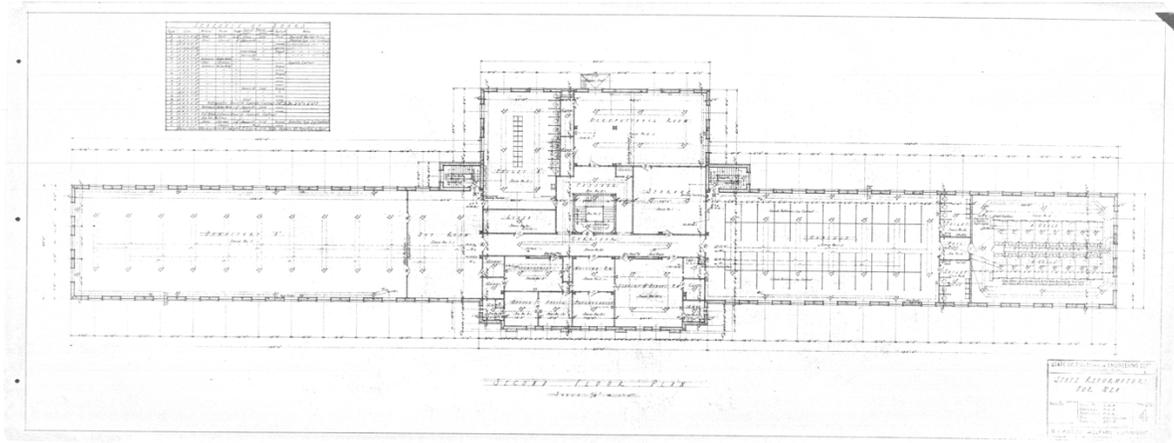
BY STATE INSTITUTIONS ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT



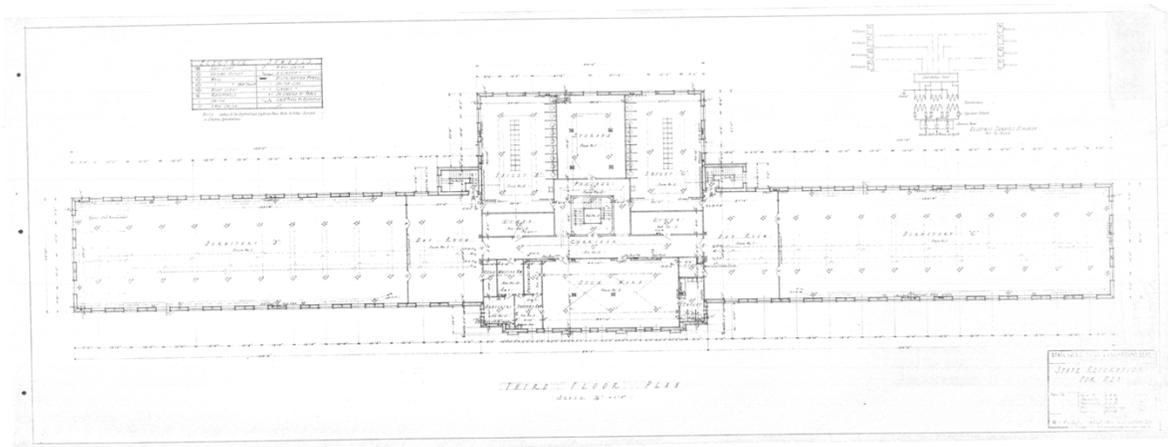
Basement Floor Plan



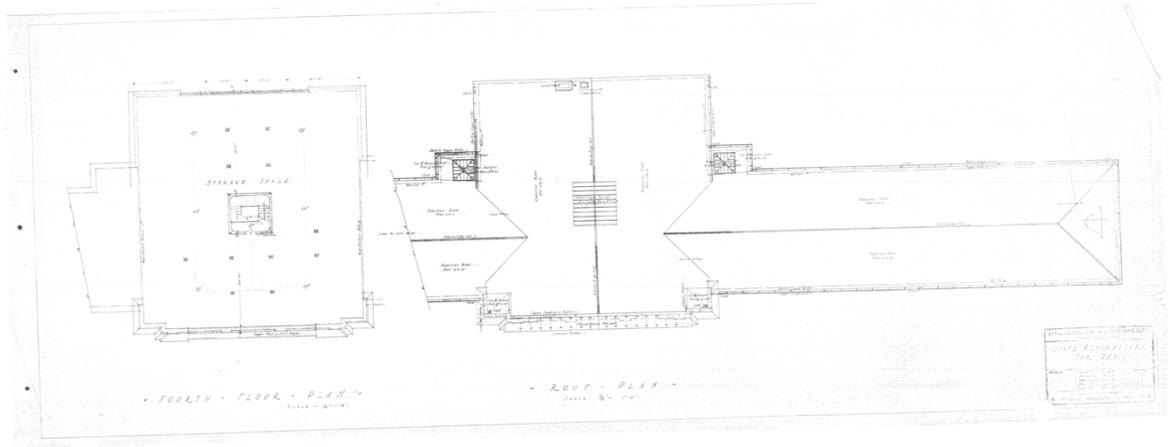
First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan



Attic Floor Plan / Partial Roof Plan