

**SEMINARY OF VIRTUE:
THE IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF INMATE REFORM AT EASTERN
STATE PENITENTIARY, 1829-1971**

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ABSTRACT

Seminary of Virtue: The Ideology and Practice of Inmate Reform at Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829-1971

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This study is an analysis of the role educational programming has played in reforming inmates in American correctional institutions between the Jacksonian era and the 1970s. A case study, “Seminary of Virtue” focuses on the educational curriculum at Philadelphia’s famed Eastern State Penitentiary, a cutting-edge institution that originated the Pennsylvania System of penal discipline. “Seminary of Virtue” argues that Eastern State Penitentiary’s extensive and aggressive educational program reflected a general American belief that correctional institutions should educate inmates as a way of reducing recidivism and thereby “reforming” them.

While Americans remained committed to educating inmates, Eastern State’s curriculum evolved during its century and a half institutional life. As its emphasis shifted from the religiously oriented “reform” of prisoners in the early nineteenth-century to a medical model of “rehabilitation” a half century later, Eastern State’s educational program evolved, shifting from a curriculum of rudimentary literacy skills, religious instruction and an apprenticeship of sorts to industrial education in the mid-nineteenth century and then finally to a traditional academic curriculum in the first third of the twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2006, I took a summer job as a docent at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, which bills itself as “America’s Most Historic Prison.” The administrative staff instructed new guides about Eastern State’s revolutionary design and rehabilitative methods, as well as its various roles as home, hospital, and factory. One of the things they never touched upon, however, was the prison’s role as school; this is not odd, for in the year that I worked at Eastern State, none of the estimated 20,000 tourists who visited the prison ever asked me about the prison’s educational program. Yet evidence abounded that Eastern State educated as well as housed, fed, and sometimes brutalized its inhabitants: an exhibit on prison life featured a picture of a GED class, and spaces on the campus map marked the “library” and the “school.” Guides told visitors that famed bank robber Willie Sutton was involved in a flamboyant tunnel escape in 1945; no one told us that that Sutton taught in the prison school during his incarceration in the 1930s and 1940s.

As I worked in the cellblocks answering visitors’ questions, I began developing my own: what and how did Eastern State teach its inmates during its 142-year existence? How did that program change over time? How did the prison’s educational programs reflect changes in educational policy? And how did Eastern State’s racially and ethnically diverse population of men and women benefit from these programs? These questions prompted further research into the voluminous literature on the history of American corrections, where I found little explanation of the connection between educational programming and the ideology of reform in America’s penitentiaries. This study is my attempt to fill that vacuum.

Prisons are fascinating, exotic institutions that capture our attention and spark the imagination. The United States currently has no fewer than forty museums dedicated to the history of prisons, jails, reformatories, and corrections spread throughout the country; tourists come from around the nation (and sometimes even the world) to experience part of a life they hope never to live. But what is a prison? The best definition comes from Michel Foucault, who defined the prison as an “exhaustive disciplinary apparatus,” an omni-disciplinary institution that assumed control of all aspects of the individual, including his education, his work, his “moral attitude,” and his physical training.¹

The idea that prisons, jails, workhouses and penitentiaries function as educational institutions might seem odd. For instance, noted historian of education Michael B. Katz drew a distinction between penal and educational institutions in his seminal 1968 book *The Irony of Early School Reform*, a chapter of which examined the creation of Massachusetts state reform school. According to Katz, this was “not...an institution intended to be penal but one designed to be educational.”² I would submit that Katz created a false dichotomy between penal and educational institutions, and that a cursory survey of the history of European and American corrections reveals that penal institutions have provided educational programming to their inmates, usually as part of a rehabilitative program designed to reduce recidivism. The historiographical literature shows that European prisons and workhouses from at least the sixteenth century utilized education as part of a rehabilitative program, and by the eighteenth century, this had

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 233.

² Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (New York: Teachers College/Columbia University Press, 2001), 166.

grown into a program that blended religious, academic, and vocational education, all of which overlapped and were intended to inculcate morality and ensure inmates had the skills and values to sustain themselves upon release. But eighteenth century penal reformers were not solely interested in what went on in prison. Many believed that increased access to education would better the general population, making crime less likely, implicitly connecting ignorance and crime.

My research indicates that Eastern State Penitentiary was a self-consciously educational institution, and that educational programming was the institution's primary method of reforming or rehabilitating inmates. By education, I am borrowing noted historian of education Lawrence Cremin's definition: "...the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills or sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended."³ As its emphasis shifted from the religiously oriented "reform" of prisoners in the early nineteenth-century to a medical model of "rehabilitation" a half century later, Eastern State's educational program evolved, shifting from a curriculum of rudimentary literacy skills, religious instruction and an apprenticeship of sorts to industrial education in the mid-nineteenth century and then finally to a traditional academic curriculum in the first third of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that the institution's administration remained steadfast in its devotion to education as the main method of reforming inmates, there were a number of important changes at Eastern State between 1829 and 1971. The most obvious is the transition from moral reform, with its

³ Lawrence Cremin *Popular Education and Its Discontents* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1990), vii-viii.

undertone of religious salvation, to social rehabilitation, which connotes a medical or psychological understanding of deviance. When it opened, Eastern State's understanding of its mission was rooted in a pan-Protestant Christianity that relied on religion to remake inmates. While education was the primary method of moral reform, the primary educator was the prison's chaplain, assisted by visiting clergy from local churches and (later) by teachers. This was a very similar educational model to the nascent Philadelphia educational system, where Sunday schools dispensed both literacy lessons and moral training, and where the Bible was an accepted text in the city's public schools.

Following the Civil War, the nascent professionalism of both educators and penal administrators diminished the role of religion in both public and prison education. Penal administrators in particular began looking toward science for an answer to the problem of crime. Adopting a medical model, which emphasized physiological (and sometimes genetic) explanations for criminal behavior, penal reformers began talking about rehabilitation. In addition, by the Progressive Era, reformers went so far as to introduce small-scale social institutions like inmate government associations in order to replicate in microcosm the society that inmates would be released into; this was a direct rejection of the penitentiary model, which emphasized the need to remove offenders from society in order to reform them. In other words, the post-Civil War era represented a decisive break with many important assumptions of the Jacksonian Era, which observers at the time and scholars since have noted. In many ways, however, the post-Civil War Era continued many of the techniques and approaches of the Jacksonian Era. Eastern State remained committed to rehabilitating inmates after the war, and still relied on aggressive

educational programming that, despite the many hurdles caused by overcrowding, succeeded in teaching inmates how to read.

These changes notwithstanding, the underlying faith in education as a rehabilitative tool was never seriously questioned. Eastern State's approach to rehabilitation – education – was not unique to the distinctive “Pennsylvania System” that the penitentiary originated; various types of educational programming were available at many U.S. penal institutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At Eastern State, rehabilitation meant reducing recidivism, which was achieved by inculcating disciplined work habits and morality and by teaching skills or knowledge that could be traded for gainful, legal employment upon release. All three goals were achieved, at least in part, by aggressive educational programming. Education was the penitentiary's method of rehabilitating inmates throughout its institutional life.

One of the most interesting discoveries is that each generation essentially embraced and repeated the previous generation's method of reform, education, while simultaneously applauding themselves for breaking with “traditional” approaches to rehabilitation. A perfect example occurred after the Civil War, when reformatories, or the next generation of penal institutions, swept the United States. Supporters and administrators believed they had decisively broken with the penitentiary model but, as chapter two shows, in reality the reformatory model of penal reform was more similar to the penitentiary model than reformers admitted. Similarly, the enthusiasm after World War II for rehabilitation services had much more in common with prison practice in the Jacksonian Era than post-war penologists at the time cared to admit. In other words, one of the defining characteristics of penal reform has been “historical amnesia,” and the

unwillingness or inability to recognize how little actually changes from generation to generation. As the succeeding chapters illustrate, historical amnesia was endemic to American penology, as each succeeding generation claimed credit for introducing “true” education into America’s penal institutions.

Scholars of prison education like Benjamin Justice and Dominique Chlup have, unfortunately, also tended to begin their analysis *en media res*, failing to appreciate how firmly entrenched educational programming was in the early nineteenth century. For instance, Justice wrongly places the rise of the of the prison school *after* the Civil War, arguing “formal schooling played a negligible role in the nineteenth-century prison *paeadia*.”⁴ Justice is not alone in minimizing the educational efforts of early nineteenth century penitentiaries; Thom Gehring argues that, while there was some educational programming at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail as far back as 1789, “real” efforts at penal education began with Zebulon Brockway’s penal reforms at Elmira in the 1880s and 1890s.⁵ Dominique Chlup went so far as to place the emergence of penal education in the middle of the twentieth century!⁶ All three fail to appreciate how important education was to American rehabilitation efforts because none starts “at the beginning,” preferring instead to see developments or modifications at the institutions they examine as revolutionary or groundbreaking. In so doing, they repeat the same mistake that has

⁴ Benjamin Justice, "A College of Morals: Educational Reform at San Quentin Prison, 1880-1920," *History of Education Quarterly* 40:3 (Fall 2000), 283.

⁵ Thom Gehring, “The History of Correctional Education”
<http://www.csusb.edu/coe/cg/csce/research/documents/TheHistoryofCorrectionalEducationbyThomGehring.pdf> Viewed 11/2/2007

⁶ Dominique Chlup, “Educative Justice: The History of Educational Programs and Practices at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women, 1930-1960” Harvard University Ed.D. diss., 2004.

plagued generations of penal reformers: an unwillingness to contend with the fact that, for better or worse, educational programming has always been the default approach to rehabilitating offenders.

The value of a case study usually rests on the individual's ability to shed light on the general, to illuminate trends or characteristics ignored by the broad stroke. In this sense, the history of U.S. prisons needs to move beyond the tyranny of broad generalizations based on the examples of institutions in New York or New England. New York's Sing Sing was not all U.S. prisons, and Pennsylvania's penal experience provides an important counterweight to the prevailing narrative of the history of American corrections by demonstrating how vital educational programming was to its rehabilitative mission. As an institution, Eastern State represents some challenges when it comes to generalizations – the penitentiary was not an “average” prison – but, as I hope the following chapters demonstrate, while the penitentiary was unique in some respects, it was also quite commonplace in many others.

I chose Pennsylvania as the setting for my dissertation because Eastern State Penitentiary changed the penological world in the 1820s by its radial design and separate system of incarceration, only to be rendered an anachronism by the time of its hundredth anniversary. During Eastern State's existence, almost everything changed: the prison's unique physical arrangements, its system of prisoner discipline and its status (from a penitentiary to a state correctional institution). Yet the various administrations' faith in the rehabilitative function of education remained undiminished, even though the actual educational methods changed. A cursory examination of *The Prison Journal*, published since 1845 by the Pennsylvania Prison Society (formerly the Philadelphia Society for

Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons), a leading forum for discussions of penology and criminology, demonstrates that while scholars and reformers have debated educational methods, few seriously questioned the value of prison education programs.

I am not the first scholar to chronicle Eastern State's history. Among the many fine popular and scholarly books about it are Negley K. Teeters' *They Were in Prison*, *Cradle of the Penitentiary*, and *The Prison at Philadelphia*, as well as Norman Johnston's *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions*. In addition, numerous published memoirs have dealt with inmates' and administrators' time in Eastern State from the end of the nineteenth through the middle of the twentieth centuries, including Willie Sutton's *That's Where the Money Was* and his *I, Sutton*, Joseph Corvi's *Breaching the Walls*, Bernard Marzie's *Prison Manifesto*, and George Appo's diary, edited and annotated by Timothy J. Gilfoyle and published as *A Pickpocket's Tale*. Many of these works tend to be hagiographic and celebratory, and few provide a focused, rigorous examination of the penitentiary's educational agenda, which I argue was the crux of its rehabilitative program.

Chapter one offers a brief introduction to the history of prisons and penal reform. Particularly important is the prison reform movement inaugurated in England by John Howard in the 1770s and imported to the United States through his writings. The focus of the chapter, however, is the formation and operation of the Philadelphia Society for the Alleviation of Public Prisons (PSAMPP), which worked to reform Philadelphia's notorious Walnut Street Jail and then to build Eastern State Penitentiary. The chapter argues that prison reformers in general (Howard, Cesare Beccaria, Jeremy Bentham), and the PSAMPP specifically, placed great faith in the rehabilitative function of education.

Penal reformers put this faith into practice at both the Walnut Street Jail between 1790 and 1810 with mixed results. By the 1820s, most members of the PSAMPP were also involved in other reform projects, most notably Roberts Vaux, a prominent member of the PSAMPP who also agitated for the seminal education laws that created and expanded the Philadelphia public school system in both 1818 and 1836. The crosspollination of educational and penal reform – two movements that shared people and assumptions – assured that Pennsylvania’s penal institutions would not only be punitive, but also highly didactic institutions.

Chapter two, covering the years 1829 to 1866, moves from the general to the specific, showing how assumptions about the connection between ignorance and crime influenced Pennsylvania’s approach to reform. Eastern State was conceived as an educational institution, providing both rudimentary academic learning and advanced vocational training to prisoners. In this period, the educational duties were split between the moral instructor, who was responsible for academic education (reading, writing and math) as well as religious instruction, and the prison overseers (guards), who were responsible for teaching prisoners vocational skills like shoemaking. The penitentiary’s discharge records demonstrate that Eastern State’s educational program was fairly successful in that it actually did teach many of its illiterate inmates (irrespective of gender or race) how to read, which reinforces this study’s central point that the penitentiary’s goal was educating inmates and that Eastern State’s administrators took that responsibility seriously. Eastern State’s labor program, which was also a cornerstone of the Pennsylvania System, was less successful; while inmates were assigned labor

regardless of race or gender, many of the skills they learned were geared toward an artisanal world that was gradually being eclipsed by industrialization.

Chapter three examines the years 1866 to 1913, a period when, according to most scholars, U.S. penitentiaries lost whatever reformatory zeal they once had and became merely custodial institutions. This chapter argues that Eastern State remained committed to educating its inmates despite the challenges that the administration faced in carrying out that mission. Certainly, after the Civil War, Eastern State had more prisoners than cells, which compromised the penitentiary's approach to security – separation – and forced the administration to rethink its approach to governing the institution.

Overcrowding eventually led to the Pennsylvania System's demise in 1913, when, Eastern State adopted a congregate style of incarceration. Despite these changes, the administration remained as committed to education as it had been during the Jacksonian Era, but the focus shifted from religious education and literacy training to vocational education, mirroring similar shifts within the public education system. In addition, the generation of “gentlemen dabblers” – men of wealth and influence who were interested in both educational and penal reform – passed from the scene, replaced by “professional” penal administrators, or men with significant professional experience in law enforcement and/or prison administration.

Chapter four explores the forty-years between 1913 and 1953, which included a number of important changes at the penitentiary. Eastern State's transition from the separate to the congregate style of incarceration begat many changes. The administration combined and transformed individual exercise yards into factory style work environments, cafeteria style dining areas, and classrooms. Eastern State's inmates took

part in a variety of educational activities, and Eastern State developed a modern education program that emphasized credentialed learning. As the prison's administration professionalized (it was during this period that the *Prison Journal*, a PSAMPP publication, declared itself “dedicated to the *science* of penology”), its educational methods changed. Because of legal restrictions on employing prisoners, the penitentiary was largely unable to maintain its vocational educational program. Eastern State’s administrators responded by embracing academic education delivered through a combination of correspondence courses and on-site instruction, usually in partnership with local colleges and universities. Though the curriculum changed, and some administrators evinced skepticism about the possibility of actually reforming inmates, the institution continued aggressively promoting education. This was likely due to an important ideological shift that began following the death of the Pennsylvania System. Whereas the institution itself bore the responsibility for reforming inmates in the early nineteenth century, by the middle of the twentieth, administrators had shifted the burden to the inmates. Rather than being something that was done to the inmate, rehabilitation was something that the inmate chose by participating in the institution’s educational programs.

The last chapter chronicles Eastern State’s last eighteen years as a correctional institution (1953-1970). Following a series of riots at prisons throughout the nation (including Pennsylvania’s Western State Penitentiary and Rockview prison), the Commonwealth significantly reengineered its penal structure. This included centralizing administrative control over the prisons, creating different classes of institutions with different services based on the population they held, and creating diagnostic and

classification centers to diagnose and classify new inmates so they could be assigned to appropriate institutions. Eastern State Penitentiary, which many argued should be closed, was reclassified as a “correctional institution,” and offered a rehabilitative program that included substantial psychological and psychiatric services, which dovetailed with the increased emphasis on prisoners playing an active part in their own rehabilitation. However, at the heart of this new system was an old approach: inmates were heavily encouraged to partake in the former penitentiary’s expanded educational program.

I conclude the study by examining some contemporary penal education programs. Recognizing the inherent danger of repeating the historical amnesia displayed by earlier scholars, this is not merely an institutional study; it is an explanation of the methods by which Americans’ abiding faith in education as a solution to social problems was put into practice at Eastern State during its 141-year history as a state penal institution. Eastern State Penitentiary’s story demonstrates that penologists for the last two hundred years have believed that educational programming was one of (if not the) keys to lowering recidivism. Yet, at the same time, each succeeding generation of reformers dismissed its predecessors’ efforts as lacking because the fundamental promise of educational promise – alleviating crime – never came to fruition.

Historiography

This study reverses the trend of recent educational scholarship, which has focused mostly on classrooms and schools, and in many ways reopens many of the questions Lawrence Cremin explored half a century ago. Cremin, whose prolific writing established him as the foremost scholar of American educational history in the 1950s and 1960s, is

now often politely dismissed due to his association with the progressive school of American educational historiography. Historians of the progressive school argued that American education was the story of constantly improving schools and expanding opportunities for students. While Cremin's excessively rosy view has been repeatedly challenged in the last forty years, his scholarship should not be dismissed completely. For instance, Cremin argued that American education has been driven by three tendencies – popularization, or making education more widely available, multiudinousness, or the multiplicity of educational institutions, and politicization, or the effort to solve political problems through education.⁷

On the one hand, Cremin's thesis betrayed optimism about educational opportunities that succeeding scholars have rightly viewed skeptically. On the other hand, Cremin's insight about multiple institutions has largely been ignored by subsequent scholars because it does not fit neatly with their priorities. However, Cremin's broad definition of education noted earlier is more appropriate to my project because it recognizes that learning does not take place solely in the school.

The progressive interpretation of schooling was critiqued during the late 1960s and early 1970s by a group of revisionists. Michael Katz's path-breaking 1968 work *The Irony of Early School Reform* questioned the progressives' faith in constantly expanding opportunities by arguing that education often worked to constrain economic advancement and inculcated submission to authority. In Katz's words, "education was something the

⁷ Lawrence Cremin, *Popular Education and Its Discontents* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), vii-viii.

better part of the community did to others to make them orderly, moral, and tractable.”⁸ Moreover for Katz, nineteenth century public school supporters saw public education as something “... to make children orderly, industrious, law abiding, and respectful of authority.”⁹ This was the dawn of the neo-Marxist school of the history of education; these scholars offered a variety of arguments to demonstrate that schooling often reinforced patterns of inequality created by industrial capitalism. In *The Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century* (1973) another revisionist, Clarence Karier, argued that: “The school, as a formal vehicle of education, exists as an instrument of social and economic power for the most influential elite groups as much as for the political and social organizations through which society is managed. Thus, in the twentieth century, schools became important instruments of power under capitalism and fascism, as well as under communism.”¹⁰ His coeditor, Joel Spring, argued that at the end of the nineteenth century, schools became “charged with the responsibility of maintaining social order and cohesion and of instilling individuals with codes of conduct and social values that would insure the stability of existing social relationships.”¹¹ Coeditor Paul Violas argued that social reformers like Jane Addams were inspired by the “new

⁸ Michael B. Katz, quoted in Stanley Thernstrom “Foreword” in Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), ix.

⁹ Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America*, (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1971), xvii

¹⁰ Clarence Karier, “Business Values and the Educational State” *The Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Joel Spring, Clarence Karier, and Paul Violas (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Co., 1973), 6.

¹¹ Joel Spring, “Education as a form of Social Control” *The Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Joel Spring, Clarence Karier, and Paul Violas, 30.

liberalism,” which sought “psychosociological control of the individual within a controlled community.”¹²

The apotheosis of the Neo-Marxist interpretation was economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis’ 1976 classic *Schooling in Capitalist America*, which argued that schooling existed to reproduce the status quo by teaching the lower classes to accept their social and economic positions. According to Bowles and Gintis, educational reform as it had been practiced up to that point was useless because reform measures failed to deal with the overall problem: namely, that capitalism, by its nature, generates inequality. According to the authors, any schooling system operating in a capitalist economy would reproduce those inherent inequalities. They argued that the only solution was to overthrow America’s capitalist economy and replace it with an economic system built on ensuring equality.¹³

The Neo-Marxist interpretation of schools dominated the field for a very short time; within a decade, there was a scholarly backlash against the Neo-Marxists’ heavily deterministic view. Neo-Marxists stripped parents and students of any control over schools and schooling; for scholars like Katz, Karier and Violas, working class parents (who often footed the bill for public school buildings and programs) and students were merely the elites’ dupes; there was little room for them to exercise agency or control over their destiny. The most recent developments in the historiography of schools is to view them as contested arenas of political battle; this school of historical thought is indebted to

¹² Paul Violas, “Jane Addams and the New Liberalism” *The Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Joel Spring, Clarence Karier, and Paul Violas, 68

¹³ Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 15

the neo-Marxists for their cynicism toward the progressives' tales of unalloyed progress, but regards the Neo-Marxist view as overly deterministic.

This new view was best expressed in Maris Vinovskis' *The Origins of the American High School*, which revisited Katz's evidence from *The Irony of Early School Reform*. Where Katz "proved" that the high school in Beverly Massachusetts was created by elites to consolidate their economic and political power, Vinovskis argued that people's proximity to the high school, rather than their class, determined whether they supported or opposed it.¹⁴ Where Karier, Violas and Spring argued that industry's need for a docile work force drove educational expansion, Vinovskis and Carl Kaestle argued in *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* for an ecological view of education, which included not only economic factors but cultural ones as well. They sketched three broad tendencies: first, a big surge in school enrollments between 1750 and 1830, second, intensification, meaning more years of schooling, rather than expansion, or more students attending classes, and the growth of centralized educational bureaucracies. Whereas Katz, and Karier, et al argued for direct and simple relationships between America's educational system and economic relations, Vinovskis and Kaestle argued that the history of education is a more complex subject and that school systems have been shaped by a number of cultural, economic, social, and political factors. This view was further refined in 2000 by William W. Cutler III, whose *Parents and Schools: the 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* argued that schools have been

¹⁴ Maris Vinovskis, *The Origins of the American High School* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986)

shaped by the struggle between parents and bureaucrats over the control of schools; for Cutler, class is less important than the nature of one's relationship to the institution.¹⁵

In addition, scholars in the 1980s and 1990s began tackling issues of race and gender in the America's educational system. For instance, Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir's *Schooling for All* (1985) complicated the Neo-Marxists' class based model of America by arguing that class was not the only or even the most important fault line in America's urban schools during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Race was equally if not more important. James Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (1988) made a similar argument; it showed that blacks' drive toward education was consistently thwarted by whites afraid of losing their social position. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot's *Learning Together* (1990) focused on coeducation, which these scholars argued was a product of the American Revolution and quickly became the norm, although it was contested and debated throughout the nineteenth century. As this brief list demonstrates, the history of education has reached a moment where it has expanded beyond simplistic explanations (just as the neo-Marxists moved away from progressivism's simplistic story of unfettered progress) to embrace a wide range of gender and race based theories; the moment seems propitious to redirect the discussion and look once again beyond the classroom to other educational institutions, like prisons. The history of Eastern State's educational program touches on the "holy trinity" of race, class and gender, and broadens our understanding of nontraditional educational environments.

¹⁵ William W. Cutler III, *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

Educational historians' recent preoccupation with the school has been detrimental to the field, as some historians have noted. As early as 1960 Bernard Bailyn criticized the field for being narrow, parochial, and amateurish.¹⁶ Even Lawrence Cremin was forced to concede that the history of education was often practiced by overly enthusiastic amateurs whose focus on schools created a field that was less than the sum of its parts.¹⁷ He recognized the contributions of a wide variety of educational institutions, and therefore the Neo-Marxists, while raising important questions about the Progressive interpretation, narrowed the scope of inquiry for educational historians; the Neo-Marxists' main achievement was asking probing questions about schooling that were prompted by contemporary political and social unrest, not redefining the discussion by moving beyond the classroom's walls. Those who argue that schools are realms of contested authority have followed their predecessors' lead; Cutler's title *Parents and Schools* adequately summarizes the book's scope, while the anemic literature on the history of autodidacticism, or informal avenues of education, proves that education historians' conception of their field is still narrowly wedded to viewing education as that which takes place in or near a school. This narrow focus has often overlooked adult education, focusing almost solely on children's education; my work will contribute to the understudied field of adult education.

Aside from some impressive volumes on the Chautauqua movement such as John E. Taipa's *Circuit Chautauqua* (1997) and Andrew C. Rieser's *The Chautauqua Moment:*

¹⁶ Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Formation of Society* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960)

¹⁷ Lawrence Cremin, *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberly: An Essay on the Historiography of American Education* (New York: Teachers College/Columbia University Press, 1965)

Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism (2003), the history of adult education is defined by Joseph Kett's *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990* (1994), which argued that American efforts at adult education shifted from informal self education to formal, classroom education; though both had an economic motive, Kett argued that the profit motive was more pronounced from the mid 19th century onward. One historian of education who has tackled non-classroom based educational activities is Carl Kaestle, who edited a collection of articles called *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (1991). This book considers non-classroom based education by focusing on what and how Americans have read over the past 125 years. However, Kaestle is a notable exception in a field that in the last forty years has largely defined education by what goes on inside the classroom.

When education historians have contributed to the larger discourse on American history, they have done so by using the history of education to engage larger themes or issues such as race, gender, class and power relations. John Rury argued that, in the 1980s and 1990s, education historians like David Labaree, David Hogan, and James Anderson whose work received widespread acclaim, did so by engaging with these larger issues; according to Rury, Labaree's *The Making of an American High School, Class and Reform* and Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* won prizes because they "tackled issues big enough to be interesting to a wide range of other educational researchers," like race and class.¹⁸ The larger point, which informs this

¹⁸ John Rury, "The Curious Status of the History of Education: A Parallel Perspective" *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Winter, 2006), 588.

study's purpose, is that historians of education must stop conflating the history of education with the history of schools, must move beyond a narrow preoccupation with the classroom, and must engage with the larger historical community so as to help us better understand education as both a cultural value and a social institution.

The history of American corrections has also evolved over time from simple narratives of humanitarian goodness to more nuanced pictures of complex social institutions that often departed from their founders' intentions. Blake McKelvey, celebrated for his studies of American cities, wrote *American Prisons: A Study in Social History Prior to 1915* in 1936, which was later edited and reissued in 1976 as *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions*. The latter's subtitle aptly describes McKelvey's picture of beneficent elites whose humanitarian instincts drove them to try to create ever more civilized and humane institutions of reform and rehabilitation. Negley K. Teeters' writings on Eastern State Penitentiary and the Pennsylvania Prison Society – *They Were in Prison* (1937), *The Cradle of the Penitentiary* (1955), and *The Prison at Philadelphia* (1957) – shared McKelvey's optimistic picture of America's prisons as constantly striving toward a humanitarian ideal. According to Teeters, “The motives of [Eastern State's founders] could not be questioned. There was a deep interest in the prisoner, whose lot was indeed a hard one, even as it was today, judged by modern standards of well-being.”¹⁹

The cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s in general, and a series of well-publicized prison riots in particular, shook this faith in American prisons' progress

¹⁹ Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 90.

toward humanitarian incarceration. Though prison violence occurred before the 1960s (violence broke out at Alcatraz in 1946, killing 5), there were numerous well-publicized riots – Eastern State (1961), Attica (1971), Kingston (1971) – that suggested prisoners disagreed with scholars who argued that America’s prisons displayed the height of humanitarianism. As a result, scholars reexamined the history of American corrections, and found much to be skeptical about. Focused on the evolution of the penitentiary in New York, David Lewis’ *From Newgate to Danemora* (1965) argued that prison reformers were often unable to see the prisoners’ humanity, viewing them through a class and ethnicity-driven prism of bigotry, which justified a harsh regimen of “rehabilitation.”

David J. Rothman’s path-breaking and award winning (Albert J. Beveridge Award) work *The Discovery of the Asylum* (1971), connected penitentiaries, hospitals, asylums and orphanages to the same Jacksonian era impulse to control the “dependant classes.” According to Rothman, the shift of responsibility for dealing with the insane, the retarded, the sick, and criminals from families and communities to the state led to the creation of large institutions to fulfill those functions. For Rothman, the purpose of these institutions was social control and they inevitably degenerated into repression. Like Michael Katz’s on schools, Rothman argued that asylums and penitentiaries were not foreordained and, like Katz, he implicitly called for revisiting the alternatives. Michael Ignatieff’s *A Just Measure of Pain* (1978) made roughly the same argument regarding the English penitentiary system, which he located in the crisis of social control in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries.²⁰

²⁰ Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 2.

Michel Foucault's 1975 book *Discipline and Punish* argued that the shift from corporal punishment to incarceration during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not proof of progress, as scholars like Teeters maintained. Rather, Foucault argued that the state moved from torturing prisoners' bodies to torturing their souls, an infinitely worse punishment in his mind. According to Foucault, "the apparatus of punitive justice must now bite into this bodiless reality."²¹

Lewis, Rothman, Ignatieff, and Foucault fall into the category of "social control" theorists, or those who believe that the distinguishing feature of penitentiaries is not their humane treatment of prisoners. For these theorists, penitentiaries' *raison d'être* was to reproduce the class structure and punish transgressors. Similar to Neo-Marxists regarding schools, social control theorists saw penitentiaries as inculcating prisoners with values and habits that would make them docile workers when they emerged from incarceration. Social control theorists often cite American penitentiaries' policies of enforced labor as proof that penitentiaries functioned to create ideal workers, a view that is most explicitly stated in *The Prison and the Factory*, edited by Dario Melossi & Massimo Pavarini. According to Pavarini, "the history of the rise of the American prison is (also) the history of models of prison employment," where prisoners are reeducated to be compliant workers and are thus not a threat to private property.²²

²¹ Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 17.

²² Massimo Pavarini "The Penitentiary Invention: the US Experience of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" in Dario Melossi & Massimo Pavarini *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981), 135

The Marxist perspective influenced a generation of prison scholars, including Christopher Adamson, whose influential article “Towards a Marxian Penology: Captive Criminal Populations as Economic Threats and Resources” (1984) argued that business cycles “influence how populations are processed through the criminal justice system.”²³ Adamson examines the century from 1790 to 1890, concluding that downswings in the U.S. economy prompted reformers to reconsider prison industry because outside lobbies (business and labor interests) considered convict labor a threat. Adamson’s Marxism is more nuanced and less deterministic than Pavarini’s, and “Towards a Marxian Penology” foreshadowed the next phase in the historiography of American corrections: post theoretical. Though Adamson’s argument is Marxist, he conceded “No single theory accounts for the complex historical process whereby imprisonment has become the dominant form of punishment in western societies.”²⁴

More recently, Mark Colvin’s *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs* (1999) used three case studies – the rise of the penitentiary, the transformation of gender roles, and the shift in capital punishment – to support Adamson’s contention that the history of American corrections lacks a single, satisfying narrative. Colvin’s first chapter is the most relevant to this study, and he explains the rise of the penitentiary in largely economic terms, arguing that the economic and social changes following the Revolution, like urbanization and the growth of capitalism, necessitated a new form of punishment:

²³ Christopher Adamson “Toward a Marxian Penology: Captive Criminal Populations as Economic Threats and Resources” *Social Problems*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Apr., 1984), 437

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 435

incarceration.²⁵ Like the Marxists, Colvin is dubious about prison reformers' stated intentions of rehabilitation; he argued that, by the 1850s, penitentiaries had become "grim warehouses for criminals."²⁶

The literature on prison schools is dominated by a single article, Benjamin Justice's "'A College of Morals': Educational Reform at San Quentin Prison, 1880-1920" in the autumn 2000 number of *History of Education Quarterly*. Justice argued that "penal theory has been a type of educational theory,"²⁷ which is true; this is the same argument my work makes. My research suggests that most of the important Americana and European prison reformers – John Howard, Cesare Beccaria, Jeremy Bentham, Benjamín Rush, and William White – were passionately interested in both educational and penal reform, and often attributed crime to convicts' poor education. Moreover, both the Walnut Street Jail (1776-1835) and Eastern State Penitentiary incorporated educational programming into their reform efforts.

Thus, the history of American corrections, like the history of American education, has shifted from a narrative of humanitarian progress to a story of capitalist and political exploitation and ultimately to a field with no single unifying explanatory theory. Many scholars share a deep skepticism about prison reformers' intentions and about penitentiaries' ability to "reform" inmates; the history of American correction is thus more cynical than the history of American education. Historians of American education,

²⁵ Mark Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs: Social Theory and the History of Punishment in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 30

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Benjamin Justice, "'A College of Morals': Educational Reform at San Quentin Prison, 1880-1920" *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000), 279.

while skeptical of educational reformers' intentions and about the role of education in facilitating social mobility have been more willing to view their subjects as earnest, if misguided, in their attempts to reform America's schools.

This study is heavily indebted to educational historiography's less cynical view of reformers, and stands in opposition to penological historians who distrust prison reformers' intentions; by and large, I take those reformers at face value. I am unconvinced by scholars like Katz, Rothman, and Foucault who impute malevolent motives to prison and educational reformers. America's prison reformers have consistently placed their faith in education to reduce recidivism and give prisoners a chance at a new life. This is not to argue that prison educational programs were *solely* about reform and rehabilitation. Prisons are by their nature institutions of social control, and all of their programs (including educational ones) serve this purpose. However, education is not merely a method of social control; in fact, prison reformers believed that controlling prisoners' behavior facilitated their education. My research builds upon the Progressives' optimistic outlook regarding reformers' intentions as well as the Neo-Marxists' recognition that education often closes as many doors as it opens. The result will be a more complete understanding of nineteenth and twentieth century Americans' expectation regarding education, as well as a more nuanced and complete understanding of the role education has played in American correction.

CHAPTER I THE CANNON AND THE CLERGYMEN

Sometime late in 1787, two men visited Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail and made an odd request. They asked the jail's overseer if they could preach a sermon to the inmates the following Sunday, an astonishing request that historian Negley K. Teeters called "unheard of up to that time."²⁸ Perhaps even more surprising were the would-be prison chaplains' identities: Philadelphia's Anglican bishop, William White, and the former pastor of Philadelphia's first Baptist church and brigade chaplain in the Continental Army, William Rogers. These men were both members of a recently formed organization, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (PSAMPP) that had an important and long-lasting impact on the ideology and practice of incarceration in the United States.

Due to the oddness of the request, the jail's keeper at first refused the two men access to jail, claiming that "such a measure was not only fraught with peril to the person who might deliver the address, but would involve also the risk of the escape of all the criminals."²⁹ The two ministers, convinced of the necessity of providing the jail's inmates with religious training, recounted the episode to Philadelphia's sheriff, who ordered the jailer to allow Rogers and White access to the inmates. The jailer complied with the sheriff's order, and allowed Rogers to preach a sermon. The only concession to the jailer's concerns was the loaded cannon aimed at the assembled inmates, which could be

²⁸ Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1937), 19.

²⁹ Roberts Vaux, *Notices of the Original and Successive Efforts to Improve the Discipline of the Prison at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Kimber and Sharpless, 1826), 25.

fired at a moment's notice by the attendant who held a lighted candle or match inches from the fuse throughout the sermon. As Society member Roberts Vaux noted fifty years after the event, "This formidable apparatus failed to intimidate or obstruct the preacher, who discoursed to the unhappy multitude for almost an hour, not only unmolested, but, as he had reason to think, with advantage to his hearers, and all behaved with much greater decency than he expected."³⁰ Religious services thus became a component of Walnut Street Jail's routine, with guest sermonizers (often recruited by the PSAMMP) providing spiritual uplift for the inmates.

This anecdote, which is likely more than a little embellished, illuminates a number of important facets about late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century penal reform in the United States. The first facet is the emerging belief that penal institutions should do more than simply house offenders; they should reform criminals as well. Reform was achieved, at least partially, through religious, academic, and vocational education. Finally, prison administration was not simply a state concern because Pennsylvania's penal institutions relied on the volunteer efforts of private citizens and organizations to help reform inmates. In many ways, the basic template of American corrections – incarceration, reform through education, reliance on outside groups and individuals – was clearly visible as early as the last eighteenth-century.

Eighteenth-century European penal reformers heavily influenced American prison reformers, who built on European precedents in constructing America's penal system. This was especially true after the Revolution, when American penal reformers looked to John Howard, Jeremy Bentham and other Europeans for inspiration in reforming

³⁰ Ibid., 26.

deviants. For both European and American reformers, education became a particularly important method of curtailing crime and reducing recidivism at least in theory, and American penal reformers were often very active in educational reform movements. Penal reformers' interest in both schools and prisons grew from their shared belief that more effective and diffuse public education would gradually reduce or even eliminate crime. This faith in education was put into practice in Philadelphia's eighteenth-century penitentiary, the Walnut Street Jail, which functioned as both a punitive and educational institution.

History of Incarceration

One of the earliest prisons was the Cretan labyrinth, which, according to myth, King Minos of Crete constructed in order to detain the Minotaur. While mythical, the labyrinth indicates that incarceration was not unknown to the ancient world. Recounting Socrates' trial and conviction, Plato's *Apology* names the multitude of punishments available in the Athenian world. According to Plato, when Socrates contemplated punishment for his crimes (he was allowed to suggest one under Athenian law), he ruminated on the possibility of exile, execution, and fine with imprisonment until ultimately deciding on execution.³¹

Further evidence is the Romans' Mamertine Prison, constructed sometime around 386 BC. Because Roman law did not proscribe incarceration as a punishment for crime, the Mamertine functioned more as a jail, or a place where people were held awaiting

³¹ Edward M. Peters "Prison Before the Prison" in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

judgment, rather than as a prison, or a place where incarceration is the punishment. Medieval European history furnishes multiple examples of long-term incarceration in buildings specifically designed for the purpose. Historian G. Geltner argued in *The Medieval Prison* that prisons, or facilities for long-term imprisonment, emerged in Italy as early as the fourteenth century. These institutions differed from their modern counterparts in that medieval prisons were usually located in the center of town and prisoners were integrated into the community's civic life through periodic furloughs during Christmas, Easter, and other festive occasions.³² In addition, Geltner noted that, "both the 'total' and rehabilitative attributes of modern prisons were absent from even the most highly regulated medieval facility."³³

For commoners after the mid sixteenth century, the likely punishment for debt or poverty was a workhouse, which Frederick Howard Wines called "the foundation of the modern prison system."³⁴ Workhouses were institutions for beggars or the elderly where inmates supported themselves through enforced work. According to historian Donald Arthur Cabana "Hard labor ... was thought to be rehabilitative, therapeutic, and educational."³⁵ Known in England as "bridewells," after the first one established at Bridewell in 1553, workhouses spread quickly from England to Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Belgium, Bremen, Antwerp, Lyon, Madrid and Stockholm; within a

³² G. Geltner *The Medieval Prison: A Social History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), xvii.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴ Frederick Howard Wines, *Punishment and Reformation: An Historical Sketch of the Rise of the Penitentiary System* (London, UK: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), 117.

³⁵ Donald Arthur Cabana, "The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education in the American Penitentiary, 1790-1990" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1996), 59.

century, as many as 170 workhouses existed throughout England alone. England's King Edward VI converted the Bridewell palace to a house of correction after lobbying by Reverend Thomas Lever and Bishop Nicholas Ridley in the form of sermons delivered before the king in 1552.³⁶ Bridewells fulfilled some of the functions of a jail, despite the fact that they existed in tandem with institutions defined as jails. The fact that jails and workhouses overlapped is indicative of the disorganized nature of penology in Europe at this time, with institutional roles ill defined and ambiguous.³⁷ The original Bridewell was not even solely a penal institution; it was one of four specialized institutions, each responsible for specific groups of people, only some of whom were held against their will. For instance, Christ's Hospital housed and educated pauper children, while St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew's aided the sick and maimed.³⁸ Bridewell itself served four functions: as an industrial school for the young, a refuge for elderly and infirm, a place of guaranteed employment for the unemployed poor, and a correctional facility for the vagrant.³⁹ Clearly, the boundaries separating educational, charitable and penal institutions were somewhat fluid in the sixteenth-century.

In 1563, Bridewell instituted a system of apprenticeship to educate poor children and prepare them for entry into the economy.⁴⁰ Unskilled workers sent to Bridewell were

³⁶ Max Grunhut, *Penal Reform: A Comparative Study* (Oxford, UK: The Clarendon Press, 1948), 15.

³⁷ J.M. Moynahan and Earle K. Stewart, *The American Jail: Its Development and Growth* (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1980), 18.

³⁸ Austin Van der Slice "Elizabethan Houses of Correction" *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, vol. 27, no. 1 (May-June, 1936), 50.

³⁹ Moynahan and Stewart *The American Jail*, 18.

⁴⁰ Austin Van der Slice "Elizabethan Houses of Correction," 52.

often sentenced for five years, where they were taught a trade by competent instructors during the first three years, and repaid the costs of their internment through labor during the last two years.⁴¹ Overseen by governors, inmates learned cloth making, spinning, weaving, and even ironworking. Inmates were given raw materials supplied by tradesmen, who then collected and marketed the finished product.⁴² Part of the popularity of workhouses in England can be attributed to the fact that the Poor Law of 1601 shifted responsibility for dealing with poverty to the parishes, who found workhouses a convenient and economical solution to the “problem” of poor people; prisoners were paid for their work, but in turn charged fees for their housing and food.⁴³

Workhouses’ purpose was both punishment *and* reformation, because of the widespread belief that idleness was habitual and could only be changed through enforced labor.⁴⁴ One of the attractions of these institutions is that they were designed to both be profitable *and* teach inmates values. For instance, between 1599 and 1602, Amsterdam’s house of correction had a staff that included a schoolteacher, and two spinning masters and a rasping master responsible for teaching inmates work skills.⁴⁵ Penal historian Randall McGowan noted that “many of the proposals offered by penal reformers in the 1780s were foreshadowed here, even in smaller details,” such as salaries for the keepers and oversight by magistrates but, unlike later penitentiaries, there seems to have been

⁴¹ Ibid., 63.

⁴² Grunhut, *Penal Reform*, 16.

⁴³ Austin Van der Slice “Elizabethan Houses of Correction,” 51.

⁴⁴ Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 14.

⁴⁵ Austin Van der Slice “Elizabethan Houses of Correction,” 45.

little emphasis on religion or moral reform.⁴⁶ According to Pieter Spierenburg, workhouses had three main tasks: “to keep the inmates busy with work, to provide them with food, and to ensure internal order.”⁴⁷

As these examples make clear, educational programming was deeply rooted in Europe’s penal institutions. This was certainly facilitated by the porous borders between institutions – the functions of jails, workhouses, and houses of correction often overlapped – as well as the fact that these institutions held not just “criminals,” but a wide range of people, including orphans, the sick or elderly, and the mentally handicapped. The point is that when American reformers looked to European precedents, they saw a group of institutions that had adopted educational programming as a method of reintegrating inmates back into society. American reformers copied these precedents, and the penitentiary reflected the belief that educational programming was an important component of reforming inmates.

Early Prison Reform and the Birth of the Penitentiary

A new era of criminal jurisprudence began in 1704 at the opening of Rome’s Hospital of St. Michael. Founded by Pope Clement XI, the hospital was intended to reform, rather than physically punish inmates, which is reflected by the inscription over the door: “For the correction and instruction of profligate youth: That they who when

⁴⁶ Randall McGowen “The Well-Ordered Prison” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75.

⁴⁷ Pieter Spierenburg “The Body and the State: Early Modern Europe” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 62.

idle, were injurious, when instructed might be useful to the state.”⁴⁸ The Hospital of St. Michael was actually a composite institution cobbled together from Leonardo Caruso’s home for boys (established 1582), Pope Sixtus V’s hospice for the poor (founded between 1586 and 1588), Tomasso Odescalchi’s home for boys (1684), and Pope Innocent XII’s orphanage for girls and the aged poor.⁴⁹ St. Michael’s was intended for two types of juvenile delinquents: those under twenty convicted by a criminal court, and boys who refused to obey their parents. These two classes received different treatment: for the convicts, it was group work in a central hall, performed in silence. For “incorrigible boys,” it was around the clock separation from each other and extensive whipping.⁵⁰ Historian Dell Upton noted that some inmates were even housed “in solitary confinement to promote the same sort of introspection that monastic isolates practiced.”⁵¹ In other words, many of the characteristics that would be hailed as revolutionary when put into practice in Pennsylvania’s penal institutions – silence, work, and separate confinement – were based on European precedents.

Prominent penal reformer John Howard, who investigated St. Michael’s for his 1777 book *The State of the Prisons in England*, noted that some of the inmates were educated as printers, book-binders, designers, smiths, carpenters, tailors, shoe-makers, and barbers and that, “... when the boys arrive at the age of twenty years, they are

⁴⁸ Thorsten Sellin, “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Feb., 1930), 534.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 536.

⁵⁰ Grunhut, *Penal Reform*, 20.

⁵¹ Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 251.

completely clothed, and a certain sum is given to set them up in the business they learned.”⁵² Thorsten Sellin identified four unique aspects of St. Michael’s that were revolutionary at the time: first, the focus on reform, second, the emphasis on moral and religious instruction, third, the use of skilled artisans to provide manual training and, fourth, the use of inmates’ labor to provide goods for the army, navy, and court.⁵³

According to the historian Frederick Howard Wines, “the erection of this juvenile reformatory institution, therefore, is the landmark which divides two civilizations or two historical epochs.”⁵⁴

In 1773, Hippolyte Vilain XIII of Belgium established in Ghent a prison that, like the Hospital of St. Michael, classified and separated inmates. They were expected to labor as part of their reformation, which was the purpose of incarceration. McGowan asserted that the early eighteenth century was “a decisive break in penal thought and practice” that “signaled a shift away from penalties that employed the body in a public spectacle to sentences defined in terms of labor and time.”⁵⁵

There are multiple explanations for the paternity of the penitentiary, a subject that has aroused a considerable amount of historiographical scrutiny. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a penitentiary was originally “A place of penitential discipline or

⁵² John Howard *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales with Preliminary Observations and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals* 3rd ed. (Warrington, UK: 1784), 113-144 in Thorsten Sellin “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Feb., 1930), 534.

⁵³ Sellin, “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome,” 541.

⁵⁴ Wines, *Punishment and Reformation*, 122.

⁵⁵ Randall McGowan “The Well-Ordered Prison” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison*, 76.

punishment for ecclesiastical offences,” the earliest use being in the fifteenth century by Margaret of Anjou. The word originally had religious connotations; alternative definitions included “ a manual for priests hearing penance” and “the box in which a priests sits when hearing confession.” According to Janet Semple, eighteenth-century penal reform in Britain was rooted in two schools of thought: the Enlightenment’s rational utilitarianism and concerns about prisoners’ souls rooted in Christianity.⁵⁶ Mark Colvin called these the rationalist tradition, represented by Charles-Louis Montesquieu, William Blackstone, Cesare Beccaria, and Jeremy Bentham, and the religious tradition, represented by John Howard. For Colvin, the central difference between rational and religious was that “ ... rationalists were skeptical of efforts at moral reform, and in fact were even hostile to it because it involved intrusions into free thinking individuals’ rights to believe as they wished, a major tenet of rationalist thought and the Enlightenment.”⁵⁷

Colvin overplayed this distinction, because Bentham wrote “ ... the necessity of a chapel to the penitentiary house, is a point rather to be assumed than argued. Under an established church of any persuasion, a system of penitence without a means of regular devotion would be a downright solecism.”⁵⁸ Reading both “rationalist” and “religious” writings, it becomes clear that, as far as education goes, Colvin’s dichotomy between the two types of reformers is a distinction without a difference. John Howard, Jeremy

⁵⁶ Janet Semple *Bentham’s Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993), 62.

⁵⁷ Mark Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs: Social Theory and the History of Punishment in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 49.

⁵⁸ Jeremy Bentham *The Panopticon Papers* (London, UK: Verso, 1995), 97 in Muriel Schmid “‘The Eye of God:’ Religious Beliefs and Punishment in Early Nineteenth-Century Prison Reform” *Theology Today* vol. 59, no. 4 (Jan., 2003), 547.

Bentham, Cesare Beccaria, and others all offered education as, in part, the answer to crime. All advocated, in some form, increased access to public education, and each justified that position on the grounds that education would naturally reduce crime. Each called for a system of religiously infused education, which calls into question Colvin's suggestion that there was a great deal of difference between these two groups. In looking at eighteenth century penal reformers, one is struck by the uniformity of opinion regarding the palliative effects of education, not their differences of opinion about what kind of education.

American penal historian Adam Hirsh noted that the rationalists approached crime control from the theory of "sensational psychology" developed by John Locke. Locke's doctrine of *tabula rasa* provided the basis of rationalists' argument that criminal behavior was dictated by environmental factors.⁵⁹ According to Locke, men's minds were *tabula rasa*, or blank slates, an idea that liberated men to reshape themselves through experience and self-education.⁶⁰ Though Locke was not a penal reformer per se, Hirsh's perceptive analysis of the importance of his theories to the development of the penitentiary supports my thesis about the crosspollination of educational and penal reform. Historian Louis P. Masur identified Lockean theories of education as particularly important to the late eighteenth-century American penal reform movement. According to Masur, "As

⁵⁹ Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary*, 15.

⁶⁰ Peter Laslett, "Introduction" in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

Americans labored self-consciously to revise systems of punishment in the early Republic, Lockean ideals contributed to a revolution in attitudes toward discipline.”⁶¹

William Penn was so impressed by Locke’s theories on government and education that when he shipped a parcel of books to Pennsylvania containing 125 titles in 138 volumes, Locke’s works accounted for nearly one quarter of the shipment, more copies of *more titles than any other single author*.⁶² Penn was not the only colonial impressed by Locke’s theories; in one survey of 92 colonial college, circulating, social and private library catalogs between 1700 and 1776, Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* appears in 41 percent of them, (second in prevalence only to John Tillotson’s *Sermons* in this period) while his *Thoughts on Education* appears in approximately 25 percent of the libraries.⁶³ Benjamin Franklin cited Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as one of the volumes he encountered during his period of self-education as an apprentice in Boston, and credited the writings of Locke’s patron, Lord Shaftsbury (whose published works appeared in almost 33 percent of colonial libraries between 1700-1776)⁶⁴ with giving him superior debating skills.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76.

⁶² Edwin Wolf, 2nd “A Parcel of Books for the Province in 1700,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. LXXXIX (1965), 432.

⁶³ David Lundberg & Henry F. May, “The Enlightened Reader in America,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 28, No. 2 Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (1976), 273.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. L. Jesse Lemisch (New York: Signet Classics Publishing, 2001), 29-30.

Moreover, it was from Locke's *A Collection of Several Pieces* (1720) that Franklin derived the phrase that defined his role as educator -- "promoting useful knowledge."⁶⁶

Another important early prison reformer involved in education and the dissemination of knowledge was Dr. Thomas Bray, founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and countless colonial religious libraries. Bray was born in 1656, and graduated from Oxford in 1678; he took holy orders, and served as the curate first at Bridgnorth and then at Warwickshire.⁶⁷ Bray is best known for founding religious libraries for Anglican missionaries in Maryland so that they would have access to religious books. He also wrote "An Essay towards promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge, both Divine and Human, in all parts of His Majesty's Dominions, both at Home and Abroad" which attested to his interest in education. Further evidence of this predilection was the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge which, according to Bray's eulogy, "... assisted him in sending Libraries abroad, and dispersed Numbers of excellent Books among our Fleets and Armies, rais'd Charity-Schools in and about the City, and promoted the same by their Correspondences in several parts of the Kingdom."⁶⁸

As an extension of its educational work, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge also took an interest in penal reform, because prisons and jails often relied on

⁶⁶ Carl Bridenbaugh "Philosophy Put to Use: Voluntary Associations for Propagating the Enlightenment in Philadelphia 1727-1776," 75.

⁶⁷ George Smith "Dr. Thomas Bray" *The Library Association Record* (Aberdeen, UK: The University Press, 1910), 6.

⁶⁸ Samuel Smith *Publick Spirit Illustrated in the Life and Designs of the Reverend Thomas Bray, D.D., late minister of St. Botolph without Aldgate* (London, UK: J. Brotherton, 1746), 19.

education to reduce recidivism. After an investigation of the conditions at Newgate prison in 1700, the society's treasurer released *An Essay Towards Ye Reformation of Newgate and Other Prisons in and About London*, which recommended the appointment of overseers, a monthly recitation of the rules, and provisions for the separate confinement of inmates. As President of the Society, Dr. Bray himself led the committee that investigated Newgate, and the report stressed the need for improving prisoner education and providing inmates Bibles.⁶⁹ Bray and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge were not only implicitly arguing that education was a legitimate function of prisons, but also that it was a necessary function if these institutions were to achieve their goal of reforming inmates. Bray provided a model of educational and penal reform that the PSAMPP emulated less than a century later.

The best known eighteenth-century prison reformer was John Howard, whose groundbreaking investigation of Europe's jails *The State of the Prisons in England, and An Account of the Principal Lazarettos of Europe* exposed the shocking conditions prisoners endured. Howard was born in 1726 to a London upholsterer. His mother died when he was five, followed by his father when Howard was sixteen. Though Howard's family was not rich, they were wealthy enough that John lived in his own apartment and kept a servant while an apprentice (which was extremely unusual). Howard bought out his apprenticeship shortly after his father's death.⁷⁰ From then on, Howard retired to his family's estates, looking forward to a life as a member of the landed gentry. His

⁶⁹ Frederick Powers, Jr. "The Role of the Prison Chaplain: An Analysis of the Prison Ministry in Philadelphia from 1682-1970 Including English Antecedents" unpublished thesis, Philadelphia Divinity School, 1971, 18.

⁷⁰ D.L. Howard *John Howard: Prison Reformer* (London, UK: Christopher Johnson, 1958), 21.

formative experience with prisons and incarceration occurred when French privateers on a voyage to Portugal captured him during the Seven Years War; conditions were harsh, though Howard was released after a short time and returned to England. In 1773, he was appointed High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, a position that was more of a sinecure than an occupation because those elected normally delegated the actual work to an Under Sheriff.⁷¹

Bucking tradition, Howard actually examined the prison himself and was shocked because he found prisoners exonerated but still imprisoned, debtors who had racked up fees far in excess of the debt for which they were incarcerated, and horribly unsanitary conditions.⁷² Over the winter of 1773-1774, Howard set off to tour other English county prisons to better understand conditions across England, and what he found dismayed him. D.L. Howard, a sympathetic biographer, wrote, “... when Howard visited a prison, what offended him most was the evidence of disorder and inattention, the failure to post rules, the indiscriminate mixing of inhabitants, and the unregulated boundary between the prison and the community.”⁷³ Specifically, Howard was appalled to find women and men incarcerated together. Moreover, different classes of prisoners – debtors, those only indicted, and convicts – were held in one large, undifferentiated mass. Jailors made their living by charging inmates fees for food, clothing, and liquor, and there was an open trade in sex and liquor between inmates. Jails were squalid, disease-ridden places, and

⁷¹ Ibid., 39.

⁷² Ibid., 41.

⁷³ Randall McGowen “The Well-Ordered Prison” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison*, 79.

Howard estimated that more inmates died from illness than were hanged.⁷⁴ Finally, because jails and prisons were often not secure, prisoners were shackled at night to ensure their presence in the morning.⁷⁵ According to D.L. Howard, there were even a few jails where “... the windows were left unbarred, or gaps in walls remained unrepaired, so escapes were frequent.”⁷⁶

Howard recommended that prisoners be incarcerated in separate cells to prevent the spread of disease, that prisoners be classified and segregated by their offenses to prevent “hardened” criminals from teaching their trade to juveniles and debtors. He believed that prisons should promote reformation through healthy food, sustained labor and education, and religious services.⁷⁷ According to Colvin, Howard “... formulated a system of prison discipline that borrowed from both workhouses and monasteries to include a regimen of hard labor during the day and solitary confinement at night.”⁷⁸ His testimony before Parliament in 1774 contributed to the passage of the Gaol Act that year, which abolished jailors’ fees and suggested standards of hygiene for Great Britain’s prisons. Howard’s contribution to penal reform was to shift attention to the prison and, as judges were increasing the number of convicts sentenced to confinement, create the

⁷⁴ Janet Semple *Bentham’s Prison*, 72.

⁷⁵ Moynahan and Stewart, *The American Jail*, 22.

⁷⁶ D.L. Howard *John Howard*, 17.

⁷⁷ Grunhut, *Penal Reform*, 21.

⁷⁸ Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs*, 49.

impression that incarceration in prison was the “natural” and humane form of punishment.⁷⁹

The publication of *The State of Prisons in England and Wales* in 1777 contributed to the agitation that resulted in the Penitentiary Act of 1779. Drawn up by William Blackstone and William Eden, the Penitentiary Act incorporated many of Howard’s suggestions, including salaried administrators, separate confinement for prisoners at labor and religious instruction.⁸⁰ The act provided for the construction of two penitentiaries around London, managed by three men appointed by the Crown who in turn appointed a governor (warden) and overseers. According to historian Michael Meranze, the Penitentiary Act was an attempt to graft a system of “personal penitence” onto the existing workhouse framework, and “... the Penitentiary Act marked the intersection of the practice of coercive, institutionalized labor with the monastic traditions of penitence and self-transformation.”⁸¹

Though the provisions of the Act were never realized – the penitentiaries were never built – it was nonetheless a “seminal piece of legislation” that influenced not only penal reform in Britain but in her former colonies as well.⁸² In 1775, the English county of Horsham built a prison with cells for offenders and continuous employment, and these reforms were later instituted at Gloucestershire (1779), Pentworth (1781), Wiltshire

⁷⁹ Randall McGowen “The Well-Ordered Prison” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison*, 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸¹ Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 141.

⁸² Janet Semple *Bentham’s Prison*, 45.

(1784), and Manchester (1790). In 1785, Sir Thomas Beevor established the jail at Wynmondham in Norfolk, which incorporated all of John Howard's suggestions, including separation by sex and extremity of offense, as well as solitary confinement at labor. Historian Negley Teeters found that the PSAMPP was familiar with Beevor's efforts, which may have influenced its efforts at reforming Pennsylvania's penal institutions.⁸³ The PSAMPP reprinted a letter from Beevor outlining Wynmondham's goals and administration with approving commentary by society president William White.⁸⁴

Beevor was John Howard's friend and follower, but with or without his assistance, Howard's work had a profound influence on nineteenth-century American penal reformers. His books, and books about him, were readily available to members of Philadelphia's Library Company, which Benjamin Franklin founded in 1732 and whose membership rolls by 1840 included 99 members of the PSAMPP.⁸⁵ The Library Company's 1807 book catalog contains numerous works by Howard, including *Observations Concerning Foreign Prisons and Hospitals, State of the Prisons in England & Wales*, and *An Account of the Principle Lazarettos in Europe*. In addition, the library owned numerous works about John Howard, including *An Ode to John Howard*, "*The Triumph of Benevolence*," and John Aiken's *View of the Character and Public Services*

⁸³ Negley K. Teeters, *The Cradle of the Penitentiary: The Walnut Street Jail at Philadelphia, 1773-1835* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1955), 33.

⁸⁴ *Extracts and Remarks on the Subject of Punishment and Reformation of Criminals: Published by Order of the Society, Established in Philadelphia, for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1790).

⁸⁵ Joy L. Anderson "The Economy of Discipline: Expertise and Reform in the Early Penitentiary System, 1820-1845" unpublished PhD diss., NYU, 2001,251-253.

of the Late John Howard.⁸⁶ Harry Elmer Barnes concluded, “... it was through his writings, well-known to Philadelphians, that America gained knowledge of these advanced institutions and caught the spirit of Howard’s labors in behalf of prison reform.”⁸⁷

Another indication that Howard’s work was widely available in the United States is the fact that American penal reformers often quoted him. Job R. Tyson, in his 1827 *Essay on the Penal Law of Pennsylvania*, cited Howard’s influence when describing the penitential regime at the Walnut Street Jail.⁸⁸ Robert J. Turnbull’s 1797 *A Visit to the Philadelphia Prison* cited Howard regarding the corporal punishment of prisoners. Though Turnbull disagreed, he nevertheless couched his critique in “... the greatest deference to so superior a judgment.”⁸⁹ Francois A. F., duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt scaled the peaks of verbal adoration, writing that the penitentiary system at the Walnut Street Jail was the embodiment of the doctrine of separate confinement advocated by “Howard, beneficent Howard.”⁹⁰

Admiration was a two-way street, because Howard was aware and approved of the PSAMPP’s efforts to put his ideas into practice. Reverend William White forwarded

⁸⁶ *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia; to Which is Prefixed a Sort Account of the Institution, With the Charter, Laws, and Regulations* (Philadelphia: Bartram & Reynolds, 1807).

⁸⁷ Barnes, “The Historical Origins of the Prison System in America” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, vol. 12, no. 1 (May, 1921), 43.

⁸⁸ Job R. Tyson *Essay on the Penal Law of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The Law Academy, 1827), 46.

⁸⁹ Robert J. Turnbull *A Visit to the Philadelphia Prison* (Philadelphia: J. Philips & Son, 1797), 47.

⁹⁰ Francois A. F., duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt *On the Prisons of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Moreau De Saint-Mery, 1796), 1.

the PSAMPP's constitution to John Howard, and expressed the society's obligation to the British reformer " ... for having rendered the miserable tenants of prisons the objects of more general attention and compassion, and for having pointed out some of the means of not only alleviating their miseries, but of preventing those crimes and misfortunes which are the causes of them."⁹¹ Poet and reformer William Roscoe quoted Howard's second work, *Account of the Principle Lazarettos in Europe*, in which Howard stated that he would gladly donate five hundred pounds to any permanent British penal reform agency modeled on PSAMPP.⁹²

Howard's work stretched beyond prisons to include hospitals and schools. As a landowner, Howard not only improved his tenants' housing, but he also opened schools, which were open to any who chose to attend.⁹³ They provided male students with a "limited" but "useful" education, " ... well calculated to foster habits of order and regularity in the poor." The schools were very much an exercise in noblesse oblige, as Howard's enthusiastic biographer Hepworth Dixon made clear.⁹⁴ The educational opportunities for women in Howard's schools were even more limited – writing and sewing, though ultimately Dixon celebrated Howard's contribution to English education

⁹¹ William White to John Howard, letter in Barnes, "The Historical Origins of the Prison System in America," 44.

⁹² William Roscoe *Observations on Penal Jurisprudence and the Reformation of Criminals* (London, UK: John and Arthur Arch, 1819), 86.

⁹³ Grunhut, *Penal Reform*, 32.

⁹⁴ Hepworth Dixon *John Howard and the Prison World of Europe: From Original and Authentic Documents* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1850), 114.

for abrogating “ ... the dread of an educated laboring class” and his schools for being “ ... pioneers of national education.”⁹⁵

Another well-known European advocate of penal reform was Cesare Bonesana, Marchese di Beccaria, born March 15, 1738, in Milan. At 21, Beccaria read Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, which set him on his life’s mission: reforming society, with particular emphasis on penal reform.⁹⁶ His most famous work on this topic is *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* (Crime and Punishments), completed in 1764; the English translation, appeared in 1778. According to Harry Elmer Barnes, Beccaria’s work was “ ... the most significant single contribution of the eighteenth century to the reform of criminal jurisprudence.”⁹⁷ Beccaria believed that the most effective method of dealing with crime was *prevention* rather than *punishment*; to this end, he wrote that “ ... the most certain method of preventing crimes is to perfect the system of education.”⁹⁸

Beccaria’s work influenced American penal and educational reformers like Benjamin Rush, who quoted Beccaria in his *Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania*. Robert J. Turnbull cited Beccaria, Montesquieu and John Howard in support of Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail (a progenitor of Eastern State Penitentiary).⁹⁹ Caleb Lownes, director of the Walnut Street

⁹⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁹⁶ Coleman Phillipson *Three Criminal Law Reformers: Beccaria, Bentham, Romilly* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1923), 4.

⁹⁷ Barnes, “The Historical Origins of the Prison System in America,” 42.

⁹⁸ Marquis Beccaria, *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments, With a Commentary by M. de Voltaire* (Philadelphia: William Young, 1793), 157.

⁹⁹ Robert J. Turnbull, *A Visit to the Philadelphia Prison*, 47.

Jail, cited Montesquieu and Beccaria in his description and defense of the Walnut Street Jail's policy of separate confinement.¹⁰⁰ According to penal historian Max Grunhut, Beccaria's ideas " ... proved the effective stimulus to a utilitarian approach to penal policy, which became the great cause of Jeremy Bentham."¹⁰¹

Born in 1748, Bentham is best known for his proposal regarding the perfect prison called the Panopticon, which was designed to allow continuous surveillance of all the prisoners at all moments. According to Bentham, this could be achieved by building all of the cells in a circle, facing a raised guard tower, which allowed the guards to maintain complete surveillance of all of the cells at all times. Janet Semple (paraphrasing David Hume) argued that the plan for the Panopticon dominated Bentham's life, obtaining a disproportionate place among his intellectual endeavors.¹⁰² According to Semple, this was because " ... his concern with punishment was central to his early ideas on government," and the plan for the prison " ... enabled Bentham to give substance to ideas that had long been maturing in his mind."¹⁰³ Barnes credited *The Panopticon Papers* with affecting Pennsylvania's penal reform, particularly architect William Strickland's design for Western State Penitentiary (opened 1826). It was " ... one of the few institutions which were modeled to some degree after Bentham's ingenious plan for a perfect prison

¹⁰⁰ Caleb Lownes *An Account of the Alteration and Present State of the Penal Laws of Pennsylvania Containing Also an Account of the Gaol and Penitentiary House of Philadelphia and the Interior Management Thereof* (Philadelphia: J. Bradford, 1799), 4.

¹⁰¹ Grunhut, *Penal Reform*, 38.

¹⁰² Janet Semple *Bentham's Prison*, 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 25.

structure.”¹⁰⁴ This institution was torn down in 1833 and rebuilt along the architectural lines of its more famous sister, Eastern State Penitentiary.

Bentham’s approach to crime was utilitarian, in that he promoted balancing the pain criminals would experience from punishment against the pleasure they could expect from their crime; as rational men, they would choose not to commit crimes. Like Beccaria, Bentham realized “ ... that crime could best be prevented by eliminating the general conditions which promoted its development.”¹⁰⁵ Should a person be sentenced, Bentham argued, the Panopticon would teach him to love work rather than loath it.¹⁰⁶ Foucault argued that the Panopticon functioned as a laboratory for “ ... pedagogical experiments,” that could “ ... teach different techniques to workers.”¹⁰⁷ Bentham himself believed that, once his principles had been applied to prisons and proven effective, they could easily and successfully be applied to schools.¹⁰⁸ The Panopticon is thus not so much a building but a set of ideas about how to discipline and educate prisoners and students alike in order to prevent crime and reform convicts. In other words, Bentham’s plan made the prison’s architecture a crucial component of his reformation philosophy.

Bentham’s one published work on education, *Chrestomathia*, gives us some insight into the ways in which his ideas on education informed his notions of penal

¹⁰⁴ Barnes, “The Historical Origins of the Prison System in America,” 45.

¹⁰⁵ Barnes, *The Story of Punishment: A Record of Man’s Inhumanity to Man* 2nd ed. (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith Publishing Corp, 1972), 101.

¹⁰⁶ Grunhut, *Penal Reform*, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 203-204.

¹⁰⁸ Jeremy Bentham *Panopticon: or, the Inspection House* (Dublin, Ireland: Thomas Byrne, 1791), 107.

reform, and vice versa. Published in 1817, the book lays out the curriculum and teaching methods of a secondary day school for London's middle and upper classes.¹⁰⁹ According to Bentham, he derived its title from “ ... two Greek words, signifying *conducive to useful learning*,” which offers the learner four advantages: respect, defense against ennui, security against sensuality and, (most important) “ ... security against idleness and mischievousness.”¹¹⁰ Bentham believed that one of the ways to keep people on the “straight and narrow” was to deploy education to inculcate certain habits, like order and respect for authority. The ideal Chrestomatic school is vaguely reminiscent of the Panopticon because, according to E. Halevy, “ ... the [Panopticon] realizes the ideals of a school in which the educator is to be the absolute master to determine the external conditions in which the pupil is situated, or of a society in which the legislator is absolute master to create all the social relations of the citizens among themselves.”¹¹¹

Like Howard, Bentham was not solely interested in prison reform, but was also a tireless advocate of educational reform, which also grew from his ideas on government. Also like John Howard, Bentham's works were well known among eighteenth century American penal reformers. The Library Company's 1807 *Catalogue* includes three works by Bentham: *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, *Defence of Usury*,

¹⁰⁹ M.J. Smith and W.H. Burton, ed. *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Chrestomathia* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1983), xi.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹¹ E. Halevy *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. M. Morris (London, UK: 1972), 83-5 cited in Janet Semple *Bentham's Prison*, 2.

and *Protests Against Law Taxes*.¹¹² Francis Lieber, an important booster of the Pennsylvania system and a member of the PSAMPP, even met Bentham while in England.

Thus far, the evidence supports my assertion that key eighteenth-century penal reformers were also passionately interested in educational reform, and often viewed increased or democratized access to education as a crucial strategy in combating crime and reforming offenders. Put another way, the intellectual and philosophical basis of the penitentiary had an educational component, but it is also important to understand how that philosophy was put into practice. To do that, it is necessary to examine not just penal reformers but also penal administrators, or the men who practiced what the eighteenth-century penal philosophers preached.

Criminal Justice in Colonial Pennsylvania

Numerous scholars have ably chronicled seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Pennsylvania's penal history over the last 80 years. The best known is Harry Elmer Barnes, whose 1927 book, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, is a classic in the field. Barnes divided the history of Pennsylvania's penal code between 1676 and 1776 into three periods.¹¹³ The Duke of York's laws, promulgated on September 25, 1676, dominated the first period. On that day, Governor Edmund Andros of New York and the Jerseys promulgated by executive ordinance a series of laws compiled by the Duke of

¹¹² *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia; to Which is Prefixed a Sort Account of the Institution, With the Charter, Laws, and Regulations* (Philadelphia: Bartram & Reynolds, 1807).

¹¹³ Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 28.

York for the colonies under his dominion. The defining characteristic of the codes was their severity: blasphemy, murder, homosexuality, bestiality, kidnapping, treason, and smiting one's parents were all capital offenses.¹¹⁴ Under the Duke of York's laws, all towns were required to provide stocks for offenders, and for those towns where court sessions were to be held, prisons and pillories were required. Towns that failed to provide the necessary facilities were fined forty shillings for each infraction.¹¹⁵

The second period of Pennsylvania's penal history began when William Penn founded the colony in 1682. He promulgated the "Great Law or Body of Laws," which were adopted by the assembly on December 7, 1682. Though the Great Law still criminalized sexual immorality, drunkenness, and profanity, it substituted imprisonment in a house of correction and/or fines for most offenses except murder, which was still a capital offense. The Great Law also required:

... that every county within this province of Pennsylvania and territories thereunto belonging shall by the last day of the tenth month next ensuing, at their own cost and charge, erect, build or cause to be built in the most convenient place in each county, respectively, a sufficient house at least twenty foot square, for the restraint, correction, labour, and punishment of all such persons committed thereunto by law; and that every county fayling herein shall forfeit and pay forty pounds to be levied on the goods of the inhabitants of such county¹¹⁶

William Penn was adverse to jails, and the horrors he had experienced while incarcerated in London's infamous Newgate prison pushed him to seek alternatives. Because he had been deeply impressed by Dutch workhouses (which were based on the English bridewell

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁵ Staughton George, Benjamin Need and Thomas McCsmant *Charter To William Penn and Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania Passed Between the Years 1682 and 1700* (Harrisburg, PA: Lane S. Hart, 1870), 47.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 139-140.

system) during his tour of Holland, Penn decreed that, in Pennsylvania, all counties were to have workhouses that, like their European counterparts, should provide “ ... religious instruction and education for the inmates.”¹¹⁷

In addition to dealing with prisons, the Great Law also set out the Commonwealth’s responsibilities for educating its children, which Penn considered extremely important. For instance, Chapter CXII of the Great Law stated:

And to the end that poor as well as rich may be instructed in good and Commendable learning, which is to be preferred before wealth, Be it enacted that all persons in this Province and territories thereof, having children, and all such guardians or trustees of orphans, shall cause such to be instructed in reading and writing; so that they may be able to read the Scriptures; and to write by the time they attain twelve years of age; and that they may be taught some useful trade or skill, that the poor may work to live and the rich, if they become poor, may not want; of which every county court take care; and in case such parents, guardians or overseers shall be found deficient in this respect, every such parent, guardian or overseer shall pay for such child five pounds, except there should appear an incapacity in body or understanding to hinder it¹¹⁸

Because Penn believed education should equip students to read Scripture and support themselves, the law only required very rudimentary education: literacy and vocational training. In many ways, this was similar to the education provided by workhouses, which was designed to minister to inmates’ spiritual needs and provide them with vocational skills for economic self-sufficiency. Under the Great Law, parents who failed to fulfill their obligations were fined because legislators feared that uneducated children would commit crimes as a result of improper religious instruction. To assist parents in their civic duty of educating their children, Penn decreed in “The Frame of Government” that “ ...

¹¹⁷ Moynahan and Stewart, *The American Jail*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Staughton George, Benjamin Need and Thomas McCsmant *Charter To William Penn and Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania Passed Between the Years 1682 and 1700*, 142.

the governor and Provincial Council shall erect and order all publick schools, and encourage and reward the authors of useful sciences and laudable inventions in the said province,” though there is little indication this actually happened.¹¹⁹

Penn’s control over the colonial government was extremely tenuous. Between 1682 and 1701, Pennsylvania had four different governments, and Penn lost his charter for two years beginning in 1692. By May 1718, Pennsylvania operated under the much harsher English Criminal Code, a system that lasted until independence. According to Barnes, Pennsylvania’s embrace of the English criminal code was rooted in Quakers’ aversions to oath taking.¹²⁰ In 1715, Parliament forbade the right of affirmation, which the Quakers had used in lieu of swearing oaths. Pennsylvania’s Quakers were understandably agitated, because their refusal to swear oaths meant that they could not participate in criminal procedures, disrupting colonial justice. Pennsylvania’s new governor, William Keith, offered a solution: Pennsylvania might induce Parliament to recognize the right of affirmation if the Commonwealth adopted the English criminal code, which it did on May 13, 1718. This inaugurated the third period of criminal law in Pennsylvania.

Jack D. Marietta and G.S. Rowe characterized the changes after 1718 as “reactionary,” and indeed they were. Whereas the Duke of York’s laws had prescribed the death penalty for twelve offenses, the English criminal code contained at least thirteen

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 95.

¹²⁰ Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 37.

capital crimes.¹²¹ The revised criminal code was defined by two tendencies: extreme severity and “... the almost exclusive employment of some form of corporal punishment.”¹²² The 1718 revision of Pennsylvania’s criminal code was a repudiation of Penn’s vision for the colony, and both Barnes and Marietta and Stone note the symbolic conjunction of the bill’s passage in May 1718 and Penn’s death later that year.¹²³ According to Thorsten Sellin, Penn’s design was “destroyed” when the “... sanguinary and dishonoring penalties in use in England were again introduced”; these included the pillory and the whipping post, which Sellin noted were again “more commonly used.”¹²⁴ Moreover, the Assembly passed an act that year authorizing the construction of both a jail and workhouse; these opened a few years later, facing each other on High Street near the intersection with Third Street, though the new code provided “little or no labor” for inmates.¹²⁵ The English criminal code was the basis of Pennsylvania’s criminal law until September 15, 1786, when the Commonwealth’s legislative assembly adopted a new set of criminal laws.

Though Pennsylvania adopted England’s severe criminal code, the colony’s legal system was much more democratic than England’s, which led to a higher level of litigiousness. William M. Offutt neatly summarizes colonial Pennsylvania’s legal system,

¹²¹ Jack D. Marietta and G.S. Stone, *Troubled Experiment: Crime and Justice in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 7.

¹²² Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 27.

¹²³ Marietta and Stone, *Troubled Experiment*, 23 and Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 39.

¹²⁴ Sellin, “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome,” 326.

¹²⁵ Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 221.

noting “Delaware Valley reformers reduced the information costs of resolving disputes through law by simplifying legal language and forms. They reduced threshold costs by making lawyers less necessary, streamlining small claims procedures, and diverting some cases to arbitration.” In addition, they also reduced legal fees, and established and enforced timetables that sped legal proceedings.¹²⁶ Unlike England’s well-established community of legal professionals, “ ... colonial justice was the business of amateurs,” in the sense that there was no police force, and cases were presided over and decided by lay magistrates and lay juries.¹²⁷ Allen Steinberg has found that, through 1760, Pennsylvania (like other colonies) relied on private prosecution of criminal matters, meaning that plaintiffs not only acted as their own lawyers, but were responsible for ensuring that witnesses and sometimes even the accused attended court.¹²⁸

One cause of Pennsylvania’s litigiousness was the fact that the colony was an abnormally violent place by colonial standards, which the colony’s boosters downplayed or lied about in order to encourage emigration. Jack D. Marietta and G.S. Stone argued that, between 1682 and 1800, violent crime was a “hallmark” of Pennsylvania society, because one third of all criminal charges resulted from some form of assault upon persons.¹²⁹ One of the strategies that Pennsylvania’s leaders deployed to deal with the crime problem was education generally and schooling in particular because, they hoped “

¹²⁶ William M. Offutt, Jr. “*Of Good Laws and Good Men:*” *Law and Society in the Delaware Valley, 1680-1770* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 18.

¹²⁷ Lawrence M. Friedman *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 28.

¹²⁸ Allen Steinberg “From Private Prosecution to Plea Bargaining: Criminal Prosecution, the District Attorney, and American Legal History” *Crime Delinquency*, vol. 30 (1984), 571.

¹²⁹ Marietta and Stone, *Troubled Experiment*, 107.

... an informed, enlightened people would act civilly towards their fellows.”¹³⁰ For instance, the Assembly ordered that the statutes were not only to be printed and read at court sessions, but they were also to be taught in Pennsylvania’s schools.¹³¹ Clearly, Pennsylvania’s leaders saw crime control as a legitimate function of the colony’s schools. In addition, workhouses and later prisons provided vocational, academic, and moral instruction in an attempt to reform convicts, suggesting that Pennsylvania’s leaders saw a link between education and crime. In this case, they were arguing that educating convicts could reduce recidivism.

Incarceration in Colonial and Revolutionary Pennsylvania

Though imprisonment was not unknown in seventeenth and early eighteenth century Pennsylvania, it was primarily reserved for debtors, those awaiting adjudication or those awaiting punishment.¹³² Pennsylvania was not unique in this regard because, according to Adam J. Hirsch, “... the central function of the jail in early Massachusetts was to facilitate pretrial and pre-sentence detention,” though there were exceptions to this, like debtors or political prisoners, for whom incarceration could be a lengthy process.¹³³

¹³⁰ Ibid., 157.

¹³¹ Ibid., 158.

¹³² David J. Rothman, “Perfecting the Prison: United States, 1789-1865” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101.

¹³³ Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary*, 7.

Colonial society was largely rural and dominated by isolated communities. According to Hirsch, these communities perceived crime as “the basic human condition,” and punished lawbreakers through fines or physical punishment and public humiliation. Instead, “... the preferred sanctions operated to draw resident offenders back into the community.”¹³⁴ For this reason, and because there was a labor shortage, executions and disabling punishments were infrequently used against community residents.¹³⁵ Outsiders who lacked property or skills necessary to the community’s survival were banished out of fear that they might become a burden or commit crimes.¹³⁶ Because jails deprived the community of needed labor and were expensive, there was little investment in them. According to Barnes, colonial Pennsylvania’s “... jails and prisons were generally rough frame buildings, at the best only satisfactory from the standpoint of a moderately safe and sure detention of prisoners in custody.”¹³⁷

Philadelphia’s first jail was a five by seven foot cage erected at Second and High Street between 1682 and 1683 by Council Member William Clayton at the Council’s request. It was only used for about two years, because in 1685 the Sheriff rented a house in the same vicinity to serve as the jail. That same year, construction began on a jail near the site of the cage.¹³⁸ That jails were frequently buildings adapted, rather than built, for incarceration is reflected in the fact Colonial Williamsburg’s jail, erected between 1703

¹³⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹³⁵ Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs*, 34.

¹³⁶ David J. Rothman, “Perfecting the Prison: United States, 1789-1865” Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, ed *The Oxford History of the Prison*, 101.

¹³⁷ Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 70.

¹³⁸ Sellin, “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome,” 326.

and 1704, resembles an “ordinary seventeenth century house.”¹³⁹ Despite the fact that Pennsylvania had jails as early as 1683, incarceration was only utilized widely during and after the Revolution. According to Jack D. Marietta and G.S. Stone’s analysis of sentencing in colonial Chester County, “... jail sentences appear in significant numbers only after 1765.”¹⁴⁰ Incarceration replaced whipping by 1788 due to penal reforms, and corporal punishment in general declined after the Revolution.¹⁴¹ Prisons gradually replaced corporal punishments, and even incarceration in jails and workhouses, because these were not designed for or secure enough for long term internment.¹⁴²

Orlando F. Lewis noted that, between 1776 and 1845, Americans exhibited a “zest” for penal reform and that “... the birth of the American republic and the birth of an organized prison system in this country occurred practically simultaneously.”¹⁴³ This was partially due to the explosion of crime caused by the dislocations of the Revolutionary War and its effect on the economy. Accusations of crime jumped from 322 per 100,000 people in the 1780s to 361 a decade later, a jump of more than 12 percent.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, immigration swelled Philadelphia’s numbers, further stressing the city’s job market.¹⁴⁵ Its population quintupled in the fifty years between 1750 and 1800, driven by natural

¹³⁹ Moynahan and Stewart, *The American*, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Marietta and Stone, *Troubled Experiment*, 192.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 192-3.

¹⁴² Moynahan and Stewart *The American*, 35.

¹⁴³ Orlando F. Lewis *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Marietta and Stone, *Troubled Experiment*, 216.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

growth, poor Scots-Irish immigrants and former slaves from the South. As inequality and unemployment grew following the Revolution, so did property crime, which became especially pronounced in the black community (Marietta and Stone called it a “token of black crime”) and among Pennsylvania’s women.¹⁴⁶ Inflation, caused by the War for Independence, exacerbated social inequality, creating a city “ ... increasingly marked by luxury and poverty” which pushed many of those at the bottom run of the economic ladder into crime.¹⁴⁷ A contemporary writer noted “With the disorders the numbers of prisoners increased to such a degree as to alarm the community with fears, that it would be impossible to find a place either large or strong enough to hold them.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, the shift toward incarceration strained the existing penal facilities, necessitating the construction of new ones.

Another push toward incarceration was the “liberal” state constitution of 1776, which reflected the more radical politics of the drafting committee that included Benjamin Franklin and David Rittenhouse.¹⁴⁹ Under this constitution, all tax paying resident freemen over 21 were eligible to vote as long as they were willing to declare a belief in monotheism and the Scriptures. Executive authority was lodged in a committee of twelve representing each county and the city of Philadelphia. Supreme Court justices and justices of the peace were given seven-year terms; they, along with sheriffs and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 229.

¹⁴⁷ Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*, 67.

¹⁴⁸ Caleb Lownes *An Account of the Alteration and Present State of the Penal Laws of Pennsylvania*, 4-5.

¹⁴⁹ Rosalind L. Branning *Pennsylvania Constitutional Development* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1960), 9.

coroners, were appointed by the president of the executive committee.¹⁵⁰ Imprisonment for debt, long the bane of the lower classes (and not a few luckless elites) was more or less abolished, because section twenty-eight stated debtors (not suspected of fraud) who had delivered up all of their property “ ... shall not be continued in prison.”¹⁵¹ Section thirty-eight lowered the number of capital offenses and called for punishments that were more proportionate to the crime punished than the English Criminal Code. According to Barnes, “ ... the barbarous criminal code of 1718 was replaced by one for which justice, mildness and humanity was almost unique in the civilized world at that time, and which restored Pennsylvania to that position of supremacy in enlightened criminal jurisprudence which it had held under the domination of Penn’s laws from 1682 to 1718.”¹⁵²

The legislature’s substitution of incarceration for capital punishment increased the need for cells, which pressured the builders of Philadelphia’s partially complete Walnut Street Jail. Built between 1773 and 1780 in response to Philadelphia’s population growth and attendant increase in crime the Walnut Street Jail was designed by Robert Smith and located behind Independence Hall. Construction stopped for eighteen months during the British occupation, possibly due to lack of funds or to Smith’s death.¹⁵³ The jail was eventually completed in 1780, and was officially overseen by Philadelphia’s sheriff

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵¹ J. Paul Selsam *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776: A Study in Revolutionary Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), 203.

¹⁵² Barnes, *The Story of Punishment*, 73.

¹⁵³ Negley K. Teeters, *The Cradle of the Penitentiary: The Walnut Street Jail at Philadelphia, 1773-1835* (Philadelphia: 1955), 18.

(though in practice, he often delegated the responsibility to an under sheriff, who functioned as a “gaol keeper.”)¹⁵⁴

Though built to provide more humane incarceration for debtors and convicts, conditions were no better at the Walnut Street Jail than in jails that preceded it. In February 1776 a group of concerned citizens formed the Philadelphia Society for Relieving Distressed Prisoners and solicited food and clothing door to door to relieve prisoners’ distress. The Society grew out of Richard Wistar’s attempts to alleviate prisoners’ suffering by delivering soup to inmates. Wistar lived on the same block as the High Street Jail, and was undoubtedly exposed to its wretched conditions as he walked about the city. He was motivated to action by a 1776 petition written by debtors in the Walnut Street Jail, who begged that some arrangement be made to feed them lest they starve. The Society existed for nineteenth months, until the British occupied Philadelphia in 1777 and converted the Walnut Street Jail into a prisoner of war camp.¹⁵⁵

After the War, Philadelphia’s elites turned their attention from independence to rebuilding and reforming their city. A prominent group of citizens that included Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, William Bradford and Caleb Lowmes pushed for reform of the English Common Law, which had been in effect in America since 1718. One reform was the so-called “Wheel-barrel Law” of 1786 that substituted incarceration at hard labor for death for many lesser felonies. Under the Wheel-barrel Law, prisoners worked “ ... in streets of cities and towns, and upon the highways of the open country and

¹⁵⁴ Barnes, *The Story of Punishment*, 64.

¹⁵⁵ Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1937), 14.

other public works.”¹⁵⁶ They wore distinctive, garish dress and were to be manacled to cannon balls to prevent elopement.¹⁵⁷ According to Meranze, this law was revolutionary because “ ... it transformed punishment into a continuing process,” and therefore “radically altered the context and importance of punishment.”¹⁵⁸ The preamble stated “ ... it is the wish of every good government to reclaim rather than destroy.”¹⁵⁹ While the law’s intent was reformation, Upton noted that it nonetheless reflected late eighteenth-century Euro-Americans’ belief that “ ... dull labor, onerous labor was the most effective way to reform criminals.”¹⁶⁰

This law proved disastrous because prisoners often abused Philadelphia’s residents by hurling the cannon balls to which they were chained or by mugging them as they walked by. Fifteen prisoners escaped the first day the new law was in place!¹⁶¹ Caleb Lownes, a member of the PSAMPP and warden of the Walnut Street Jail, described the unintended consequences of this act:

The disorders in society, the robberies, burglaries, breaches of prison, alarms in town and country – the drunkenness, profanity, and indecencies of the prisoners in the streets, must be in memory of most. . . . The severity of the law, and disgraceful manner of executing it, led to a proportionate degree of depravity and insensibility and every spark of morality appeared destroyed. The keepers were armed with swords, blunderbusses, and other weapons of destruction. . . . The old and hardened offender [was] daily in the practice of begging and insulting the inhabitants – collecting crowds of idle boys, and holding them with the most indecent and

¹⁵⁶ *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: 1887) vol. XII 280-281 in Teeters, *The Cradle of the Penitentiary*, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 23.

¹⁵⁸ Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*, 175.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁶⁰ Upton, *Another City*, 253.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

improper conversation. Thus disgracefully treated, and heated with liquor, they meditated, and executed, plans of escape – and when at liberty, their distress, disgrace, and fears, prompted them to violent acts to satisfy the immediate demands of nature¹⁶²

Between 1787 and 1789, 78 out of 290 male convicts escaped – an astonishing 27 percent!¹⁶³ There were also deadly confrontations between guards and inmates on the streets, and public labor meant that inmates could be slipped contraband in the form of weapons.¹⁶⁴ Liquor was easily obtained and criminals intermingled, violating Howard’s precept that inmates ought to be separated. Clearly, the Act of 1786, for all its humane intentions, had backfired. Worse, in September 1787, Philadelphia’s Grand Jury reported that moral conditions at the prison were deplorable, citing the fact that prostitutes falsely confessed to crimes in order to be incarcerated and more easily ply their trade among the jail’s “captive audience.”¹⁶⁵ Philadelphia’s civic leaders regrouped, and the following year formed the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons.

The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons

On May 8, 1787, a group of what Teeters called “... the most substantial and intelligent citizens of early Philadelphia” formed The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (PSAMPP).¹⁶⁶ Within a year of its founding in May 1787,

¹⁶² Caleb Lownes *An Account of the Alteration and Present State of the Penal Laws of Pennsylvania; Containing Also an Account of the Gaol and Penitentiary House of Philadelphia and the Interior Management Thereof*, 4-5.

¹⁶³ Sellin, “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome,” 327.

¹⁶⁴ Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*, 91.

¹⁶⁵ Sellin, “The House of Corrections for Boys in the Hospice of Saint Michael in Rome,” 327.

¹⁶⁶ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 3.

the PSAMPP swelled to 175 members, most of whom (49.7 percent) were merchants and professionals.¹⁶⁷ The organization's membership heavily influenced its values and goals because, as Pasur noted, the PSAMPP's members "...wanted to remake the world into a species of man that was a mirror of their own self-perception: disciplined, industrious, frugal, temperate, faithful."¹⁶⁸

While religion was an important component of the PSAMPP's mission, very few of the early members (15 out of 175, or 9.7 percent) were clergy.¹⁶⁹ More interesting, only 69 members can be conclusively identified as Quakers (39.4 percent), meaning that the PSAMPP was hardly a "Quaker organization."¹⁷⁰ This is not to say that religion was unimportant to the PSAMPP's actions or its members; far from it. Religious enthusiasm suffused many (if not most) of its members, and certainly formed the basis of activities like sermonizing at the Walnut Street Jail. The PSAMPP's religious orientation was simply expressed through a pan-Protestant outlook that de-emphasized doctrinal differences between Christian sects in order to create a shared group of values and assumptions from which the organization could proceed. It seems best to conclude, as Meranze did, that the PSAMPP "... epitomized the Enlightenment desire to regulate society through reason and the state through society."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 143.

¹⁶⁸ Masur, *Rites of Execution*, 91.

¹⁶⁹ Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*, 143.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., fn. 143.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 145.

The PSAMPP's agitation led to acts of 1789, 1790, and 1794, which collectively transformed the Walnut Street Jail into a state prison.¹⁷² Of particular importance is the Act of 1790, the legal origin of the "Pennsylvania System" of prison discipline.¹⁷³ This law introduced separate confinement-at-hard labor as the means of reformation, which the Society proposed as both more humane and more terrifying than the death penalty, and thus more appropriate to a rational, republican society. In accordance with the law, a small addition was built on one wing of the U-shaped cellblock to house some inmates in individual cells. According to a PSAMPP publication,

It may be assumed as a principle that the prospect of a long, solitary confinement, hard labour, and a very plain diet, would, to many minds, prove more terrible than even an execution; where this is the case, the operation of example would have its full effect, so far as it tended to deter others from the commission of crime¹⁷⁴

Though separate confinement was not invented in Pennsylvania, what developed – separation of all prisoners from each other – was novel, and formed the basis of the Pennsylvania system of penal discipline.¹⁷⁵

Though the Walnut Street Jail had morphed into a penitentiary, its administrators continued forcing inmates to labor as part of their punishments. The major difference was that inmate labor now took place behind the institution's walls and therefore out of the public's sight. Instead of public works, inmates were trained for a variety of occupations,

¹⁷² Harry Elmer Barnes *The Story of Punishment*, 48.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷⁴ *Extracts and Remarks on the Subject of Punishment and Reformation of Criminals* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1790), 4.

¹⁷⁵ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 41.

including nail making, carpentry, joinery, and blacksmithing.¹⁷⁶ By 1798, each of these separate cells was furnished with a bench and whatever tools inmates required to ply their newly learned trades.¹⁷⁷ Upton called the penitentiary at the Walnut Street Jail “... the first of the initial wave of American reformed penitentiaries,” though it is clear that, even as a penitentiary, the Walnut Street Jail continued to embody many European precedents.

In addition to adjusting its labor program, the Walnut Street Jail’s administrators made a more concerted and systematic effort to teach inmates academic skills. Historian Rex A. Skidmore found informal efforts to educate inmates as early as 1790 that resulted, by 1798, in a school within the prison, with classes in reading, writing, and arithmetic.¹⁷⁸ The administrators went so far as to purchase desks and textbooks, though it is unclear how traditional classroom learning was incorporated into the institution’s regimen of separate confinement.¹⁷⁹ Between 1809 and 1811, the Society worked to establish a library in the jail, though (true to the PSAMPP’s religious impulses) it is likely that only Bibles and religious tracts were available to inmates.¹⁸⁰ Cabana identified education and vocational training as the Walnut Street Jail’s goals, and noted “... it was this legacy, more than any other, that the first penitentiary would hand down to its successors for

¹⁷⁶ Upton, *Another City*, 252.

¹⁷⁷ Cabana, “The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education,” 126.

¹⁷⁸ Rex A. Skidmore “Penological Pioneering at the Walnut Street Jail, 1789-1799” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Jul.-Aug., 1948), 179.

¹⁷⁹ Cabana, “The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education,” 126.

¹⁸⁰ Barnes asserts that the library originated in 1809, but Caleb Lowmes, the prison’s warden, wrote that the prisoners were provided with suitable books as early as 1793. Whether this was a formal library, in the sense of a dedicated space for books, is unclear. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that inmates had at least limited access to books as early as the 1790s. Barnes, *The Story of Punishment*, 97 and Caleb Lowmes *An Account of the Alteration and Present State of the Penal Laws of Pennsylvania Containing Also an Account of the Gaol and Penitentiary House of Philadelphia and the Interior Management Thereof*, 42.

centuries to come.”¹⁸¹ In other words, the Walnut Street Jail bequeathed to its successors a reformatory program based on European precedents that relied on educational programming, vocational training, and (as the anecdote at the beginning of the chapter made clear) religion. Furthermore, this reformatory program was derived from and incorporated European precedents.

Another important source of interest in education was PSAMPP members’ work with schools, learned societies, libraries, and other educational institutions. For instance, one of the Society’s founders, Benjamin Franklin, was also instrumental in founding what became Philadelphia’s first college, the University of Pennsylvania. In 1749, Franklin published his famous “Proposals Relating to the Education of the Youth in Pensilvania,” a treatise that encouraged “persons of Leisure and publick Spirit” to create an academy for educating Philadelphia’s young boys.¹⁸²

Second in prominence only to Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Benjamin Rush was an integral member of the PSAMPP and, like Franklin, a strong proponent of increased public education. Rush was born outside of Philadelphia in 1745, and after attending the College of New Jersey, he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Upon his return to America in 1769, Rush became professor of Chemistry at the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania) and engaged with Philadelphia’s civic life, eventually signing the Declaration of Independence and attending the Continental Congress. In addition, Rush was a well-known abolitionist, opposed the death penalty,

¹⁸¹ Cabana, “The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education,” 7.

¹⁸² Benjamin Franklin, “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania” (Philadelphia: Franklin & Hall, 1749).

promoted public education, and worked for penal reform. It is in these last two capacities, as a penal reformer and advocate of public education, that Rush is an example of the fact that educational and penal reforms sprang from the same impulses and were often inseparable.

Cabana correctly noted that “ ... the end-all for Rush was education” because it was “ ... the great equalizer that made all things possible.”¹⁸³ Rush’s faith in education grew out of and reinforced his attachment to environmentalism, or the belief that man’s innate ability to choose between good and evil was heavily affected by the environment in which it developed.¹⁸⁴ In other words, a corrupt environment produced immorality and crime just as surely as a proper environment fostered morality and respectability.

Naturally, an effective and comprehensive system of public education would help create the proper environment for properly developing individuals’ innate sense of morality.

According to historian Robert H. Azbug, Rush “ ... viewed the school as the key social instrument for reform and spent much time working out a multi-faceted instructional environment.”¹⁸⁵

Not surprisingly, Rush was involved in a number of educational institutions and societies, including the Infant School Society, the Philadelphia Society for the Education of Indigent Boys, the Society for the Establishment of Sunday Schools, and the education committee of the Society for the Promotion of the Public Economy. Rush believed that

¹⁸³ Cabana, “The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education,” 121.

¹⁸⁴ Robert H. Azbug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 20.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

the cost of public schools paled in comparison to the safety and stability that such schools would bring to the community. He asserted that:

Fewer pillories and whipping posts, and smaller jails, with their usual expenses and taxes, will be necessary when our youth are properly educated, than at present. I believe it could be proved, that the expenses of confining, trying and executing criminals amount every year, in most of the counties, to more money than would be sufficient to maintain all the schools that would be necessary in each county. The confessions of these criminals show us, that their vices and punishments are the fatal consequence of an improper education.¹⁸⁶

Much like Cesare Beccaria, who is quoted in *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools*, Rush drew a direct connection between crime and ignorance, and prescribed a comprehensive system of public education in the hope of reducing criminal deviance.

Rush was no democrat, and his system of education was not designed to facilitate social or economic mobility so much as it was intended to “... render the mass of people more homogenous, and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government.”¹⁸⁷ Practically, he achieved this by a system of manual labor in between intervals of study, “... moderate sleep, silence, occasional solitude, and cleanliness,” which is strikingly similar to the system of discipline adopted at Eastern State Penitentiary half a century later.¹⁸⁸

Another Society member who believed that ignorance and crime were related was the Society president, the Reverend William White. Born in Philadelphia in 1748, White studied at the College of Philadelphia, earning a B.A., an M.A., and later a Doctorate of

¹⁸⁶ Benjamin Rush *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; To Which is Added Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1786)

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 24.

Divinity. He traveled to Britain where he was ordained an Anglican priest; returning to Philadelphia, he became rector of Christ Church, and served as the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States, the first Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, and the second chaplain of the United States Senate. In addition to his religious activities, White was extremely active supporting education in Philadelphia: he founded the Episcopal Academy in 1785 and the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in 1820, and served as President and treasurer of Penn's board of trustees.

White is the best example of the intersection of religion, education, and penal reform that characterized penitential discipline in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In an 1818 sermon, White laid out his rationale for promoting Sunday schools and, by extension, his conception of the relationship between education and crime. According to White, man was “... ignorant of God and of his perfections,” and for this reason, it was necessary to introduce children to God through Sunday schools.¹⁸⁹ In many ways, this is similar to Locke's concept of the *tabula rasa*, although White's rendition was more religious than Locke's secular philosophy. White promoted the idea that taking children to Sunday schools results in “... the preventing of much disorder, on that day in particular, in the streets.”¹⁹⁰ Moreover, he cited anecdotal evidence from Ree's Cyclopedia regarding Sunday schools in Gloucester, England. According to White, of 3000 pupils educated in Gloucester's Sunday schools, only a single one was ever charged

¹⁸⁹ William White *A Sermon on the Festival of the Holy Innocents* (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1818), 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

with a crime. Therefore, Philadelphians ought to support Sunday schools because they made their pupils less likely to commit crimes.¹⁹¹

It was not just Sunday schools that would reduce crime. In the same sermon, White provided additional anecdotal evidence from a Mr. Ackerman, who had been the keeper of England's Newgate Prison. White stated that Ackerman

...has left behind him the testimony, that of the number of felons whom he had known executed, *not one in an hundred had learned to read* [my emphasis]. The testimony of a respectable clergyman, Dr. Ford, who had been ordinary of that extensive place of punishment, is said to have been to the same effect. These facts throw light on the question – whether the children of the poor, by being taught to read, are disqualified from the lower offices of society¹⁹²

More than just reading, White highlighted literacy as a defense against falling into the “criminal class.” The crucial point is that White believed that both secular and religious education were needed to reduce crime.

Another Society member deeply committed to both penal reform and the expansion of educational opportunities was Francis Lieber, a German born immigrant best known for his 1863 book *Code for the Government of Armies in the Field*, a manual for conduct appropriate to soldiers. In an 1835 letter to Society president William White titled *Remarks on the Relation Between Education and Crime in a Letter to the Right Rev. William White, D.D.*, Lieber defended public education as a bulwark against crime. He opened by noting that, despite the recent creation of public schools, crime rates had in

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹² Ibid., fn. 12.

fact gone up, leading some to conclude that public education was not the panacea that its boosters claimed.¹⁹³ Though Lieber accepted this, he pointed out:

an immense majority of convicts are men who have not received a fair school education...I think we are authorized to conclude that there actually does exist a necessary connexion between [ignorance and crime] and that by diffusing knowledge of a moral and scientific character, we may hope for a decrease in crime¹⁹⁴

Basically this document (published by the PSAMPP) reinforced what Rush and White had been saying since the 1780s: education would reduce crime. Moreover, it demonstrates that the Society advocated schooling, despite the fact that this was not, strictly speaking, a penal matter.

Franklin, White, Lieber and Rush were not the only members of the PSAMPP who believed that increased educational opportunities, both secular and religious, would lead to lower crime. Historian Joy L. Anderson compiled a list of affiliations for the Society's members between 1787 and 1840, and the results show that members of the PSAMPP were heavily involved in promoting and expanding education in Philadelphia.¹⁹⁵ Upton noted, "In most cities a core of reformers ... turn up on the lists of directors of institution after institution."¹⁹⁶ Most interesting is that twelve PSAMPP members were also affiliated with the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Public Schools, while two joined the Philadelphia Association of Friends for the Instruction of

¹⁹³ Francis Lieber *Remarks on the Relation Between Education and Crime in a Letter to the Right Rev. William White, D.D.* (Philadelphia: Society for the Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, 1835), 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹⁵ Joy L. Anderson, "The Economy of Discipline: Expertise and Reform in the Early Penitentiary System, 1820-1845," 251-253.

¹⁹⁶ Upton, *Another City*, 245.

Poor Children and the Philadelphia Society for the Establishment and Support of Charity Schools. Fourteen were trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, eight served on the Westtown School Committee, three were trustees of Girard College, and one was a trustee of Philadelphia Female College.¹⁹⁷

For members of the PSAMPP, education did not merely mean schooling. Many PSAMPP members supported educational institutions like libraries or mercantile societies that sought to more widely diffuse knowledge to Philadelphia's adult population. For instance, eleven members of the Society joined the Franklin Institute, eight affiliated with the College of Physicians, seven were members of the Philadelphia Association and the Apprentices' Library, six were members of the Academy of Fine Arts, five the Academy of Natural Sciences, and three the Mercantile Library.¹⁹⁸ One was a director of Girard College, one a member of the Evangelical Knowledge Society, and one a member of the Infant School Society.¹⁹⁹ While these are not overwhelming majorities, what does stand out is the variety of educational initiatives taking place in Philadelphia between 1787 and 1840 and the fact that members of the PSAMPP were actively taking part in them.

Looking at the issue another way, focusing on the educational agencies and institutions demonstrates the impact members of the PSAMPP had on Philadelphia's educational culture. For instance, in 1819 Philadelphia and the surrounding communities were divided into sections and ordered to create public schools, and at least six of the 24

¹⁹⁷ Anderson, "The Economy of Discipline," 251-253.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251-253.

directors of the first section (Philadelphia) were PSAMPP members, an impressive 25 percent.²⁰⁰ Of the members of Penn's board of trustees between 1749 and 1800 who were alive in 1787 (and therefore able to join the Society), one in five joined Rush, Franklin and White to advocate for better conditions in Philadelphia's prisons. Finally, of the seventeen men named as visitors of Philadelphia's Young Ladies' Academy, a whopping nine (53 percent) were also members of the PSAMPP.²⁰¹ Clearly, Society members were not only interested in Philadelphia's educational culture, they actively shaped it.

To a certain extent, the PSAMPP represented what sociologist C. Wright Mills called a "power elite," or a group of men " ... whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men. They are in positions to make decisions having major consequences."²⁰² Though Mills was writing in the 1950s and criticizing the centralization of military, political, and financial power in the hands of a series of overlapping cliques, his analysis has some value in understanding how educational and penal reformers achieved their goals in the Early Republic. According to Mills, members of a power elite " ... become self-conscious members of a social class" because of a shared set of assumptions about how the world works and a common educational, social, and political background.²⁰³ Mills' most important insight regarding power elites, at least in so far as it relates to my study of Eastern State, is that these individuals, " ... run the

²⁰⁰ I arrived at this number by comparing the names on the Society's member rolls to the names listed in *First Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools of the First School District of the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Board of Control, 1819), 14.

²⁰¹ *The Rise and Progress of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia: Containing an Account of a Number of Public Examinations and Commencements* (Philadelphia: 1794), 2.

²⁰² C. Wright Mills *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-4.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 11.

machinery of the state and claims its prerogatives,” through the overlapping organizations they construct. This is certainly true of both public schools and penitentiaries in Jacksonian Philadelphia, which (as this chapter has explored) were initially quasi-public institutions funded by the legislature but largely overseen by private citizens.

The crosspollination of penal reform agencies and educational societies or institutions was not unique to Philadelphia. For instance, historian William W. Cutler III found that the New York Public School Society trustees were involved in 33 separate organizations, including The American Bible Society, The American Sunday School Union, the New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and (most important for this study) the Prison Discipline Society.²⁰⁴ Cutler explained that the Society utilized the “authoritarian monitorial method” (similar to the Lancasterian method adopted by the Philadelphia schools) to reduce crime and pauperism; the goal was to inculcate subordination to achieve order among New York’s pauper children.²⁰⁵ The fact that trustees of the New York Public School Society were also members of educational organizations like the American Sunday School Union should come as no surprise. More interesting was the fact that men like them were involved in the Boston Prison Discipline Society (BPDS).

The BPDS also exhibited a strong crosspollination between educational and penal reform. Though it would eventually become the PSAMPP’s great rival because it favored the New York System of penal discipline (which will be explored in the next chapter),

²⁰⁴ William W. Cutler III “Status, Values and the Education of the Poor: the Trustees of the New York Public School Society, 1805-1853” *American Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Mar., 1972), 71.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

both were extremely interested in the reformatory potential of educational programs inside prisons. Founded in 1826 by the Reverend Louis Dwight the BPDS started the Sabbath School Movement in 1833. It also placed 700 tutors in ten prison schools, responsible for teaching 1,500 inmates.²⁰⁶ Clearly, the BPDS considered education an important component of prison reform.

Beyond prison education, BPDS members were invested in other educational movements. For instance, the American Education Society (founded in 1815 to revitalize religion and educate ministers)²⁰⁷ counted many BPDS members among its members. Just a survey of BPDS officers (vice-presidents and managers) shows that, in 1827, more than 57 percent of the vice-presidents and almost 64 percent of the managers were members of the American Education Society.²⁰⁸ Specifically, members of the Prison Discipline Society included Rev. Edward D. Griffin, president of Williams College and professor of elocution, Rev. Herman Humphrey, president of Amherst College, and Rev. Justin Edwards, president of Andover Theological Seminary. What this information proves is that interest and activism on behalf of education was not unique to members of the PSAMPP; the two best known and important penal reform agencies of early republican America promoted the purported reformatory power of education.

²⁰⁶ Dominique T. Chlup “Chronology of Corrections Education” *Focus on Basics* vol. 7, Issue D (Sept., 2005) <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=865> Accessed 12/24/2007.

²⁰⁷ Natalie A. Naylor “‘Holding High the Standard:’ The Influence of the American Education Society in Ante-Bellum Education” *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter, 1984), 479.

²⁰⁸ *Reports of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston* 1-29 (Boston, MA: Prison Discipline Society, 1855), 139.

Overlapping membership between nineteenth century American penal reform organizations and other organizations, most notably abolitionism, has been ably chronicled by Ronald G. Walters in *American Reformers*. According to Walters, the years between the War of 1812 and the Civil War produced “... an incredible proliferation of reforms,” and it was “the rare person” who participated in only one.²⁰⁹ This was clearly the case with the New York Public School trustees, the BPDS and the PSAMPP (despite being founded in the eighteenth century).

Although he briefly discussed education, Walters never connected educational with penological reform. Historian Michael Stephen Hindus examined the seeming contradiction between the fact that many Northern abolitionists also advocated the construction of penitentiaries, and he noted that abolitionists countered their Southern critics, who pointed to the irony of promoting freedom for the slave and incarceration for the convict, by arguing that penitentiaries provided opportunities for inmates to self-improve that were unavailable to slaves.²¹⁰ Those opportunities came in the form of moral instruction and vocational and academic instruction that were supposed to not only morally reform inmates but also to give them the ability to support themselves on the outside. Reframing the issue in this way, it should come as no surprise that those interested in penological reform were also interested in educational reform. These men often saw education as a necessary component of self-discipline, and sought to infuse penal institutions with both religious and secular educational programming.

²⁰⁹ Robert G. W *American Reformers: 1815-1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1997), xiii.

²¹⁰ Michael Stephen Hinsu *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), xvii-xxviii.

Conclusion

As early as the sixteenth century, penal institutions such as workhouses were educating inmates in the hope of reducing recidivism by inculcating skills and values that would allow discharged inmates to support themselves. Workhouses were imported to Pennsylvania because they appealed to the colony's founder, William Penn. However, the generally poor conditions of both European and American penal institutions led to a backlash in the eighteenth century. One effect of this backlash was increased emphasis on penal institutions as vehicles of inmate reform, which reformers believed could be achieved through education. Moreover, many penal reformers were not just interested in prisons, jails, and workhouses, but often showed a keen interest in educational institutions like schools and libraries. This was particularly true in America, where members of the two main penal reform societies were also often involved with various educational reform societies and educational institutions. Their twin interests in education and penology were mutually reinforcing in that American reformers often made two arguments: first, they claimed that increased access to education would make people less likely to commit crime and, second, that convicts would be less likely to commit additional crimes if they were educated while incarcerated. Education thus played an important part in America's first penitentiary, the Walnut Street Jail, a role that would be unchanged for the next two centuries.

CHAPTER II THE PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM, 1829-1866

On Monday, May 17, 1830 Lewis Morris was escorted into “Philadelphia’s Bastille,” the massive penitentiary set on a hill two miles outside the city. Called Cherry Hill because it overlooked a cherry orchard, the building more closely resembled a medieval castle than a cutting edge penal institution. Though Morris was probably unaware of it, he was entering the largest and most expensive structure in America,²¹¹ a project so immense that sociologist William G. Staples called Eastern State “... the most ambitious public works project” of its time because Eastern State occupied an entire city block and each cell had indoor plumbing while President Andrew Jackson was still using an outhouse.²¹² Morris’ reaction to the penitentiary can only be guessed, though it is logical to assume that the eighteen-year-old “mulatto” wished he was anywhere else.

Born in Wilmington, Delaware, Morris burgled a Philadelphia house and was sentenced to two years in the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District, known colloquially as Eastern State Penitentiary. This reflected Pennsylvania’s comparatively merciful criminal justice system; in New York, the same crime might have earned Morris life imprisonment if the house was occupied and up to five years if it was not.²¹³

According to Pennsylvania law, there were only fourteen crimes that could land a convict

²¹¹ Norman Johnston “Introduction” *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States* reproduced from the 1835 Edition (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, NJ: 1969), xi.

²¹² William G. Staples “In the Interest of the State: Production Politics in the Nineteenth Century Prison,” *Sociological Perspectives* 33 (Autumn, 1990) 382.

²¹³ Martin B. Miller “Dread and Terror: The Creation of the State Penitentiaries in New York and Pennsylvania, 1788-1838” UC Berkeley, 1980, 233.

in Eastern State, with first-time sentences ranging from one year (for perjury) to twelve years (for second degree murder).²¹⁴ Still, the penitentiary's system of separate confinement was extremely controversial. Some critics believed that it drove men insane.

Upon entering the penitentiary, Morris was examined and his height, age, place of birth, education, and crime were all recorded. Next, Morris was escorted to a small building in the superintendent's yard; here, Morris undressed, bathed, and received his uniform and inmate number.²¹⁵ Henceforth, he was no longer Lewis Morris, he was only "Number 25." After he donned the summer uniform (cotton pants, short jacket, and shoes), Morris was hooded so that he could neither see nor be seen as he walked to the central rotunda to meet the warden, Samuel Wood. The warden asked him questions about his personal history and habits, trying to discover what had led him to burgle and then delivered a perfunctory speech about the institution's rules and the necessity of reform.²¹⁶ All of these steps – the hooding, questions, and lecture – were components of Eastern State's reformatory philosophy, which was rooted in the belief that inmates needed to be extracted from the social influences that led them to commit crimes. Through rigorous segregation, inmates could contemplate their sins and return to their innate goodness. As historian Dell Upton observed, Eastern State Penitentiary “ ...

²¹⁴ “A Further Supplement to an act, entitled ‘An act to reform the Penal Laws of this Commonwealth’ in *Acts of the General Assembly Relating to the Eastern State Penitentiary and to the New Prisons of the City and County of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.W. Allen, 1831), 6-8.

²¹⁵ William Crawford, “Appendix,” in *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States* reproduced from the 1835 Edition (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, NJ: 1969), 2.

²¹⁶ Negley K. Teeters, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill: The Separate System of Penal Discipline, 1829-1913* (New York: Columbia University Press for Temple University Press, 1957), 186.

presented a utopian vision ... of a republic of introspective, self-regulating, productive men and women.”²¹⁷

After the interview, Morris was again hooded and escorted to his cell. Morris’ whitewashed cell was 11 feet 9 inches long and 7 feet 6 inches wide, a palace compared to the cells at New York’s infamous penitentiary, Sing Sing, which measured a mere seven feet by three and a half feet wide.²¹⁸ Morris’ cell contained a tin cup and pan and eating utensils, an iron bed frame with a cornhusk mattress, a clothes rack and stool, a coarse brush for scrubbing the floors, a comb, and a wash basin with a towel.²¹⁹ The door closed behind him, and Morris began his new life as “Number 25.”

Eastern State’s reformatory program – a mixture of isolation, labor, and ministry – appears to have been successful, at least according to numbers compiled by the PSAMPP. According to the *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Inspectors* (1863), only 4.65 percent of inmates then at the penitentiary were serving their second term at Eastern State; the percentages drop to .45 and .08 for third and fourth sentences, respectively.²²⁰ It is hard to completely trust these numbers, because the PSAMPP was engaged in a bruising ideological battle with the Boston Prison Discipline Society over the best penitential system, so administrators had an incentive to underreport recidivism rates. Moreover, the penitentiary’s administrators relied on inmates’ word as to whether they (the inmates) had

²¹⁷ Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 242.

²¹⁸ William Crawford, “Appendix,” in *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States*, 8 and 29.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 and Norman Johnston *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2000), 49.

²²⁰ *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: McLaughlin, 1863), 46-47.

ever been incarcerated. Thus, the PSAMPP's pronouncements about the efficacy of the Pennsylvania System needed to be taken with a grain of salt.

Though it is impossible to know if Morris was reformed by his time at Eastern State, it is indisputable that, in at least one aspect, he was changed for the better. When Morris entered the prison in May 1830, he was illiterate, but the discharge records indicate that he learned to read and write while incarcerated.²²¹ Lewis Morris' story, which was relived countless times at Eastern State between 1829 and 1866, demonstrates that the penitentiary was self-consciously an educational institution, an identity rooted in the penal philosophy of the time.

The penitentiary's curriculum was designed to "moralize" inmates and provide them with saleable skills. This was achieved through three overlapping curricula: vocational, academic, and moral. As Eastern State's moral instructor noted in 1850 " ... here, every man's cell is not only his workshop but also his school room and study."²²² Academic education meant teaching prisoners literacy and basic quantitative skills, and allowing them to read the Bible and religious tracts, while vocational education meant preparing them for outside employment by teaching them a trade. Academic and moral education was largely the moral instructor's responsibility, while the penitentiary's guards, or overseers, were expected to be master craftsmen who could provide the inmates with an abbreviated apprenticeship in skills like broom, rope, and shoe making.

²²¹ Descriptive Registers, RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

²²² *Twelfth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Edmond Barrington and George Haswell, 1850), 37.

In this regard, Eastern State was typical, and therefore illustrative of the educational character of antebellum American penitentiaries.

Eastern State's educational program was both palliative and empowering, and was part of a larger ideology that promoted the idea that most crime was partially caused by ignorance; adherents were committed to the social value of education in all of its manifestations. Advocates of what became known as the "Pennsylvania System" – the system of penal discipline that Eastern State originated – sincerely believed that increased public education lowered crime; if that failed, however, and men committed crimes, the penitentiary's educational curricula would likely correct whatever defect had led them astray. While reformers' faith in the ability of education to overcome substantive issues like poverty and economic insecurity may seem naïve and idealistic, it was nonetheless sincere and rooted in generally accepted ideas about the causes of crime. Surprisingly, educational services were dispensed without regard to race or gender, meaning that women and men of color had the same educational opportunities as white male prisoners. This educational mission, while well meaning and sincere, was nonetheless undertaken without reference to the realities of convicts' lives and the circumstances of their crimes. As educated men, reformers reasoned that ignorance caused poverty, not the other way around, and set about treating the symptom rather than the disease.

Ignorance and Crime in Jacksonian America

In the last chapter, we learned that many important eighteenth-century American penal reformers were also educational reformers, which led them to conclude that ignorance caused crime, and suggested a solution: education. By the time Eastern State

opened in 1829, some of these men (Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, etc.) were dead, but the younger generation of penal reformers followed their predecessors in advocating increased public education and in promoting educational programming in the penitentiary. No one better symbolizes this younger generation than Roberts Vaux who, like his predecessors in the PSAMPP, was committed to a model of reform based on moral, academic, and vocational education because he was both an educational and a penal reformer.

Vaux was born in Philadelphia in January 1786, the scion of a prominent Quaker family. He was admitted to Philadelphia's bar at 22 and became a judge of the Court of Common Pleas in 1835, though his most lasting contribution to the city's civic life was through the myriad of philanthropic organizations he joined. Vaux was elected the PSAMPP's secretary, a position he held for twenty-one years, and later one of its vice-presidents. As a prominent member of the PSAMPP, Vaux vocally defended the purpose and method of Pennsylvania System in numerous publications, including *Notices on the Original and Successive Efforts to Improve the Discipline of the Prison at Philadelphia and the Reform the Criminal Code of Pennsylvania*. But Vaux was not solely interested in penal reform; like the PSAMPP's founders, Vaux also worked tirelessly to expand educational opportunities in Philadelphia. In addition to being the first president of the Board of Controllers of the Philadelphia school system (a position he held for fourteen years), Vaux served as vice-president of the Pennsylvania Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, one of the founders of the Pennsylvania Institute for the Instruction of the Blind as well as the Infant School Society. Clearly Vaux, the most prominent PSAMPP member behind William White, continued his predecessors' interest in both educational and penal

reform, which led to the same type of crosspollination that characterized PSAMPP's efforts following the Revolution.

Because of the crosspollination of educational and religious reformers, PSAMPP members believed that ignorance was a leading cause of crime and that increased public education was both its prevention and cure. According to Vaux, " ... it will not, at this enlightened period, be denied, that one of the first duties, as well as the true policy, of every government is to adopt measures *for the prevention of crime*; nor that the most powerful instrument for effecting this important object is universal education."²²³ Eastern State's 1837 annual report asserted that increased public education led to decreased crime, noting, " ... it is even more essential that our youth be so trained and educated as to fit them for useful members of the society. If this subject were properly attended to ... the number of criminals, in this highly favored country, would be very small indeed."²²⁴ Ultimately, penal reformer William Roscoe best summarized the prevailing wisdom in 1819, writing, "All persons will agree that the inculcation of [a correct sense of moral duty] on the minds of youth would not only be the best, but the cheapest method of preventing crime."²²⁵

It was not just penal reformers who linked increased public education to lower crime; educational reformers shared this belief and often supported proposals for a state

²²³ Roberts Vaux, *Notices on the Original and Successive Efforts to Improve the Discipline of the Prison at Philadelphia and the Reform the Criminal Code of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Kimber and Sharpless, 1826), 2.

²²⁴ *Eighth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: J. Thompson, 1837), 11.

²²⁵ William Roscoe *Observations on Penal Jurisprudence and the Reformation of Criminals* (London: John and Arthur Arch, 1819), 21.

financed public education system. In June, 1837, the *Common School Assistant* printed statistics from the Connecticut State Prison showing that many of the inmates were illiterate and most were poorly educated; the headline was “Ignorance as a Cause of Crime.”²²⁶ The following year, the same paper ran an article titled “On the Principles, Means, and End of Education,” which included the statement, “... in none more than [in the prisons] of America is this truth more clearly demonstrated, that intemperance and ignorance are the chief causes of crime; and in that proportion as temperance and education are promoted, crime is diminished.”²²⁷ According to the *Connecticut Common School Journal*, “... the inference surely must be that education prevents or restrains crime.”²²⁸

Penal and educational reformers (who were often one and the same) merely repeated a widely held belief in Jacksonian America: crime was caused, in part, by ignorance. In 1824, the *Boston Recorder* opined, “It is impossible therefore, not to infer from these facts, that the influence of education is strongly opposed to crime; and that those who assign it as the cause of crime, select the most improbable of all causes.”²²⁹ Thirty years later, *The Western Journal and Civilian*’s editors wrote that they were persuaded “... that it will not cost the community as much to prevent crime and pauperism by a judicious system of public education as to provide for the punishment of

²²⁶ “Ignorance as a Cause of Crime,” *Common School Assistant, for the Improvement of Common Schools*, June, 1837, number 2, pg. 6.

²²⁷ “On the Principles, Means, and End of Education,” *Common School Assistant; a Monthly Paper, for the Improvement of Common Schools*, Nov. 1838 3, 11.

²²⁸ “Ignorance and Crime,” *Connecticut Common School Journal*, Feb. 15, 1840, number 2, pg. 9.

²²⁹ “Effect of Education in Preventing Crime,” *Boston Recorder*, Oct. 16, 1824, number 9, pg. 42.

delinquents, and the support of paupers.”²³⁰ Finally, as Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont noted in *On the Penitentiary System in the United States*, “Some Americans believe also that knowledge and education, so much in the states of the North have a tendency to diminish the number of crimes.”²³¹

Penal reformers went so far as to compare penitentiaries to schools, implicitly emphasizing the penitentiary’s educative potential. Many of these comparisons were negative, asserting that prisons simply taught inmates to be better criminals. Penal reformer Dr. James Mease asserted in 1828 that “... the older criminals serve as teachers to the younger sinners, and prepare them for the commission of greater crimes than those for which they were convicted.”²³² This assertion was seconded by John Sergeant and Samuel Miller, who observed that “... our prisons are schools of vice, where a most finished education is obtained, if we may call by that name the maturing of our worst propensities by a stimulating culture.”²³³ The PSAMPP’s answer was to advocate separating prisoners from one another and designing a penitentiary building that would prevent inmates from communicating with one another.

At the same time, however, some reformers argued that prisons’ “curriculums” did not *have* to be negative; according to these thinkers, penal institutions could reform

²³⁰ “Relation between Ignorance and Crime,” *The Western Journal and Civilian; Devoted to Agriculture, Manufactures, Mechanics, etc.*, Aug. 1852, number 8, pg. 5

²³¹ Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville *On the Penitentiary System and Its Application in France*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1979), 94.

²³² James Mease M.D., *Observations on the Penitentiary System and Penal Code of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Clerk and Easer, 1828), 8.

²³³ John Sergeant and Samuel Miller, *Observations and Reflections of the Design and Effects of Punishment* (Philadelphia: Jesper Harding, 1828), 4.

inmates through education. William Roscoe's 1819 work, *Observations on Penal Jurisprudence and the Reformation of Criminals*, pleaded that prisons should not be "... a seminary of crimes destructive to society, but a school of reformation."²³⁴ Clearly, Roscoe believed that prisons should be educational as well as custodial institutions, and he was not alone. The true innovation introduced by Jacksonian penal reformers was not transforming penal institutions into educational ones, but rather designing buildings in such a ways as to give penitentiary administrators total control over the curriculum.

Penitentiaries, Public Schools, and the Poor in Jacksonian America

It is not surprising that reformers saw penitentiaries and public schools as complementary institutions, because both emerged at the same time in response to economic and social changes of the Jacksonian Era. As Katz observed, "... in terms of finished products the objects of reformation [in penal institutions] were the same as the objects of public education: respect for authority, self-control, self-discipline, self-reliance and self-respect."²³⁵ These were particularly important values during a period of economic, social, and political transition, when the old cultural institutions for restraining deviance – the family, the church, and community disapproval – lost their power to enforce normative standards of behavior. As communities grew, they became impersonal and were no longer able to fill the informal educational and caretaker roles they once had. The responsibility for educating citizens and controlling deviance shifted to the state, which created bureaucratic institutions like schools, asylums, and penitentiaries to

²³⁴ Roscoe *Observations on Penal Jurisprudence*, 88.

²³⁵ Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (New York: Teachers College/Columbia University Press, 2001), 186.

provide these services and to manage or contain the pervasive economic and social change. Public schools and penitentiaries, which were often championed by the same men, emerged to solve some of the same problems, including crime and urban disorder. Both institutions reflected reformers' faith in education to reduce crime and reform offenders.

The two most important changes in America following the War of 1812 were the so-called "Market Revolution," and the concomitant growth of American cities. According to historian Charles Sellers, technological innovation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century coupled with American expansion and internal improvements created a capitalist economy (at least in the urban North) by the time Andrew Jackson assumed the presidency in 1829.²³⁶ Cities became manufacturing and trading centers, which led to explosive growth; according to historian Elizabeth M. Geffen, the population of Philadelphia and its surrounding areas swelled 58 percent in the 1840s and nearly 40 percent in the following decade. Philadelphia boasted an astounding 100,000 inhabitants after 1825, second only to New York.²³⁷

Urban growth was bolstered by America's emerging capitalist economy, which fostered a new set of values that reflected the country's changed circumstances. As Katz noted, capitalism is defined by wage labor, and he noted that its appearance had

²³⁶ Charles G. Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6-7.

²³⁷ Stuart M. Blumin "Residential Mobility Within the Nineteenth-Century City" in *The Peoples of Philadelphia: A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower Class Life, 1790-1940* ed. Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 47

“immense” consequences for the nation.²³⁸ One consequence was the breakdown in traditional forms of labor as factories replaced home workshops and machines replaced artisan labor with deskilled, repetitive wage work. Whereas before the Market Revolution, masters and journeymen produced goods in small workshops using techniques perfected during years of apprenticeship, the emergence of wage labor pushed production into factories and obviated the need for highly skilled artisans. As historian Sharon V. Salinger noted, by the end of the eighteenth-century, Philadelphia’s labor market was defined by “...a reliance on wage labor.”²³⁹ According to historian Bruce Laurie, between approximately 1820 and 1850, “... most handicraft workshops lost their easy ambience. Shops grew larger, and by 1850, when some twenty to thirty men worked together, their artisanal moorings were broken.”²⁴⁰ Specifically, industrial capitalism eroded the journeymen and masters’ autonomy and control of production, condemning a generation pathologically afraid of “dependence” to a lifetime of wage work.²⁴¹

Worse, reducing artisans to wage workers did not occur uniformly, meaning that industrialization created a class separation between those industries where masters continued to control production and those where unskilled or skilled laborers worked for

²³⁸ Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, xxiii.

²³⁹ Sharon V. Salinger, “*To Serve Well and Faithfully: Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

²⁴⁰ Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 38.

²⁴¹ For discussion of the effect of industrial capitalism on Philadelphia’s workers, see Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 14. An excellent discussion of Jacksonian Americans’ fear of dependence can be found in Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 30 as well as Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Welfare and the Poor in the Nineteenth-Century City* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), 19-23.

wages. Laurie has concluded that, in Philadelphia, real wages for skilled and unskilled employees declined between 1820 and 1840 while masters' incomes seem to have risen during this period.²⁴² This separation contributed to a widening cultural disparity between wageworkers and artisans. In addition, the emerging wealth disparities cut the ties of deference that formed the basis of relations between the classes before the Market Revolution. In colonial and Revolutionary America, the lower classes had deferred to community leaders – often wealthy, politically powerful men – because of an unspoken agreement: the leaders could rule as long as they exercised power in the best interests of all members of the community. According to historian Sean Wilentz, a form of class-consciousness emerged during this period that challenged the concept of deference, spurred by the working class' recognition that community leaders were no longer protecting their interests.²⁴³

Perhaps most important for this study is the changes industrialization wrought with regard to education. Historian Sharon Sundue has noted that during the Revolutionary and Early National period, formal education (learning that took place in schools) played a “marginal role” in most American children's lives, but that “Work...was central to [their lives because it was] regarded as the core of useful education, heralded as preventive against idleness and sin and essential to the vitality of the economy.”²⁴⁴ Apprenticeship was the key conduit by which this education was

²⁴² Laurie, *Working People*, 12.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴⁴ Sharon Braslaw Sundue, *Industrious in Their Stations: Young People at Work in Urban America, 1720-1810* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 1.

transmitted, but that a changing labor market rendered apprenticeship anachronistic by the end of the eighteenth century.²⁴⁵

Laurie noted that, as early as the late eighteenth-century, artisanal masters began slacking in their duties to their apprentices, which included teaching them to read and write. Apprenticeship had provided not just vocational training, but also literacy and mathematical skills as well, and its disappearance created an educational vacuum in an era before state subsidized public education. More important, these masters stopped teaching the “art and mystery” of their crafts, preferring instead to utilize the would-be journeymen as free labor, and leaving their apprentices with few realistic job prospects at the end of their apprenticeship.²⁴⁶ Laurie concluded that, as early as the 1780s, Boston housed an astonishing six journeymen for each master, creating a glut of labor sure to push down the price of goods.²⁴⁷ Wilentz noted, by the 1820s, apprenticeship had devolved into, “... juvenile wage labor for children from...the poorest families.”²⁴⁸ These displaced apprentices formed the backbone of America’s urban working class.

America’s newly emerging urban working class began demanding access to the political sphere, which often led to violence and rioting. Historian Michael Feldberg noted that, “Violence was central to the city’s artisan culture.”²⁴⁹ Violence served a

²⁴⁵ Salinger, “*To Serve Well and Faithfully*,” 3

²⁴⁶ Laurie, *Working People*, 5.

²⁴⁷ Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers*, 36.

²⁴⁸ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33.

²⁴⁹ Michael Feldberg, “Urbanization as a Cause of Violence: Philadelphia as a Test Case” in *The Peoples of Philadelphia: A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower Class Life, 1790-1940* ed. Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 57.

variety of purposes in antebellum America, including a “recreational function” that was “a social or economic asset.”²⁵⁰ At other times, urban working classes employed violence as a “bargaining tool” to protest price increases or wage cuts.²⁵¹ Between 1825 and the Civil War, riots broke out in urban centers around the country, including Boston (1825, 1829 and 1835), New York (1832, 1834, 1835, 1837, 1849 and 1857), Baltimore (1835, 1856, 1857, 1858, and 1859), and Washington, D.C. (1841 and 1857). The Quaker City was not immune; two ethno-cultural riots broke out in 1844 that resulted in a Catholic church being burned. Though people rarely died during riots (usually it was “only” one or two), they destroyed property and threatened public safety, which was inimical to capitalism and therefore frightening to urban elites.

In addition to class and ethnic tensions, violence was facilitated by alcohol consumption, which was an astonishing *three and a half times* higher than the amount Americans consume today. According to Feldberg, some workers were partially paid in alcohol, and “... nearly every workshop and factory employed young boys to run out frequently for buckets of beer.”²⁵² This exacerbated class tensions, because the newly emerging professional class, which was closely allied to capital’s interests, did not normally imbibe on the job; it would have sapped job performance. Sociologist Andrew Abbot wrote that the emerging factory work floor was not the place “... for the fuddled

²⁵⁰ Roger Lane, *Violent Death in the City: Suicide, Accident and Murder in 19th Century Philadelphia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 60.

²⁵¹ Feldberg “Urbanization as a Cause of Violence,” 56.

²⁵² Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 15.

execution, slow work, and relaxation that resulted from the then customary consumption of alcohol during the working day.”²⁵³ Historian Daniel Walker Howe noted “Although socially tolerated, drunkenness frequently generated violence, especially domestic violence, and other illegal behavior.”²⁵⁴ Drunkenness became increasingly associated with the working classes, and urban elites did not stop at temperance laws. They responded to the disorders of Jacksonianism by promoting laws designed to eliminate alcohol. Urban elites also created institutions such as hospitals, asylums, and penitentiaries designed to contain many of the working class’ purported excesses.

In many ways, Philadelphia’s public schools also reflected reformers’ anxieties about the disruptions of Jacksonianism; as Katz noted, “... educational reform was one aspect of a widespread effort of government, both state and local, and private philanthropy to create a network of institutions capable of restraining the effects of...large-scale manufacturing and increasing urbanism.”²⁵⁵ Though Philadelphia’s urban working classes vociferously demanded and supported public education, class bias was clearly visible in the 1818 law that established Philadelphia’s public school system.²⁵⁶ The law required parents to make a humiliating public declaration that they were indigent and therefore unable to pay for private schooling before their children were

²⁵³ Andrew Abbot, *The Systems of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 37.

²⁵⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167.

²⁵⁵ Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, 164.

²⁵⁶ Ken Fones-Wolf “An Industrial Giant Takes Shape, 1800-1872” in *Keystone of Democracy: A History of Pennsylvania Workers* ed. Howard Harris and Perry K. Blatz (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historian and Museum Commission, 1999), 51.

admitted to Philadelphia's public schools. Because many parents refused to do so, school enrollments remained low, so the act was amended in 1836 and the declaration was abolished. While the schools were now theoretically open to anyone, in reality, wealthy parents sent their elementary school aged children to private schools. Public elementary schools were designed for poor children, or those children most urban elites felt were most likely to commit the crimes – robbery, burglary, larceny, forgery, and theft – that necessitated a penitentiary. In this sense, Katz was partially correct when he noted that “... education was something the better part of the community did to others to make them orderly, moral, and tractable.”²⁵⁷ For instance, in July 1828, the PSAMPP assembled a digest of Pennsylvania's criminal laws, had it and printed, and distributed it gratis in the schools; the point is that these cultural elites believed that schools were an appropriate forum for introducing students to laws and encouraging their obedience.²⁵⁸

If this approach failed, and public school graduates committed crimes, the answer was another Jacksonian institution: the penitentiary. As Upton noted, British and American penal reformers “... envisioned the penitentiary as one of a range of institutions that defended society from deviance. ...[the penitentiary] was an institution of last resort when other means had failed.”²⁵⁹ By the 1830s, the movement toward incarceration that had started in the eighteenth-century culminated in an almost exclusive reliance on penal institutions to punish felonies. But penitentiaries were not just designed

²⁵⁷ Michael B. Katz *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), ix-x.

²⁵⁸ *Sketch of the Principle Transactions of the Philadelphia Society for the Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons From Its Origins to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: Merriehew and Thompson, 1859), 12.

²⁵⁹ Upton, *Another City*, 277.

to be punitive; they were also designed to reform inmates by inspiring penitence and teaching basic skills. They achieved this through aggressive religiosity and through an educational program that emphasized literacy and vocational learning. Penal reformers recognized that inmates needed to be taught not just to “love” labor, but also *how* to labor. Eastern State’s educational program illuminates the methods and goals of these self-consciously educational institutions.

The Pennsylvania System of Penitentiary Discipline

Lewis Morris’ story aptly demonstrates how the Pennsylvania System of penitential discipline functioned at Eastern State Penitentiary between 1829 and 1866. Its advocates believed that the key to reforming criminals was removing them from negative influences; they achieved this by segregating prisoners not only from visitors, but also from each other. Eastern State Penitentiary was thus the architectural embodiment of environmentalism, which posited that unwholesome environments corrupted people and pushed them to commit crime. As Katz noted, this was a “profoundly democratic” understanding of crime, because it implied that “... all men were inherently equal in moral potentiality.”²⁶⁰ In addition, it also appealed to the ethic of individualism that grew out of and supported the development of American capitalism; as historian Eric C. Schneider noted, free market principles, “... accentuated individual responsibility for failure.”²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, 180.

²⁶¹ Eric C. Schneider, *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s-1930s* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 33.

This understanding of the causes of deviance also suggested a reformative strategy: remove individual offenders from the unwholesome environment, and incarcerate them in separate cells in an institution devoid of temptation and corrupting influence. This thinking is reflected in the description of the Pennsylvania System written by Roberts Vaux's son, Richard, in 1867; according to Vaux, "All Christendom refers with respect to the system 'separate confinement,' to the careful, wholesome discipline, to the means of moral and literary instruction, with the absence of all temptation to error, to the provision for acquiring the means of honest support, and the care for the outgoing prisoner, which distinguish the Pennsylvania penitentiaries."²⁶² This vision of reform was congruent with the free market, individualist principles Schneider described, because the purpose of the Eastern State and penitentiaries was not to reform the *community*. Rather, the goal was to reform community members *as individuals*, which would in turn purge the community of corruption.²⁶³ Naturally, this program of reform ignored larger, more complex social phenomena that might incline individuals to commit crimes, preferring instead to view criminality through the lens of individuals corrupted by a rapidly changing society.

Eastern State Penitentiary was not America's, or even Philadelphia's, first penitentiary; as the last chapter made clear, that distinction belongs to the Walnut Street Jail. What makes Eastern State significant is that it is an important example of the use of prison architecture to reinforce a system of inmate reform. The institution was designed

²⁶² Richard Vaux, *The Pennsylvania System of Separate Confinement Explained and Defended* (Philadelphia: J.B. Chandler, 1867), 39.

²⁶³ Upton, *Another City*, 266.

on a hub-and-spoke design by Philadelphia architect John Haviland. All seven of its original cellblocks met at a central point (known as “center”), making it possible to survey all of them from one central location. This hub-and-spoke design was not revolutionary in and of itself: many county jails in Haviland’s native England followed such a plan.²⁶⁴ What differentiated Haviland’s design was the architect’s attempt to create a structure that helped achieve the PSAMPP’s goal of reforming inmates through separation. According to architectural historian Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, Eastern State’s historical importance “... lies in the way that its architect brought together ideas from [earlier prison designs] and merged them with the goals of [the PSAMPP] to create a prison that suited [their punishment needs].”²⁶⁵ Eastern State initiated a new era in prison design during which, according to Upton, “... all the new penitentiaries relied on a precisely calibrated architecture to accomplish their goals.”²⁶⁶

That Eastern and Western State merely *separated* inmates from one another, rather than kept them in solitary confinement, was an important distinction because critics maintained that solitary confinement drove men insane. As the 1843 annual report made clear: “Although prisoners are separated from one another they are not deprived of intercourse with their fellow men.” Both the warden and the moral instructor visited the prisoners frequently, and the penitentiary’s frequent visitors were often allowed to speak

²⁶⁴ Norman B. Johnston, *The Human Cage: A Brief History of Prison Architecture* (Philadelphia: The American Foundation, Inc., 1973), 30.

²⁶⁵ Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, *Building Power: Architecture and Surveillance in Victorian America* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 17.

²⁶⁶ Upton, *Another City*, 261.

to the inmates.²⁶⁷ Penal reformer Dorothea L. Dix, who visited Eastern State in the 1840s, emphasized the distinction between separate and solitary confinement, arguing that inmates saw the officers who distributed meals and work materials daily. Moreover, inmates had “... the means of communicating at any moment with the officer of corridor...he may see the minister or priest of his choice when he desires; the committee from the Prison PSAMPP, weekly; the inspectors twice a week.”²⁶⁸

The Pennsylvania System was extremely controversial, attracting visitors not only from around the nation, but around the world. Dix concluded in 1845 that her investigation revealed “... the many excellencies of the system” and “its few defects.”²⁶⁹ European tourist Harriet Martineau, who visited the penitentiary in the 1830s, wrote that she “... was convinced that the system of separate confinement at Philadelphia is the best that has yet been adopted.”²⁷⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, famed author of *Democracy in America*, and his partner Gustave de Beaumont, rhetorically asked:

Can there be a combination more powerful for reformation than that of a prison, which hands over the prisoner to all the trials of solitude, leads him through reflection to remorse, through religion to hope?²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Joseph and William Kite, 1843), 4 quoted in Robert Daniels Tuttle “The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, 1829-1870, MA Thesis (Univ. Chicago, 1946), 11.

²⁶⁸ Dorothea L. Dix *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Joseph Kite and Co., 1845), 72.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁷⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel, Vol. I*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838), 123.

²⁷¹ Beaumont and Tocqueville *On the Penitentiary System*, 84.

Naturally, the answer was a resounding “no.” But not all visitors were impressed; British novelist Charles Dickens visited the penitentiary in 1842, and concluded that “ ... nothing wholesome or good has ever had its growth in such unnatural solitude. . . . There is surely more than sufficient reason for abandoning a mode of punishment attended by so little hope or promise, and fraught, beyond dispute, with such a host of evils.”²⁷² The Pennsylvania Legislature even investigated the penitentiary’s claims regarding the reformatory effects of separate confinement, though it ultimately concluded that Eastern State lived up to its promises, and the institution earned the committee’s “approbation.”²⁷³

Despite what some scholars have maintained, Eastern State’s administrators were never able to totally implement the Pennsylvania System. For instance, Rothman argued “ ... throughout the pre-Civil War period, penitentiaries organized on the separate system made almost no compromises.”²⁷⁴ The evidence indicates that, in the words of historian Leslie Patrick, “ ... discipline at Eastern State Penitentiary was not imposed in the manner that advocates and authorities claimed.”²⁷⁵ Historian Jaqueline Thibaut called Warden Wood’s administration (1829-1840) “almost unbelievably informal,” and noted that inmates worked “all about the premises,” a clear violation of the principles of the

²⁷²Charles Dickens *American Notes* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2000), 122-3

²⁷³ *Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: J. Thompson, 1837), appendix 2.

²⁷⁴ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 95.

²⁷⁵ Leslie Patrick “Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country’s Premier Prison, Eastern State Penitentiary, 1831.” *Pennsylvania History*, vol. 67 (Summer, 2000), 363.

Pennsylvania System.²⁷⁶ The 1833 annual report listed the various occupations prisoners held; according to the report, there were five blacksmiths, one cook, and one apothecary, all positions that were almost certainly practiced outside inmates' cells.²⁷⁷ Worse, as early as the 1840s, the penitentiary was forced to hire guards who roamed the penitentiary's halls in an attempt to prevent inmates from communicating with one another; according to Andrzejewski "...prison officials had recognized the inadequacies of architectural means of surveillance and had come to rely on nonarchitectural strategies to assert their authority."²⁷⁸

While these early examples might be excused as minor deviations, the reality is that prisoners were employed outside their cells throughout this period; the May 1861 minutes for PSAMPP's Eastern State recorded their conclusion that "... it would also be desirable to get one of the prisoners to act permanently as librarian," a suggestion that was approved by the board and put into practice by the next month's meeting.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, while the majority of inmates (83 percent) at Eastern State between 1855 and 1860 worked in their cells, 13 percent of inmates were listed as "domestics,"

²⁷⁶ Jaqueline Thibaut, "'To Pave the Way to Penitence: Prisoners and Discipline at the Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829-1835.'" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* vol. CVI (April, 1982), 211

²⁷⁷ *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, 1833), 9.

²⁷⁸ Andrzejewski, *Building Power*, 16.

²⁷⁹ Minutes, May 1861, Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

revealing that the penitentiary's world renowned system of separate confinement was not absolute as late as thirty years after its opening.²⁸⁰

The irony here is that one component of the penitentiary's reformatory program – separation – was sacrificed for another: labor. It would appear that the reason was simple: cost. For Eastern State to exist as a publicly supported, non-profit making institution the penitentiary's administrators had to cut corners wherever they could, including by employing inmates in support positions. This does not prove that the penitentiary's founders cynically mouthed a humane penal philosophy while greedily rubbing their hands in anticipation of extracting windfall profits from inmate labor. For instance, in 1833, the Board of Inspectors made a point of ordering Warden Wood to replace inmates who worked outside their cells with people hired for those positions.²⁸¹ This statement belies the assertion that inmate labor at the penitentiary was exploitative. At Eastern State, labor was first and foremost designed to be educational and reformatory; profit was a secondary concern.

Labor and Reform

The January 1862 issue of the PSAMPP's *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* articulated the rationale for incarceration at labor arguing that, “... the possession of [labor] is a positive good, not only as a comfort and companion in their

²⁸⁰ Barnes, “The Economics of American Penology as Illustrated by the Experience of the State of Pennsylvania,” *The Journal of Political Economy* 29, 8 (Oct., 1921), 622.

²⁸¹ Jaqueline Thibaut, “To Pave the Way to Penitence,” 212

separate hours, but also as a reformatory agent.”²⁸² This statement reflects the PSAMPP’s belief that labor was itself reformatory, in that it focused the mind; this argument, as well as the fact that prison labor gave inmates marketable skills were the reasons that the PSAMPP so enthusiastically promoted incarceration labor. David J. Rothman noted that the *idea* of labor, separate from its profitability, was “central to the penitentiary.”²⁸³ Proponents of incarceration labor also believed that incarceration labor overcame convicts’ purported natural laziness and disinclination to work. According to PSAMPP member (and editor of its journal) William Parker Foulke, “If we are to reconcile to steady occupation men, most of whom owe their incarceration to a dislike of it, we must accustom them to find in labor a comfort which they have not known; to obtain voluntarily from it, by habitual application, protection from evil thoughts and from the natural results of idleness, for the first time clearly manifested in them.”²⁸⁴

One of the reasons contemporary observers believed that laziness caused crimes was because of the nature of convictions. From the penitentiary’s opening through 1846, Eastern State received 2,176 prisoners. Of these, more than half (51 percent) were convicted of larceny; the other crimes rounding out the top five were burglary (11 percent), horse theft (6.8 percent), forgery (4 percent), and passing counterfeit money (3.6 percent). In all, these five non-violent, property-based offenses accounted for 75.6

²⁸² *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Jan. 1862), 5.

²⁸³ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 105.

²⁸⁴ William Parker Foulke, “Remarks on Cellular Separation: Read by Appointment of the American Association for the Improvement of Penal and Reformatory Institutions, at the Annual Meeting in New York, November 29, 1860” contained in Richard Vaux, *The Pennsylvania System of Separate Confinement Explained and Defended* (Philadelphia: J.B. Chandler, 1867), 36.

percent of all sentences to the penitentiary. The first violent crime on the list, manslaughter, was sixth highest, accounting for a mere 2.8 percent of all convictions, which is statistically almost the same as the seventh highest crime, robbery (2.7 percent).²⁸⁵ These numbers dovetailed with the fact that most of Eastern State's inmates had never been taught a trade. Of the prisoners received in 1856, 74.66 percent had not been apprenticed, while 11.64 percent ran away from their masters without completing their apprenticeships; a mere 13.7 percent of inmates completed their apprenticeships.²⁸⁶ This was likely due to the fact that apprenticeship was waning as the preferred method of educating non-elite children, creating a vacuum that had only recently and incompletely been filled with public schools. Penal reformers did not make that connection. They saw inmates, the majority of whom had been convicted of economic crimes, and concluded that this was due to the fact that those inmates either did not *want* to work or did not know how, which the penitentiary's regimen was designed to alleviate.

The penitentiary's vocational education program, which was designed to be an apprenticeship of sorts, speaks to the fact that, for all their good intentions, Philadelphia's penal reformers were looking backward rather than forward. The values and approaches toward labor they sought to teach inmates were artisanal values that were increasingly out of step in a rapidly mechanizing workplace. As historian Daniel T. Rodgers noted, equating work with virtue, which the PSAMPP clearly did, made little sense by this time

²⁸⁵ *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Ed Barrington, 1847), 11.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35

because “ ... the context in which [those values] had taken root had all but been obliterated.”²⁸⁷

Eastern State Penitentiary’s administration was extremely proud of its vocational education program, noting in 1833 that only 9 of the 43 inmate weavers and 4 of the 32 shoemakers “ ... understood these branches when admitted.”²⁸⁸ The 1862 annual report was even more enthusiastic, noting that “ ... many of the prisoners, who in early life were victims of neglect, by the education gained in the penitentiary, have established the basis of an honest livelihood.”²⁸⁹ In this way, Eastern State’s vocational education program inculcated the same values – education, hard work, discipline, and sobriety – that had made the penitentiary’s founders (in their minds) so successful. In this way, this was not just a strategy for making the inmates compliant workers once their sentences expired; it was also an honest attempt to give them the tools to succeed. It is almost as if the administrators were saying, “These values made us successful. If you adopt them, you too can be successful.” While this attitude may have been chauvinistic, it was also sincere, and penitentiary officials believed they held the inmates’ best interests at heart.

Beyond being merely a tool for reformation, Eastern State’s labor system was both a carrot and a stick; according to Martineau, prisoners were told that their diet would be cut if they failed to work. But the warden also made clear to inmates that, if they

²⁸⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii.

²⁸⁸ *Fourth Annual Report of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, 1833), 10.

²⁸⁹ *Twenty-third Annual Report of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: McLaughlin, 1862), 35.

worked above what was considered “hard labor” – i.e. if their productivity was higher than what was expected – “ ... the price of it will be laid by to accumulate, and paid over to him on his leaving prison.”²⁹⁰ In 1841, the average prisoner received \$28.52 upon release for overwork wages, a pretty tidy sum given the fact that the average wage for carpenters in nearby Chester County in the late 1830s was \$1.75 per day.²⁹¹ Even after the penitentiary’s directors changed the system in 1852 (inmates were assigned work that equaled their cost to the state, and were permitted to keep half of any overwork), parolees received an average of \$12.41 upon release.²⁹² Clearly, while inmates did not become wealthy during their incarceration, the penitentiary’s labor system provided opportunities for them to build a small nest egg to smooth their reentry into society.

In addition to providing opportunities for making money, the penitentiary’s labor program was not particularly arduous. Historian Glen Gildemeister noted “An accepted rule of thumb among wardens and contractors was that one convict laborer would produce two-thirds what a free laborer would each day.”²⁹³ According to Dix, inmate tasks were “ ... not burthensome, are accomplished at intervals during the day, the prisoner being left to choose his time: so his work accomplished, he has liberty to rest, to read, or write, to listen to the counsels of the chaplain, or the teachings of the schoolmaster, and to cultivate in its season the small plot of ground, which the

²⁹⁰ Martineau *Retrospect of Western Travel, Vol. I*, 128.

²⁹¹ For the average amount distributed to paroled prisoners in 1841, see Glen Gildemeister, “Prison Labor and Convict Competition in Industrializing America, 1840-1890” Ph.D. diss (Northern Illinois University, 1977), 102. The information regarding carpenters’ salaries in Chester County was taken from Wolf, “An Industrial Giant Takes Shape,” 49.

²⁹² Gildemeister, “Prison Labor,” 103.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

industrious have much pleasure in keeping in order, and in which an hour daily may be spent.”²⁹⁴

The PSAMPP was not alone in arguing that ignorance and crime were related; Reverend S.G. Lathrop, chaplain of the Illinois state penitentiary (and later superintendent of Chicago’s New Mission and Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church) asserted that people often committed crimes due to “perverted” or aborted apprenticeships. He wrote that “ ... those prisoners who profess to have learned trades have, in general, acquired them so imperfectly, that they are of little avail in enabling them to earn an honest livelihood. Half learned trades, almost equally with no trades, are a cause of destitution and crime.”²⁹⁵ Like the PSAMPP, Lathrop argued that ignorance (in this case, lack of vocational education) caused many convicts to commit their crimes; the corollary of this argument is that penitentiaries must therefore remedy this defect by teaching inmates a trade. Lathrop, much like the PSAMPP, believed in the reformative value of prison labor and promoted penitentiaries’ responsibility for teaching their inmates.

While some penal reformers celebrated the virtues of incarceration labor, free labor was, unsurprisingly, less enthusiastic. Eastern State adopted the “public account system,” under which inmates manufactured goods and the penitentiary sold them on the open market, in competition with non-inmate manufactured products, which workingmen correctly saw as a threat to their livelihoods. One workingman’s newspaper decried

²⁹⁴ Dix *Remarks on Prisons*, 71.

²⁹⁵ Rev. S.G. Lathrop, *Crime and its Punishment and Life in the Penitentiary* (Joliet, IL: Re. S.G. Lathrop, 1866), 55.

prison labor, arguing that “ ... branch after branch of the mechanical professions are becoming subject to the monopoly of convict labor, as if the system of producing the most unjust and demoralizing effects, were actually working righteously and profitably!”²⁹⁶ *The Mechanics’ Magazine, and Journal of the Mechanic’s Institute* denounced prison labor, arguing that it was “ ... calculated, to make many an honest and well-meaning mechanic feel shame and disgust in consequence of the society with which he has been unconsciously brought into competition and association – felons!”²⁹⁷ *The American Masonic Register and Literary Companion* went so far as to call prison labor “odious,”²⁹⁸ while *The New York Sentinel and Working Man’s Advocate* steamed that “ ... the government grossly abuses its trust, and inflicts an incalculable injury on society” in supporting prison labor.²⁹⁹ In retaliation, New York’s mechanics simply refused to hire discharged convicts who had learned their trades in the penitentiaries.³⁰⁰

Penitentiary labor has also aroused a great deal of scholarly controversy; some have argued that the labor was primarily educational or humanitarian while others have viewed it as exploitative and profit-driven. Some scholars saw penitentiaries as merely institutions designed to inculcate prisoners with values and habits that would make them docile workers when they emerged from incarceration. This view is most explicitly stated

²⁹⁶ “The State Prison Monopoly,” *The Man*, June 6, 1843.

²⁹⁷ “State Prison Labor,” *The Mechanics’ Magazine, and Journal of the Mechanic’s Institute* Sept. 13, 1834.

²⁹⁸ “Mechanics and State Prison Labor” *The American Masonic Register and Literary Companion* Jul 21, 1841.

²⁹⁹ “State Prison Sales,” *The New York Sentinel and Working Man’s Advocate*, Jul 21, 1830.

³⁰⁰ Gildemeister, “Prison Labor,” 129.

in *The Prison and the Factory*, a 1981 study edited by Dario Melossi & Massimo Pavarini. According to Pavarini, “... the history of the rise of the American prison is (also) the history of models of prison employment,” making prisons places where inmates are reeducated to be compliant workers and not a threat to private property.³⁰¹ Historian Christopher Adamson examined the century from 1790 to 1890 and concluded that downswings in the U.S. economy prompted reformers to reconsider prison industry because outside lobbies (business and labor interests) considered convict labor a threat.³⁰² These scholars dismissed out of hand the notion that reformers were earnest in their attempts to educate and reform inmates, seeing instead a hidden agenda of capitalist exploitation.

Scholars who have criticized penal labor have usually constructed a dichotomy between reform based on education, which is “good,” and labor-based reform, which they assert is “bad.” This view was best expressed by Eric C. Schneider in his study of juvenile delinquency in Boston between the 1810s and the 1930s. According to Schneider, reformers faced a choice “... between two versions of reform: one based on education, the other based on manual labor; one expensive, the other supposedly cost effective; one based on self-restraint, the other based on imposed order.”³⁰³ Schneider’s construction of education versus labor is similar to the line Katz drew between

³⁰¹ Massimo Pavarini “The Penitentiary Invention: the US Experience of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in Dario Melossi and Massimo Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981), 135.

³⁰² Christopher Adamson “Toward a Marxian Penology: Captive Criminal Populations as Economic Threats and Resources” *Social Problems*, 31, 4 (Apr., 1984), 435.

³⁰³ Schneider, *In the Web of Class*, 40.

educational and penal institutions; my research indicates that these are false dichotomies. As I previously mentioned, David J. Rothman correctly noted that the *idea* of labor, divorced from any discussion of profitability, was essential to the penitentiaries' reformatory programs.³⁰⁴ Incarceration labor was not a discrete activity that took place in addition, or in opposition, to reform. Instead, it is important to see incarceration labor as one part of a multi-pronged effort to reform individual inmates through education.

Even scholars with a less cynical view of penal reformers' motives have overlooked or dismissed the educational content of penitential discipline. For instance, Robert Daniels Tuttle erroneously concluded that Eastern State's administration promoted vocational education partly to "... offset the expenses of the prisoners' upkeep." According to Tuttle, "... the founders didn't have the educational interests of the prisoners as such in mind."³⁰⁵ Historian Larry Goldsmith concluded that, when the administrators of Massachusetts' state prison at Charlestown discussed the possibility of expanding the prison school's curriculum, "... the desirability of education came up against the necessity of labor, and the latter, which promised to not only reform the criminal but also to pay for his reformation, ultimately prevailed."³⁰⁶ Goldsmith's argument presumes that labor and education functioned discretely, and that academic education was considered a luxury that could be cut when the budget demanded. Eastern State's experience demonstrates that Pennsylvania's experience differed from

³⁰⁴ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 105.

³⁰⁵ Robert Daniels Tuttle, "The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, 1829-1870," MA Thesis (Univ. Chicago, 1946), 17.

³⁰⁶ Larry Goldsmith "History from the Inside Out: Prison Life in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts" *Journal of Social History*, 31, 1 (Autumn, 1997): 118.

Massachusetts'; labor in Pennsylvania *was* supposed to be educational, not simply profitable, and all branches of education – academic, moral and vocational – were considered vital components of the penitentiary's reformatory program.

There were moments where Eastern State's administrators had lapses of judgment regarding the balance of reformation and profit; one such lapse occurred in 1859, when the PSAMPP's committee on the penitentiary briefly discussed whether more profitable trades could be introduced at Eastern State or sentences lengthened, so that prisoners could become profitable in their newly learned trades; nothing seems to have come of the suggestion.³⁰⁷ But, when viewed in the context of the penitentiary's history, these lapses were few and far between. In reality, Eastern State's experience more closely matches historian Gerald Grob's portrait of benevolent and sincere philanthropists whose efforts at humane treatment were derailed by deficient public funding.³⁰⁸ Scholars who have studied Eastern State's labor program agree. According to Teeters, Eastern State's labor program had two goals: teaching the inmate a skill or trade and defraying the cost of prison administration and construction.³⁰⁹ Sociologist William Staples agreed, arguing that prison labor in Jacksonian Pennsylvania was " ... dedicated to the notion that inmate labor was primarily for the purposes of reformation and not profit," though he does admit that the state penitentiaries occasionally yielded to the temptation to offset costs through

³⁰⁷ Committee minutes, 6/21/1859 Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁰⁸ Gerald N. Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History at Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1966), introduction.

³⁰⁹ Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 142.

inmate labor.³¹⁰ Even David J. Rothman, no supporter of the Pennsylvania System, noted that Eastern State's administrators were not solely interested in profit because, "... if profit alone preoccupied [them], they could have found a better return on their investments elsewhere."³¹¹

Penitentiary Operation

Eastern State was located in Philadelphia's Fairmount section, which, during mid-nineteenth century, was a center of charitable institutions, including the House of Refuge, Girard College for Orphans, and the City Hospital for patients with infectious diseases.

³¹² The prison administration consisted of a warden, a physician, and (after 1838) a moral instructor, all appointed and overseen by five inspectors who were in turn appointed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The inspectors directly oversaw the penitentiary's operation, by setting salaries and purchasing raw materials for inmate labor and selling the final product. In addition, they visited the prison at least twice weekly, talking with inmates to ensure the penitentiary was living up to its humane ideals. Unlike the inspectors at other penitentiaries, sociologist Finn Hornum observed "The Eastern State inspectors took their oversight responsibilities very seriously and appear to have had considerable influence on policy."³¹³

³¹⁰ William G. Staples, "In the Interest of the State: Production Politics in the Nineteenth Century Prison" *Sociological Perspectives*, 33 (Autumn, 1990), 383.

³¹¹ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 104.

³¹² Michele Taillon Taylor, "Neighborhood and Prison Management in the Early Nineteenth Century," in Marianna Thomas, ed., *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, 165.

³¹³ Finn Hornum, "Prison Governance and Administration, 1829-1865" in Marianna Thomas, ed., *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, 65.

The law required the warden to visit every prisoner every day (an arduous task in a prison with 385 prisoners in 1837), to interview every incoming inmate, and to appoint the overseers (guards responsible for teaching prisoners their assigned labor and maintaining security). In addition, the warden maintained a daily journal, recording entries, discharges, deaths, illnesses among the prisoners, punishments, and any unusual activity, as required by law. According to Hornum, the warden played “ ... the most important management role,” because he oversaw the penitentiary’s day-to-day operation. The overseers, or prison guards, were primarily responsible for maintaining the penitentiary’s safety and security; article III of the 1821 law authorizing Eastern State’s construction stated, “It shall be the duty of the overseers to inspect the conditions of each prisoner at least three times in every day, to see that his meals are regularly delivered, according to the prison allowance, and to superintend the work of the prisoners.”³¹⁴

The law’s language fails to convey the fact that the overseers were also educators responsible for teaching inmates a trade. When she visited Eastern State, Dix noted that the overseers met with prisoners and taught them how to work.³¹⁵ According to penal reformer M.B. Sampson, the penitentiary sought “ ... persons duly qualified to be employed to teach the prisoner suitable trades, and to instruct him in religion and in the elements of learning.”³¹⁶ This multiplicity of roles figured in the penitentiary’s hiring

³¹⁴ “A Further Supplement to an act, entitled ‘An act to reform the Penal Laws of this Commonwealth,’” in *Acts of the General Assembly Relating to the Eastern State Penitentiary and to the New Prisons of the City and County of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.W. Allen, 1831), 13.

³¹⁵ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons*, 72.

³¹⁶ M.B. Sampson, *Criminal Jurisprudence Considered in Relation to Cerebral Organization* (London: Samuel Highley, 1843), 66.

practices; Warden Wood noted in his journal on November 18, 1829, that he “Employed Allan Fisher to cut out leather and instruct in shoemaking.”³¹⁷ When D.L. Davis, who had “... been acting as an overseer in the fifth block gallery,” left the penitentiary in June 1858, the warden noted “... a shoemaker being required in the place he occupied.”³¹⁸

Beyond vocational education, overseers apparently also occasionally functioned as academic educators as well. Warden Halloway noted in April 1860 that he had “... engaged John Dickenson as an overseer to assist in the library and in instructing the prisoners in reading and writing”³¹⁹ Overseers even occasionally read to prisoners in their cells, a situation that got out of control on October 31, 1847. According to Warden Scattergood’s daily journal, prisoner 2120 asked his overseer, David Scattergood, to come into his cell and read to him; “... whilst so engaged the prisoner watched his opportunity to slip out of the cell and tho’ the overseer sprung after him he succeeded in getting out and shutting the door.”³²⁰ Comical as this incident is, it demonstrates that overseers were more than mere prison guards; they also functioned as vocational and, occasionally, academic educators, and were therefore a key component of Eastern State’s educational program.

³¹⁷ Warden’s Daily Journal 11/18/1829 RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

³¹⁸ Warden’s Daily Journal 6/11/1858 RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

³¹⁹ Warden’s Daily Journal, 4/2/1860 RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

³²⁰ Warden’s Daily Journal, 10/31/1847 RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

That being said, the primary burden of educating Eastern State’s inmates fell upon the moral instructor, who oversaw the moral and academic instruction of the penitentiary’s inhabitants. While all three prongs of Eastern State’s educational mission – vocational, moral, and academic – were considered equally essential to reform, it was the moral instructor, more so than the overseers, who were responsible for achieving this task. The law required the moral instructor to provide religious and moral instruction, containing “ ... as far as possible the means of their reformation, so that when restored to their liberty, they may prove honest, industrious, and useful members of society.”³²¹ As such, the moral instructor was a vital and important part of the penitentiary’s staff, and a crucial component in formulating and implementing Eastern State’s reformatory curriculum.

In this regard, Eastern State was typical; many Jacksonian Era penitentiaries provided educational opportunities for inmates, even if those institutions were less committed to reformation than Philadelphia’s penitentiary. Though the New York system contrasted very sharply with the Pennsylvania System, both provided educational programming for inmates. In 1819, New York’s legislature ordered the construction of an eighty-cell wing at the Auburn prison modeled on the Walnut Street Jail, though without labor; this was abandoned four years later after five men died and one went insane.³²² Although originally introduced at Auburn Prison in 1816, the New York System is most

³²¹ A Further Supplement to an act, entitled ‘An act to reform the Penal Laws of this Commonwealth’ in *Acts of the General Assembly Relating to the Eastern State Penitentiary and to the New Prisons of the City and County of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.W. Allen, 1831), 17.

³²² Frederick Howard Wines, LLD, *Punishment and Reformation: An Historical Sketch of the Rise of the Penitentiary System* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1895), 150.

closely associated with the state's infamous penitentiary in Ossining known as Sing Sing, which opened in 1828. Authorized by an act of the New York legislature on March 7, 1825, construction proceeded quickly (probably due to the fact that inmate labor was used), and the prison opened in May 1828. While Eastern State was built on a radial plan, Sing Sing's cellblocks were long and narrow, and prisoners only slept in their cells. During the day, they labored silently in factory style work environments.

Sing Sing's first warden, Elam Lynds, was specifically chosen for his reputation as a rigid (some would say inhumane) disciplinarian. A former Army captain, Lynds viewed inmates as "the enemy," and treated them with cruelty and contempt.³²³ He was so concerned that the penitentiary turn a profit that he ordered all "shirkers," or inmates who refused to work, be whipped. Public outrage over the discovery that a sick inmate had been dragged from his bed, beaten, and forced to work compelled Lynds to resign in 1839.³²⁴ Edward Livingston, who corresponded with Lynds, reported that the warden " ... did not expect reformation" because he considered it "hopeless." Livingston went on to assert the superiority of the New York system, " ... but it does not, and cannot, from the nature of things, ever approach perfection, if we allow reformation to enter into our views, and if we wish to guard against the abuse of authority."³²⁵ Yet, the Prison Discipline Society noted in 1827 that Lynds had " ... spared no pains to open the way for

³²³Dennis Brian, *Sing Sing: The Inside Story of a Notorious Prison* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), 15.

³²⁴ Christopher Adamson, "Toward a Marxian Penology," 446.

³²⁵ Edward Livingston, *Letter from Edward Livingston, Esq. to Roberts Vaux on the Advantages of the Pennsylvania System of Prison Discipline* (Philadelphia: Lester Harding, 1828), 7.

the introduction of a chaplain in this institution, who shall devote his whole time to [moral and religious instruction of the inmates].”³²⁶

Moral Instruction and Literacy

The legislation authorizing Eastern State’s construction and outlining its administration specified that the penitentiary’s religious staff would be all volunteer out of fear that a paid chaplaincy would lead to sectarian indoctrination.³²⁷ In particular, the law stipulated that Eastern State’s inspectors “... shall attend to the religious instructions of the prisoners and procure a suitable person for this object, who shall be a religious instructor of the prisoners: *Provided*, Their services shall be gratuitous.”³²⁸ Robert Daniels Tuttle quoted the 1831 *Annual Report*, which responded to fears of sectarianism by arguing “... that religious instruction may be imparted to the prisoners, without the slightest bias from sectarian influence.”³²⁹ Sectarianism was perceived to threaten the pan-Protestant ideology that defined many American institutions, especially the republic’s emerging public school system.

Education was a largely religious affair in Jacksonian America; historian Daniel Walker Howe noted that America’s Sunday Schools, which appeared at this time, “...

³²⁶ *Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1829), 43

³²⁷ Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 53.

³²⁸ “A Further Supplement to an act, entitled ‘An act to reform the Penal Laws of this Commonwealth’ in *Acts of the General Assembly Relating to the Eastern State Penitentiary and to the New Prisons of the City and County of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.W. Allen, 1831), 12.

³²⁹ *Fifth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Harrisburg, PA: Welsh and Patterson, 1834), 4, quoted in Robert Daniels Tuttle “The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, 1829-1870, MA Thesis (Univ. Chicago, 1946),6.

provided one day a week of instruction in basic literacy for 200,000 American children by 1827.”³³⁰ Historian Larry Goldsmith noted that “... run by volunteer teachers under the guidance of the American Sunday School Union, independent local schools provided a non-denominational Protestant “moral education” and the literacy necessary for Bible reading.”³³¹ Sundue called Sunday schools “...by far the most popular and successful efforts to instruct poor children in Philadelphia...after 1790.”³³² The fact that Sunday schools included both teaching and preaching (from the same man) demonstrates how porous the boundaries were between “religious” and “literary” education. In an era when Philadelphia’s public schools required daily Bible reading and the Bible was often used as a textbook, the difference between “religious” education and “academic” education was difficult to parse. Even after public schools came into existence, the curriculum often included Bible readings that reflected elements common to all Protestant denominations, though it purposefully excluded Catholicism. Educational reformers would never have advocated a non-Christian public school system, meaning that, for students in Jacksonian America, there was little distinction between academic and religious instruction.

Religion was such an integral part of the public education system, that when rising access to public education dovetailed with rising crime rates in Jacksonian America, many authors merely asserted that the public schools failed to provide enough religious content. Reverend S.G. Lathrop discussed “perverted” education in his *Crime and Its Punishment*, arguing that inmates’ “... education has been a perverted one. They

³³⁰ Howe *What Hath God Wrought*, 449.

³³¹ Larry Goldsmith “History from the Inside Out: Prison Life in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts” *Journal of Social History*, 31 (Autumn, 1997): 177.

³³² Sundue, *Industrious In Their Station*, 187.

have been taught false doctrines in relation to crime.”³³³ The answer was, naturally, more education, but this time of the right character. An anonymous 1857 pamphlet attacked the purported secularity of America’s public school system, arguing that it failed to reduce crime because it only schooled, it did not educate. According to one pamphleteer, “ ... an intellectual education may retrain a man from the violent use of his hands upon property or person, but it will certainly assist him in the criminal use of his wits.”³³⁴ Preventing the public schools from merely creating a better class of criminals required a public education thoroughly imbued with religious, meaning Protestant Christian, values, because “ ... you will always diminish crime and degradation in a land, in proportion as you give a moral and religious education to the young.”³³⁵

Any threat to this pan-Protestant nationalism, like Deism or Catholicism, was considered extremely grave. Eastern State’s warden was so concerned about the infiltration of Deistic thought into the prison that he ordered a biography and collections of the works of Thomas Paine removed from the penitentiary library because it promoted “deistical doctrines.”³³⁶ In another instance, Warden Wood confronted an overseer for promoting “deistical doctrines among the prisoners;” Wood recounted the conversation, saying that he told the overseer that he was inclined to fire him, but he could not because the dismissal would be attributed to “other motives,” possibly a reference to the charges

³³³ Rev. S.G. Lathrop *Crime and its Punishment and Life in the Penitentiary* (Joliet, IL: Re. S.G. Lathrop, 1866), 83.

³³⁴ *Crime Increasing and Our School Tax Wasted* (Newark, NJ: A. Stephen Holbrook, 1857), 19.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

³³⁶ Anecdote contained in Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 54.

that were leveled against the prison the following year.³³⁷ In 1834, the Pennsylvania Legislature created a committee to investigate five charges against the penitentiary's administration: first, immoral behavior among overseers, employees, and inmates, second, embezzlement of public property, third cruel and unusual punishments inflicted on inmates, fourth, practices inconsistent with penal discipline, and fifth, deviations from the Pennsylvania system.³³⁸ The first, third, and fourth charges sprang from lurid stories concerning a Mrs. Blundin, the wife of one of the penitentiary's overseers. Apparently she held lavish parties, stole food from the penitentiary store, and engaged in sexual intercourse with guards and inmates, resulting in a venereal disease outbreak. The second and fifth charges were aimed at Warden Wood, and involved allegations that he misappropriated prison labor for his own profit and punished an inmate so severely that the man died.³³⁹

According to Warden Wood, the charges resulted from sectarian differences within the prison administration; Wood argued that many of the overseers were deists and that at least one was " ... a strong sectarian who was busy inculcating among the prisoners his own notions."³⁴⁰ Because of Wood's counter charges, witnesses' religious beliefs were examined, and any holding "unorthodox" views or those who were Deists were

³³⁷ Warden's Daily Journal 12/22/1833 RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg

³³⁸ *A Concise History of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Neall and Massey, 1835), 34

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁴⁰ Samuel Wood quoted in Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 97.

disqualified from testifying before the committee.³⁴¹ Not surprisingly, the warden was ultimately vindicated, though the Blundins left the penitentiary.

Deism was not the only sectarian division facing Eastern State's administration; the Quaker community, which provided important manpower and political assistance to the PSAMPP, split over the "Hicksite Question." Elias Hicks, for whom the Hicksite movement is named, believed that American Quakerism had developed an anti-democratic and corrupt oligarchy, and that Quakers should reject worldliness.³⁴² In 1827, Hicks' followers walked out of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and established their own, forcing other yearly meetings to recognize it and fomenting a schism within Quakerism.³⁴³ This schism produced bitter, and long lasting, acrimony. The *Historic Structures Report* quoted Warden Thomas Scattergood's 1849 complaint about Mary Caley's allegedly Hicksite ministry to the prisoners in which he noted that she failed to direct penitents toward the savior, a point noted by all the guards who overheard her.³⁴⁴

John Stanford's 1819 *Catechism for the Use of the Schools in the Alms-House and the Penitentiary, New-York* illuminates the interrelationship between religious and literary education and the fact that penitentiaries were educational institutions. Though there is no evidence that it was used at Eastern State, Stanford's catechism speaks to the assumptions that guided the penitentiary's educational policies. The catechism contains

³⁴¹ Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 97.

³⁴² Howe *What Hath God Wrought*, 195.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁴⁴ Scattergood quoted in Michele Taillon Taylor "Early Administration and Controversy in the 1830s" in Marianna Thomas, ed. *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, 70.

numerous lessons with titles like “On Man’s Relation to his Maker” and “On Morality,” but the most pertinent to this discussion is “On Education.” Structured as a series of questions and answers that students were expected to memorize, the catechism offers insight into penitentiaries’ educational priorities:

Q. What is education?

A. The improvement of the mind in useful knowledge

Q. What kind of learning will be of most use to you?

A. I wish to learn to spell, to read, to write, and to cipher

Q. Are these the most necessary?

A. I think so; but I should like to get more learning, besides, while I am young; for afterwards, I may not have the opportunity

Q. You said, you considered writing necessary

A. It is, for every one that cannot write his name is ashamed of his ignorance³⁴⁵

It is striking that a catechism designed to acquaint prisoners with Christianity would devote any space to promoting “secular” subjects like writing and reading. Just as the anonymous pamphleteer believed that literary education needed to be balanced by moral education, John Stanford asserted the reverse: namely, that true moral education required a thorough knowledge of “secular” subjects. In Jacksonian America, while Americans drew distinctions between the literary and religious education, they nonetheless saw them as complementary and necessary, a belief that was reflected in penitential education.

William Parker Foulke felt that the Pennsylvania System was uniquely suited to educate convicts because:

The instructor not only has a choice of time, which is impossible under any other arrangement, and which is of great importance to the individualization of his

³⁴⁵ John Stanford, *A Catechism for the Use of the Schools in the Alms-House and the Penitentiary*, New York (New York, T. and J. Swords, 1819), 29-31.

efforts; he also has in his favor the fact, that his teaching is rendered more acceptable by its coming in a better manner, as an alleviation of punishment... In a separate cell the intervals between the hours of instruction may be more freely, and probably will be more customarily, given to the reconsideration of what has been learned, than in an associate room where there are many constant and external distractions.³⁴⁶

Yet, without a full time, paid moral instructor, the amount of reform was limited.

PSAMPP members and visitors alike criticized the fact that penitentiary lacked a full time moral instructor, often arguing that such a deficiency handicapped the institution's efforts to reform inmates. The 1832 annual report criticized the law requiring chaplains to serve gratis, saying:

Moral and religious instruction form one of the most important features of the system and will require the faithful, unremitting, and undivided time of a chaplain or religious instructor³⁴⁷

William Crawford noted that, though each prisoner had access to a Bible and religious tracts, the penitentiary lacked a moral instructor, and therefore “... the moral and religious instruction of the prisoner is so greatly neglected, that the reformatory effects of which the system is capable, cannot be developed.”³⁴⁸ The PSAMPP's great rival, the Prison Discipline Society of Boston, sniped during Eastern State's construction “... we may hope, therefore, if the [Pennsylvania System] is again tried, it will not be done without adequate provision for moral and religious instruction.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ William Parker Foulke, “Remarks on Cellular Separation: Read by Appointment of the American Association for the Improvement of Penal and Reformatory Institutions, at the Annual Meeting in New York, November 29, 1860” contained in Richard Vaux, *The Pennsylvania System of Separate Confinement Explained and Defended* (Philadelphia: J.B. Chandler, 1867), 34-35.

³⁴⁷ *Third Annual Report of Eastern State Penitentiary* (Harrisburg, PA: Henry Welsh, 1832), 4.

³⁴⁸ Crawford *Report on the Penitentiaries*, 10.

³⁴⁹ *Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1829), 43.

This changed in 1838 when the Pennsylvania Legislature passed Resolution Nineteen, which authorized the Inspectors to elect or appoint a salaried moral instructor, “ ... whose duty shall be to advise and instruct prisoners therein confined in their moral and religious obligations and perform such services as shall, in the opinion of said inspectors, appertain to his station.”³⁵⁰ Tuttle concluded that the two proximate causes for the legislature’s change of heart were the Legislature’s 1834 investigation of the penitentiary, and William Crawford’s 1835 report, which (while generally favorable) urged the state to employ a full time, salaried moral instructor, which demonstrates the integration of religion and education.³⁵¹

The inspectors hired Reverend Thomas Larcombe in 1838 to be Eastern State’s moral instructor, a position he held for the next 23 years. Larcombe was a minister at Philadelphia’s First Baptist Church as well as a teacher in a Philadelphia public school.³⁵² Sociologist Jacob Gruber described Larcombe as a “ ... dedicated man, strong in his Baptist faith, consecrated to the saving of souls, and devoted to his unofficial ministry to the lost.”³⁵³ According to the 1839 annual report, “ ... [Larcombe’s] prudence, fidelity, and piety, are manifest in his untiring labours, and he well deserves the excellent

³⁵⁰ “No. 19” *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Passed at the Session of 1837-38* (Harrisburg, PA: Theo. Fene, 1838), 690.

³⁵¹ Tuttle, “The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary,” 9.

³⁵² Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 151.

³⁵³ Jacob W. Gruber “Jews in the Eastern State Penitentiary in the 19th Century” unpublished MS, APS, 3.

testimonials of character he adduced before his appointment.”³⁵⁴ The report also gave an extensive description of Larcombe’s duties, noting that:

[Larcombe] spends six to eight hours every day of the week in visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant, and imparting to all as opportunity offers, moral and religious knowledge. On the Sabbath he preaches in the block or corridors in turn, morning and afternoon.³⁵⁵

According to Reverend Frederick Powers, Jr., it was not unusual in this period for penitentiary chaplains to serve in a variety of capacities, including social workers, teachers, psychiatrists, and penal reformers; though many of these were subsequently taken over by professionals in the twentieth century, in the nineteenth century the prison chaplaincy was a “catch-all” position.³⁵⁶

Despite the positive description in the 1839 annual report, Larcombe’s years as Eastern State’s moral instructor were not free of controversy; Teeters noted that very soon after Larcombe’s appointment, the legislature was “besieged” with petitions written by citizens “... urging that the office be discontinued for fear of prostyletizing.”³⁵⁷ Even those within the prison often resented the moral instructor; in February, 1841 the warden dismissed overseer James Tweed for threatening Larcombe and calling the moral instructor a liar. The dispute apparently sprang from the fact that Larcombe had given a

³⁵⁴ *Tenth Annual Report of Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bickering and Guilbert, Printers, 1839), 6.

³⁵⁵ *Tenth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary*, 4 quoted in Tuttle “The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary,” 10.

³⁵⁶ Reverend Frederick F. Powers, Jr., “The Role of the Prison Chaplain: An Analysis of the Prison Ministry in Philadelphia from 1682 to 1970 Including a Review of English Antecedents” MST Thesis Philadelphia Divinity School, 1971, 1.

³⁵⁷ Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 151.

Bible to a prisoner that Tweed had disciplined for failing to work.³⁵⁸ The PSAMPP's minutes include a cryptic reference in October, 1858 to a committee to see the moral instructor; while unable to actually speak to him as a committee, the minutes report that he was " ... privately spoken to, and disclaims any wrong motives."³⁵⁹ Larcombe complained about his relationship with the prison administration, writing in one of his official journals:

Difficulties of the moral instructor: Overseers conceive hostility against him for trivial causes or for none at all – sometimes for the obvious discharge of duty. They either speak to their prisoners against him or insinuate something to his disadvantage and their prisoners to court the good will of those who can make their situation pleasant or afflictive, misrepresent him or having their imagination imperfect they watch him closely and often wrongfully interpret his language³⁶⁰

Larcombe's statement demonstrates that, while reform was a crucial part of Eastern State's regimen, it was certainly not an easy job.

Thomas Larcombe's role as both minister and educator did not distinguish him from other prison chaplains, many of whom also fulfilled both a spiritual and an educational role. At the prison in Wethersfield, Connecticut, the chaplain was required by law to " ... spend his whole time instructing the prisoners," while on Sundays, " ... officers of the prison" taught Sunday school, dividing the convicts into "Bible" and

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 153.

³⁵⁹ Committee Minutes, 10/26/1858 Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

³⁶⁰ This quote is taken from Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 153. It is derived from Larcombe's journals, which are at the American Philosophical Society. The finding aid for this collection contains the same quotation, but the author has been unable to verify the veracity of the wording because the journal has gone missing. This particular quote has been reproduced by numerous scholars, so I am accepting as fact that it existed as they claim.

“reading” classes.³⁶¹ Sabbath Schools were particularly popular in penitentiaries and prisons during this period; an 1850 survey found active Sunday schools at prisons in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Ohio.³⁶² These schools provided more than merely religious education; as at Eastern State, Sunday Schools transmitted both moral and academic education. For instance, at the Massachusetts State prison in Charlestown, the chaplain taught Sunday School eight months a year and “ ... those, who cannot read are formed into spelling classes and taught, others are instructed according to the views of those who are teachers.”³⁶³

At Eastern State, the high rate of illiteracy among inmates was particularly concerning. The warden noted in 1838 that:

the deficiency in common school learning is greater than is generally supposed; of the 142 prisoners who have been received here from the commencement, only four have been well educated, and only about six more could read or write tolerably³⁶⁴

Larry Goldsmith observed that by the mid-nineteenth century, explanations for crime had shifted from idleness to illiteracy;³⁶⁵ this shift is reflected in M.B. Sampson’s 1843 assertion that “ ... a large portion of the infringement by individuals of social duties arises

³⁶¹ *Dix Remarks on Prisons*, 51.

³⁶² *Fifth Report of the Prison Association of New York* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1850), 137.

³⁶³ *Dix Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United*, 52.

³⁶⁴ *Ninth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bickering and Guilbert, 1838), 4.

³⁶⁵ Larry Goldsmith, “History from the Inside Out: Prison Life in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts” *Journal of Social History*, 31, (Autumn, 1997), 115.

from the previous non-fulfillment of the duties society owed to them,” including teaching them to read.³⁶⁶

From the day it opened, the penitentiary’s administrators confronted an inmate population whose literacy rate was far lower than the general population’s, which made individual Bible-reading and study (a core component of religious education, and hence reformation) impossible for some prisoners. Eastern State’s illiteracy rate in 1840 was an astounding 1,250 percent higher than in Philadelphia County; it was therefore incumbent on the penitentiary to tackle this problem. Johnston concluded that because Philadelphia lacked free compulsory education, most of the prisoners were poorly educated, many completely illiterate.³⁶⁷ While Johnston is correct that Pennsylvania lacked compulsory education laws, this did not cause the high rates of illiteracy at Eastern State. According to the 1840 census, 98 percent of Pennsylvanians and 98.7 percent of Philadelphians could at least read, where as 25 percent of convicts received at the penitentiary were unable to do so. Eastern State’s higher than average illiteracy rates more likely reflected the fact that criminal behavior was not uniformly distributed throughout the population; thus, the 2 percent of Pennsylvanians who committed crimes were disproportionately illiterate.

Literary education was a crucial part of Eastern State’s reformatory program; Johnston himself noted “During his first days in the cell, the new prisoner would not be given work or reading materials. He would have to make a request for either, and a Bible

³⁶⁶ M.B. Sampson *Criminal Jurisprudence*, 71.

³⁶⁷ Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 54.

and inspirational reading material would be given to him as “a favour.”³⁶⁸ By depriving the inmates of reading material, the goal was to encourage them to appreciate the instruction and labor. Giving the inmates educational materials and work after a few days of solitude alleviated what one contemporary observer called “ ... the dreadful punishment of absolute solitude without labor and without instruction,” and made the inmate appreciate his work and his education because they were a respite from the penitentiary’s stultifying solitude.³⁶⁹

Because of the high rates of illiteracy, it was deemed necessary almost from the beginning to teach prisoners like Lewis Morris to read. In his 1840 annual report, Larcombe noted that, of 162 prisoners discharged, roughly half could read and write; seven of those were taught to read and write at the penitentiary while eight learned to write, and twelve learned arithmetic.³⁷⁰ Two years later, the penitentiary released forty inmates (roughly one-quarter of the total released in 1842) who had learned to read and write while incarcerated at Eastern State Penitentiary.³⁷¹ According to the PSAMPP’s minutes, “George Elkinton reports, that several, who, upon entering the prison, could neither read nor write, have mastered both, and now evince such a thirst for knowledge.”³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 49.

³⁶⁹ Livingston, *Letter from Edward Livingston*, 11.

³⁷⁰ *Eleventh Annual Report of Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bickering and Guilbert, printers, 1840), 38-9.

³⁷¹ Discharge Books RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

³⁷² Committee Minutes, 11/16/1858 Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Illiteracy plagued other prisons as well; 39 percent of Western State Penitentiary's new white male inmates could not read or write in 1840, compared with 0.8 percent rate of illiteracy for Allegheny County, where the prison was located. Dix noted that, in 1845, 156 of 778 inmates admitted to New York's Auburn prison (roughly 20 percent) were illiterate, though she does not give a breakdown on race and gender, so it is impossible to compare those numbers to the 1840 census statistics.³⁷³ According to Lathrop, 20 percent of inmates at the Massachusetts State Prison, and nearly one third of those in the Connecticut State Prison were illiterate, compared to general state literacy rates of 97 and 98.5 percent, respectively.³⁷⁴ Katz noted that during the mid-1850s, 73.7 percent of inmates in Massachusetts' county jails were illiterate; though this dropped to 37.8 percent a decade later, even this number was exponentially higher than illiteracy rates for Massachusetts's population generally.³⁷⁵ Rothman noted that for jails and penitentiaries in Connecticut, Virginia, and Ohio between 1820 and 1840, somewhere between one third and one half of inmates were illiterate.³⁷⁶ As Dix put it at the time, "Inquire of this large class, which crowd our penitentiaries to their utmost capacity, what have been their moral training, and educational advantages, and how small a number will be found, who have sinned under the full light of wise instruction, early commended and persevered in!"³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons*, 55.

³⁷⁴ Lathrop, *Crime and its Punishment*, 52-3.

³⁷⁵ Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, 184.

³⁷⁶ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 248.

³⁷⁷ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons*, 64.

Like Eastern State, these prisons developed aggressive literacy programs to educate inmates, as part of their reformatory program. The fifth annual report of the Prison Association of New York (1850) reprinted selections from the annual reports of prisons in New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, all of which document educational programs aimed at curbing illiteracy, usually under the auspices of the prison chaplain or moral instructor.³⁷⁸ Goldsmith asserted that literacy instruction was a “key feature” of Charlestown’s rehabilitative program, and that prisoners were eager to learn, though he concluded that inmates utilized their new found skills in ways that the prison administration found surprising and disappointing.³⁷⁹ This was clearly the case at Eastern State as well; the warden’s journal noted that both teacher and the warden reprimanded prisoner 3333 for writing obscene language and pictures in the library’s books.³⁸⁰

To support their literacy programs, prisons and penitentiaries often constructed libraries, which ranged from a few dozen to a few thousand volumes, depending on the institutions. Usually, these libraries were supported by philanthropists or religious or educational organizations, rather than the prison administration or the states themselves. Most prisons developed small collections of books that prisoners could borrow; an 1850

³⁷⁸ *Fifth Report of the Prison Association of New York* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1850), 127.

³⁷⁹ Larry Goldsmith “History from the Inside Out: Prison Life in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts,” 111.

³⁸⁰ Warden’s Journal 4/20/1856 RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

survey described thirteen prison libraries, usually overseen by the prison chaplain.³⁸¹ For instance, Western State’s chaplain oversaw the prison library, which numbered about 100 volumes; and Dix “ ... found those, who could read, referring to their books with interest. Some gave themselves, during their leisure hours, to a regular course of study in arithmetic, geography, history, &c.”³⁸² In a sworn statement before the committee investigating Sing Sing, the chaplain reported that, regarding the library, “I have the entire control. The library is under my charge as to the choice of books; there is a rule that no books shall be lent without my consent.”³⁸³

To support Eastern State’s educational mission, as early as 1837, there appears to have been a library composed of “ ... some tracts containing edifying anecdotes” available to prisoners.³⁸⁴ Dickens noted in 1842 that Eastern State’s prisoners received pens and ink, Bibles, and “sometimes other books,”³⁸⁵ while de Tocqueville and de Beaumont observed that, “ ... the books which are at their disposal, are in some measure companions that never leave them.”³⁸⁶ In 1843, James J. Barclay donated some “useful volumes,” and Larcombe referred to a library donated and maintained by the PSAMPP.³⁸⁷

³⁸¹ *Fifth Report of the Prison Association of New York*, 219.

³⁸² Dix, *Remarks on Prisons*, 59.

³⁸³ *Third Report of the Prison Association of New York* (New York: The Prison Association of New York, 1846), 22

³⁸⁴ Letter addressed to the Inspectors by Tocqueville and Beaumont, quoted in Tuttle, “The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, 1829-1870,” 20.

³⁸⁵ Dickens, *American Notes*, 113.

³⁸⁶ Beaumont and Tocqueville, *On the Penitentiary System*, 113.

³⁸⁷ *Fourteenth Annual Report*, (Philadelphia: Joseph and William Kites, 1843), 21 quoted in Tuttle, “The Personal Services in The Eastern State Penitentiary,” 23.

Due to the enormity of Larcombe's duties, the overseers hired a Mr. Williss in 1845 who worked as both an overseer and teacher, suggesting that these two positions often overlapped; Mr. Williss was replaced in 1850 by the Reverend George Neff.³⁸⁸ In 1854, the penitentiary added a full-time teacher named Abram Boyer who expanded the available academic courses to include bookkeeping, Spanish and German.³⁸⁹ Teeters concluded that this "might be considered" the beginning of an educational program at Eastern State.³⁹⁰ Yet the evidence indicates that education was the core of Eastern State's reformatory program from 1829.³⁹¹ Nevertheless, the introduction of a "professional" teacher seems to have irritated Larcombe, who noted:

The Moral Instructor has ever regarded literary instruction to be highly important as a subsidiary to moral and religious training but can never regard it as a substitute for that higher teaching which the Son of God has ordained for the effectual recovery of men from vice and iniquity³⁹²

Larcombe's statements are interesting, because, while he drew a distinction between academic learning and the "higher teaching" of moral instruction, the reality is that functionally this was a distinction without a difference; the man dispensing religious education was often the same man training inmates to read. Even after the school teachers were hired in the 1840s, they reported to Larcombe, and he often worked side by side with them to educate the inmates; Dorothea Dix recalled that, following Sunday religious

³⁸⁸ Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 152.

³⁸⁹ Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 54.

³⁹⁰ Teeters and Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 159.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 153.

services, and “ ... in addition to collective teaching, the chaplain and the schoolmaster converse with many of the prisoners individually.”³⁹³

My research indicates that Eastern State penitentiary was a self-consciously educational institution with three overlapping curricula, all centered on “reforming” inmates vocationally, morally, and academically. Though all penitentiary employees had an educational role at Eastern State, the bulk of the responsibility fell to the moral instructor, which reflected the porous boundary between “religious” and “academic” education in Jacksonian America. Even as overcrowding pressured prison facilities, Eastern State’s administration remained steadfast in its proclamations that the problem of crime could be eradicated through education.

The overlapping nature of the religious and academic education testifies to the fact that incarceration at Eastern State was a learning experience. Almost every member of Eastern State’s staff was involved in achieving the penitentiary’s educational mission; while overseers provided vocational education, the Moral Instructor and his subordinates taught inmates reading, writing, and religion after his arrival in 1833. These experiences closely resembled educational systems outside the walls: apprenticeships and public school curriculums heavily suffused with religious content. That penitentiary education resembled public education should come as no surprise; in many cases, the men overseeing the public schools were the same ones designing and implementing the Pennsylvania System. Eastern State reflected penal and educational reformers’ belief that ignorance caused crime, and the penitentiary set out to remedy this by providing inmates with educational opportunities many had never had. In this regard, Eastern State was not

³⁹³ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons*, 62.

unique; many American penitentiaries, even those skeptical of inmate reform, made penal education a core component of their programs.

Inmate Agency and Resistance

Obviously, Eastern State's inmates were not passive mounds of clay to be molded as the administrators saw fit. The case of inmate 3333, who "decorated" the penitentiary's books demonstrates that prisoners exercised agency in a variety of ways, leading historian Jennifer Janofsky to conclude that "Eastern State was never a site of unmitigated power" because prisoners resisted the administration's hegemonic power structure by initiating "... open or subtle rebellion against reformers, keepers, and administrators."³⁹⁴ Thibaut chronicled the experiences of Eastern State's first three hundred inmates between the penitentiary's opening in October 1829 and November 1838; she found twenty-seven instances where prisoners were placed in a dark or bare cell as punishment and eight instances where inmates were dressed in a straight jacket. Perhaps most horrifying, she found instances of prisoners being beaten with a stick, placed in a "tranquilizing chair" (designed by Dr. Benjamin Rush), and at least one instance of penitentiary administrators using a device called "the iron gag," an incident that caused the inmate's death.³⁹⁵ Clearly, for all their humane intentions, Eastern State's administrators were not above inflicting physical pain when confronted with recalcitrant inmates.

³⁹⁴ Jennifer Janofsky "'There is No Hope for the Likes of Me:' Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829-1856," PhD Thesis, Temple University (2004), IV.

³⁹⁵ Jaqueline Thibaut, "'To Pave the Way to Penitence,'" 211

Inmate resistance was facilitated by breakdowns in the Pennsylvania System, the most obvious of which was the administration's use of prisoners to work around the penitentiary. Eastern State's first escape, which occurred in 1832, was partially caused by the fact that the administration was not uniformly practicing the Pennsylvania System. William Hamilton, prisoner number 94, lowered himself to the street from the warden's quarters using the administrator's bed sheets; Hamilton had access to the warden's chambers because, in addition to working in the prison bakeshop, he was employed as the warden's waiter.³⁹⁶ Clearly, the administration's laissez faire attitude toward actually implementing the most basic component of the Pennsylvania System – separation – created an environment where inmates could more effectively resist the other aspects of the system, including education.

Race and Gender at Eastern State Penitentiary

Women benefited from the breakdown in Pennsylvania System discipline, because they were often assigned jobs that took them out of their cells. It is hard to generalize from women's experiences at Eastern State, because they were always such a small minority of the penitentiary's population – less than three percent, and sometimes lower than two percent.³⁹⁷ Yet, the evidence suggests that women inmates were employed around the penitentiary as cooks and washers, performing the tasks that would have been

³⁹⁶ Norman Johnston *Escapes from Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Eastern State Historic Site, n.d.), 4.

³⁹⁷ Leslie C. Patrick-Stamp "Women in Eastern State Penitentiary" in Marianna Thomas, ed., *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, 128.

seen as part of the “women’s sphere.”³⁹⁸ Likely, this was due to the fact that, at least initially, there was only one woman employed at the penitentiary, Mrs. Blundin. She had no official position – she was married to one of the overseers – but she apparently took on the responsibilities of overseeing the penitentiary’s domestic staff.

Though women were most likely assigned to domestic tasks because of the penitentiary’s need for cleaning and cooking services, these tasks served the same purpose for female inmates that trade training did for the males: it gave them marketable skills for supporting themselves upon release. Jacksonian Americans believed that a woman’s place was in the home, and to the extent that women worked, it was most often as domestic labor, which Howe called an “overwhelmingly female occupation.”³⁹⁹ Eastern State’s labor program, which was designed to both teach skills and to inculcate positive attitudes toward work, was adapted to fit both women’s employment prospects *and* the penitentiary’s labor needs. In the sexist world of Jacksonian America, Eastern State’s administrators sought to reconcile one aspect of the penitentiary’s reformatory program – labor – with the likely job prospects for released female inmates and did so by employing women prisoners as domestic labor around the penitentiary.

Ascertaining how gender affected the other components of Eastern State’s educational curriculum – academic and religious learning – is more difficult given the fact that the penitentiary’s administrators did not break down statistics by gender on the number of sermons or lessons delivered. What evidence exists tends to support the conclusion that academic and religious education was provided equally, regardless of

³⁹⁸ Leslie Patrick “Ann Hinson,” 365.

³⁹⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 555.

gender. The best index for measuring female inmates' access to education is the penitentiary's discharge registers, which noted what skills prisoners were taught during their incarceration. A good example is the case of Sarah Anderson (inmate number 646), who was "learned to read" during her time at Eastern State. Anderson, a black woman from New Orleans whose occupation was listed as "servant," began a five-year sentence at Eastern State in October 1836 after being convicted of robbery. According to the entrance register, Anderson was unable to either read or write when she arrived at the penitentiary, but after five years, she was at least able to read. She was hardly unique; according to the discharge records for 1842, at least five women – Letitia Kennard, Mary Woodward, Eliza Bell, and Elizabeth Robinson – learned to read during their incarceration.⁴⁰⁰ Astonishingly, though women comprised only about 2 or 3 percent of Eastern State's population at any one time, these women accounted for almost 13 percent of the inmates released that year better educated than when they arrived. Though this is a crude measure at best, it nonetheless shows that women had access to academic education at Eastern State and apparently took advantage of it.

An important consideration is that a large percentage of women incarcerated at Eastern State – usually between forty and fifty percent – were black. For instance, all of the first four women sent to the penitentiary in 1831 were of African descent, and by the late nineteenth-century, nearly half of Eastern State's females were non-white.⁴⁰¹ Of the five females cited earlier, four were listed in prison records as either "black" or

⁴⁰⁰ Eastern State Penitentiary Descriptive Registers, RG-15 Records of the Department of Justice, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

“mulatto.” By the end of the nineteenth-century, historian Kali N. Gross found that forty-one percent of women inmates were black.⁴⁰² Thus, it is extremely difficult to establish where issues of gender stop and those of race begin.

Surprisingly, the evidence suggests that the penitentiary educated inmates regardless of race. There are plenty of instances where non-white inmates such as Lewis Morris were taught to read while incarcerated at Eastern State. For instance, of the 40 inmates discharged from the penitentiary in 1842 who had learned to read, 21 (52.5 percent) were either listed as black or mulatto.⁴⁰³ Furthermore, while women were segregated from the men at Eastern State, there is no evidence to demonstrate that blacks and whites were housed separately until 1904 when, in the face of the Pennsylvania System’s collapse, the Board of Trustees ordered the races separated.

This is not to argue that Eastern State was a race-blind utopia where blacks and whites lived in perfectly equality; far from it. Thibaut noted that, as a group, blacks suffered longer sentences and received fewer pardons than white inmates. In addition, the rate of illiteracy among blacks was higher than among whites, probably because black inmates “ ... came more conspicuously from the lowest occupation levels, i.e. unskilled laborers and those with no occupation.”⁴⁰⁴ Worse, members of the penitentiary’s administration were not above expression of vulgar racism, such as when Thomas Larcombe complained about the number of “ ... coloured persons. ... so besotted by gross

⁴⁰² Kali N. Gross *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 162.

⁴⁰³ Eastern State Penitentiary Descriptive Registers, RG-15 Records of the Department of Justice, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

⁴⁰⁴ Jaqueline Thibaut, ““To Pave the Way to Penitence,” 206.

sensuality, as to have little relish for literary learning, and some seem to be destitute of capacity to receive it.”⁴⁰⁵ That members of the penitentiary’s administration were racist is not the point. The point is that, at least as far as education goes, there is no evidence that Eastern State’s administrators discriminated against inmates based on race. Both Lewis Morris and Sarah Anderson were able to improve their education at Eastern State, despite the fact that both were non-white, and the discharge records demonstrate that they were not alone. While it is inappropriate to assume that educational services were dispensed with complete equality, it is equally inappropriate to assume that racism impacted educational services when no evidence exists to substantiate that assumption and quite a bit of evidence indicates that women and blacks were educated at the penitentiary.

Conclusion

Between 1829 and 1866, Eastern State penitentiary was a self-consciously educational institution with a three-pronged curriculum designed to reform inmates and provide them with marketable skills for post-incarceration employment. The three prongs of this curriculum – labor, academic learning and religious instruction – reinforced one another, and grew out of the close relationship between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century educational and penal reform. Though Eastern State’s administrators imperfectly practiced the Pennsylvania System, the evidence suggests that female and non-white inmates were afforded the same educational opportunities as the majority white males, though this conclusion is speculative. In general, the evidence suggests that inmate

⁴⁰⁵ *Tenth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bickering & Guilbert, 1839), 37.

education was a cornerstone of Eastern State's reformative program, a testament to the faith that Americans placed in the palliative power of learning in the decades before the American Civil War.

CHAPTER III CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CORRECTIONS, 1866-1913

Early on the morning of March 28 1883, Charles Deckert (alias Frank Mishler) was found dead in his cell at Eastern State Penitentiary, having apparently hanged himself during the night. Suicides at Eastern State were not unheard of – another inmate killed himself that same year – but the details reported in the *New York Times* offer some important insights about life at the famed penitentiary after the Civil War.⁴⁰⁶ According to the article “Suicide of a Convict,” Deckert hanged himself using one of the special linen undershirts that the penitentiary’s administrators allowed him to wear in lieu of the standard issue uniform, which Deckert complained irritated his skin. Deckert’s body was apparently visible to the cellblock’s two guards, Thomas Haney and Marvin Root, who “... passed and repassed the door many times during the night ... [allowing a] full view of the interior of the cell.”⁴⁰⁷ The column’s writer was obviously criticizing the guards for inattention to their duties, but another statement stands out. According to the article, Deckert’s suicide was “... the climax of a life of self-willed independence and idleness” because, while Deckert had attended twelve years of school in Germany, the *New York Times* noted tellingly that the inmate had “... never learned a trade.”⁴⁰⁸

The sad tale of Deckert’s suicide sheds light both on the challenges that the institution faced after the Civil War and on the evolution of Eastern State Penitentiary’s

⁴⁰⁶ *Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane and Scott’s Printing House, 1884) 5.

⁴⁰⁷ “Suicide of a Convict” *New York Times* Mar. 28, 1883 pg. 1.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

program of inmate reform. Following the Civil War, Eastern State's reformatory program, predicated on education – moral, academic, and vocational – faced swelling inmate populations and changing penal philosophies. Spectators at the time and scholars since have charged that penitentiaries abandoned their reformatory orientation and became solely custodial institutions. The evidence indicates that American penitentiaries continued to offer educational programming between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I. During these years, the institutional setting for punishing inmates shifted from penitentiaries to reformatories, and the heavily religious basis of reformation gave way to a “scientific” program of rehabilitation, but the underlying method – education – remained constant. Though the religious content diminished (but never disappeared), penal institutions continued educating inmates aggressively in order to reduce recidivism. In other words, penal institutions remained consistently and self-consciously educational sites dedicated to teaching basic academic and vocational skills and morality.

Penology was not static during this period. Following the Civil War, American penologists asserted vociferously that prison guards and administrators ought to be “professionals,” qualified for their positions through on-the-job training. By extension, the era of the “gentleman philanthropist,” whose qualifications were usually leisure time and an interest in penology, slowly passed from the scene. They were gradually replaced by men who spent their adult lives staffing penitentiaries, reformatories, and prisons. Yet, this new generation espoused the same articles of faith regarding education that the previous era of administrators had: the surest way to lower crime and reduce recidivism

was through greater access to public education and aggressive vocational training programs for inmates.

After the Civil War, penal and educational reform continued running along similar tracks. Just as penologists demanded better training and education for prison guards and overseers, educational reformers initiated teacher training and certification programs. Both educational and penal reformers actively espoused the value of vocational education, arguing that teaching prisoners trades not only gave inmates skills to support themselves but also taught them to love labor, which was exactly the same argument reformers made before the war. In this regard, American penitentiaries (Eastern State included) rebalanced, but did not reject, the three prongs of their educational approach to rehabilitating inmates.

Some scholars have asserted that penal education did not exist before the Civil War and was an innovation during this period. For instance, historian Benjamin Justice placed the emergence of penal education *after* the Civil War, arguing “... formal schooling played a negligible role in the nineteenth-century prison *paedia*.”⁴⁰⁹ Justice was not alone in minimizing the educational efforts of early nineteenth century penitentiaries. Historian Thom Gehring asserted that, while there was some educational programming at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail as far back as 1789, real efforts at penal education began with Zebulon Brockway’s penal reforms at Elmira in the 1880s and

⁴⁰⁹ Benjamin Justice, “‘A College of Morals’: Educational Reform at San Quentin Prison, 1880-1920” *History of Education Quarterly*, 40 (Autumn, 2000) 280.

1890s.⁴¹⁰ According to historian Keith Edgerton, “ ... a new emphasis on educating and reforming the criminal and ultimately addressing society’s evils within the prison walls became increasingly prevalent around the turn of the [twentieth] century.”⁴¹¹ Gehring, Edgerton, and Justice ignored how firmly rooted educational impulses were at American penitentiaries before the Civil War. As the last chapter demonstrated, educational programming was a core component of the penitentiary’s rehabilitative program at least as far back as the Jacksonian period.

This chapter focuses on changes in educational programming caused mainly by two factors: the drive toward “professionalization” and the continuing connection between educational and penal reform. While professionalization weakened the crosspollination of educational and penal reformers that had made educational programming in penitentiaries so attractive to earlier generations, educational and penal reforms continued moving along similar lines between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I. This was particularly true with regard to vocational education, which both educational and penal reformers embraced with gusto in the 1880s and 1890s.

State of the Prisons and Reformatories in America, 1867

During the late 1860s, conditions at American penitentiaries and prisons rapidly deteriorated due to overcrowding caused by the more efficient capture and prosecution of

⁴¹⁰Thom Gehring, “The History of Correctional Education” Viewed 11/2/2007, <http://www.csusb.edu/coe/cg/csce/research/documents/TheHistoryofCorrectionalEducationbyThomGehring.pdf>

⁴¹¹ Keith Edgerton, *Montana Justice: Power, Punishment, & the Penitentiary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 81.

offenders. Whereas before the mid-1850s, criminal justice was largely the business of amateurs – aggrieved parties had to capture and deliver to judges the people responsible for injuring them – the introduction of municipal police forces in the 1850s changed all this. Following the 1854 Act that consolidated all of the municipalities in Philadelphia County into the City of Philadelphia, criminal prosecution shifted from a citizen-driven enterprise to one driven by police and public prosecutors. According to historian Kali N. Gross, the number of Philadelphia policemen rose from 650 in 1855 to 1,000 sixteen years later and to 1,250 by the turn of the century.⁴¹² Other cities also created or expanded their police forces; for instance, by 1880, New York had 2,536 officers and patrolmen.⁴¹³

As cities absorbed the functions of criminal investigation, detention, and prosecution, convictions increased. This had a lot to do with the fact, as historian Philip S. Benjamin noted, after the Civil War “Philadelphia had been transformed into an industrial city plagued by crime and local unrest.”⁴¹⁴ According to historian Roger Lane, who looked at crime in Philadelphia, the percentage of homicide indictments that led to convictions jumped from 33 percent in the mid-1850s to 42 percent in the late 1860s to 63 percent by the late 1890s.⁴¹⁵ Between 1880 and 1894, criminal convictions grew

⁴¹² Kali N. Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in The City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 69-70.

⁴¹³ Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 149.

⁴¹⁴ Philip S. Benjamin, *The Philadelphia Quakers in the Industrial Age, 1865-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 73.

⁴¹⁵ Roger Lane, *Violent Death in the City: Suicide, Accident, and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 69.

almost 40 percent. This number nearly doubled fifteen years later. In addition, sentences got longer; whereas before the Civil War, only five percent of homicide convictions led to sentences longer than twelve years, between 1860 and 1880, this number jumped to eight percent. By 1901, it had doubled, to 16 percent.⁴¹⁶ Unfortunately, more convictions and longer sentences meant that penitentiaries had more prisoners than they were designed to handle, which led to overcrowding.

The New York Prison Association appointed Enoch Cobb Wines and Theodore Dwight to investigate the efficacy of rehabilitative programming in North American penal institutions and to draft a report in response to the perception that America was suffering a crime wave. In 1867, Wines and Dwight released their report, which lambasted the various state prisons and penitentiaries for their poorly maintained buildings, overcrowded conditions, inhumane disciplinary techniques, and unprofessional staff, as well as their lack of centralized oversight. Most damning, they asserted, “There is not one [prison or penitentiary]...which seeks the reformation of its subjects as a primary object; and even if this were [not] true of any of them, there is not one...which pursues the end named by the agencies most likely to accomplish it.”⁴¹⁷ According to historian Eduardo Rotman, “... their critical finding was that not one of the state prisons in the United States was seeking the reformation of its inmates as a primary goal or

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁴¹⁷ E.C. Wines and Theodore W. Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada, Made to the Legislature of New York, January, 1867* (Albany, NY: Van Benthuysen & Sons’ Steam Printing House, 1867), 62.

deploying efficient means to pursue reformation.”⁴¹⁸ This report is the basis of the scholarly conclusion that after the Civil War, penitentiaries devolved into merely custodial institutions that made little effort to rehabilitate their inmates. Eastern State’s experience challenges that conclusion.

The New York Prison Association’s choice of Wines and Dwight to investigate state prisons reflects the close relationship between educational and penal reformers at the time. Theodore W. Dwight was the president of the New York Prison Society as well as a delegate to the International Prison Congress at Stockholm in 1878, and so choosing him to draft the report made sense. But he was also an educator, having taught Classics at the Utica academy in the early 1840s and law, history and political science at Hamilton College between 1842 and 1858. Enoch C. Wines was also heavily involved in both educational and penal reform. Before he became a Congregational minister in 1849, he had been a teacher. He published *Hints on Public Education* in 1838, and briefly returned to the classroom in 1853 as a professor of languages at Washington College in Pennsylvania.

Wines and Dwight’s interest in educational reform bled into their recommendations for reforming North America’s state prisons and penitentiaries. The National Prison Conference, which met in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1870 adopted a “Declaration of Principles” that reflected its commitment to penal education. Article ten asserted “Education is a vital force in the reformation of fallen men and women. Its tendency is to quicken the intellect, inspire self-respect, excite to higher aims, and afford

⁴¹⁸ Eduardo Rotman, “The Failure of Reform: The United States, 1865-1965” *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 154.

[a] healthful substitute for low and vicious amusements. Education is, therefore, a matter of primary importance in prisons, and should be carried to the utmost extent consistent with the other purposes of such institutions.” Article twenty-one repeated the common wisdom that education made pupils less likely to commit crime, and urged more industrial schools for “ ... children not yet criminal.”⁴¹⁹

The report itself was chock full of assumptions about the connection between education and criminality. For instance, as a preliminary step toward lowering the purported explosion in crime that America faced following the war, Wines and Dwight prescribed “a law, by which the education of all children of the state should be made compulsory,” because “ ... it is far better to force education upon the people than to force them into prisons to expiate crimes, of which neglect or ignorance has been the occasion.”⁴²⁰ Clearly, Wines and Dwight drew a direct line between ignorance and crime. Greater access to education, they asserted, would shrink America’s prison population.

Wines and Dwight also hypothesized that educational programs in prisons could reduce or eliminate recidivism. Rehabilitation was possible, they believed, through education, but not the silent, reflective type offered by the Pennsylvania System.

According to Wines and Dwight:

It is vain to talk of ignorant, inert and corrupt minds profiting from their own unaided reflections. They will either sleep over these or do worse...they must be plied with external intellectual apparatus, in the form of lessons, lectures, discussions, and books, by which the mind will be awakened, stimulated, and kept

⁴¹⁹ Quoted in Alexander W. Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory-Prison Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 158.

⁴²⁰ Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 63.

alive and alert; and by which, also, it will be stored with “better thoughts” than the disgusting and corrupting images hitherto most familiar⁴²¹

This was clearly a shot at the Pennsylvania System, whose world renowned model of separating inmates from one another and the outside world had been one of the two defining penological models a generation before. It is important to note that Wines and Dwight were merely critiquing the Pennsylvania System’s *methods*, not its *premises*; they shared the same faith in the rehabilitative power of education that had motivated men like William White and Roberts Vaux to found Eastern State Penitentiary in the first place. Wines and Dwight’s report merely restated the belief that education was the best method for rehabilitating inmates, a position that had guided American penology for nearly half a century.

This is not to say that their criticism of America’s penitentiaries was invalid; according to historian Negley K. Teeters, “... by 1860 the [Pennsylvania System] had broken down to the point where a disinterested observer would have admitted that the concept championed by the [PPS] was no longer tenable.”⁴²² In 1872 the penitentiary held 596 prisoners but had only 550 cells, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* asked how the Pennsylvania System could be carried out under such conditions.⁴²³ A decade later, only 2 out of five inmates (40.4 percent) were held in separate confinement.⁴²⁴ The penitentiary’s supporters and administrators tacitly acknowledged that separating inmates

⁴²¹ Ibid., 221.

⁴²² Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 401.

⁴²³ “Eastern Penitentiary” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 9/5/1872, pg. 2.

⁴²⁴ “In Solitude” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 11/03/1881 pg. 2.

was impossible and following the Civil War, they stopped discussing the “separation” in favor of “individual treatment.”⁴²⁵

Overcrowding may have negatively affected Eastern State’s rehabilitative program. Some members of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (PSAMPP) claimed that few inmates were sentenced to the penitentiary a second time, instead becoming law-abiding citizens upon release. Yet, Eastern State’s own warden wrote in the penitentiary journal that, in 1882, “ ... at least one half of the prisoners received this year are reconvictions.”⁴²⁶ While Cassidy may have been referring to people whose first conviction was served in another penitentiary, his statement raises questions about the veracity of the official pronouncements made by the PSAMPP. Kali N. Gross found that, at least for black females, the recidivism rate was closer to 30 percent, though it is important to remember that black women comprised an incredibly small percentage of the penitentiary’s population (about 1.2 percent).⁴²⁷ Brockway asserted that Cassidy put the Pennsylvania System’s success rate at a measly four percent, though he offered no explanation of where Cassidy got this statistic.⁴²⁸

Confusion over recidivism rates was not unique to Eastern State, and many other institutions seemed to have based their numbers on conjecture alone. Historian Lawrence M. Friedman quoted Auburn’s warden, who claimed in a letter to Zebulon Brockway that

⁴²⁵ Negley K. Teeters & John D. Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill: The Separate System of Penal Discipline, 1829-1913* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 318.

⁴²⁶ Warden’s Daily Journal, September 9, 1882, RG-15, Pennsylvania State Archives.

⁴²⁷ Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 56.

⁴²⁸ Zebulon Reed Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Service: A Memoir* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1902), 166.

ninety percent of inmates were likely to commit crimes following their release; of the other tenth he could not offer a confident opinion. Friedman noted, “ ... this did not leave many souls actually saved.”⁴²⁹ A perfect example of the inefficacy of the rehabilitative programs of American penal institutions is illustrated in pickpocket and con artist George Appo’s career: by age thirty, Appo had served a year aboard a prison boat, three separate sentences at Sing Sing, a prison term in New York’s state prison at Clinton, six separate terms in New York City’s Tombs, and a year long sentence at Eastern State Penitentiary!⁴³⁰ Yet, all of these institutions failed to change Appo, and following his release from Eastern State, he immediately returned to a life of crime.

Identifying recidivists became an especially pressing concern to public officials whose cities seemed to be gripped by crime. This was one of the reasons that in 1899 the Pennsylvania legislature enacted the Act for the Identification of Habitual Criminals. This act assured that police, prosecutors, and penitentiary officials worked together to apprehend and punish criminals. Eastern State was required to photograph inmates and develop detailed personal histories that they shared with police and the district attorney. Kali N. Gross noted that, “The 1899 act marks the institutionalized transformation of notions of crime and also points to how these notions modified policing, specifically with regard to mug shot photography.”⁴³¹ The level of interagency cooperation required to

⁴²⁹ Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History*, 159.

⁴³⁰ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket’s Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century* (New York New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 202.

⁴³¹ Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 137.

successfully implement such a strategy shows how much America's law enforcement community had matured over the previous forty years.

Better record keeping contributed to the development by penologists of the concept of a "criminal class," or a group of ethnically distinct people (usually Central European or African) considered less developed than "normal" Americans; this meant attention shifted the focus from the criminal act to the criminal himself, with the goal of finding a "cure."⁴³² The growing focus on the crime class reflected the shift toward "scientific" penology, or the idea that scientific approaches could be used to better understand and alleviate social problems like crime. At its worst, the drive toward scientific understandings of crime shaded off into pseudo-sciences like eugenics, which claimed that convicts were often "born criminals" whose genetic make-up predisposed them to deviance. Historian Mark Haller noted that criminal anthropologists were debating whether criminal activity resulted from corrupt nature or bad nurturing by the 1890s, though these ideas had circulated for at least two decades before.⁴³³ According to Kali N. Gross, "Criminality became the subject's primary identity."⁴³⁴ Part and parcel of this transition was the fact that penal administrators stopped conceptualizing their goals in terms of religiously oriented "reform" in favor of more scientific "rehabilitation." For

⁴³² Finn Hornum "Reactions to the New Developments in Penology" Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 169

⁴³³ Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 43.

⁴³⁴ Kali N. Gross *Colored Amazons*, 138

Brockway, “the old principle of punishment must give place to the idea of social protection...the criminal must be studied instead of studying the criminal act.”⁴³⁵

Brockway led the way when it came to pathologizing crime because professional penologists needed an explanation when their new methods failed to meet expectations. When education failed to rehabilitate, penal administrators and reformers simply decided that some people (“born criminals”) were biologically driven to commit crime and therefore could not be rehabilitated.⁴³⁶ Yet, despite their cynicism about the possibility of reforming most inmates, reformers continued advocating and administrators continued practicing strong penal education programs.

In reality, Eastern State’s inmate demographics looked the same after the war as they had before, at least with regard to class: the penitentiary continued receiving (mostly) men drawn from the lowest rung of the economic ladder. Their crimes, according to Kali N. Gross, “ ... largely reflected poverty and financial hardship,” with 69 percent of inmates sent to the penitentiary for larceny, burglary, robbery, fraud, embezzlement, and receiving stolen property. Whites dominated the penitentiary, composing more than three quarters of Eastern’s inmates, followed by blacks (about one in five), and then assorted other races. Fifty-three percent of inmates were born in Philadelphia or the surrounding counties and one in five was foreign born.⁴³⁷ It appears

⁴³⁵ Zebulon Brockway, quoted in James McKenn, “Evolution of Penal Methods and Institutions” *Factors in American Civilization: Studies in Applied Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), 246.

⁴³⁶ Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, 11.

⁴³⁷ Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 140.

now that poverty, not membership in a “crime class,” drove many to commit their crimes, which continued to be largely non-violent and economic in nature.

Despite these continuities, the penitentiary model lost its status as America’s preferred method of incarceration. Historian Nicole Hahn Rafter called post-Civil War penitentiaries “old-fashioned” institutions that were “... merely punitive or custodial institutions... [unable] to distinguish between reformable and incorrigible inmates.”⁴³⁸ Penitentiaries were supplanted by the “Reformatory Model” pioneered by Zebulon Brockway and most notably associated with the reformatory at Elmira. Scholars regard Elmira as a paradigm shift in American penology, away from religiously inspired penitence to scientifically driven rehabilitation. While this is undoubtedly true, there is also an old adage that is equally true: the more things change, the more they stay the same. Elmira did break with past practices, particularly with regard to the professionalization of the penal administration and workforce, new techniques of rehabilitation, and a reduced emphasis on religion. Yet each of these changes was also true of Eastern State Penitentiary after the Civil War, making it a legitimate case study of Americans’ faith in the ability of education to rehabilitate inmates during his period. In addition, Elmira merely continued and built on precedents established in Philadelphia. Scholars have heretofore underestimated the degree of continuity between the penitentiary and the reformatory, particularly with regard to educational programming.

⁴³⁸ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 95.

The Elmira Model

The key figure in Elmira's history was the reformatory's first warden, Zebulon Brockway. Born in Lyme, Connecticut, in 1827 (two years before Eastern State opened) he represented one of a series of new schools of thought regarding American penology. According to Rafter, Brockway, " ... profoundly influenced nineteenth century thinking about crime and punishment."⁴³⁹ Historian Alexander Pisciotta noted that Elmira is " ... widely regarded as the father of the 'new penology' and the 'rehabilitative ideal.'"⁴⁴⁰ Unlike the previous generations of penal reformers, Brockway was a "professional" in the sense that his resume included numerous tours of duty at American prisons and penitentiaries; for instance, he worked as a guard at Connecticut's state prison in Westerfield and spent two years as the warden of Albany's almshouse. At age twenty-seven, Brockway took over the Monroe County Penitentiary near Rochester, NY. Seven years later, he became warden of Detroit's prison, where he unsuccessfully attempted to introduce indeterminate sentencing. As Rafter noted, "Brockway took a major step in the professionalization of prison management."⁴⁴¹

Pisciotta noted that at Detroit, Brockway introduced, " ... a profitable labor system, religious instruction, and educational programs," all of which sounds like Eastern State's rehabilitative program.⁴⁴² Brockway is most famous for his quarter century at the helm of New York's famous Elmira Reformatory starting in 1876, which Pisciotta called,

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁴⁰ Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression*, 2.

⁴⁴¹ Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 94.

⁴⁴² Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression*, 29.

“ ... the most important penal institution ever opened in the United States.”⁴⁴³ According to Harry Elmer Barnes, “The great advance the...Elmira systems mark[ed] over [the] Pennsylvania and New York Systems was the fact [at Elmira] the term of incarceration was at least roughly made to depend upon observable progress made by the prisoner on the road to ultimate reformation.”⁴⁴⁴ According to Rothman, post-Civil War Americans believed that “Elmira proved that prisons, if properly designed, could fulfill their original purpose.”⁴⁴⁵ Put another way, Elmira demonstrated that Americans had not lost their faith in the ability of institutions to rehabilitate deviant offenders.

Unlike Eastern State Penitentiary, America’s reformatories did not rely on the complex (and expensive) marriage of architecture and penal philosophy to rehabilitate offenders. This may have explained the popularity of the reformatory concept with American lawmakers: it required few changes to existing physical plants, which meant that the reformatory system could be adopted with little additional expense. Any prison built along the New York system could be adapted to the new model, and Iowa, Massachusetts and Kentucky simply rechristened their prisons as “reformatories.”⁴⁴⁶ In the post-Civil War era, penal philosophy was no longer expressed in complex architectural arrangements but was instead manifest in a series of administrative

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁴⁴ Barnes, *The Story of Punishment: A Record of Man’s Inhumanity to Man* 2nd ed. (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith Publishing, 1972). 147.

⁴⁴⁵ David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 35

⁴⁴⁶ Cabana, “The Evolution and Development of Correctional Education,” 201.

reformers that penologists promised would fulfill such institutions' promise: namely, reducing recidivism and rehabilitating inmates.

One such innovation was indeterminate sentencing, which gave inmates some control over the length of their incarceration. In theory, indeterminate sentencing meant no fixed sentence, meaning that a convict would be sent to prison for as long as it took to be rehabilitated. This could happen in just a few days or it might never happen. Historian Lawrence M. Friedman observed, the thinking was that, " ... if a man was truly incurable, criminally speaking, he might as well stay in prison for the rest of his life."⁴⁴⁷ The reality of indeterminate sentencing law was somewhat different: typically, the law prescribed a minimum sentence but no maximum, parole (ideally) being a function of the inmate's behavior while incarcerated. As Friedman somewhat rhetorically pointed out, " ... the indeterminate sentence pointed in two directions: leniency and rehabilitation for the savable, eternal damnation for the rest."⁴⁴⁸

Indeterminate sentencing struck at the Pennsylvania System's basic assumptions. When Eastern State was founded, inmates were given definite sentences, which the penitentiary's administration supported because it gave them *time*, an essential component in rehabilitating convicts. The only way sentences could be shortened was through a gubernatorial or presidential pardon, and the PSAMPP railed against these because, at least initially, many prisoners expected to be pardoned, giving them little incentive to follow the penitentiary's rules or actively work toward rehabilitation. This was such a problem that, in 1881, Eastern State's administrators banned Philadelphia's

⁴⁴⁷ Friedman, *Crime and Punishment*, 161.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

lawyers from the penitentiary; apparently, the lawyers convinced inmates that they (the inmates) were eligible for pardons and offered to file the paperwork. Inmates, confident they would soon be released, were often unwilling to work and even verbally abused some of the guards.⁴⁴⁹

It was only after reality set in, and inmates realized they would not be pardoned that it became possible to rehabilitate them. This system offered little in the way of quantifiable, empirical evidence of the rehabilitation demanded by an age enamored of “scientific” approaches to social problems. Indeterminate sentencing solved this problem, though it was not embraced at Eastern State. Eastern State’s Warden Cassidy, never one to mince his words, condemned indeterminate sentencing in a speech before the National Prison Association in July 1887 referring to it as “... the new contagion now prevailing...that has been transmitted from England. Where it has been tried and failed of accomplishing the results desired...I hope you will forgive me for not advocating the prevailing epidemic of indeterminate sentence and parole.”⁴⁵⁰

At first, Pennsylvania took small steps toward indeterminate sentencing, passing a law in 1860 prescribing maximum sentences but leaving the minimum to the sentencing courts. But the Commonwealth did not pass a true indeterminate sentencing law until 1909, which was “emasculated” two years later, according to historian Harry Elmer

⁴⁴⁹ “Fleeing Convicts,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 1, 1881.

⁴⁵⁰ Michael J. Cassidy, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts: Remarks from Observation and Experience Gained During Thirty-Seven Years Continuous Service on the Administration of the Eastern State Penitentiary, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Patterson and White, 1897), 55-57.

Barnes.⁴⁵¹ In this, as with so much else, Pennsylvania was woefully behind the curve. This has led scholars to focus almost exclusively on the differences between the penitentiary and the reformatory models of penal discipline, blinding them to the obvious similarities.

Much like Brockway's innovations at Detroit, Elmira's program was as self-consciously educational as Eastern State's had been a half century before. As at Eastern State, new inmates met with Brockway when they were admitted, and Pisciotta noted that the warden " ... assigned the inmate to an appropriate class in school and a suitable industry" as well as a cell. At Elmira, inmates were expected to learn and practice a trade " ... to prepare them to join the honest working class;" on sight facilities included an iron foundry, shoe and broom factories, and even a small farm.⁴⁵² Reflecting the increased importance of professional credentials, Brockway noted in his memoirs that the trade school was overseen by Mr. Clark, who had a degree in mechanical engineering from Cornell and thirteen years experience selecting, adopting, and developing, " ... industrial arts to meet the individual needs of the prisoner."⁴⁵³

After working from 7:30 AM until 4:30 PM, all of Elmira's inmates attended classes, which started at 7:00 PM and ran for an hour and a half. Inmates learned reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as history, geography, and composition, though Pisciotta

⁴⁵¹ Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania: A Study in American Social History* (Montclair, NJ: Paterson Smith, 1968), 183.

⁴⁵² Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression*, 19.

⁴⁵³ Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, 259.

noted these latter three were reserved for “advanced students.”⁴⁵⁴ Formal classroom education was supplemented by guest speakers who lectured the inmates on a variety of topics including practical “life skills” necessary for success in the outside world after release.⁴⁵⁵ In sum, for as much as Elmira was hailed, legitimately, as a departure from the Pennsylvania System, it shared the same fundamental faith in the power of education to rehabilitate inmates and turn them into productive citizens. This demanding regimen reflected Brockway’s belief in the “... indispensableness of a school of letters in any rational system of prison reformation.”⁴⁵⁶ Historian Donald Arthur Cabana correctly noted that Brockway “... believed that education provided the elusive piece of the difficult puzzle that was inmate rehabilitation.”⁴⁵⁷ Yet, Brockway’s belief that education was a crucial component of rehabilitation was not new; it was a holdover from at least one generation, and perhaps even a century, of penal reform. When it came to the benefits of penal education, Brockway did not invent the wheel, as some scholars believe; he added the tire.

Emergence of Scientific Penology and the Decline of Religion

Elmira’s opening coincided, and contributed to, the emergence of “penal science,” or the growing belief among reformers and administrators that scientific methods could

⁴⁵⁴ Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression*, 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Donald Arthur Cabana, “The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education in the American Penitentiary (1790-1990)” Ph.D. diss (University of Southern Mississippi, 1996), 175.

⁴⁵⁶ Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, 101.

⁴⁵⁷ Cabana, “The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Educational Programming,” 158.

be used to lower crime rates and reduce recidivism. Pisciotta noted “ ... the diffusion of prison science contributed to the professionalization of penology and the creation of ‘scientific criminology.’”⁴⁵⁸ Though Brockway’s program was heavily indebted to previous rehabilitation schemes, religion was less important at Elmira than it had been at Eastern State in 1829. According to parole officer Lewis Haas, Brockway even sneered “ ... most contemptuously at our Sunday-school training,” asking Haas if he had “ ... brought some more of my good little Sundaschhol-boys [sic] down” for Brockway to train.⁴⁵⁹ This is not to say that Brockway was an atheist or that he disdained religion. In his memoirs, Brockway claimed to believe in the force of an almighty god. Brockway just believed that faith could not adequately rehabilitate prisoners. For Brockway, rehabilitating inmates was a *science* that required scientific methods. He noted that, “ ... even today, in spite of the advance in theological ideas, the wardens of prisons and reformatories are too apt to shirk their scientific duty in this regard by devolving it on the chaplain.”⁴⁶⁰

Scientific penology required professional administrators, particularly certified educators. Zebulon Brockway bragged in his memoirs, published in 1902, that he had employed “two thoroughly trained” teachers while overseeing Detroit’s prison in the early to mid-1860s.⁴⁶¹ This happened at penal institutions across the country, as prisons

⁴⁵⁸ Pisciotta, *Benevolent Repression*, 4.

⁴⁵⁹ Records of the New York State Agricultural and Industrial School, *Chaplain and Parole Officer Correspondence*, Lewis Haas to Superintendent F.H. Briggs, 21 January 1903 quoted in Alexander W. Pisciotta *Benevolent Repression*, 1.

⁴⁶⁰ Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, 30.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

began hiring “trained educators” to handle the academic teaching that went on behind the walls. For instance, in 1899, Minnesota’s prison at Stillwater hired the superintendent of public schools to teach three nights a week.⁴⁶² Minnesota’s and Kansas’s prisons rode the same wave of professionalization that was redefining prison education elsewhere in the United States: a movement away from using chaplains as teachers in favor of trained, and later credentialed, professional educators.

In many ways, the chaplain’s waning role in the educational process reflected the fact that science had replaced religion as the primary tool of rehabilitation. This is not to say that religion stopped being important – many Americans considered the country a “Christian Nation” and were passionately invested in their faith – but just to suggest that penitentiaries, reformatories, and prisons became less overtly religious institutions. Where once the PSAMPP’s activities were “... permeated [by a]...deep religious and moral quality,” by the 1890s, that religiosity had been replaced by “scientific technique” which “pervaded” its outreach efforts. Though the old religious convictions never disappeared, according to Teeters, PSAMPP employees were chosen for their knowledge of “professional technique,” which quickly became the coin of the realm in post-Civil War America.⁴⁶³ Chaplains remained vital components of the rehabilitative process, but they no longer bore the primary educational responsibilities. The declining use of chaplains to oversee penal education was symptomatic of the drive toward professionalization in both American penology and education.

⁴⁶² Anne M. Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men’s Penitentiaries* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 180.

⁴⁶³ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 291.

The seeds of professionalization were sown before the Civil War in the myriad of reform organizations like the PSAMPP and the New York Prison Discipline Society. Though these were generally associations of “gentlemen dabblers,” they formed the basis of professionalized organizations that emerged after the war. Historian Gerald N. Grob, writing about American asylums, noted that institution administrators had banded together as early as the 1840s in recognition of “... their common concerns and interests.” He posited that, in so doing, these administrators “... laid the foundation for a professional self-identity and self-awareness,” thus beginning “... the process of professionalization.”⁴⁶⁴ Professionalization of penal staff after the Civil War was a key development, and the demand for more “professional” prison workers was repeated in every subsequent era.

Penologist Harry Elmer Barnes wrote disapprovingly in the 1920s that “Pennsylvania ha[d] long since ceased to be a pioneer, an innovator, and a leader in penological progress and has become content to follow, more or less tardily, progressive departures initiated elsewhere.”⁴⁶⁵ While Barnes was undoubtedly right in saying that the mantle of innovation had passed from Eastern State to Elmira, he failed to acknowledge the degree of continuity between these two institutions. Elmira was, like Eastern State, a self-consciously educational institution, and education was the cornerstone of both institutions’ rehabilitative programs. In addition, while some of Elmira’s innovations

⁴⁶⁴ Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 172.

⁴⁶⁵ Barnes quoted in John C. McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 2002), 26.

(like indeterminate sentencing) failed to permeate Eastern's faux medieval façade, others (like professional educators, guards, and administrators, increased focus on vocationalism) were clearly visible at the penitentiary in the decades following the Civil War. This fact makes Eastern State as valuable in studying post Civil War developments as any other institution especially with regard to penal education.

The Transition to Custody Post-Civil War

The dominant narrative in the history of American corrections is that, following the Civil War, American penal institutions lost their rehabilitative focus and became merely custodial institutions. This narrative is most closely associated with historian David J. Rothman, who wrote two books on the subject – *The Discovery of the Asylum* and *Conscience and Convenience*. According to Rothman, custodial care was a function of overcrowding and mounting cynicism with the seeming failure of penitentiaries to fulfill their missions, and was characterized by brutality and indifference on the part of the administration toward inmates. In short, as Rothman noted, “Custodial care was generally not humane care.”⁴⁶⁶

One of the weaknesses of Rothman's analysis, however, is that he fails to explain *how* institutions lost their rehabilitative focus. Rothman simply noted that these institutions became overcrowded which exacerbated penal institutions' natural emphasis on obedience to authority and discipline, but provided no evidence that overcrowding in and of itself necessarily led to a diminution in rehabilitative zeal. A better analysis of this

⁴⁶⁶ Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 21.

phenomenon is found in Gerald Grob's book *Mental Institutions in America*. Though Grob critiqued Rothman for the latter's focus on the social control aspect of nineteenth-century institution, both believed that their respective institutions – asylums and prisons – became custodial institutions following the Civil War. According to Grob, following the Civil War “... mental hospitals became the very antithesis of the ideals and hopes” of their founders and early administrators.⁴⁶⁷ Because patients did not recover as quickly as the asylums' founders had intended, an institution designed for short-term care was forced to accommodate patients for long-term care, which led to overcrowding. Grob also believed that early asylums' success was due in part to charismatic leadership rather than the systems adopted by the institutions; thus, when the mantle of leadership was passed to a new generation, the inherent systemic weaknesses became apparent.⁴⁶⁸

Eastern State's experience demonstrates this narrative to be simplistic and overstated because, while the penitentiary was overcrowded after the Civil War, it still maintained its commitment to penal education, which the last chapter showed was the primary method of rehabilitating inmates. There is no dispute that Eastern State was a violent and brutal place, and this was often caused or exacerbated by overcrowding. For instance, in 1873, an inmate bashed his cellmate's head into a wall, nearly killing him. Seventeen years later, an inmate decapitated his cellmate, wrapping the severed head in a towel as a “present” for the guards.⁴⁶⁹ But brutality and violence were nothing new at Eastern State; recall that the penitentiary was investigated in 1835 following an inmate's

⁴⁶⁷ Grob, *Mental Institutions*, 175.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁶⁹ “Fight in a State Prison,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1873, and “Beheaded by his Cell-Mate,” *Evening World*, June 5, 1900.

death from being placed in the iron-gag. Moreover, brutality and violence do not demonstrate that Eastern State had abandoned its rehabilitative goals. Brutality and educational programming were not mutually exclusive, as Eastern State's experience shows, and proving that the administration brutalized inmates does not necessarily prove that it gave up on rehabilitating them.

Changing of the Guard at Eastern State

While Eastern State is widely regarded by scholars today as an anachronism after the Civil War, looks are deceiving. Undoubtedly, the penitentiary's administrators and patrons in the PSAMPP (renamed the Pennsylvania Prison Society, or PPS, in 1887) eschewed many of Brockway's techniques, yet both institutions' educational programs looked startlingly similar. This because, as far as education went, Elmira was derivative, not innovative; its rehabilitative program was based on the same basic assumption – education lowered recidivism – that had driven Eastern State's rehabilitative program for forty years. This is not to say that Eastern State's educational program had remained unchanged for that long. The balance between religion, academics, and vocationalism shifted substantially following the Civil War, away from religion and academics and toward manual education. This fact was a reflection of developments in America's educational philosophy as well as the result of the shift toward professionalism in the penitentiary's administration.

Eastern State's last "non-professional" warden was Edward Townsend, who was born in Philadelphia in 1807. Like earlier generations of PPS members, Townsend was both a penal and an educational reformer. In the mid-1820s, he and some friends formed

the “Association of Young Men for the Instruction of Colored Men between the Ages of 18 and 45 Years,” and opened an evening school for black adults for “ ... instruction in the rudiments of our education.”⁴⁷⁰ Townsend served as one of the school’s teachers, offering lessons one night a week in topics such as “ ... natural philosophy, chemistry, history, or the habits of birds and animals.” In addition, students were also taught the rudiments of single entry bookkeeping, in the hope that they would be able to accurately compute their wages, preventing employers from underpaying them. In addition, Townsend noted that his pupils were, “ ... also enabled by the moderate amount of learning to get more lucrative situations.”⁴⁷¹

This was not Townsend’s only educational undertaking; in 1858 he was also elected a manager of the Pennsylvania Institute for the Instruction of the Blind, one of the organizations that Roberts Vaux helped found. Townsend noted that he was “unremitting” in his duties, which was reflected in the fact that the board of managers selected him to chair two committees and elected him both vice-president and president of the board. Reflecting the fact that he was an educator, Townsend noted that he took particular pride in the fact that “ ... the practical knowledge gained by many of the pupils in literature and handicraft is truly wonderful.”⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Virginia Basset Little, “Remembrances of the Family of Edward Townsend 1806-1896 & Ann Albertson Townsend (1809-1882): Created for the Occasion of the Eastern State Penitentiary Tour and Picnic at Hill Farm Hosted by the Worth-Spackman Families, September 17, 1994,” *Bound Manuscript Held at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 10

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 12

Townsend's interests were not confined to educational reform. Like many educational reformers, he was passionately interested in penal reform and Eastern State Penitentiary. He joined the PPS in 1846 and quickly became an active member, eventually serving as the Society's secretary, vice-president, and president. In 1870, while serving as president, Townsend became Eastern State's warden, which reflected his " ... great interest in the judicious administration of the penitentiary and my familiarity with it."⁴⁷³ The death of Eastern State's previous warden, John S. Halloway, fortunately coincided with Townsend's doctor's recommendation that he give up his profession – dentistry – because it was too arduous for a man Townsend's age (one is forced to wonder how different nineteenth century dentistry was that being warden of a state penitentiary was considered *less* arduous). There was thus symmetry of opportunity and necessity, and Townsend took the job.

Though Townsend's interest in penal reform and Eastern State penitentiary was both genuine and decades long, he had no formal training. This was also the case when it came to teaching. But formal training programs for educators were still in their infancy, and those for criminal justice professionals were non-existent. Following Townsend's resignation in 1881, a new epoch dawned where the PPS looked outside its own ranks for men to administer the penitentiary. According to Teeters, Townsend " ... may be regarded as the last non-professional warden," who bridged, " ... two epochs, characterized by

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

moral and humanitarian Quakers on the one hand and ‘career’ administrative officials on the other.”⁴⁷⁴

The new epoch is best represented by Townsend’s successor, warden Michael J. Cassidy. Cassidy spent most of his adult life working at Eastern State, rising from overseer to warden during his nearly forty years at the penitentiary. Cassidy was born in Philadelphia in 1829 to Irish Catholic immigrants of very modest means. His parents moved numerous times during his childhood and adolescence, but always within the lower-class, Irish sections of Philadelphia’s second, fourth, and fifth wards. Like much of Philadelphia’s working class, Cassidy received little academic education; instead, his father trained him to be a carpenter. Originally, the penitentiary hired Cassidy in 1861 as a carpenter, but the following year he became an overseer in cellblock three. As the last chapter illustrated, this was entirely consistent with Eastern’s practice of hiring guards for their work skills. These guards were then expected to teach, as well as guard, the inmates. He described his career at the penitentiary in 1897, saying, “From carpenter to warden, doing all that was to be done in different directions.”⁴⁷⁵

Like Brockway, Cassidy supported professional education, believing that it was essential to teach overseers how to do their jobs. At an 1884 conference in Chicago, Warden Cassidy asserted that, “... prison-keeping should be made a vocation, not a mere employment.”⁴⁷⁶ The following year at the National Prison Association meeting in

⁴⁷⁴ Teeters and Shearer, *Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*, 374.

⁴⁷⁵ Warden Michael Cassidy Testimony Taken During Legislative Investigation of State Penitentiaries 1897, RG-15, Pennsylvania State Archives.

⁴⁷⁶ Cassidy, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, 12.

Detroit, Cassidy remarked that, “ ... the selection, education, and training of prison officers is as much a public necessity as the training of railroad officials.”⁴⁷⁷ Cassidy was not alone in this opinion; his predecessor, Warden Edward Townsend, had instituted an evening school to train overseers. According to Teeters, Inspector Richard Vaux had suggested to Townsend that new guards needed to be trained in the correct application of the Pennsylvania System. The warden agreed so, assisted by seasoned guards, Townsend, “ ... instructed them in the true philosophy of prison-keeping and the requirements of their position.”⁴⁷⁸

In an 1897 deposition, Cassidy described at length his opinions regarding professional education.

Q: Does it require any special aptitude or qualification in a man to take care of or handle prisoners as they come in day by day?

A: Undoubtedly it does. A qualification that we require is that the man must be a mechanic of some sort, that he must have followed a mechanical pursuit or some one of the general trades that are in vogue in the community

Q: For what reason do you require that he shall be a mechanic?

A: Mechanics are a better class of people than those who are making their living by their wits. They have been brought up to habits of industry, and the others have not.⁴⁷⁹

Cassidy clearly thought of his overseers as more than simply prison guards. He said as much to support his assertion that guards ought to receive special training. According to Cassidy, “ ... to take people out of ordinary walks of life without any special training and

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁷⁸ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 393.

⁴⁷⁹ Cassidy *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, 23-24.

place them in positions of teachers, directors, custodians, and disciplinarians of individuals under punishment for crime, is as absurd and injurious to the public interest, as well as that of the prisoners, as to commission doctors, lawyers, or mechanics without preliminary special qualifications.”⁴⁸⁰

Cassidy was not alone in arguing for a professionalized prison administration and work force; the Pennsylvania Prison Society, and other such organizations, joined the chorus pushing the idea that only professional experience qualified individuals to speak with authority on issues of penology. The January 1875 issue of the *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* quoted M.C. Lucas of the Institute of France, who pugnaciously asserted, “It is only after having studied ‘Prison Discipline’ in the school of practical experience, that it is possible to have the right to point out the imperfections and the deficiencies of prisons, and to indicate means of remedying them.”⁴⁸¹ Printing these words, even if were written by someone else, was ironic, given that the PPS was founded and staffed by men who hardly fit these qualifications.

Partially, this had to do with the pronounced differences between the professional warden and the “gentlemen philanthropists” of the PPS. Cassidy’s lack of formal education was clearly evident when he interacted with the penitentiary’s inspectors or other members of the PPS, who tended to be affluent and well educated. Andrew Maloney, president of the penitentiary’s board of inspectors said about Cassidy that, “... you can see from his speech that he is not an educated man, but he is a man of very great mental power and strength of character...I think that, with education, he would be a

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸¹ “Knowledge” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Jan., 1874), pg. 76.

very difficult person to match.”⁴⁸² Maloney’s statement reflects his underlying faith that education, particularly academic education, was necessary to develop natural qualities like strength of character and intelligence, both of which he felt that Cassidy possessed.

Unlike previous wardens and members of the PPS, Cassidy did not believe that education in all its forms was an unalloyed good. According to his 1897 book, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, “... education, in the sense in which it is understood, is at best only secondary as an agent to prevent crime.”⁴⁸³ Cassidy believed that “... crimes of education,” or those that required book learning, were caused by indiscriminately educating the masses. During an investigation into the penitentiary’s operation in 1897, Cassidy asserted with regard to crimes like forgery that “... [education] was both the means and the cause ... of the crime.”⁴⁸⁴ In his 1897 book, Cassidy noted that education was more generally diffused throughout the community, which most believed to be a good thing Cassidy saw things differently, believing that the expansion of education contributed to “... the replacement of bank burglars with bank wreckers.”⁴⁸⁵ His point was that that higher levels of public education led to greater incidents of “crimes of education,” an interesting view given Eastern State’s history as a self-consciously educational institution.

⁴⁸² J. Maloney Testimony Taken During Legislative Investigation of State Penitentiaries, 1897, RG-15, Pennsylvania State Archives.

⁴⁸³ Cassidy, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, 41.

⁴⁸⁴ Warden Michael Cassidy Testimony Taken During Legislative Investigation of State Penitentiaries, 1897, RG-15, Pennsylvania State Archives.

⁴⁸⁵ Cassidy, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, 42.

Cassidy was not entirely anti-education. As quickly as he damned academic education for affording a potential criminal “... the facilities for carrying out his dishonesty,” he richly praised vocational education as being an antidote to crime. When asked about vocational education, Cassidy asserted that “... people with trade knowledge do not go into crime.” Cassidy believed that “... the education of the hand and the eye is an education that tends to diminish crime,” noting that, “... when [people] form habits of industry, no matter at what...they don’t go to steal.”⁴⁸⁶ Here, Cassidy was merely repeating the PPS’s forty-year-old rationale for incarceration labor. Cassidy was hardly outside the mainstream in this regard, though perhaps a little extreme in his complete denunciation of book learning’s value. For instance, Wines and Dwight recommended vigorous programs of vocational education in all American prisons and penitentiaries.⁴⁸⁷ Though Cassidy criticized academic education, Eastern State remained a self-consciously educational institution because the new warden merely shifted the educational balance toward vocational education.

Cassidy was not alone in promoting vocational education. Though less vociferously than the warden, some contributors to the PPS’ *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* also promoted the idea that vocational programming was more valuable than academic education for lowering crime and rehabilitating prisoners. In January 1877, an article titled “Preventive: Apprenticeship Considered” asserted that, “... valuable as is scholastic education...[it] is not that which restrains criminal acts or keeps

⁴⁸⁶ Warden Michael Cassidy Testimony Taken During Legislative Investigation of State Penitentiaries, 1897, RG-15, Pennsylvania State Archives.

⁴⁸⁷ Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 250.

the criminal from the prison....Education is not, then, a hindrance to crime...[though] it may elevate a man from the condition of ‘sneak thief’ to the more consequential position of burglar.”⁴⁸⁸ The article never seriously critiqued the notion that education led to lower crime. It merely concluded that the best approach was vocational rather than academic education. Ten years later, another commentator noted that, “ ... given 1000 cases [or criminals] not five per cent are mechanics, trained, taught mechanics,” rehearsing Cassidy’s assertion that mechanics were less likely to commit crimes than those with academic educations.⁴⁸⁹ Three years later, the *Journal* went even further, celebrating, “ ... the advantage of acquiring a mechanical trade as lifting the boy above the temptations that beset youth, and giving disciplined employment that saves from bad associations, and thus withholds vice and crime.”⁴⁹⁰

Nor was Eastern State alone in emphasizing vocational education with renewed vigor; state prisons across the United States had similar programs. Barnes called the Industrial Reformatory at Huntingdon’s manual training school, “ ... one of the best in the country.”⁴⁹¹ The state prison in Huntsville, Texas, had a large production facility, staffed by employees and trained inmates, who instructed prisoners to be wheelwrights, blacksmiths, and furniture, shoe, clothing, boiler and wagon makers.⁴⁹² Kansas went one

⁴⁸⁸ “Preventive: Apprenticeship Reconsidered” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Jan., 1877), pg. 104.

⁴⁸⁹ “Opinions Without a Basis” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Jan., 1886), pg. 46.

⁴⁹⁰ “Crime Cause” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Jan., 1880), pg. 88.

⁴⁹¹ Barnes, *Evolution of Penology*, 362.

⁴⁹² Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*, 180.

step further, mandating prisoner education, in the form of vocational education, as early as the 1870s.

Despite the increased focus on vocational education and Cassidy's expressed antipathy toward academic education, the "3 R's" never disappeared from Eastern State's curriculum; in fact, they flourished. Whereas in 1860, twenty-three hundred individual lessons in academic subjects like reading and math were given to Eastern State inmates, the number of lessons rose to sixty-seven hundred in 1874. Obviously, the penitentiary's population had increased during that period, but not by the 290 percent that the number of lessons did. Clearly, Eastern State's inmates were receiving more education per capita by 1874 than they had in 1860. According to Barnes, both the swelling inmate population and the increase in individual lessons required hiring a teacher whose sole responsibilities were giving academic instruction and maintaining the library. He reported that by 1895 the penitentiary school served three hundred and thirty five inmates.⁴⁹³ By 1910, the tuberculosis ward atop cellblock three had been converted to a two-room schoolhouse.⁴⁹⁴ In other words, despite Warden Cassidy's expressed preference for vocationalism, basic book learning was thoroughly ingrained in Eastern State's character.

In part, the continuing existence of basic education was probably due to the fact that the PPS still believed wholeheartedly in the rehabilitative power of Eastern State's educational program, based on the triumvirate of religion, labor, and academics. While

⁴⁹³ Finn Hornum, "Reactions to the New Developments in Penology" Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 169.

⁴⁹⁴ Joshua L. Bailey "A Visit to the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania" *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Jan., 1910), pg. A8.

they embraced vocationalism to an extent, most members of the PPS were not as convinced as Warden Cassidy of the dangers of academic education. According to PPS vice-president Alfred H. Love:

A well-stocked and well-circulated library is an essential to the Separate System, and with it competent and faithful schoolteachers, as well as one-story buildings, and yards attached to the cell...this, joined with religious teaching and the music, vocal and instrumental, of interested persons⁴⁹⁵

Clearly, despite Cassidy's reservations, basic education still was to be an important feature at the penitentiary.

This is not to say that the Eastern State's administration was able to offer each inmate as much attention as before the Civil War. The pervasive overcrowding of U.S. penitentiaries forced changes in the ways that administrators delivered educational services. For instance, the penitentiary's moral instructor John Ruth noted in 1878 that "The overcrowded condition of our prison has compelled me of necessity to make my visits short, and at the door of the cell, except in such cases as called for special attention."⁴⁹⁶ Clearly, inmates received less individual attention after the Civil War even as they were receiving more educational lessons per capita.

Yet, Eastern State's educational program remained effective, at least according to the institution's statistics. Again, it is important to remember that the penitentiary's administrators and the PPS were constantly trying to prove the efficacy of the Pennsylvania System in rehabilitating inmates, so these figures should be interpreted critically. On the other hand, the very fact that the penitentiary's annual reports and

⁴⁹⁵ Teeters, *They Were In Prison*, 205.

⁴⁹⁶ *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: McLaughlin Brothers, 1878), 88.

discharge books mentioned what inmates had learned during their incarceration testifies to the expectation that penitentiaries were supposed to be educational institutions. The 1869 annual reported noted that, of 308 inmates received during the year, 102 (33 percent) had some level of educational deficiency. Of that 102, 54 percent were illiterate when admitted, but the educational staff was able to cut that number to 21 percent in less than a year. The number of inmates who could read imperfectly fell from 25 percent to 10 percent, while the number of inmates who could read, write, and cipher rose from 0 percent to 69 percent in that same time frame.⁴⁹⁷ Eight years later, the penitentiary received 109 inmates who required literacy training. Though 81 were completely illiterate at admission, less than a year later that number had fallen to 6. The number who could read, write and cipher skyrocketed from 0 to 71.⁴⁹⁸ Of the 429 inmates discharged during 1892, 47 (10.9 percent) learned to read and write during their incarceration.⁴⁹⁹ These numbers indicate both that the institution's administration continued the pre-Civil War policy of educating inmates and that the penitentiary's educational program remained effective.

As before the Civil War, Eastern State's black inmates were afforded the same educational opportunities as white prisoners. Twenty-five percent of the inmates discharged from the penitentiary in 1877 who had learned to read and write during their

⁴⁹⁷ *Forty-First Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: McLaughlin Brothers, 1870), 115-6.

⁴⁹⁸ *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: McLaughlin Brothers, 1878), 95.

⁴⁹⁹ *Sixty-Fourth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane and Scott, 1893), 4.

incarceration were listed as black or mulatto.⁵⁰⁰ Fifteen years later, blacks accounted for thirty-four percent of inmates who had learned to read while at Eastern State (the penitentiary no longer listed “mulattoes” on the discharge register).⁵⁰¹ By 1906, blacks accounted for over thirty percent of inmates discharged during the first seven months of that year.⁵⁰² After July 1906, it is impossible to identify the racial composition of discharged inmates who learned to read because the administration stopped recording information in the “education received while in prison” column in the discharge records. Nonetheless, these numbers indicate that black inmates had considerable access to Eastern State’s educational curriculum and benefited from it.

The same was not true of Eastern State’s female inmates, who appear to have been shut out of the penitentiary’s educational program after the Civil War. No females were included in the list of inmates discharged during the years 1877, 1892 and 1906 who learned to read and write during their incarcerations despite the fact that women were discharged in those years. This was a definite shift from the penitentiary’s policy before the war, when women were taught to read and write during their incarceration. The reasons behind this shift are not entirely clear; the annual reports are silent on this issue. Part of the problem is that women were such a small proportion of the penitentiary’s population (usually about 2-3 percent) that there is a very small set of cases from which to generalize. One possibility is that few of them required literacy instruction. For

⁵⁰⁰ Discharge Descriptive Dockets, RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

instance, of the 10 women released during the first seven months of 1906, only 1 was listed as “illiterate” on the reception register (another was listed as being able to read and write “imperfectly.”).⁵⁰³ Another possibility is that women’s sentences were generally too short for literacy instruction: most of the women discharged in 1906 had served less than two years, with most serving just over a year. In any case, it is clear that after the Civil War, while race was not a barrier to literacy education at Eastern State Penitentiary, gender was.

In general, this information clearly demonstrates that Eastern State continued educating its inmates after the Civil War. Perhaps education remained a cornerstone of the penitentiary’s rehabilitation program because educators led the PPS. John J. Lytle, the Society’s secretary between 1852 and 1911 (the last three years as honorary secretary) believed that “bad education” – reading pulp books instead of more wholesome fare – caused youths to commit crimes.⁵⁰⁴ His successor, Albert H. Votaw was a career educator who taught at a Friend’s school in New York, and later the Westtown boarding school in West Chester, Pennsylvania.⁵⁰⁵ George W. Hall, the PPS’s tenth president (1905-1906) was also associated with a variety of educational institutions: he was a member of the Franklin Institute and a director of both the School of Design for Women and the Home for Feeble-Minded Children.⁵⁰⁶ His successor, Joshua L. Baily (PPS

⁵⁰³ Convict Reception Registers, RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

⁵⁰⁴ Teeters, *They Were In Prison*, 324.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

president, 1907-1916) was, for half a century, a manager of the Philadelphia Society for Employment and the Instruction of the Poor, which oversaw Philadelphia's House of Industry.⁵⁰⁷ These examples demonstrate that the PPS's tradition of reformers interested in both academic education and penology continued into the twentieth century, which increasingly distanced the PPS' point of view from the career prison men administering the penitentiary.

The differences of opinion as to the value of basic education between Cassidy and the PPS reflected a growing chasm between the philanthropists in the society and the professionals in the penitentiary. Cassidy apparently felt that at least some members of the PPS were "benevolent cranks" due to their enduring faith that prisoners could be rehabilitated.⁵⁰⁸ Some of this likely reflected Cassidy's aggravation at their influence over penitentiary policy; whereas other prison boards of trustees were weak and mostly disconnected from day to day operations, Wines and Dwight called Eastern's board, " ... vigilant, active, thorough and pervading."⁵⁰⁹

To a certain degree, the dissonance between Cassidy and the PPS reflected sociologist Andrew Abbot's model of professionalization. According to Abbot, professions are defined by struggles over jurisdictional claims.⁵¹⁰ Clearly, Cassidy's dissatisfaction with the PPS was a jurisdictional claim over how much authority the

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 377.

⁵⁰⁸ Warden's Daily Journal May 30, 1886 quoted in Kali N. Gross *Colored Amazons*, 70.

⁵⁰⁹ Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 79.

⁵¹⁰ Andrew Abbott, *The Systems of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.

amateurs (the members of the PPS, who theorized about penology) would exercise over the professionals (the administration and employees of the penitentiary, who worked first hand with the inmates). Conflict was probably inevitably because, as historian Thomas Haskell sagely noted “ ... the professional defines himself largely by the amateur practices he rejects.”⁵¹¹

The warden was not the only one who regarded the PPS as meddling and wedded to an anachronistic philosophy. Following the Civil War, the Commonwealth attempted to consolidate its control over various public charitable, educational, and penal institutions in order to assure their professional management and uniform adherence to the law. On April 24, 1869, Pennsylvania’s legislature passed an act mandating the creation of a Board of Public Charities to oversee any charitable or correctional institutions that received state money. Unfortunately, as Barnes noted, this was a “ ... feeble” attempt that ultimately proved unsuccessful.⁵¹² Though abortive, this attempt to centralize control under a professional, state run agency was symptomatic of the growing rift between lay practitioners and professional administrators that was causing so much friction between the PPS and Warden Cassidy. Moreover, this was not the last time that the Commonwealth tried to assert its control over the penitentiary. Yet, as pervasive as professionalism was, it had its limits in post-Civil War America, and Eastern State was able to retain some degree of autonomy until the mid-1950s.

⁵¹¹ Thomas Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), xxi.

⁵¹² Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 300.

Educational Thought in America, 1870-1920

Just as before the Civil War, Eastern State's educational program largely mirrored trends in the larger discourse of American education, particularly the emergence of the manual training movement. Historian Diane Ravitch noted that, by the end of the nineteenth century, there had developed a "new education," which encompassed manual training, industrial and vocational education, commercial, occupational and agricultural studies, and domestic science.⁵¹³ According to noted historian of education Lawrence Cremin, the leader of the manual training movement, Calvin Woodward, viewed manual training " ... as part of a balanced general education for all."⁵¹⁴ The "new education" eventually came to be known as "progressive education," and it was most closely associated with the work of the noted educational reformer John Dewey, who viewed schools as laboratories of social reform.

For Dewey, the purpose of vocational education was not *trade* education, meaning that students were not *merely* to be taught a specific job; instead, vocational education emphasized skills that would allow students to prosper at a number of different types of employment. In Dewey's mind, trade education ghettoized students by locking them into one form of labor, which perpetuated social inequality. Vocational education, on the other hand, taught students skills that could be applied in any work place. As

⁵¹³ Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 51.

⁵¹⁴ Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in America, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 29.

historian Howard R.D. Gordon noted, “Dewey believed that it was education’s role to combat social predestination, not contribute to it.”⁵¹⁵ Dewey himself noted that “... nothing could be more absurd than to try and educate individuals with an eye to only one line of activity.”⁵¹⁶ According to Dewey, the misunderstanding arose because of the word “vocation,” which most people took as synonymous with “job.” Dewey asserted that a vocation was in fact, “... such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person... Each individual has of necessity a variety of callings, in each of which he should be intelligently effective.”⁵¹⁷ This was more or less the goal of vocational programming at Eastern State; while the penitentiary’s program tended more toward job training than Dewey’s vision, its administrators were nonetheless concerned with inculcating universal skills and values that would serve inmates in whatever legitimate calling they pursued after release.

Ravitch identified four assumptions associated with progressive education: first, that education could be developed scientifically, with empirically quantifiable methods; second, that those methods should be based on children’s innate natures (she called this the basis of the child-centered approach to education); third, that the purpose of education was to determine society’s needs and fit children to fulfill those needs (a process called education for social efficiency, a model that Ravitch attacked); and finally, that education could be used to reform society, though she dismissed progressive education as “anti-

⁵¹⁵ Howard R.D. Gordon, *The History and Growth of Vocational Education in America*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2003), 32.

⁵¹⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1944), 307.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 307.

intellectual” because she believed that it failed to provide students a classical education.⁵¹⁸ In many ways, these assumptions were similar to those shaping penology in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, because the entire purpose of education in prisons was to rehabilitate inmates by turning them into compliant workers and responsible citizens.

Even the PPS got involved with the debate, once again illustrating the fluid boundaries between penal and educational reform. In 1880, the PPS asserted that, “... the public schools must be supplemented by industrial schools. There is too much time unnecessarily consumed in public schools, there are too many books, and their books too comprehensive. They should be taught only reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, and grammar.”⁵¹⁹ Moreover, many penologists believed the same thing that educational reformers did; namely, that penology was (or should be) a science, with quantifiable truths derived from rigorous investigation and experimentation. Thus, educational and penal reform developed along similar lines between the Civil War and the Depression, just as they had in Jacksonian and antebellum America.

Just as the creation of urban public school systems was in part a response to the disturbing social changes of the Jacksonian Era, the vocational education movement was partially fueled by late nineteenth century Americans’ sense of vertigo at the changing cultural landscape they inhabited. According to noted historian of education David Tyack, the basis of progressive education was that, following the rise of urban

⁵¹⁸ Ravitch, *Left Back*, 60.

⁵¹⁹ “Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons” *Philadelphia Inquirer* January 23, 1880 pg. 3.

industrialism, “ ... the idea that a common school grounding in the three R’s would suffice for any career and that public education could train any boy to be President of the United States was clearly absurd.”⁵²⁰ The expansion of factory labor created the need for a new type of educational programming, and vocational education moved to fill this void. Ironically, as historian Leslie H. Fishel, Jr. noted, vocational education programs tended to be “backward looking” in the sense that they focused “ ... on traditional manual trades” that had largely been replaced by deskilled industrial jobs in the Gilded Age.⁵²¹

Philadelphia was a center of the vocational education movement because, according to then superintendent of schools James MacAlister, “ ... this new feature of education had been more heartily welcomed, and ... more has been done in putting it into practical operation in Philadelphia than in any other city in this country.”⁵²² MacAlister noted that manual education had been introduced into Philadelphia’s public schools in 1884 based on Dewey’s philosophy of training “ ... the hand and the eye, not for the purpose of superseding the action of the mind, but as the efficient agents of the mind in gaining a truer and ampler knowledge of the world.”⁵²³ The purpose of Philadelphia’s

⁵²⁰ David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 188.

⁵²¹ Leslie H. Fishel Jr., “The African American Experience” *The Gilded Age: Perspective on the Origins of Modern America* ed. Charles W. Calhoun (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 151.

⁵²² James MacAlister, *Manual Training in the Public Schools of Philadelphia* (New York: New York College for the Training of Teachers, 1889), 33.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 35.

manual training program was to meet the city's social needs, which MacAlister defined as teaching students to “...believe in work.”⁵²⁴

Ravitch, who has been extremely critical of vocational education, noted that it represented an unlikely coalition of business leaders, who sought “... economy and efficiency” from America's public schools, and university based progressive educators like Dewey, whose goal was to more closely link educational outcomes with the needs of an industrial society.⁵²⁵ Tyack asserted that vocational education represented a growing conviction that schools should prepare students for the job market through “... vocational guidance and testing, junior high schools, and differentiated curricula” for different “tracks” – i.e. differentiating between those going to college and those going to work.⁵²⁶ By separating future workers from future middle managers, this coalition of businessmen and university professionals created a set of institutions that trained pupils for their future roles not just by inculcating specific skills, but also by teaching values that separated the two groups.

While the vast majority of students were not enrolled in vocational education – Tyack estimated the number at 10 percent - vocational education was significant for the attention devoted to it and the fact that, in practice, minorities and immigrants were often funneled into these programs, which became “... a dead-end track for lower class youth.”⁵²⁷ Ravitch agreed, asserting that class-biased educational administrators

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵²⁵ Ravitch, *Left Back*, 51.

⁵²⁶ Tyack, *The One Best System*, 190.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 190.

foreclosed any possibility of economic mobility for students by placing them in these programs.⁵²⁸ Kliebard noted that vocational training was usually prescribed for those considered to need “remedial treatment,” especially the mentally handicapped, African Americans, and juvenile delinquents. By 1902, vocational training programs were promoted “ ... as a source of moral and social enrichment.”⁵²⁹

Vocational Education at Eastern State

Historian Timothy Gilfoyle asserted that inmates at Eastern “theoretically” learned trades, but that, in practice, “ ... this rarely happened.”⁵³⁰ Historian Richard Fulmer noted that Eastern State’s administration “ ... established a small mechanic arts training program, with lip service to improving inmates’ prospects for finding work upon release, although it was mostly to help with construction projects at the prison.”⁵³¹ Fulmer’s and Gilfoyle’s assertions, and others like it, that the penitentiary’s labor program was exploitative and that administrators were not really concerned with inmate education is not supported by the facts. As early as 1852 inmates were permitted to keep 50 percent of what they produced over the cost of their maintenance, which was about thirty cents a day.⁵³² The other 50 percent was returned to the county where they were convicted.

During the 1880s, this program proved incredibly popular; in 1882, the 815 inmates paid

⁵²⁸ Ravitch, *Left Back*, 51.

⁵²⁹ Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 13.

⁵³⁰ Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket’s Tale*, 200.

⁵³¹ Fulmer, “The House” Manuscript in the Author’s Personal Collection, 18.

⁵³² Glen Gildemeister, “Prison Labor and Convict Competition with Free Workers in Industrializing America, 1840-1890,” Ph.D. diss (Northern Illinois University, 1977), 104.

for overwork generated \$10,271.00, while five years later, 808 inmates generated a surplus of \$11,081.00. While these numbers declined precipitously in the 1890s, they indicate that a majority of inmates were interested in working for a profit.⁵³³ As Warden Cassidy noted in 1897, labor was an extremely important part of life at Eastern State, contributing not just to inmates' rehabilitation, but making their time at the penitentiary bearable.

The severest punishment in our institution is the deprivation of labor. The very first thing we do to an unruly prisoner is to take the tools and materials away from him... Under the operation of this rule there are few infractions or prison laws, and these few quickly repent and make terms with the authorities to begin work⁵³⁴

Clearly, inmate labor was still an important and valuable component of penitentiary life.

Moreover, Eastern State's labor program was designed to provide inmates with skills they would need in Philadelphia's labor market. While the traditional narrative of post-Civil War industrial expansion is that industries deskilled labor and shifted toward machine driven production, historian Philip Scranton has demonstrated that this does not adequately describe the complexity of Philadelphia's labor market. According to Scranton, "Philadelphia made visible the achievements and potentials of batch and custom manufacturing from the Centennial through the 1890s."⁵³⁵ John K. Brown, in his study of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, noted that the type of large, custom manufactured products for which Philadelphia was known, like locomotives and ships, could not adopt the labor-saving approach to manufacturing that involved replacing men

⁵³³ Barnes, *Evolution of Penology* 243.

⁵³⁴ Cassidy, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, 17.

⁵³⁵ Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 90.

with machines. In short, in Philadelphia, “ ... skilled men, an army of craftsmen, were irreplaceable.”⁵³⁶ As a result, Eastern State’s vocational program was, to a certain degree, uniquely fitted to Philadelphia’s labor market.

Much like Eastern State’s academic program, it appears that the penitentiary’s administrators assigned inmates occupations without regard to their race. For instance, in 1892 blacks and whites caned chairs, made cigars, sewed stockings and wove mats.⁵³⁷ This remained true even in 1906, when many of the inmates were listed as idle. For instance Joseph Rawl and William Layton – both white inmates – were listed as idle when discharged, but Frank Hink, William Garbrey, Frank Stokes, and Frank Burrow were black inmates taught to cane chairs. This is not to suggest that all black inmates were employed – Benjamin Carr, Charles Brown and Edmund Brooker were idle black inmates. The point is that race does not appear to have been a barrier to participating in Eastern State’s vocational education program.

Yet, all was not perfect with regard to vocational training at the penitentiary. Part of the problem was the nature of Eastern State’s vocational educational program, which taught inmates anachronistic trades. The penitentiary was legally prohibited from teaching inmates to use power driven machines until 1915, a fact that likely handicapped “graduates” of Eastern State’s vocational education program.⁵³⁸ While Philadelphia’s labor market held opportunities for skilled, non-machine driven labor (particularly in the

⁵³⁶ John K. Brown, *The Baldwin Locomotive Works, 1831-1915* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 130.

⁵³⁷ Discharge Descriptive Dockets, RG-15, Records of the Dept. of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary Population Records, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

⁵³⁸ Brown, *the Baldwin Locomotive Works*, 184.

manufacture of large, custom ordered products), a large segment of the city's industrial firms had adopted machine driven manufacturing techniques. Brown noted that, while ship and train manufacturers were unable to adopt mass production techniques and unskilled labor, most firms did. "Between 1870 and the late 1890s, the workforce became industrially organized, with only vestiges of its old craft orientation. Workers' skills and autonomy were narrowed during this period by the extension of piecework, the adoption of standard parts, and the drawing room's influence over work."⁵³⁹ Historian Peter N. Stearns argued that the disjuncture between Eastern State's vocational education program, which emphasized artisanal methods and values, and America's rapidly expanding industrial sector, which required large numbers of unskilled workers, led states to abandon the Pennsylvania System.⁵⁴⁰

The prohibition against teaching inmates to use power machinery sprang from organized labor's growing power after the 1880s. According to historian Ken Fones-Wolf, the Civil War "... spurred an aggressive labor upsurge ..." that positioned organized labor to successfully challenge inmate labor, which reached its apogee in the decade after 1875.⁵⁴¹ Labor unions had attacked the penitentiary's penal labor system from the day Eastern State opened, because they asserted (correctly) that inmates produced goods at artificially low prices. In addition, non-incarcerated workers asserted

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁴⁰ Peter N. Stearns, "Prisons, Production, and Profit: Reconsidering the Importance of Prison Industries" *Journal of Social History* 14, no. 2 (Winter, 1980), 257.

⁵⁴¹ Ken Fones-Wolf, "An Industrial Giant Takes Shape, 1800-1872" in *Keystone of Democracy: A History of Pennsylvania Workers* ed. Howard Harris and Perry K. Blatz (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1999), 66 and Gildemeister, "Prison Labor," 196.

that penal labor created the impression that manual labor was a punishment, which promoted the idea that manual laborers were analogous to criminals. Organized labor won an important victory in June 1883, when the state legislature abolished contract convict labor at all of Pennsylvania's penal institutions. While Eastern State was not directly affected, because the penitentiary operated on a slightly different system, the labor unions smelled blood, and pushed for further restrictions. They succeeded with a second act passed the same month that required all inmate-produced goods to be stamped "convict made." Labor unions then vigorously campaigned against such goods, arguing that consumers should not buy anything with the stamp.

The worst blow, from the standpoint of vocational education, came in 1897 in the form of the Muehlbronner Act. This law prohibited Pennsylvania's prisons from using power machinery of any sort in manufacturing and capped at five percent the number of inmates who could be employed manufacturing brooms, brushes and hollowware. Worse, the act limited to ten percent the proportion of the inmate population manufacturing anything else, with the exception for mats, which was capped at twenty percent.⁵⁴² Any sort of widespread vocational education program under these circumstances was simply impossible.

The effect on Eastern State's inmate population was delayed. Throughout the mid-1880s, the number of idle inmates fluctuated, but remained below three hundred. By 1893, the number had jumped to almost eight hundred, and increased to 1,156 the following year. Though the number of idle inmates eventually shrank, it never dipped

⁵⁴² Finn Hornum "Prison Labor, 1866-1923" Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 222.

below 800 until after the turn of the century.⁵⁴³ Any sort of legitimate vocational education programming was impossible under these circumstances, because fewer than one-in-three of the penitentiary's inmates could be employed at any one time. The PPS reacted sharply, calling the acts, "monstrous" and "a disgrace to the intelligence of the nineteenth century," but to little avail.⁵⁴⁴ Barnes critiqued the prohibition on machine labor, writing: "it is difficult not to agree with the inspectors as to the therapeutic and rehabilitative value of vocational instruction for prisoners, but it is impossible to admit that this purpose was likely to be accomplished by teaching a handicraft trade which had long been an anachronism in the outside world."⁵⁴⁵

The official death of the Pennsylvania System, coupled with the heavy restrictions on inmate labor, was both a challenge and an opportunity for Eastern State. Education remained a vital force at the penitentiary, but restrictions on vocational education, Eastern State's curriculum tilted heavily toward academics. The official end of the Pennsylvania System in 1913 meant that the penitentiary could organize traditional classes and offer a diverse range of high school and college courses. It even gave inmates the opportunity to act as teachers. Of course, this violated one of the original attractions of the Pennsylvania System: total control over what inmates learned. Though vocational education never completely disappeared, it was increasingly pushed to the margins by the turn of the twentieth century, just as religion had been after the Civil War. The twentieth century

⁵⁴³ Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 228.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 251

⁵⁴⁵ Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 231.

was the Era of the Credential, and through onsite classes and correspondence courses, this was exactly what Eastern State's inmates sought.

Conclusion

Despite the myriad changes in America's approach to penology between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I, education remained a cornerstone of rehabilitative thought and technique. While many scholars at the time and later have asserted that the reformatory model was a decisive break with the penitentiary model, this is simply not true: for everything that changed, the fundamental assumptions about the "curative" power of education to reduce recidivism remained intact. This makes Eastern State Penitentiary a legitimate case study because, despite the fact that the institution was largely considered anachronistic, its rehabilitative program was representative of late nineteenth century American penal practice.

While the philosophy of rehabilitation remained firmly rooted in education, there were two important changes associated with Elmira that also appeared at Eastern State: professionalization of prison staff and administration and the rebalancing of educational priorities away from religion and academics and toward vocational education. Professionalization and the shift toward vocationalism reflected changes in educational thought as well; thus, the currents of penal and educational reform moved along parallel tracks. This was also the case before the Civil War, and prison education in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America was therefore a story of continuity, as well as change.

CHAPTER IV THE DE-INSTITUTIONALIZED INSTITUTION, 1913-1953

On February 4, 1934, Eastern State Penitentiary welcomed one of its most notorious and colorful inmates: famed bank robber and jail breaker, Willie Sutton. Sentenced to twenty-five to fifty years for robbing Philadelphia's Corn Exchange Bank (for the second time), the thirty-two year old Sutton had already spent a considerable portion of his adult life behind bars. Sutton's reputation as an accomplished escapist had preceded him: he recalled that Eastern State's warden, Herbert "Hardboiled" Smith, told him that, if he tried to escape, the guards would "... blow your fuckin' head off."⁵⁴⁶ Naturally, this threat did not stop Sutton from attempting many times, although succeeding took more than a decade. What is surprising is the degree to which Sutton was able to use his decade-long confinement at Eastern State to finish his education. Sutton proudly noted in his second memoirs, *Where the Money Was*, that he gave himself a "complete education" by taking advantage of the penitentiary's various educational opportunities and programs.⁵⁴⁷ Sutton's story, which was not atypical, demonstrates that Eastern State continued functioning as a self-consciously educational institution between 1913 and 1953, just as it had since the Age of Jackson.

This chapter spans four decades in the penitentiary's history, bookended by two monumental shifts in the penitentiary's penal philosophy and administration: the official

⁵⁴⁶ Willie Sutton with Edward Linn *Where the Money Was: The Memoirs of a Bank Robber* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 155.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

end of the Pennsylvania System in 1913 and the rechristening of Eastern State Penitentiary as the State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia, or SCI-PHI, in 1953. In the forty years between these two milestone events in the institution's history, the penitentiary continued aggressively educating inmates in the hopes of fitting them for reentry into society. Thus, even as penologists continued defining rehabilitation in medical rather than religious terms, the primary method of rehabilitating inmates – education – remained the same.

The history of penal education in this period is shaped by two themes – the continued shift toward professional administration and the move away from penal labor as a component of rehabilitation – that profoundly impacted prisons across the country. While education remained the preferred method of rehabilitation, the legal curtailment of penal labor shifted prison learning away from vocational education and toward academic programs usually designed to culminate in a credential of some sort. In addition, the continuing professionalization of penal staff led to the creation of the first professional organization for penal educators, the Correctional Education Association. This organization heavily promoted academic learning as being essential to rehabilitating inmates.

For Eastern State Penitentiary, this was a period of transition, as the institution threw off the last vestiges of the Pennsylvania System. This shift was accompanied by a shift in the way that administrators thought about institutions and rehabilitation. Rehabilitation was no longer something that an institution “did” to an inmate. Now, the inmate was expected to take an active role in his own rehabilitation. This change was retarded by the penitentiary administration's general cynicism about rehabilitation during

the 1930s and 1940s. Though this shift would not be complete until the 1950s, its outlines were clearly visible as early as the 1910s. Another transition was the movement toward centralized penal administration, which picked up steam during this period. Though it would take a series of riots in the early 1950s to finally consolidate the Commonwealth's administrative control over its various penal institutions, various commentators identified the penitentiaries' relative autonomy as a vestige of a previous age that needed to end. In sum, this chapter details a period of immense change for Eastern State, but also demonstrates that education remained the cornerstone of the penitentiary's rehabilitative program.

The New Penology

The 1910s was the era of what President Theodore Roosevelt dubbed the "New Penology," and which historian Rebecca M. McLennan called the foundation of the modern penal state.⁵⁴⁸ Though short lived, the New Penology left its mark on American penal institutions, particularly with regard to education. Adherents of the New Penology believed that medical science could be used to identify the causes of crime and develop strategies for eliminating criminal behavior, eventually rehabilitating individual convicts.⁵⁴⁹ According to historian Eduardo Rotman, this ideology " ... resulted in the 'Big House,' a new type of prison managed by professionals instead of short-term political appointees and designed to eliminate the abusive forms of corporal punishment

⁵⁴⁸ Rebecca M. McLennan *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11.

⁵⁴⁹ Thomas G. Blomberg and Karol Lucken *American Penology: A History of Control* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 2000), 99.

and prison labor prevailing at the time.”⁵⁵⁰ Even after this set of ideas fell out of fashion, the reforms they achieved remained in place and functional. These included aggressive classroom and citizenship training programs as well as a scientific approach to rehabilitation that relied upon a dramatic expansion of penal education programs.

The New Penologists’ critique of American penal institutions was rooted in their anti-institutionalism, which they shared with some educational reformers at the time. Anti-institutionalism was not the same as being anti-institution; according to noted historian David J. Rothman, New Penologists conceived of institutions not as “... buildings with walls but a style of operation that was rigid, inflexible, and machine-like.”⁵⁵¹ They sought to “de-institutionalize” institutions by introducing reforms that were designed to make prisons more like ideal American communities in the hope that prisoners could be reeducated to their appropriate places as citizens in a democratic republic. This particular reform is most closely associated with famed penal reformer Thomas Mott Osborne, whose career as a prison administrator was brief, but whose influences reverberated throughout this period.

One manifestation of the anti-institutional impulse was classification, or the designation of institutions as minimum, medium, and maximum security. Usually, these designations were based on the perceived level of threat that the inmates posed and was made manifest by the presence, height, and construction of a wall surrounding the

⁵⁵⁰ Edgardo Rotman “The Failure of Reform” *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 165.

⁵⁵¹ David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 43.

institution in question. The basic idea was to better fit various classes of inmates to the most appropriate institutions, rather than the “one-size fits all” approach that the New Penologists asserted characterized previous generations’ approach to penology. In some respects, this was quite similar to the approach that early nineteenth-century penologists had taken in advocating the Pennsylvania System because they argued that separation allowed them to work with inmates as individuals. However, the New Penologists’ embrace of classification betrayed their skepticism about the institutions’ ability to actually rehabilitate inmates. The Ashe Committee Report, an investigation of Pennsylvania’s correctional system published in 1944, displayed this skepticism. Though slightly after the New Penologists’ heyday, the report nonetheless reflects their rejection of the Pennsylvania System, which had advocated elaborate architectural constructions designed to buttress the philosophical system. According to the report “The significant question is not how the prison is built but, rather, how it is operated ... it is our opinion that a sounder method of classification would be to take the institutional program rather than the physical plant as the differentiating criterion.”⁵⁵²

In addition, one of the things that New Penologists asserted was that criminal behavior was a form of disease that ought to be approached and cured “scientifically.”⁵⁵³ One of the corollaries of this scientific or medical approach was “individualization,” which criminologists Thomas G. Blomberg and Karol Lucken described as driven by

⁵⁵² Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, *Report of the Committee Appointed by Honorable Edward Martin to Survey the Penal and Correctional System of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1944), 13

⁵⁵³ Nicole Hahn Rafter and Debra L. Stanley *Prisons in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1999), 10.

determining, “ ... the individual cause(s) of an individual’s criminal behavior and the associated treatment needs and then provid[ing] treatment that was responsive to these individual needs.”⁵⁵⁴ They noted that both medicalization and individualization were predicated on four assumptions: first, that human behavior resulted from antecedent causes, second, that those causes were identifiable, third, identification of antecedent causes allowed scientists to develop treatments, and fourth, those treatments were therapeutic and led to lower recidivism rates.⁵⁵⁵ According to Rothman, New Penologists believed that, by studying inmates’ life histories, properly trained clinicians could “ ... devise a remedy that was specific to the individual.”⁵⁵⁶ Obviously, delivering individualized diagnostic and treatment services to each inmate necessitated a dramatic increase in the number of services for prisoners and a concomitant rise in the number of clinicians employed to provide them.

One of the services that expanded to meet individual prisoners’ needs was education, which had historically been the most popular tool for rehabilitating inmates. According to the 1931 Report of the State of Pennsylvania Commission on Penal Institutions “In a progressive program of rehabilitation, education carries a wider meaning and becomes of fundamental importance. Its principle function should be to rebuild the character of the inmates, to develop their personality and to provide training in habits that will lead to successful social adjustments on release.”⁵⁵⁷ Thinking in these

⁵⁵⁴ Blomberg and Lucken, *American Penology*, 107.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

⁵⁵⁶ David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 5.

⁵⁵⁷ *Report of the State of Pennsylvania Commission on Penal Institutions* (1931), 20.

terms, prison administrators again adjusted their educational focus, shifting from vocationalism to classroom learning. Due also to a concomitant ideological shift away from penal labor, many state prisons, including Eastern State, shuttered or drastically scaled back their vocational education programs. Now, penal reformers saw prisons as being responsible not just for teaching academic skills, but also for educating inmates to function as citizens in a rapidly changing democratic society. According to the 1931 National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement report on America's prisons, " ... it is the function of the prison to find the means so to reshape the interests, attitudes, habits, the total character of the individual [so] as to release him both competent and willing to find a way of adjusting himself to the community without further violation of the laws."⁵⁵⁸ Harry Elmer Barnes crystallized the era's central tension as, " ... nothing less than the question of whether a prison shall be a place in which to punish criminals or an institution for training convicts to be decent citizens."⁵⁵⁹

In order to achieve these goals, reformers in Pennsylvania demanded that the Commonwealth abandon the practice of dividing the system into eastern and western districts and arbitrarily incarcerating offenders at the institutions that corresponded to the geographic area where the crime was committed. The Ashe Committee asserted that during the Jacksonian period " ... it was entirely logical and practical that the State be divided into two prison districts," but that with the advent of better transportation and

⁵⁵⁸ National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, *Report on Penal Institutions, Probation and Parole* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1931), 7.

⁵⁵⁹Barnes, *The Story of Punishment: A Record of Man's Inhumanity to Man* 2 ed. (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith Publishing Corp., 1972), 216.

communication technologies, this set-up was anachronistic.⁵⁶⁰ The Commission on Penal Institutions called for a “... state-wide policy of discovery and treatment,” which necessitated a higher level of coordination among the Commonwealth’s institutions.⁵⁶¹ Thus, to achieve the New Penologists’ goals required not just reforming institutions, but required centralizing control over those institutions and integrating them into a larger penal system.

A related innovation in this period was the development of the first professional organization for penal educators, the Correctional Education Association (CEA). This organization grew out of and supported the innovations of the New Penology and advocated more rigorous credentialing standards for penal educators as well as curriculums specifically targeted toward adult learners. This sundered the traditionally strong relationship between penal and public educators, because the CEA articulated a vision of penal education that was something more than “public schools behind bars.” The CEA believed that prisons should provide material specifically geared toward inmates’ learning needs, rather than simply “borrowing” textbooks, tests, and classroom projects from elementary and high schools. Unfortunately, the CEA’s appeals often fell on deaf ears, and the continuing shortage of credentialed penal educators meant that guards and even inmates continued teaching in prison classrooms.

While both Harry Elmer Barnes and Negley K. Teeters asserted that the New Penology “... largely bypassed Eastern State due to the apathy connected with the constantly anticipated closing of the institution and its replacement by the facility at

⁵⁶⁰ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, *Report of the Committee*, 13

⁵⁶¹ National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, *Report on Penal Institutions*, 20.

Graterford,” my research suggests otherwise.⁵⁶² It is true that, in many ways, Eastern State was not the cutting edge institution it had once been, particularly after it formally abandoned the Pennsylvania System in 1913. The Ashe Committee did not mince words in criticizing Eastern State and called upon Pennsylvania’s legislators to “... face the fact that [the penitentiary] now belongs to a vanished age of penology.”⁵⁶³ While the Committee was correct that Eastern State’s physical plant was a relic from a bygone era, they were simply incorrect when it came to the penitentiary’s rehabilitative program. Despite the skepticism toward rehabilitation that Eastern State’s administrators evinced after 1924, the belief that penal institutions should provide educational programming was never seriously questioned, and the penitentiary’s administrators remained firmly committed to educating inmates.⁵⁶⁴ The continuation and expansion of educational programming at the penitentiary demonstrates that penal education was so ingrained in the penitentiary’s culture that it was never seriously questioned. Moreover, Eastern State was never as far from the mainstream as either Barnes or Teeters believed, and the penitentiary remains an important and useful case study of American penal education.

America’s Inmates: A Demographic Profile

Just as before, America’s inmates in the early and mid-twentieth century were disproportionately undereducated compared to the U.S. population as a whole. Eastern State’s population and educational programming clearly mirrored state prisons across the

⁵⁶² Finn Hornum “Redefinition, 1923-1970” *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* ed. Marianna Thomas (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 229.

⁵⁶³ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, *Report of the Committee*, 20.

⁵⁶⁴ Barnes, *The Story of Punishment*, 216.

country. These institutions served an inmate population that looked roughly the same: most were undereducated, relative to the country's population in general, and some were completely illiterate. William Marion Weaver's 1933 dissertation, a study of 308 inmates incarcerated at Eastern State between 1931 and 1933, illustrates the point. According to Weaver, 70 percent of the penitentiary's 2,734 inmates were white, almost 17 percent were below the age of sixteen, and only 49 percent were first time offenders.⁵⁶⁵ In addition, whereas only 8.8 percent of American boys left school before the age of 16 in 1930, 65.5 percent of Eastern State's white inmates and 77 percent of the penitentiary's black inmates had quit school by that age.⁵⁶⁶ Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the penitentiary's inmates had less than a sixth grade education (nearly 60 percent of the whites and over 80 percent of the blacks fell into this group). The illiteracy rate for the penitentiary population in general – 5.9 percent - was 43 percent higher than the average illiteracy for all Commonwealth residents over the age of 21 in 1930. While this is not quite a fair comparison (the penitentiary had a significant population under the age of 21, and the black population accounted for a significant chunk of that illiterate inmates), these numbers demonstrate that Eastern State's inmate population was still largely uneducated and (in some cases) illiterate.⁵⁶⁷

Ignorance was not limited to Eastern State's inmate population; Western State Penitentiary's population was also disproportionately undereducated, although some of

⁵⁶⁵ William Marion Weaver "A Group of Antisocial Lives: A Case Study of 308 Inmates in the Eastern State Penitentiary" (S.T.D. diss., Temple University, 1933), Chapter I, 6.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., Chapter III, 10A.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., Chapter III, 11.

that can be attributed to the higher numbers of non-English speaking immigrants incarcerated there. The best evidence of trends at Western State is a 1927 study titled *A Psychological and Educational Study of 1916 Prisoners in the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania*. Written by University of Pittsburgh professor of educational psychology William T. Root, Jr., it was based on data he and his graduate students collected. Inmate demographics at Western State Penitentiary differed slightly from those at Eastern State in that the latter held a much higher proportion of immigrants, many of whom did not speak, read or write English, which depressed the overall educational attainment and literacy levels. For instance, Root noted that 18 percent of Western State's inmates were completely illiterate, though this is probably deceptively high due to the high rates of illiteracy among immigrants incarcerated at Western State. According to Root, 52.2 percent of Italians, 53.2 percent of Austrian/Hungarian/Slavs/Croats, 58 percent of Russians, and 50 percent of Spaniards were listed as illiterate; this may simply indicate that they could not read or write English, though they may also have been illiterate in their native tongues.⁵⁶⁸ For native-born blacks and whites, the educational attainment and literacy levels at Western were roughly the same as at Eastern State. For native-born whites and blacks, the illiteracy rate was 4 percent and 10.1 percent, respectively, while 92 percent of native-born whites and 99.3 percent of native-born blacks had left school by the eighth grade.⁵⁶⁹ Despite the disparity in these numbers, the evidence from

⁵⁶⁸ William T. Root *A Psychological and Educational Survey of the 1916 Prisoners in the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: Board of Trustees of the Western Penitentiary, 1927), 141.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

Western State supports my larger point, namely that penitentiary inmates were disproportionately ignorant relative to the Commonwealth's population.

In addition to being disproportionately ignorant relative to Pennsylvania's population, the Commonwealth's inmates were largely drawn from the lowest occupational rungs. According to University of Pittsburgh sociologist Walter A. Lunden, between 1928 and 1937 an incredible 51.5 percent of inmates committed to Western State Penitentiary were listed as unskilled "laborers," compared to 2.2 percent who were listed as "professionals." After laborers, the next highest percentage of inmates - 16.4 - were classified as "tradesmen."⁵⁷⁰ In other words, there remained a strong correlation between poor economic opportunity and incarceration, a correlation that had existed since the two penitentiaries opened nearly a century before.

Eastern and Western State were hardly unique because the patterns that emerged in Pennsylvania's state penitentiaries were visible across the country. America's inmate population was drawn from the nation's least educated men and women. According to historian Dominique Chlup, the inmates at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women were drawn from roughly the same population as those at Eastern State. Most of the women were largely uneducated; 63 percent had less than an eighth grade education, while only one in ten had graduated from high school. Less than one in one hundred was college educated.⁵⁷¹ In *Education Within Prison Walls*, Walter M. Wallack, Glenn M. Kendall, and Howard L. Briggs found that, as late as 1939, 92.6 percent of New York

⁵⁷⁰ Walter A. Lunden, *Statistics on Crime and Criminals* (Pittsburgh: Stevenson and Foster Company, 1942), 39.

⁵⁷¹ Dominique Chlup, "Educative Justice: The History of the Educational Programs and Practices at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women, 1930-1960," (Ed.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 2004), 77.

State's inmates had less than a tenth-grade education, and that 69 percent had quit school before the eighth grade.⁵⁷² Austin H. MacCormick, whose important 1931 study of prison education in America will be discussed later in the chapter, asserted that, in general, the country's inmates were "... undereducated from the academic standpoint and vocationally unskilled."⁵⁷³ According to his research, 18 percent of inmates were illiterate and about 71 percent had between a first and an eighth grade education. Only 3.5 percent had attended or graduated high school and only 0.3 percent had some level of college education.⁵⁷⁴

MacCormick also asserted that the percentage of inmates that the prisons listed as illiterate was deceptively low, because it failed to include inmates who could read and write in their native language. Once this group was included, the number of inmates who were functionally illiterate (those who could not read or write English, the prisons' dominant language) rose to one in four.⁵⁷⁵ His estimate was pretty close to the percentage of foreign-born inmates who were functionally illiterate at Western State Penitentiary (18 percent). While these statistics varied depending on ethnicity, nativity and race, MacCormick's research demonstrated that, for all of the advances in public education in the nineteenth century, America's inmate population was still disproportionately undereducated.

⁵⁷² Walter M. Wallack, Glenn M. Kendall, and Howard L. Briggs *Education Within Prison Walls* (New York: Teachers College, 1939), 116.

⁵⁷³ Austin H. MacCormick *The Education of Adult Prisoners: A Survey and a Program* (New York: National Society of Penal Information, 1931), 15.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

These numbers suggest that Eastern State Penitentiary's population was largely representative of other state penal institutions in terms of educational attainment (or lack thereof) relative to the American population at the time. This should come as no surprise, because ignorance and incarceration had gone hand-in-hand at least since Eastern State opened its doors in 1829, if not before. Despite all of its administrative eccentricities, Eastern State remains a legitimate case study for penal education in this period, at least in so far as the institution faced the same challenges as most other American state prisons. As in the past, these challenges were met with an aggressive educational program designed to fill the gaps in inmates' educational histories.

The Pendulum Swings Back: The Demise of Vocational Education

One warden who most clearly promoted penal education during this period was Robert J. McKenty, whose long term (1909-1923) at Eastern State Penitentiary is considered by some scholars to be a sort of "golden age" in that institution's history. McKenty believed that inmates could be rehabilitated, and he actively pursued a variety of programs designed to achieve that end. Despite serving during a period of incredible tumult (in 1913 the penitentiary officially abandoned the Pennsylvania System and became a congregate institution) and scandal (the Pennsylvania Legislature investigated the penitentiary in both 1919 and 1923), McKenty actively promoted inmate learning because he believed in rehabilitation. Historian and former Eastern State social worker Richard Fulmer asserted that McKenty's "... approach to corrections was firmly based on

his religious beliefs and his affable personality.”⁵⁷⁶ According to a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, in which McKenty compared the penitentiary to a school and inmates to students, “[McKenty] and his associates...were trying to remake the inmates so that when the time came they would go out into the world and make good.”⁵⁷⁷

Following in Warden Michael J. Cassidy’s footsteps, McKenty worked to strengthen Eastern State’s vocational training program. This was consistent with the Commonwealth’s approach to rehabilitation, which the Pennsylvania Commission on Penal Institutions defined as “... to fix work habits, to increase dexterity and to broaden social understanding and to teach technique so that each inmate can adjust himself to whatever outside employment he might find.”⁵⁷⁸ Highpoints of McKenty’s tenure included the introduction of technical and vocational correspondences courses provided by the Intentional Correspondence Schools of Scranton and courses in Engineering and Agriculture provided by the Pennsylvania State College System.⁵⁷⁹ Yet, his commitment to vocational education for Eastern’s population was hampered by the dearth of work available for inmates. The work shortage was an unintended result of a state law passed in June 1915, which mandated that all prison and reformatory labor be for “state use” products, or those designed to be consumed by other state institutions. The law was supposed to guarantee inmates work and ensure that state institutions would have access

⁵⁷⁶ Richard Fulmer, “The House,” Manuscript in the Author’s Personal Collection, 102.

⁵⁷⁷ “M’Kenty’s ‘Graduates’ Make Good, He Says,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10/14/1919, pg. 15.

⁵⁷⁸ *Report of the State of Pennsylvania Commission on Penal Institutions* (1931), 22.

⁵⁷⁹ Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania: A Study in American Social History* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1968), 361.

to cheap products like shoes and socks. The only problem was that the legislation did not *require* state institutions to buy inmate products, and they did not. Consequently, work at the penitentiary dried up as the number of orders dropped.⁵⁸⁰

Under the state use laws, only about 11 percent of the penitentiary's inmates could be employed in these shops at any one time.⁵⁸¹ Credit for overwork, which peaked in 1915 at \$19,743, dropped an astonishing 68 percent the following year to \$6,343. The overwork credit dropped another 63.5 percent the following year, to \$2,318, which represented less than 12 percent of the amount paid just two years before.⁵⁸² In January, 1921, the *Prison Journal* complained that only about 13 percent of Eastern's inmates were employed in industry. Even though an additional two or three hundred were employed in "domestic service," nearly one thousand inmates still sat idle every day.⁵⁸³ Warden Herbert Smith (1928-1945) even met with State officials to request trade education for inmates; he pleaded, "We have many young men here who are fully rehabilitated and are to be released within a year. Most of these men have no trades, and if we could teach them welding they would become useful members of society."⁵⁸⁴

The 1915 labor law represented an important shift in the relationship between education and labor at Eastern State Penitentiary. When the penitentiary first opened, and for nearly a century afterward, the purpose of inmate labor was two-fold: changing

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 362.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 363.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 244.

⁵⁸³ "Foreword" *The Prison Journal* (January, 1921), 24.

⁵⁸⁴ "Pen Warden has Plan to Train Convicts" *Bulletin* Jan 24, 1941, Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

inmates' perceived attitude toward honest labor and teaching them remunerative skills so that they could support themselves upon release. In short, the original purpose of labor was educational, but after the 1915 legislation, the purpose of incarceration labor was designed to save the state money and keep prisoners busy, not teach them a profession. This is not to say that vocational education completely disappeared; some prisoners were still taught trades. For instance, the 1934 *Report on Prison Industries in Pennsylvania* noted that Eastern State housed a clothing shop that produced hosiery and underwear, as well as shops for weaving, shoemaking, and printing.⁵⁸⁵ That same report noted, however, that all of these shops operated far below capacity. For instance, the hosiery department only operated at 65 percent of capacity, while the underwear shop produced at a paltry 44 percent of its capacity.⁵⁸⁶ Operating so far below capacity took its toll: of 1,753 inmates at Eastern State in 1928, only 303 could work in the prison's shops (a measly 17.3 percent). Even including those inmates employed around the prison in support capacities like painting and cooking as well as those engaged in building the "New Eastern State Penitentiary" (Graterford State Prison), and those engaged in individual work in their cells making products for sale in the prison shop, more than a quarter of inmates still sat idle every day.⁵⁸⁷

Another issue that undermined Eastern State's vocational education programming was pervasive overcrowding (defined as more inmates than cells), which had more or less

⁵⁸⁵ F. Herbert Cooper, *Report on Prison Industries in Pennsylvania* (Pennsylvania, 1934), 19.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁸⁷ *Annual Report of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Eastern State Penitentiary, 1928), 8

been a continuous feature of penitentiary life since the end of the Civil War. The penitentiary's administrators had tried to keep up by adding additional cellblocks, and a half-century of additional construction had yielded a total of 844 cells (although at the expense of Haviland's original design).⁵⁸⁸ Yet, even this expansion could not keep pace with the penitentiary's population growth, which necessitated that at least two (and sometimes three) prisoners occupy each cell. This was one of the reasons that the Commonwealth began building Graterford State Prison outside Norristown in nearby Montgomery County in the late 1920s. The goal seems to have been closing the "old" Eastern State Penitentiary once the new one was completed, but the explosion in the Commonwealth's prison population during the Great Depression made this impossible. Pennsylvania's inmate population swelled from 4509 in 1928 to 5031 in 1929, an increase of 10.3 percent, followed by a 5.6 percent increase in 1930, a 9.8 increase in 1932, and an 8 percent increase in 1933. Put another way, between 1928 and 1933, Pennsylvania's prison population increased by an astonishing 70 percent in five years. This sharp increase adversely affected Eastern State's vocational education program, and while 316 inmates were "productively employed" full-time according to the 1934 *Report on Prison Industries in Pennsylvania*, 775 had no employment.⁵⁸⁹

Eastern State was not the only Pennsylvania prison with idle inmates during this period. Inmates at Western State also sat idle due to laws restricting inmate labor. By 1918, the state-use legislation meant that only thirty of Western State's 720 convicts were

⁵⁸⁸ Jeffrey A. Cohen and Michael Schmidt, "Eastern State Penitentiary Population and Number of Cells" *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* ed. Marianna Thomas (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 236.

⁵⁸⁹ Cooper, *Report on Prison Industries*, 27.

employed in manufacturing, a paltry 4.2 percent. Penitentiary officials set another 265 (37 percent) to work in a variety of administrative or domestic tasks, but this still left nearly six out of ten inmates with nothing to occupy their time.⁵⁹⁰ According to Barnes, Western State's warden, "... has been handicapped by the few industries which could be maintained up to very recently, but his penchant for education as a solvent of the crime problem has led him...to make the most of the opportunities."⁵⁹¹ This was the same situation faced by all of the Commonwealth's penal institutions: by 1934, Pennsylvania incarcerated 6,401 inmates, of which a mere 15 percent had full-time, productive employment. Another 49 percent were listed as "... incapacitated or on part-time non-productive work," but an astonishing 36 percent of inmates had no employment *whatsoever*.⁵⁹² Thus Eastern and Western State's administrators found themselves in the same position: restrictions on penal labor had effectively curtailed the vocational education programs that had greatly expanded in the years following the Civil War. Accordingly, Pennsylvania's penitentiaries had to develop a new curriculum to educate their many idle inmates.

Pennsylvania was not alone, and many Northern states moved to abolish penal labor because many penologists perceived it as incompatible with modern rehabilitation techniques, was often exploitive, and because it offended organized labor. According to McLennan, most Northern states abolished or curtailed their penal labor programs, provoking what she called "... a full-scale disciplinary, financial, and ideological

⁵⁹⁰ Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 274.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁵⁹² Cooper, *Report on Prison Industries*, 26.

crisis.”⁵⁹³ She further argued that, between 1913 and 1919, “... the quest to revive and sustain industrial prison labor remained a central preoccupation.”⁵⁹⁴ While McLennan is undoubtedly correct that the struggle over penal labor intensified around the turn of the century and that prohibiting inmates from working created hardships for penal administrators, she overstated her case by arguing that the contest over penal labor reshaped prisons’ ideologies.

The primary weakness of her analysis was her contention that penal ideology was predicated on penal labor. Once that was unavailable, American penologists were forced to re-conceptualize their understanding of punitive confinement. McLennan was repeating the neo-Marxist argument that penitentiaries were designed to husband and control working class labor. Neo-Marxists believed that schools, hospitals, and penitentiaries were designed to inculcate workers with certain values that made them obedient workers and citizens. McLennan’s point was that penal labor was a crucial facet of teaching inmates to be good workers, and that curtailing or eliminating labor programs impinged prisons’ ability to inculcate capitalist values. Eastern State’s experience indicates that this is an overly cynical understanding of penal reformers’ intentions, which was to create a punitive environment that provided an array of educational opportunities including vocational skills. Education, not exploitation, was the purpose of penal labor from the beginning. The abolition of penal labor did not require the sort of ideological reorientation that McLennan suggested, though she is clearly right in saying

⁵⁹³ McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 196.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

that depriving inmates of labor heavily impacted the administration of America's prisons, penitentiaries, and reformatories.

This is not to suggest that that prison administrators at Eastern State or elsewhere simply raised the white flag and accepted the abolition of penal labor. John C. Groome's tenure as warden at Eastern State (1923 – 1928) coincided with a campaign to renew prison industries throughout the Commonwealth, spearheaded by Philadelphia's Chamber of Commerce. In December 1924, the Chamber's executive committee called on the Commonwealth to generate income by employing all state inmates and selling their products to state and federal institutions in Pennsylvania and surrounding states. In addition, the Chamber urged the Commonwealth to employ inmates on public works projects.

All of these proposals were reactions to the startlingly high number of idle inmates at Eastern State and other institutions.⁵⁹⁵ However, unlike when the penitentiary opened, prison labor in Pennsylvania after 1915 was at least as much about providing inmates with spending money during their incarceration as it was about teaching them remunerative skills or rehabilitating them. For instance, inmates worked at a variety of craft occupations, including leather-work, model boat building, and bobby pin carding; these activities may have provided inmates with pocket money, but their educational value is dubious.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁵ "New Prison Labor System Planned" *Bulletin* Dec 7, 1924 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁵⁹⁶ Ray and Steve Bednarek, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, pg.8.

Academic Education Fills the Void

Once vocational education was limited due to restrictions on inmate labor, Pennsylvania's penal institutions shifted their focus to academic skills. Taught in classrooms rather than workshops, this curriculum was usually designed to culminate in an academic credential, like a GED or even a college degree. Vocational education never completely disappeared from Eastern State's curriculum – the penitentiary was legally allowed to employ some inmates, even under the restrictive 1915 law – but by the late 1910s, the shift toward academic education was clearly visible at the penitentiary.

The shift from vocational education to an academic curriculum was not abrupt. Initially, Eastern State's administrators tried to maintain vocational education programs by shifting the focus from hands-on learning in prison workshops, to a more theoretical approach that taught in classrooms. For instance, in July 1916, the central branch of the YMCA, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania State University, opened two extension classes in engineering at Eastern State. Both enrolled approximately forty students, teaching sketching in one and “shop arithmetic” in the other.⁵⁹⁷ In 1937, the state provided most of its penal institutions with textbooks for trade training; this was part of Secretary of Welfare Arthur W. Howe's campaign to eliminate idleness through more aggressive vocational education.⁵⁹⁸ This was primarily achieved through classroom learning, not hands-on vocational experience, which would have violated the provisions of the 1915 prison labor law. In 1917, the penitentiary's administration expanded the

⁵⁹⁷ “College Training for Prisoners New Plan,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 20, 1916, pg. 2.

⁵⁹⁸ “State Puts Textbooks in Prison Schools,” *The Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 20, 1937 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

number of courses offered by Pennsylvania State University to include electricity and steam engineering.⁵⁹⁹ The 1928 annual report complained that “ ... limited classrooms and other facilities” hampered the penitentiary’s educational program, which limited the number of inmates who could attend school to 168.⁶⁰⁰ The penitentiary’s classroom education program expanded so much that, shortly after World War II, Eastern State’s administrators built second story classrooms atop the converted exercise yards lining cellblock one.⁶⁰¹

By the same token, the shift toward academic education was also gradual. In 1908, the penitentiary began offering correspondence courses in traditional liberal arts subjects like foreign languages, music, and mathematics.⁶⁰² This complemented an expanded program of in-class programming introduced under Warden McKenty. According to Barnes, the educational facilities in the Eastern Penitentiary under McKenty “ ... were notably strengthened and the school ranked well with those of the average person of the country.” Classes, ranging from basic literacy through grammar school, were held for over six hours every day between 8:30 AM and 4:00 PM. Fully one third of the inmates were enrolled in the school in 1915, where the teacher was assisted by “ ...

⁵⁹⁹ “Engineering Courses” *Umpire* March 28, 1918 pg. 3.

⁶⁰⁰ *Annual Report of the Eastern State Penitentiary* (Philadelphia: Eastern State Penitentiary, 1928), 10.

⁶⁰¹ David G. Cornelius “Building System Changes, 1923-1970” *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* ed. Marianna Thomas (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 242.

⁶⁰² *Annual Report of the Eastern State Penitentiary*, (Philadelphia: Eastern State Penitentiary, 1908), 65.

inmates selected on account of their qualifications for this kind of work.”⁶⁰³ Barnes noted that attendance was mandatory for “all uneducated prisoners,” which was reflected in the fact that, by 1917, the penitentiary school’s roster listed six hundred and seventeen inmates, nearly half of Eastern State’s population at that time.⁶⁰⁴

Eastern State’s educational program reflected an important ideological shift taking place within the penitentiary. When Eastern State opened in 1829, “reform” was something that was done to the inmate through a mixture of elaborate architecture, religious instruction, and forced labor. As each of these elements faded at the penitentiary during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, rehabilitation slowly became something that the prisoner chose to do himself, using the services offered by the penitentiary. Thus articles in the inmate run newspaper, *The Umpire*, reminded inmates that changing was “Up to You,” and that there were “Opportunities in Prison.”⁶⁰⁵ Such sentiments dovetailed with the New Penologists’ anti-institutionalism, but the transition from an top-down model of rehabilitation was not completed during this period. Inmate-centric rehabilitation rhetoric existed side-by-side with self-government programs that were entirely consistent with the older, institution-centric model of inmate rehabilitation.

The movement toward classroom education was not unique to Pennsylvania. By 1912, inmates at Kansas’ state prisons could take a wide variety of courses that included

⁶⁰³ A.H.V. “An Appreciation of the Eastern State Penitentiary by an Inmate” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* (Feb., 1915), 54.

⁶⁰⁴ Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 358.

⁶⁰⁵ Thomas F. Porter, “Up to You” *Umpire* August 23, 1916, 2 and “Opportunities in Prison,” *Umpire* February 21, 1918, 3.

penmanship and shorthand, history, music, and Spanish.⁶⁰⁶ The Massachusetts Reformatory for Women offered courses in English, poetry, biology, typing, the Bible, and basic math, to name just a few. This was in addition to the fifty correspondence courses offered by the Massachusetts State Department of Education.⁶⁰⁷ Clearly, other American penal institutions offered their inmates classroom education during this period.

Scholars then and now have dismissed these programs as ineffectual or worse. According to Barnes, penal education was “... usually...carried on in perfunctory fashion by convicts under the direction of the chaplain for the prison teacher. For the most part these prison schools are conducted for illiterates and make no pretense to carrying on secondary or higher education.”⁶⁰⁸ While Barnes is undoubtedly correct that there were weaknesses in American penal education programs, including the employment of inmates as teachers, his critique is overstated. During this period, 90 percent of Americans completed tenth grade, which vastly exceeded the number of inmates who had gotten that far, but only half of all Americans graduated from high school.⁶⁰⁹ Thus it is unreasonable to judge prison education programs as deficient because they did not provide college level classes, because a college education was outside most Americans’ experience. Eastern’s program was designed to remedy inmates’ deficient education by bringing them

⁶⁰⁶ Anne M. Butler *Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men’s Penitentiaries* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 180.

⁶⁰⁷ Chlup, “Educative Justice”, 18.

⁶⁰⁸ Barnes, *Story of Punishment*, 160.

⁶⁰⁹ Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 88.

up to par with the vast majority of Americans, which during this period meant giving them a tenth or eleventh grade education.

Self-Government for Life After Prison

Another important development during the 1920s and 1930s was increased attention to the goal of teaching prisoners how to rejoin society once they were liberated, because incarceration had become a way of life for some inmates. Many inmates spent significant chunks of their adult lives incarcerated, which likely made some dependent upon the institution, making the transition to life outside the walls difficult. According to William Weaver's thesis, 15 percent of Eastern State's white inmates and 21 percent of the institution's black inmates were serving their third sentences at a penal institution. Fourth convictions accounted for 13 percent of the whites and 10 percent of the blacks, while an astonishing 11 percent of whites and 10 percent of blacks were serving their fifth sentences.⁶¹⁰ Citizenship training programs were designed to introduce inmates to American practices like voting in the hope that it would lower recidivism.

As we have seen, inmates were usually drawn from the least educated strata of society, meaning that they had two strikes against them upon release: a criminal record and little or no education. As Sutton, who spent most of his adult life behind bars, noted:

Most people coming into jail are uneducated, unintelligent and uninterested in improving themselves.... By the time they leave, they have become so dependant on the institution to feed them, clothe them, and tell them what to do that they are unable to take care of themselves⁶¹¹

⁶¹⁰ Weaver, "A Group of Antisocial Lives," Chapter III, 19.

⁶¹¹ Sutton and Lind, *Where the Money Was*, 160.

Sutton's statement, published after he had been released from prison (and was therefore beyond the reach of any warden or guard), is interesting because it demonstrates that, in at least some cases, inmates accepted penal administrators' arguments regarding the value of education.

Citizenship training did not usually take place in prison classrooms or workshops, though its values were certainly reinforced in these venues. Instead, prisoners most often learned how to be citizens through a series of "self-government associations" designed to give them a voice in prison operation and inculcate an understanding of the democratic process. The most famous self-government society was at Eastern State's one-time rival, New York's Sing Sing. Formed under the aegis of that penitentiary's famed, but short-lived, warden, Thomas Mott Osborne (1914-1917), the Golden Rule Brotherhood was a committee of fifty inmates nominated by the various shop gangs and elected by their fellow prisoners. This committee chose five judges who dealt with infractions of the rules. The committee's punishments were carried out by the prison's guards. Barnes called this "... the first conscious and comprehensive attempt to provide a system of social reeducation."⁶¹² Weaver characterized it as, "... a plan for providing social education for those who had never been adequately trained in the matters pertaining to social conduct and responsibility."⁶¹³ The legacy of this organization profoundly influenced American penal education.

Osborne was a retired industrialist and politician who took such a keen interest in penal reform that he willingly entered New York's Auburn Prison as an "inmate" named

⁶¹² Barnes, *Story of Punishment*, 214.

⁶¹³ Weaver "A Group of Antisocial Lives," Chapter I, 5.

“Tom Brown” in 1913 (the same year Eastern State abandoned the Pennsylvania System); though not undercover – guards and inmates were told of his project before he arrived – Osborne was able to witness prison life first hand, which he described in *Within These Walls*. According to McLennan, Osborne’s stint at Auburn and the subsequent book “ ... drew considerable attention to many of the new ideas being generated in penal circles...it also helped catalyze the new progressive prison reform movement.”⁶¹⁴

The press coverage of Osborne’s experiment and the popularity of his book eventually led to his being named warden of Sing Sing, a post he held for three years. According to Edgardo Rotman, “ ... at least for a time, Osborne achieved a prison atmosphere in which inmates could develop a sense of responsibility by trusting each other to exercise meaningful decision-making powers.”⁶¹⁵ McLennan noted that Osborne encouraged a democratic prisoner government, and instituted or augmented entertainments, schooling and athletics, “ ... in the belief that he was replicating as nearly as possible the true relations of society.”⁶¹⁶ Despite the fact that the experiment with self-government at Sing Sing and other prisons was short lived (Osborne resigned after a scandal engineered by his political enemies), its spirit lived on. Author Denis Brian best documents this fact by noting that one of Osborne’s successors, long time warden Lewis Lawes (1920-1941), “ ... believed that merit should play the same part in prison as it did in the outside commercial world, where he was always willing to take a chance on

⁶¹⁴ McLennan. *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 322.

⁶¹⁵ Edgardo Rotman, “The Failure of Reform” *The Oxford History of the Prison*, 161.

⁶¹⁶ McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 376.

convicts who were prepared to work and obey the rules.”⁶¹⁷ Thus, while Osborne’s time at Sing Sing was short, his ideas influenced a generation of penal administrators.

In many ways, Osborne was reminiscent of the “gentleman philanthropist” with links to both educational and penal reform that had fueled the construction of Eastern State Penitentiary nearly a century before. For instance, Osborne served for fifteen years as a board member for the George Junior Republic, a reform school located in Freeville, New York, dedicated to serving indigent and wayward youths, and his experience with this institution clearly guided his thinking regarding inmate self-government. According to historian Jack M. Holl, the George Junior Republic, the first of a handful of “junior republics,” sought to “... defend and promote America’s principle [sic] political, economic, and religious institutions.”⁶¹⁸ McLennan described the school’s philosophy as driven by the idea that “... children could only become good citizens through active participation in the kinds of civil, political, and economic institutions they would have to engage with in the adult world.”⁶¹⁹ This was accomplished through some of the same types of organizations that Osborne later introduced at Sing Sing, particularly self-government: George Junior Republic’s inhabitants voted for a president, his or her cabinet, and attorneys general for both the girls and the boys. In addition, inmates were paid for their labor and were expected to pay “rent” for their dwellings. Greater earnings

⁶¹⁷ Denis Brian, *Sing Sing: The Inside Story of a Notorious Prison* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), 113.

⁶¹⁸ Jack M. Holl *Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era: William R. George and the Junior Republic Movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), ix.

⁶¹⁹ McLennan *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 330.

could be traded for more commodious surroundings.⁶²⁰ Clearly, Osborne's experience on George Junior Republic's board informed his penal philosophy in ways that were reminiscent of nineteenth century reformers like Roberts Vaux, because both believed that penal institutions should be educational as well as punitive.

The George Junior Republic's philosophy was very much in keeping with the New Penologists' ethos of de-institutionalization, so it should come as no surprise that penal reformers drew inspiration from the reform school. While the New Penologists advocated individualized rehabilitation services delivered by credentialed professionals for America's prisons, William R. George promoted similar goals at the George Junior Republic, which he founded in 1895. Jack Holl, whose study is the standard work on the topic, called George "anti-institutional." He drew such a strong connection between the Junior Republic movement and the New Penology that he called the reform school one of "New York's three major contributions to American penology," next to Auburn and Elmira.⁶²¹ Thus even as late as the Progressive Era, American penal and educational reform often overlapped, though the former began changing during the Depression.

Despite David Rothman's assertion that the Mutual Welfare League "... made no headway at all," Osborne's reforms at Sing Sing were widely reported in the media and were picked up at Eastern State Penitentiary.⁶²² The 1931 report on Pennsylvania's penal institutions illustrates this. According to the report, "life skills education," as it was

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 331.

⁶²¹ Jack M. Holl *Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era*, 223.

⁶²² David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 145.

called, “ ... should be introduced as far as practicable for every inmate.”⁶²³ But Osborne’s influence had been visible at Eastern State nearly a generation before. Taking a page from Osborne’s book, McKenty formed a similar organization at Eastern State in the mid-1910s called the Honor and Friendship Club. The Honor and Friendship Club bore a remarkable resemblance to Sing Sing’s Golden Rule Brotherhood, in that it functioned as a judicial organization and a mechanism for presenting prisoner grievances to the administration. In addition, the members also worked with the warden to arrange entertainment for the inmates, like sporting events and movies.

This organization was also a powerful lever that could be used to discipline prisoners. When its members complained to a visiting grand jury about conditions at the penitentiary in 1919, McKenty stripped all of the club’s officers of their positions in retaliation.⁶²⁴ Eventually, the Honor and Friendship club degenerated into a gang that became known as the Four Horsemen, and the scandal that broke out when the existence and extent of the gang’s activities (including drug smuggling and assaults on both inmates and guards) became known ultimately cost McKenty his job. However, that outcome should not obscure the fact that, for a time, Eastern State’s administrators embraced the sort of progressive penal philosophy that reshaped America’s prisons and reform schools after World War I.

Citizenship training worked slightly differently for women, although the educational programming for females proceeded from the same assumption as programs

⁶²³ *Report of the State of Pennsylvania Commission on Penal Institutions*, 22.

⁶²⁴ Untitled Newspaper Clipping, August 23, 1919 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

for men: namely, prisons ought to teach women skills to prepare them for appropriate social roles when they rejoined the outside world. In 1920, Pennsylvania opened the Muncy Industrial Home for Women, a facility designed to meet the allegedly different needs of women prisoners. It created a “home-like atmosphere” by building a series of small “cottages” arrayed around a central administration building. Initially, there was no wall around the complex, because “... the planners had endeavored to create an open-air environment that would complement the rehabilitation of more passive inmates.”⁶²⁵

Muncy was always intended to be an educational environment for wayward women. The curriculum prepared them to rejoin society not as civically engaged citizens, but as homemakers whose contribution to society would be to keep house and raise a family. The commission on penal institutions wrote in 1931 that female inmates should learn “... those skills which every woman should have...as a member of a household. It is the obligation of each penal institution to equip each inmate with the correct technique of daily living and to attach real importance to well-rounded standards of home making.”⁶²⁶ According to the *Prison Journal*, “... the girls at Muncy receive training in all departments of domestic science....[S]ince most of them may become, or ought to become, house-keepers, it should be mentioned that all the girls receive splendid training.”⁶²⁷ Women were socialized, much as men were, to fill the roles reformers

⁶²⁵ John C. McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections in Pennsylvania: A Commemorative History* (Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2002), 27.

⁶²⁶ *Report of the State of Pennsylvania Commission on Penal Institutions*, 22.

⁶²⁷ “The Two Reformatories” *The Prison Journal* VII, (Oct., 1927): 27

deemed important to American democracy: namely, homemakers whose domestic skills supported and nurtured the family unit.

Another component of teaching citizenship skills was to find inmates jobs when they left the penitentiary. According to McLennan, in the years leading up to and following World War I, “... efforts to find post-release employment for prisoners were more sustained, and former convicts helped administer the new scheme.”⁶²⁸ Historian Dominique Chlup, in her study of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women, noted that the institution’s handbook for inmates began “The court punished you and you were sent here. But that is in the past. What matters now is education for the future.”⁶²⁹ In 1925, the Pennsylvania Prison Society [PPS] created the Department of Released Prisoners, overseen by the organization’s executive secretary, Albert G. Fraser. The following year, the PPS hired a caseworker to assist prisoners in transitioning to life on the outside.⁶³⁰ By the mid-1930s, the PPS, in cooperation with the penitentiary’s board of trustees, actively sought employment for released inmates.⁶³¹ Joe Corvi noted that, in between two of his three sentences to Eastern State, the International Correspondence School class in drafting that he had taken at the penitentiary proved valuable in securing a job at the

⁶²⁸ McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 393.

⁶²⁹ Chlup, “Educative Justice”, 105.

⁶³⁰ Negley K. Teeters, *They Were In Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Group, 1937), 424.

⁶³¹ “Pen Being Made a Model Prison:” Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

Penflex Metal Hose Company in South Philadelphia, a job he found with some help from the PPS.⁶³²

To a certain extent, the principles underlying the New Penology represented a direct challenge to Eastern State's founding philosophy. As David Rothman noted in his seminal book *The Discovery of the Asylum*, the penitentiary movement was a response to social anxiety produced by the changes in Jacksonian society. Eastern State's founders had originally envisioned the penitentiary as a place where prisoners would be *removed* from society, not an institution that reproduced society in microcosm.⁶³³ For early nineteenth-century penal reformers, the goal was to totally control the inmates' time, creating a structured environment that (administrators hoped) would counteract the disordered fluidity of Jacksonian society. A century later, the New Penologists asserted the opposite: prisons should reflect the society inmates would eventually rejoin (albeit in idealized form) and should give prisoners the maximum allowable freedoms. This, more so than the shift away from inmate labor, was a direct blow to the penitentiary's founding philosophy.

The citizenship training movement, though short lived, deeply affected prison education. These institutions worked hard to create, as much as possible, mirrors of outside life so as to teach inmates how to behave appropriately once they were released. Though both Osborne and McKenty were forced out of their positions under clouds of scandal, the fundamental frameworks they created remained in place. Citizenship

⁶³² Joseph J. Corvi and Steve J. Conway, *Breaching the Walls* (Media, PA: Personal Legends Publishing, 2002), 83.

⁶³³ David J. Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 82.

training, once introduced, remained a fixture at American penal institutions throughout this period.

The Penal Press: Window to the Inmate Experience

A related and important part of the rehabilitative project was the “penal press,” or inmate produced newspapers. Though the penal press originated in the 1780s, it flourished around the turn of the twentieth century. According to historian James McGrath Morris, the first prison newspaper appeared in the spring of 1800 in New York’s debtors’ prison. That same year, two debtors held in the Walnut Street Jail named Robert Morris and John Nicholson began publishing *The Supporter*.⁶³⁴ It was not until after the Civil War that widespread support for the penal press really developed, however, mostly in response to the reformatory movement. Zebulon Brockway was an early and enthusiastic supporter, and Elmira’s inmate newspaper appeared in 1883, edited by a paroled former inmate.⁶³⁵

Brockway was not the only supporter of the penal press, however; members of the PSAMPP, most notably former congressman and newspaper publisher Joseph Chandler, believed that newspapers, carefully shorn of stories of licentiousness, crime, and immorality, could be used for rehabilitating inmates.⁶³⁶ By the 1890s Pennsylvania was one of a number of states, including Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Ohio,

⁶³⁴ James McGrath Morris, *Jailhouse Journalism: The Fourth Estate Behind Bars* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 25-6.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

Indiana, and others, whose penal institutions had begun producing inmate newspapers.⁶³⁷ Pennsylvania's contribution during this period was called the *Reformatory Record*, published at the Industrial Reformatory at Huntingdon. According to McGrath, the *Reformatory Record*, and publications like it, were creations " . . . of the reformist spirit that invaded the legislatures and prisons of the United States following the euphoric birth of a professional cadre of prison administrators."⁶³⁸

Eastern State Penitentiary was relatively late in publishing an inmate newspaper. The *Umpire*, Eastern State's first known inmate newspaper, did not appear until the mid-1910s, and was thus chronologically closer to the New Penology than Brockway's reformatory movement. It provided a healthy mix of "positive news" from the outside the penitentiary while reporting on events within Eastern State. More important is the fact that the *Umpire* yields important insights into the inmate experience at Eastern State. It is difficult to completely trust the legend on the issue released February 2, 1916, – "Edited and printed by the inmates of the E.S.P. Philadelphia, Pa." – but the paper is a valuable source regarding the penitentiary's educational program, particularly with regard to the ideological shift taking place during this period. As I noted earlier, the burden of rehabilitation was shifting from the institution to the inmates, and the *Umpire* was one of the main conduits for propagating the idea that inmates should "choose" to rehabilitate themselves. On the other hand, the *Umpire* consistently referred to inmates by their

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 54.

prison number rather than by their names, suggesting that elements of the Pennsylvania System lingered despite the fact that it had legally been abolished in 1913.⁶³⁹

Death of the “New Penology” at Eastern State Penitentiary

Even though education remained a core function of incarceration throughout this period, administrators’ belief in the possibility of actually rehabilitating inmates declined, which is ironic, given the fact that penal education programs grew out of the penitentiaries’ rehabilitative purpose. This skepticism toward rehabilitation was probably more acute at Eastern State than at other state penitentiaries due to the behavior of two wardens, John C. Groome (1924-1928) and Herbert Smith (1928-1945). Their attitudes and actions led Teeters and Barnes to claim that Eastern State had deviated from the mainstream of American corrections during this period. My research indicates that, while Groome and Smith’s antipathy toward rehabilitation may have been extreme, the reality is that Eastern State’s educational program flourished under both wardens, just as it did at most other state prisons.

According to Groome’s biographer, Harry G. Toland, the new warden derided penal reformers and theorists as “milkshops,” blaming them for the outrages committed by the recalcitrant inmates known as the Four Horsemen. This was reminiscent of the friction between the PPS and Warden Cassidy detailed in chapter 3. Part of the problem was that Groome did not share reformers’ belief that inmates could be rehabilitated.

Groome asserted in 1930 that an inmate was “... an undisciplined human being who

⁶³⁹ A particularly useful illustration of this phenomenon is the *Umpire*’s advertisement column. Here, prisoners could offer services and goods for sale (such as typing, watches, or guitar lessons). Consistently, these ads identified the inmate who placed the advertisement by his inmate number and cellblock location rather than by his name.

needs to be taught that deliberately violating the rights of other people is likely to prove an uncomfortable career....I admit further a belief in the whipping post for those convicted of their second felony, fewer of whom would be convicted of their third.”⁶⁴⁰

Groome was not the only penitentiary administrator who scoffed at the possibility of rehabilitation. His successor, Deputy Warden Herbert Smith once called the idea that inmates could be rehabilitated a “joke,” hardly an inspiring statement from the man administering a supposedly rehabilitative institution.

Perhaps the most interesting reflection on the administration’s attitude is an incident from Willie Sutton’s second memoir, *I, Willie Sutton*. During the early 1940s, Sutton worked for the penitentiary’s psychiatrist, Dr. Philip Q. Roche. One afternoon, Sutton asked his superior if Roche believed that he (Sutton) could ever be rehabilitated. Roche answered that banks “... would always present such a challenge...that I have my doubts.” Roche was basically denying the possibility of reform, at least in Sutton’s case.⁶⁴¹ The fact that Roche, who was supposed to be reforming the penitentiary’s inmates, expressed doubt about the possibility of actually rehabilitating inmates, speaks volumes about the shallowness of their commitment to the very goal that had animated Eastern State’s founders a century before.

Given that cynicism, it may be surprising that there were still so many educational opportunities available to inmates, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. Willie Sutton recalled that he was able to complete his high school education via correspondence courses, after which he took college level courses in Spanish and typing. The most

⁶⁴⁰ John C. Groome “The Riot Call” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Jan. 25, 1930 pg. 16

⁶⁴¹ Sutton with Linn *Where the Money Was*, 179.

interesting point about Sutton's recollection is that he took the typing course during a two-year confinement to the isolation cellblock for trying to escape. Even though he was being punished, and was denied all but perfunctory contact with the guards and inmates, the warden still allowed him to take clerical courses and even let him have a typewriter on which Sutton could practice his typing.⁶⁴² Apparently, there were few infractions considered heinous enough to warrant interrupting an inmate's education. In his memoirs, former inmate Joseph J. Corvi recalled another inmate complaining to the administration that Graterford, had better vocational training than Eastern State; though this was part of a larger ruse to get the inmate transferred to Graterford as part of an escape attempt, the penitentiary's administration found it valid enough that they approved the transfer.⁶⁴³

As chapters 1 and 2 made clear, rehabilitating inmates was the primary goal of penal education programs, so it is logical to assume that, considering Groome's attitude toward rehabilitation, the new warden would allow educational programming to disappear. Yet, the opposite is true: Eastern State's educational program was continued, and in some ways strengthened, under Groome and his immediate successor, Herbert "Hardboiled" Smith. Whatever the wardens' doubts about rehabilitation, it seems to have had little or no effect on the existence of educational programming, because educational programming was so ingrained in the penitentiary's culture that, even when the warden disdained the possibility of rehabilitating inmates (the entire point of teaching inmates anything), the penitentiary's administrators maintained and expanded those programs.

⁶⁴² Quentin Reynolds, *I, Willie Sutton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1953), 159.

⁶⁴³ Corvi and Conway *Breaching the Walls*, 53.

Professionalization and Penal Education

Chapters 2 and 3 argued in part that developments in penal education mirrored those in public education generally. When Eastern State Penitentiary opened in 1829, its educational program very closely resembled the curriculum in Philadelphia's charity schools, where academics and religion reinforced one another. After the Civil War, the penitentiary shifted its focus to vocational training even before vocational programming appeared in public schools across the country. Following World War I, however, this strong bond between penal and public education broke down because, as penal educators professionalized, they began to see themselves as distinct from schoolteachers. In addition, individualization demanded a curriculum fitted to each inmate's particular needs, which naturally meant that textbooks and teaching methods designed for school children were no longer acceptable. Increasingly, penal educators abandoned public school texts and methods, designed for children and created a curriculum aimed at the young adults. These changes were spearheaded by the premier professional organization for penal educators, the newly created Correctional Education Association.

PPS member Rev. J.F. Ohl, writing in the January 1910 issue of the *Prison Journal* on "The Administration and Needs of a Modern State Prison," described the educational program at an unnamed state prison, which included a school "... organized and conducted as any other school would be," as well as courses in stenography, bookkeeping, and typewriting. In another unnamed prison school, there was a Chautauqua branch, staffed completely by prisoners. In a third unnamed prison, there was an educational program of correspondence classes supported by a well-stocked and

“practical” library.⁶⁴⁴ Even if these existed nowhere but in the author’s head (the fact that he failed to name the prisons is suspicious), his descriptions still point to the fact that many penal administrators considered educational programming, in all its many permutations, to be an essential component of a “modern state prison.”

Ohl’s characterization of prisons schools as “organized and conducted as any other” reflected the close association between penal and public education detailed in chapters 2 and 3. By 1931, however, CEA founder Austin MacCormick denounced primary and high school educational methods as unsuited for training prisoners. MacCormick lambasted prison education programs, arguing that they were weak because they were “... juvenile in method, subject-matter, text-books, and equipment.” In observing various prisons’ classrooms, MacCormick saw “... grown men [sitting] at boys’ school desks and [trying] to learn to read from books that tell about how Tom and Susie went out to catch butterflies or how warm Pussy’s coat is.”⁶⁴⁵

MacCormick was not alone in criticizing penal education programs for using methods and materials aimed at elementary and high school students. As the authors of a book on prison education, Walter M. Wallack, Glenn M. Kendall, and Howard L. Briggs claimed “Educational work will be most valuable if it has a setting suitable to the maturity of the prisoners. To be sure, adults can learn from material prepared for small

⁶⁴⁴ Rev. J. F. Ohl, “The Administration and Needs of a Modern State Prison” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy*, Jan 1910, pg. 27.

⁶⁴⁵ Austin H. MacCormick “Penal Service Calls for Adult Schooling” *The Prison Journal* vol. 10, pg. 22.

boys and girls, but they are likely to have no interest in doing so.”⁶⁴⁶ Clearly, by the 1930s, a movement to break penal educators’ reliance on public school methods and materials had emerged. This movement grew out of the main force reshaping penal education during the first half of the twentieth century: professionalization.

Professionalization at Eastern State Penitentiary

Professionalization reshaped Eastern State’s administrative practices and identity during this period. This becomes particularly clear when we compare inmate reception procedures from the 1830s described in Chapter 2 with those of the 1930s. New inmates were isolated for a month, and then subject to a battery of interviews with the “classification committee,” which included both deputy wardens, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, the educational director, the chaplain, and the parole officer, as well as the two chaplains.⁶⁴⁷ The committee classified the inmate, rated his potential for rehabilitation, and decided whether he would remain at Eastern State (which by now had been designated the Commonwealth’s maximum security prison) or be transferred to another facility. The committee’s composition and purpose testifies to the fact that the force reshaping American penology –professionalization – also shaped Eastern State’s experience.

Just as in the late nineteenth century, Eastern State’s administrators in the early twentieth century were “professionals” in the sense that had spent most of their adult

⁶⁴⁶ Walter M. Wallack, Glenn M. Kendall, and Howard L. Briggs, *Education Within Prison Walls* (New York: Teachers College, 1939), 20.

⁶⁴⁷ Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 133.

lives in corrections or criminal justice. For instance, Robert McKenty had spent two decades in Philadelphia's police department at various levels before becoming superintendent of Philadelphia's House of correction in 1904. Richard Fulmer asserted that McKenty was chosen for " ... his political connections, rather than his institutional management skills," which may be true, but it is also undeniable that he came to Eastern State with more law enforcement and corrections experience than his predecessors nearly a century before, which was very much in keeping with the trend toward professionalization.⁶⁴⁸

McKenty's successor, John C. Groome, had a long and varied public career that included serving as the Army's provost marshal in charge of the military police during World War I, and, prior to that, organizing Pennsylvania's State Police force. The new warden was, much like Cassidy before him, thoroughly committed to professionalization, and he set up or augmented in-house training programs wherever he went. Groome developed a rigorous training and continuing education program for Pennsylvania State troopers that incorporated specially written textbooks and class lectures, and opened a school for military police recruits in Autun, France during the war.⁶⁴⁹ In other words, Groome placed a great deal of stock in professional training for his underlings, and his confidence in it was echoed by William Weaver in 1933 when he called for "special training on the part of prison officials and guards."⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Richard Fulmer "The House" Manuscript in the Author's Personal Collection, 41.

⁶⁴⁹ Harry G. Toland *Gentleman Trooper: How John C. Groome Shapes America's First State Police Force* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2007), 52.

⁶⁵⁰ Weaver, "A Group of Antisocial Lives," Chapter I, 7.

Yet the only real training for guards and administrators was on the job, so the penitentiary often promoted from within. Richard Fulmer excerpted a section of the 1930-1932 biennial report listing some of the subjects covered in guard school. These included “general deportment,” “loyalty,” “economics in prison management,” and “teaching the prisoner to see the right side of life.”⁶⁵¹ In addition, many of these “classes” involved lessons in military science; officers were drilled in infantry tactics and the proper use of the Springfield rifle, a tendency that increased in the lead up to World War II. Criminologist Thorstein Sellin rightly called Eastern State’s guard school a “staff conference,” designed to teach the guards the “administrative details of the prison” rather than theories of criminal behavior and rehabilitation. Nonetheless, it was a concerted effort by the penitentiary’s administrators to professionalize the guards, and represented an extension of the penitentiary’s educational mission.

Unfortunately, the staff conferences effectively reinforced the institution’s conservatism, because, as Harry Elmer Barnes noted, “... before there was any opportunity presented for a promising young officer to introduce any original ideas or innovations he was initiated into the methodology of the old separate system and soon became an advocate of its retention.”⁶⁵² Moreover, this policy led to some poor choices for key positions. Joseph Corvi asserted that the vocational director at Eastern State, a man named Joseph Banks, had no more than four years formal education that he received on an Indian Reservation. Banks’ primary qualification, at least according to Corvi, was

⁶⁵¹ Fulmer, “The House,” 118.

⁶⁵² Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 300.

that he had started as a guard, and had been promoted to lieutenant and, nearing retirement, was assigned to the vocational education department.⁶⁵³

Even the *The Prison Journal* (successor to the PPS' *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy*) criticized Eastern State's training program by noting that in Germany and Holland, it was the practice to recruit prison guards who had military service and send them to school, which provided "able-bodied and efficient guards." That contrasted sharply with the American practice where, according to the *Journal*, "... the prison guard or keeper is immediately assigned to duty, knowing little or nothing of the duties of his position."⁶⁵⁴ David J. Rothman dismissed penal training in this period, going so far as to assert that "... the staff was qualified to fulfill one task only: holding the inmates."⁶⁵⁵ My research suggests this statement to be an oversimplification; while training was lackluster, penal administrators did try to teach guards the skills they needed to effectively meet prisoner needs, and in so doing continued Eastern State's tradition of being an educational institution.

As early as 1872, George L. Harrison, then president of Pennsylvania's Board of Public Charities, proposed that the Commonwealth create a "normal school" to train prison guards and administrators. This proposal was part and parcel of a larger, ongoing project to centralize the administration of all penal institutions in one body, like the Board of Public Charities (founded in 1869). Though this was never realized, it is particularly interesting that Harrison couched his proposal in the language of teacher

⁶⁵³ Corvi and Conway, *Breaching the Walls*, 124.

⁶⁵⁴ "School for Prison Guards" *Prison Journal* April, 1928 pg. 18.

⁶⁵⁵ David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 144.

training.⁶⁵⁶ In reality, there was no concerted American effort to train prison personnel, despite the fact that Europeans instituted schools in the last decades of the nineteenth century for this purpose. As late as the early 1930s, University of Pennsylvania criminologist Thorstein Sellin, who visited Eastern State regularly with his students and who wrote prolifically on the history of corrections in Pennsylvania, noted that “ ... most of the schools or courses established...were designed to train recruits. When these were absorbed into the prison system, nothing short of an enormous turn-over in the staff could keep the schools in constant operation, unless the prison system was exceedingly large.”⁶⁵⁷

To remedy this, in the early or mid-1930s, Eastern State began sending guards to the State Police Academy in Hershey for a two month course designed to prepare them for performing their duties professionally.⁶⁵⁸ In March 1948, the Commonwealth began sponsoring continuing education classes for guards and administrators at both Eastern State and Graterford; though these were held at the same time (Monday nights) as Eastern State’s in house training courses, the state’s take-over of professional training represented an important shift, for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the continuing importance of professionalization in penal administration and, second, it is further evidence of the Commonwealth’s centralization of control over its formerly discrete penal institutions.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁶ Thorsten Sellin “Historical Glimpses of Training for Prison Service” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* vol. 25, No. 4 (Nov-Dec, 1934), 598.

⁶⁵⁷ Sellin, “Historical Glimpses of Training for Prison Service,” 599.

⁶⁵⁸ “Pen Being Made a Model Prison:” Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁶⁵⁹ “State Starts Classes for Prison Employees: *The Bulletin* Mar. 15, 1948.

Professionalization was not limited to Eastern State's guard force. As chapter 3 made clear, the penitentiary's administrators began turning to credentialed experts as early as the 1890s. This process accelerated in the twentieth century, particularly as the penitentiary's educational program moved from the chaplain's office to the psychologist and social workers' offices. The move toward professionalization meant that more and more penal educators had some type of certification. This was an uneven process at best. In surveying America's penal institutions, MacCormick found that at least ten had full-time, trained educational directors, one of whom was at Pennsylvania's Western State Penitentiary. Another eight prisons employed trained education directors on a part time basis. At many of the others, an eclectic mix of retired schoolmen, former guards, and the prison chaplains oversaw the education departments. MacCormick noted that Eastern State's educational programming fell under the aegis of the penitentiary's psychologists. In general, MacCormick found that the reformatories provided "fairly large" educational staffs, though he asserted that these were often "underpaid and overworked."⁶⁶⁰

Despite the widespread preference for trained or credentialed professionals, Eastern State Penitentiary, like many other prisons, still relied on guards and inmates to act as educators throughout this period, a practice that dated to the penitentiary's opening. As chapter 2 made clear, Eastern State's overseers were originally expected to be educators as well, teaching inmates vocational skills and occasionally academics. The march toward professionalization detailed in the last chapter had gradually limited guards' duties; ideally, prison guards were employed to keep order while credentialed,

⁶⁶⁰ MacCormick, *The Education of Adult Prisoners*, 253.

professional educators taught inmates. Unfortunately, staff shortages meant that guards were often sent into the classroom, usually with little preparation or training. This was not unique to Eastern State; Blomberg and Lucken noted that, as late as the 1950s and 1960s, “ ... teachers with meager educational backgrounds and without teacher certification credentials typically staffed prison education programs [throughout the U.S.,]...teaching materials such as textbooks were typically outdated, and ...teacher training to deal with largely undereducated and illiterate offenders was nonexistent.”⁶⁶¹

These statements could also be made about Eastern State, where some guards did “double duty,” functioning as both the prisoners’ educators and guardians. Ray Bednarek, who worked at Eastern State during the 1950s, recalled that he was initially hired as a guard, but ended up managing the penitentiary’s automobile repair program, a position that included teaching inmates. Bednarek was eligible for this position not because he held any teaching credentials, but because he had successfully passed a civil service exam in auto repair; when the mechanic position became available, it was offered to him.⁶⁶² Hiring guards to moonlight as teachers and administrators worked against the basic point of educational programming because, as MacCormick noted, “ ... when a teacher wears a guards clothing, has a club lying on his desk, marches his students back to their cells after school hours or stands guard over them in the mess hall, it is almost impossible to maintain a proper teacher-student relationship.”⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Thomas G. Blomberg and Karol Lucken *American Penology*, 114.

⁶⁶² Ray and Steve Bednarek, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 3.

⁶⁶³ MacCormick, *Education of Adult Prisoners*, 253.

Worse than guards masquerading as teachers was employing inmates for that purpose. Yet despite the expressed preference for credentialed, civilian educators, penitentiary administrators often employed Eastern State's inmates to teach in its classrooms. Willie Sutton, who spent more than a decade at Eastern State between 1934 and 1945, recalled that he taught some classes during his time at Eastern State. Sutton's only qualification was that he was marginally better educated than the average inmate.⁶⁶⁴ Joseph Corvi also recalled that inmates often taught some of the penitentiary's classes, particularly those using material provided by the International Correspondence Schools.⁶⁶⁵ Clearly, it was not unusual for Eastern State to press inmates into service as teachers when staff shortages required it.

Nor was Eastern State the only penal institution that allowed inmates to work as teachers. Dominique Chlup noted that at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women, inmates worked as teachers' aides and occasionally even taught classes, though she erroneously concluded that this "seems to have been unique to" this particular institution.⁶⁶⁶ In fact, many penal institutions utilized inmates to fill gaps in their educational programs. Rothman noted that Sing Sing's four teachers were supplemented by twenty-four inmates, while San Quentin used fifty-six inmate educators.⁶⁶⁷ In his survey of America's penal institutions, MacCormick noted that allowing inmates to teach classes was a common occurrence, a practice about which he was surprisingly ambivalent

⁶⁶⁴ Sutton with Linn, *Where the Money Was*, 171.

⁶⁶⁵ Corvi and Conway, *Breaching the Walls*, 58.

⁶⁶⁶ Chlup, "Educative Justice", 125.

⁶⁶⁷ Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 136.

given his vehement criticism of hiring guards as educators. On the one hand, MacCormick noted that the inmate-teachers were “... usually patient with poor students, poor texts, and poor working conditions.” He even conceded that some might be good teachers “by instinct.”⁶⁶⁸ On the other hand, he criticized inmate teachers, noting that even seemingly well-educated prisoners were usually only superficially so. MacCormick advocated that these inmates be sufficiently trained so that they could be effective educators, but with the understanding that employing prisoners as teachers was far from ideal. In fact, he noted that, “... we cannot hope for success as long as practically unsupervised inmates constitute our educational staffs.”⁶⁶⁹ Yet the continuing shortage of credentialed educators and staff meant that inmates served as teachers throughout this period, even as administrators and reformers deplored the practice.

Professional Penal Education: The Correctional Education Association

The first professional organization for penal educators, the Correctional Education Association (CEA), grew out of a committee formed by the National Penal Society of Penal Information (NSPI), an advocacy group not unlike the PPS. The committee on education was formed in 1927 to study the state of educational programming in America’s prisons and reformatories. One of NSPI’s directors, Austin H. MacCormick, supervised the study and, beginning in 1928, visited 110 prisons and reformatories throughout the United States, compiling statistics and observing penal education first hand.

⁶⁶⁸ MacCormick *Education of Adult Prisoners*, 255.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 256.

MacCormick was born on April 20, 1893 to the Reverend Donald MacCormick and his wife Jean Green MacCormick. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1915, and received a Masters of Arts degree from Columbia Teachers College the following year. He returned for a year to Bowdoin, where he taught English and Education, then joined the Navy in 1917. This proved a formative experience, because MacCormick became executive officer of the U.S. Naval Prison in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where he worked for Thomas Mott Osborne.

After leaving the Navy, MacCormick returned to higher education, and served as Bowdoin's alumni secretary for eight years. In 1929, the Department of Justice appointed him the assistant secretary of federal prisons; the following year, he became assistant director of the newly formed Federal Bureau of Prisons. Between 1934 and 1940, MacCormick oversaw the New York City Department of Corrections, and during World War II he served in a variety of federal positions dealing with corrections. In 1951, MacCormick joined the University of California at Berkley's faculty as a professor of criminology, a position he held until he retired in 1960.

MacCormick followed in the steps of earlier prison reformers like Wines and Dwight in that he mixed concern for penal reform with a background and interest in education that undoubtedly influenced his conclusions. While MacCormick believed that penal education was essential in rehabilitating inmates, he was one of the few penal reformers who acknowledged that education was not the panacea that some reformers believed. For instance, in the preface to his 1931 report, MacCormick frankly stated, "... education is not that single formula for the solution of crime for which society is so

restlessly and so fruitlessly seeking – fruitlessly because no single formula exists.”⁶⁷⁰ Yet measured statements like these were belied by others that betrayed the fact that MacCormick, like generations of penal reformers before him, staked the possibility on rehabilitating inmates on penal education. He asserted that “ ... the tools of education, while no guaranty of character, are a powerful aid in forming or transforming it.... [The] education of prisoners offers one of the very real hopes for their rehabilitation.”⁶⁷¹

MacCormick also rejected the prevailing wisdom from the preceding generation, namely that increased public education had created a new class of crime known as “crimes of education.” As the last chapter noted, this theory was embraced by some penal administrators, including Eastern State’s long serving warden, Michael J. Cassidy. MacCormick argued that, “ ... it is true that a man may carry a burglar’s kit and a doctor’s degree at the same time...but he seldom does.”⁶⁷² Though MacCormick offered no proof for this contention, the educational statistics that he compiled proved it true: most inmates had between a first and an eighth grade education in 1931 and, as noted earlier, less than one in twenty had completed high school. MacCormick concluded that “ ... in the main, the chances of a criminal turning from crime will be increased if he receives some measure of education while in prison.”⁶⁷³

MacCormick’s committee, which assisted him in investigating the penal institutions and compiling the NSPI report, was comprised of a large number of people

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 2 .

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 3.

whose main qualifications were experience with educational institutions. They included L.A. Emerson of the Essex County (N.J.) vocational school and Everett Dean Martin, director of the People's Institute of New York City. College and University educators served as well. These included Professors J.L. Gillin of the University of Wisconsin, Clarence C. Little of Michigan, Hervey F. Mallory of Chicago, Leon J. Richardson of California, and Drs. Howard W. Odum of North Carolina, David Snedden of Columbia, and George Kirchwey (Criminology, New York School of Social Work). Prominent librarians sitting on the committee included Sarah Askew, chairwoman of the American Library Association's committee on institutional libraries and Matthew S. Dudgeon, librarian of the Milwaukee Public Library. Given this composition, there was every reason to believe that the committee would affirm the basic assumption that had guided penal education since the 1820s: ignorance caused crime and therefore prisons should provide inmates with educational programming. Thus it is not at all surprising that MacCormick's report reached many of the same conclusions as Wines and Dwight had seventy years earlier: rehabilitation depended on education. Wines and Dwight had criticized America's prisons and penitentiaries for failing in their duty to educate inmates, and so did MacCormick; he called penal educational programs a "tragic failure."⁶⁷⁴ Just like his predecessors, MacCormick called for increased attention and greater resources devoted to educational programming.

The similarities between the observations and the recommendations of the 1867 Wines & Dwight report and MacCormick's 1931 investigation support my thesis, namely

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 38.

that penal reformers have always placed great faith in the rehabilitative power of penal education. Even when all of the promised benefits of penal education failed to materialize, such as when inmates were convicted of subsequent offenses, penal reformers never seriously examined their assumptions about the power of education and the relationship between ignorance and crime. Reformers like Wines & Dwight did the same thing in 1867 that MacCormick did in 1931: investigated the prisons, concluded that the problem was that they were not actually educating inmates, and demanded better educational programs. However, the evidence overwhelmingly proves the contrary: prisons *were* educating inmates, and had been since at least the Jacksonian period. These institutions' failure to reduce recidivism can be blamed on a variety of circumstances, but certainly not on the paucity of educational programs. Yet, each generation repeated the same orthodoxy: more education leads to lower recidivism.

Not surprisingly, the PPS fully supported MacCormick's conclusions because they were based on the same assumptions that had driven the PPS' rehabilitative efforts for a century and a half. *The Prison Journal* called MacCormick, "... inspiring and stimulating," and the well-known reformer often published articles in the PPS' journal.⁶⁷⁵ Though MacCormick shared the PPS' commitment to penal education he was not above criticizing the Commonwealth for making more than its share of "expensive mistakes," including building Western State Penitentiary close enough to the Alleghany River that the penitentiary occasionally flooded. Of Eastern State, MacCormick asserted, "... you have in [Eastern State Penitentiary] an institution that *should* be under water with fabled

⁶⁷⁵ "Editorial – Austin MacCormick Goes West" *Prison Journal* vol. 31 pg. 45.

Atlantis” because the century old building was no longer suitable to the needs of a modern maximum-security penitentiary.⁶⁷⁶ In general, however, MacCormick and the PPS saw eye to eye on the necessities of a modern prison, including an efficient system of penal education staffed by credentialed educators whose goal was reducing recidivism by preparing inmates for life after release.

Conclusion

Clearly, though education had long been a cornerstone of Eastern State’s (and America’s) rehabilitative philosophy, there were still problems putting it into practice. These included a shortage of qualified instructors and an educational program often lifted directly from the public school system which, as the Correctional Education Association and others pointed out, hardly met inmates’ needs and therefore violated the principle of individualization. Still, educational reformers remained as committed to promoting penal education as their intellectual ancestors had in the Jacksonian period, and prison administrators did the best with what they had, just as their predecessors had a century or more before. For all of the changes that had taken place at Eastern State – the death of the Pennsylvania System, the skepticism about rehabilitation, the shift toward vocational and then academic education – education remained as important in American corrections in 1953 as it had been when Eastern State opened in 1829.

⁶⁷⁶ Austin H. MacCormick “Why Pennsylvania Needs a State Department of Correction” *The Prison Journal* vol. 29, pg 3.

CHAPTER V
“THAT MEDIEVAL MONSTROSITY,” 1953-1970

January 1953 was a bad month for Pennsylvania’s penal administrators. First, on the eighteenth, a fire broke out at approximately seven o’clock P.M. in several of Western State Penitentiary’s facilities: its license tag factory, paint shops, laundry and barbershops. The fires were followed by a spontaneous riot. Inmates fed the shop fires with clothing, mattresses, and furniture, and eventually took five guards hostage. Nearly 1,000 of the approximately 1,200 inmates took part in the uprising, which damaged property valued at several hundred thousand dollars.⁶⁷⁷ The outbreak ended after twenty-four hours, and the guards retook the prison without further problems. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* called the riot attempt “ ... the largest in the prison’s 76-year history.”⁶⁷⁸

While the Commonwealth was still reeling from the riot at Western State, another broke out at Rockview near Bellefonte on the same day the siege at Western ended, this time involving 575 inmates. During the melee, six guards were taken hostage and the inmates set fires, though these were far less destructive than those at Western State.⁶⁷⁹ Two days into the riot, state police stormed the prison farm with tear gas and submachine guns. The riots at Western State and Rockview were so disturbing that news of pressing national issues like Eisenhower’s inauguration and the birth of Lucille Ball’s daughter were pushed below the fold.

⁶⁷⁷ Charles H. Allard, “1,000 Inmates Demand Parley, Improvements” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1953, 2.

⁶⁷⁸ “Pen Break Brings Probe Demand,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1953, 6.

⁶⁷⁹ John C. McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections in Pennsylvania: A Commemorative History* (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2002), 38.

The worst part about the riots was that they were not unexpected. During the riot at Western State, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* noted that “ ... the first rumble of [discontent] was heard almost two months ago.”⁶⁸⁰ Apparently, ten inmates had escaped from Western State the previous November, which had led to an investigation of security and conditions at the nearly eighty-year old institution. State Attorney General James F. Malone claimed to have predicted some sort of violent outbreak nearly two months before, and noted that he had asked the Department of Public Welfare to investigate Western State Penitentiary.⁶⁸¹ A preliminary report issued a month before the riot cited overcrowding and understaffing – there were only 22 guards for 1,127 prisoners on the night shift – for allowing the prisoners to escape. More worrisome, the report noted numerous violations of prison regulations within the prison, specifically citing an instance when two prisoners died and four others were sickened by homemade alcohol fermented with anti-freeze.⁶⁸² Conditions at Rockview were hardly better, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*’s headline said it all: “Rockview Officials Knew Riot Was Coming; Did Little.”⁶⁸³ The paper’s proof: deputy warden Harrison R. Johnston’s statement “Damned right we had an idea it was going to happen.”⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁰ “Pen Break Brings Probe Demand,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 19, 1953, 6.

⁶⁸¹ Thomas J. Moran, “Malone Returning to Help Quell Riot,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* January 19, 1953, 1.

⁶⁸² “Pen Break Brings Probe Demand,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 19, 1953, 6.

⁶⁸³ “Rockview Officials Knew Riot Was Coming; Did Little,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 21, 1953, 2.

⁶⁸⁴ “Rockview Officials Knew Riot Was Coming; Did Little,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 21, 1953, 1.

Pennsylvania's prisons were in crisis, and the Commonwealth's experience was not unique. Historian John C. McWilliams noted that in the eighteen months between April 1952 and October 1953, forty riots broke out in prisons across the country, more riots than had occurred in the previous quarter century!⁶⁸⁵ The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* decried the "epidemic of violence" sweeping through the nation's prisons.⁶⁸⁶ The president of Western State Penitentiary's board of trustees voiced the frustration and bewilderment many administrators felt when he said "... these things just happen. There's nothing you can do. They seem to be happening in cycles across the country."⁶⁸⁷ In response to these violent outbreaks, and others like them around the country, Pennsylvania Governor John S. Fine appointed a committee on January 27, 1953. It was called the Deevers Committee for its chairman, retired Major General Jacob Deevers, a Pennsylvania native and decorated World War II veteran. The commission identified seven areas where Pennsylvania's penal institutions were deficient. These included inadequate financing, overcrowding, poorly managed parole operations, and political domination of institutional management. More important, the Deevers Committee recommended a wide range of structural changes, from the creation of an independent Bureau of Corrections to the implementation of classification procedures, that substantially changed the way Pennsylvania's prisons operated

The Deevers Committee's recommendations effectively returned Eastern State Penitentiary to its philosophical roots, in that rehabilitation once again became the

⁶⁸⁵ McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections*, 37.

⁶⁸⁶ "Convict Riots Frequent in 1952" *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 19, 1953, 9.

⁶⁸⁷ Quoted in Teeters, "The Dilemma of Prison Riots" *The Prison Journal*, 33 (1953): 14.

institution's main goal. As in previous periods, the primary method of rehabilitating inmates remained educational programming. Interestingly, the renewed focus on rehabilitation dovetailed with a shift of responsibility from the institution to the inmate, which had begun in the 1910s. In the Jacksonian and post-Civil War periods, reform was something that institutions "did" to inmates, but by the 1950s, the institution was a tool that inmates use to rehabilitate themselves. Still, penal administrators' rhetoric regarding the necessity of inmate education sounded remarkably similar to what penal reformers had said a century and a half before. As director of California's Department of Corrections Richard A. McGee noted, educating prisoners was not new; in fact, "... the mere statement of its age shows how poorly the concept has been understood, how feebly it has been applied, and how little it has been accepted by the general public."⁶⁸⁸ Eastern State returned to its former role as a cutting edge penal laboratory by once again embracing what historian Richard Fulmer called its "historic culture of rehabilitation."⁶⁸⁹

American Penology, 1953-1970

Following World War II, American penologists embraced the "rehabilitative ideal," or the belief that offenders could be rehabilitated if the antecedent causes of their deviant behavior could be diagnosed and treated. In many ways, the focus on rehabilitation harkened back to the Jacksonian Era's obsession with reform, although there were some important differences. Jacksonian Era reform owed a great deal to

⁶⁸⁸ Richard A. McGee, "Professional Education for the Correctional Field," *Crime & Delinquency* 2 (1956), 195.

⁶⁸⁹ Fulmer, "The House," 100.

religion, while post-World War II style rehabilitation was thoroughly committed to a psychological understanding of criminal behavior. Second, and more important, whereas Jacksonian penal reformers feared the social changes they perceived swirling around them, post-World War II America's renewed focus on rehabilitation grew out of the optimism and prosperity of the 1950s.⁶⁹⁰ As McWilliams noted, "... policymakers had come to believe that treating the offender in [a setting that mirrored, as much as possible, the outside world] was more effective than any rehabilitative program in a superficial and institutional prison environment. This post-war approach was in direct contrast to the Jacksonian philosophy of penology that advocated rehabilitation of the offender by physically isolating him and socially disassociating him from his peers."⁶⁹¹ In fact, for post-war penologists, society was a crucial component, and American penologists spared no effort in getting communities involved in the rehabilitation process.

Despite the revived focus on rehabilitating inmates, the new method of achieving that goal retained many of the old characteristics: aggressive educational programming, supplemented by intensive psychological and psychiatric services. In many ways, the solution to criminal behavior – education – was predetermined by the ways in which scholars, penologists, and prison administrators conceived of the criminal impulse. According to Rotman, during the 1950s, "... rehabilitative strategies also shifted back to the social learning perspective, which considered criminal behavior as *a learning*

⁶⁹⁰ Edgardo Rotman, "The Failure of Reform: United States, 1865-1965," in Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, *The Oxford History of the Prison: The practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169.

⁶⁹¹ McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections*, 40.

disorder [my emphasis] in the socialization process.”⁶⁹² In other words, if criminal behavior was learned, then it could also be unlearned through aggressive reeducation and intensive psychological services. Eastern State Penitentiary regained some of its prominence as an innovator during this period, though the institution was on borrowed time: it closed in 1970 after almost a decade of attempts by the Commonwealth to shutter the prison and move its inmates to another facility.

Corrections in Pennsylvania

Crime rates for many offenses increased noticeably after the mid-1950s in the U.S., after declining for nearly twenty years. The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice noted in 1968 that between 1953 and 1965, crimes against property in the United States jumped nearly 200 percent, while crimes against people grew by almost 50 percent!⁶⁹³ As in the Jacksonian period, most crimes were crimes against property: burglary, larceny, etc.⁶⁹⁴ The growing incidents of crime strained America’s penal structure and reinvigorated the debate about the best methods of preventing crime and rehabilitating offenders.

Rising crime rates in Pennsylvania strained the Commonwealth’s penal system. By the middle of 1953, more than 90 percent of Pennsylvania’s existing prison capacity

⁶⁹² Edgardo Rotman, “The Failure of Reform,” 170.

⁶⁹³ President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 102-3.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

was filled, leaving little room for new inmates.⁶⁹⁵ By the early 1960s, the number of prisoners in the Commonwealth exceeded 8,000. Although Pennsylvania had added an additional correctional institution by then, the large number of inmates strained the Commonwealth's resources. In 1961, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that all three Philadelphia correctional institutions – Eastern State, Holmesburg Prison, and the House of Correction – were overcrowded, sometimes by more than double their intended population.⁶⁹⁶ Fortunately, by 1968, the number of inmates had dropped to a much more manageable average daily population of 5,381.⁶⁹⁷ Still, throughout most of the period covered in this chapter, Pennsylvania's correctional system was on the verge of crisis.

One effect of the Deever's Committee recommendations was legislation passed in 1953 that required both Eastern and Western State to create legally separate institutions known as "classification centers" within the penitentiaries.⁶⁹⁸ As professor of social casework Edmund G. Burbank noted in *The Prison Journal*, "Classification, as a method of treatment, is rooted in the belief that ... most inmates have potential for constructive social living. It is rooted in the belief that the individual can learn to use the prison if all resources of the institution are pooled in an integrated program to help him with this task."⁶⁹⁹ In other words, prisons were not simply punitive environments, they were social

⁶⁹⁵ McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections*, 39.

⁶⁹⁶ "Phila. Jails Crowded But Rated Safe," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 11, 1961, 2.

⁶⁹⁷ Pennsylvania Crime Commission *Task Force Report: Corrections in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: Office of the Attorney General, 1968), 5.

⁶⁹⁸ Fulmer "The House," 144.

⁶⁹⁹ Edmund G. Burbank "Prospects for Classification and Treatment in Pennsylvania's Prisons" *The Prison Journal* 33 (1953): 16.

institutions whose programs could be designed to reeducate and re-socialize prisoners to live in society.

For instance, the Deevers Committee recommended that judges no longer sentence convicts to specific institutions. Instead, they should leave those assignments to the newly created classification centers at Eastern and Western State. The committee argued that various institutions' boards of trustees should share authority with the Commissioner of Corrections in order to ensure that the institutions worked together as part of a coherent correctional system. Furthermore, the members of the Deevers Committee asserted that the Attorney General should be empowered to appoint a Deputy Commissioner of Corrections for treatment to oversee the classification centers at the two state penitentiaries.⁷⁰⁰ Finally, Graterford and Rockview, which up to this point had been considered extensions of Eastern and Western State, respectively, were legally established as separate institutions with their own administrations. In adopting these recommendations, Pennsylvania was accepting what McWilliams called "the 'corrective' approach," which entailed rechristening all penitentiaries and reformatories as "state correctional institutions," or SCIs, and referring to their managers as "superintendents" rather than "wardens."⁷⁰¹

The change was more than cosmetic, reflecting an important shift in the way that Eastern State Penitentiary (now called State Correctional Institution – Philadelphia, or SCI-PHA) did business. For instance, coincident with Governor Fine's August 27 press conference, during which he signed into law the bill based on the Deevers Committee

⁷⁰⁰ Ralph W. England, "Pennsylvania's Answer to Prison Riots" *The Prison Journal* 34 (1954): 6.

⁷⁰¹ ⁷⁰¹ McWilliams, *Two Centuries of Corrections*, 40.

recommendations, Philadelphia's District Attorney Richardson Dilworth announced that the penitentiary would immediately close a range of solitary punishment cells known colloquially as "Klondike." Though one paper referred to these cells as a "dungeon," this statement was belied by details in that very same article; inmates were not allowed furniture, but they had access to electrical lighting, radios, and reading material.⁷⁰² The issue appears to have been that solitary confinement was inconsistent with the Pennsylvania's new penal philosophy. This was ironic, given that Pennsylvania rose to prominence in penal reform on the basis of a system that was popularly (if erroneously) called solitary confinement.

The institution split into two institutions – SCI-PHA and the Eastern Diagnostic and Classification Center (EDCC) – and embraced its new mission with gusto and confidence. The General Assembly was so confident that classification would succeed in reducing recidivism that a 1963 report stated that Eastern and Western State would be maintained as maximum security prisons but only for “ ... the confinement of *those few prisoners determined to be incorrigible* [my emphasis] and inappropriate for confinement in medium and minimum security institutions.”⁷⁰³ While these expectations would go unfulfilled, the recommitment of SCI-PHA signaled a partial return to the institution's roots, albeit in vastly modified form.

As criminologist Norman Johnston has noted, classification and separation were not new at SCI-PHA; block fourteen, which housed the EDCC, had been officially

⁷⁰² “‘Oven’ Cells in Eastern Pen Bared” Aug. 28, 1953 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 35.

devoted to classifying inmates since 1934.⁷⁰⁴ In reality, the military discipline and apathy toward rehabilitation detailed in the previous chapter militated against a truly effective system of classification. Only after the Deever's Committee Report would a true shift in the Commonwealth's approach to penology and prison governance occur.

The top-down, system-wide change envisioned by the Deever's Committee required an integrated approach and necessitated a high degree of cooperation between all of the institutions. The Taskforce on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions said as much when it noted that “... the development of the Commonwealth's correctional institutions and services has long been hampered by the fact that planning has been intermittent and rarely if ever comprehensive in scope.”⁷⁰⁵ As early as 1869, the Commonwealth attempted to solidify its control by creating the Board of Public Charities (BPC) whose five members were appointed by the governor for five year terms; the goal was to bring all of the Commonwealth's penal and charitable institutions under the umbrella of an organization answerable to the governor. In reality, the BPC had little or no control over the institutions' daily administration.⁷⁰⁶ In 1921, Pennsylvania replaced the BPC with the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), charged with overseeing all state institutions for criminals, dependants and the insane, but even then, the Commonwealth did not have the level of control over SCI-PHA that it wanted. In many ways, 1953 was the moment when the Commonwealth succeeded in its eighty-year struggle to assert more

⁷⁰⁴ Norman Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Museum of Art, 2000), 97.

⁷⁰⁵ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions*, 3.

⁷⁰⁶ Finn Hornum, “Governance, 1870-1923” in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 172.

control over Pennsylvania's penal institutions, mostly because that was the only way to implement its rehabilitation scheme.

Rehabilitation and Classification at SCI-PHA

After 1953, rehabilitation became the centerpiece of the Commonwealth's prisons; it was now their fundamental purpose. The renewed commitment to rehabilitation was in many ways a rejection of the apathy and military discipline that had characterized Eastern State under Groome and Smith, and returned Eastern State to the mainstream of American correctional thought. As the director of American University's Institute of Correctional administration noted in 1960, American corrections " ... has progressed from a 'machine-gun penology,' under which security was the entirety of every prison program, to a penology which uses another kind of ammunition – security, work, vocational and academic training, medical care, family welfare, athletics, hobbies, and entertainment – all in the hope that , through these 'programs' of rehabilitation, *something* may rub off on the convicted criminals."⁷⁰⁷ The Commonwealth shared this outlook; according to the Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, " ... the purposes of prisons are to protect society by incarcerating certain offenders, to carry out penalties imposed by law and to change criminal attitudes through systematic treatment programs."⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁷ Howard B. Gill, "Developments in Correction – 1960 (Part II)" *Crime & Delinquency* 7 (1961): 263.

⁷⁰⁸ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions* 5.

Pennsylvania's approach to rehabilitation began by classifying offenders so that they could be sent to institutions whose services best matched their needs. All male inmates sentenced in the eastern half of the Commonwealth to serve time at a state penitentiary started their sentences at the EDCC (women were still sent to the Muncy Industrial Home, which had been renamed SCI-Muncy). New inmates entered the penitentiary through the front gate, and were immediately taken to the hallway leading to the center. Here, they were photographed, fingerprinted, and strip-searched. After a shower, inmates serving time for their first conviction were escorted to the EDCC in cellblock fourteen on the eastern side of the campus; second time offenders or parole violators were sent to cellblock eleven.⁷⁰⁹ In either case, inmates were assigned numbers and a cell before being escorted to the barber for a military style haircut. After that, they were returned to their cells, where they were supposed to live for eight weeks.⁷¹⁰

During that time, new inmates underwent a battery of psychological and physical tests in order to determine the most appropriate institutional placement.⁷¹¹ Incoming inmates met with SCI-PHA's medical doctor, dentist, the educational staff, at least one of the caseworkers, the vocational director, a psychologist and (if the circumstances warranted) a psychiatrist.⁷¹² Former inmate Wesley Boyd, who arrived at the EDCC in 1969, recalled that during the classification process, inmates only had "... a bed and a

⁷⁰⁹ William Barnes, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 2.

⁷¹⁰ Johnston, *Eastern State*, 97.

⁷¹¹ Tom Finn, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 5.

⁷¹² Finn Hornum, "Redefinition, 1923-1970" in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 230.

little footlocker and a table, and you had... a bible, and a pair of earphones, and that's all you were given."⁷¹³ Boyd's description of life at the EDCC is remarkably similar to descriptions of life at Eastern State in the Jacksonian period when prisoners were (allegedly) placed in cells with nothing but tools and a Bible. Recognizing that both descriptions contain more than a little oversimplification, it is nonetheless apparent that the EDCC was, to a certain extent, a return to Eastern State's rehabilitative approach from a century before.

According to architectural historian Jeffrey Cohen, the separation between SCI-PHA and the EDCC was more than a "paper wall." The prison, known officially as State Correctional Institution – Philadelphia (SCHI-PHA) was a maximum-security prison. Tom Finn, a correctional officer during the late-1950s and 1960s, described SCHI-PHA's inmate population as "long-timers," usually serving sentences between five and ten years, but sometimes going as high as life imprisonment.⁷¹⁴ Cohen noted that although inmates in both institutions shared the same dining, medical, and religious facilities, ultimately "...fraternization was intended to be restricted."⁷¹⁵ Richard Fulmer, who worked as the correctional counselor at SCHI-PHA during the late 1960s, recalled that inmates at the classification center wore blue denim uniforms to distinguish them from Eastern State's inmates, who wore brown uniforms.⁷¹⁶ These precautions seem to indicate that both

⁷¹³ Wesley Boyd, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 5.

⁷¹⁴ Tom Finn, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 5.

⁷¹⁵ Jeffrey A. Cohen, "Redefinition 1953-1970" in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 240.

⁷¹⁶ Richard Fulmer, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 4.

institutions (SCI-PHA and the EDCC) took classification and rehabilitation very seriously, and both worked hard to put the Commonwealth's new methods into practice.

The most basic components of classification were the psychological, psychiatric and educational services, all of which were notably improved and expanded in the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1965 and 1969, the Bureau of Correction (BOC) also expanded SCI-PHA's professional psychological staff from two psychologists and two former guards to thirteen psychologists and seventeen correctional counselors. The Bureau also expanded the prison's education department, which swelled from one teacher assisted by a few part-time instructors to five full-time teachers, supported by nine part-time evening instructors, all overseen by a full-time principle.⁷¹⁷ Fulmer called Eastern State, " ... the place where you got psychological therapy in the Pennsylvania BOC in the late sixties."⁷¹⁸ In fact, psychiatric services were available for more hours a week at SCHI-PHA than at any other state correctional institution.⁷¹⁹ Fulmer noted that an unintended consequence of providing the best psychological services of any prison in the Commonwealth was that the institution housed " ... most of the mental health cases and behavior problems in the state."⁷²⁰ Worse, despite the fact that the Commonwealth's inmate population was declining, the EDCC was routinely overcrowded. Thus, despite the Commonwealth's serious attempt to rehabilitate offenders, the combined institution

⁷¹⁷ Fulmer, "The House," 164.

⁷¹⁸ Richard Fulmer, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 10.

⁷¹⁹ James McKenna, *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷²⁰ Fulmer, "The House," 135.

was still bedeviled by overcrowding, which had hampered rehabilitative schemes for almost a century.

Rehabilitation in Practice

As in every previous era, educational programming was the primary method of rehabilitating inmates. This point is driven home by the fact that the Deever Committee recommended the appointment of a deputy commissioner for treatment whose primary responsibility was to coordinate all rehabilitative activities, including classification, education, personnel training, recreation, medical and psychiatric services, and the institutions' vocational training programs. In other words, education and vocational training remained cornerstones of Pennsylvania's approach to rehabilitation, just as they had for more than a century. SCI-PHA's emphasis on education was reflected in its *Handbook for Inmates*. "There are many services available here to help you...live a relatively happy and constructive life" it said. "They include religious guidance, educational, recreational, vocational, psychological, and medical facilities plus parole, discipline, and supervision."⁷²¹

According to the *Handbook*, SCI-PHA's educational services included academic studies in "spelling, arithmetic, reading and grammar," as well as classes in "typing, mechanical drawing, show card and sign lettering." These were supplemented by training for specific trades through correspondence courses in "auto mechanics, furniture refinishing, carpentry, masonry, air conditioning and refrigeration, gas and electrical

⁷²¹ *Handbook for Inmates* (Philadelphia: Eastern State Penitentiary, n.d.), preface.

welding, diesel engines, electrical subjects, machine shop practice, ocean navigation, plumbing, and various commercial courses.”⁷²²

Fulmer remembered that, at least during the 1960s, the institution’s culture encouraged inmate education. He recalled:

Everyone was expected to be doing something for themselves. This was not a place where you came in and just did time until it lapsed... The prototypical one, of course, is getting an education. Don’t just sit there and listen to your country music; go to school too.⁷²³

Fulmer’s statement mirrors the comments from Willie Sutton quoted in chapter four in that both believed that education was an important component of incarceration and that inmates should take advantage of the educational opportunities available in prison.

Fulmer believed that at least some of SCI-PHA’s inmates agreed with these sentiments, and Sutton’s comments (even though they were written nearly thirty years earlier) seem to support that conclusion.

But locus of responsibility had shifted, at least partially, from the institution to the inmate. Prisoners were no longer “reformed;” they rehabilitated themselves, and in so doing became active participants in their rehabilitation; inmates were now responsible for their own rehabilitation. This was certainly visible in Superintendent Rundle’s approach to rehabilitation, which, according to Fulmer, emphasized both education and an understanding “... that making it, both in the prison and in society, depended entirely on

⁷²² Ibid., 2.

⁷²³ Richard Fulmer, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 14.

how much you wanted to succeed and whether you were willing to sacrifice and work hard.”⁷²⁴

Inmate culture certainly reinforced the idea that prisoners should try to rehabilitate themselves, at least some of the time. The most visible outlet for this viewpoint was the *Eastern Echo*, the inmate newspaper that appeared in the mid-1950s. The *Echo* preached an ethic of individual responsibility that closely reflected the values of SCI-PHA’s administrators. At least some inmates internalized this self-help ethic. Leslie C. Patrick-Stamp quoted an inmate named D.B., who emphasized the individual’s role, noting “ ... you are going to decide if you are going to walk that straight line, or go back to the old ways.”⁷²⁵ Another inmate, R.B., repeated the individualist ethic and explicitly connected it to education, arguing that “ ... prison doesn’t rehabilitate you. It’s a school for two things: one, to do right when you get out of there and two, come out better than when you went in...[a] man has to change himself.”⁷²⁶ This emphasis on individual responsibility was characteristic of many contemporary rehabilitation programs. Kenneth Vonderheide, who was sentenced to twenty-five years in the United States Penitentiary in Atlanta early in this period, recalled that the administration encouraged him to take classes through the education department. Vonderheide chose courses in elocution and psychology, and it was these latter courses, as well as group

⁷²⁴ Fulmer, “The House,” 170.

⁷²⁵ Quoted in Leslie C. Patrick-Stamp, “Prisoners’ Perspectives: Modern Interviews” in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 259.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 259.

therapy sessions, that made him realize that “ ... my place in society was one of my own making.”⁷²⁷

As before, a segment of the general public continued to support educational programs for prisoners on the premise that learning would reduce recidivism. A 1960 editorial in the *Bulletin* is a case in point. Describing a graduation ceremony at SCI-PHA for inmates enrolled in the prison’s high school curriculum, the editorial referenced a letter published in that day’s paper, which spoke “eloquently on the subject” of penal education.⁷²⁸ The unknown editor described the letter, which noted that Pennsylvania had led the way when it came to advances in rehabilitating inmates a century before, and that penal education was an extension of that work. The editor concluded that “Certainly, teaching of convicts is not new. But it has advanced and can be advanced further, short of coddling them. Rehabilitation is another word for penance, a promise to change one’s ways for the better.”⁷²⁹ The best way to achieve that penance, at least according to the editor and the letter quoted, was better educational programming in the Commonwealth’s prisons.

These sentiments were hardly unique to Pennsylvania. President Lyndon Johnson’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice identified some characteristics of lawbreakers. Most were young males (between 16 and 30) with unstable work records. The report said that “ ... education is as good a barometer as any

⁷²⁷ Kenneth Vonderheide, “Thoughts of a Prisoner,” *Prison Journal* vol. 25 (1955), 18.

⁷²⁸ “The Graduation at Cherry Hill” October 1, 1960 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*

of the likelihood of success in modern urban society.... A high proportion of offenders are severely handicapped educationally. Many of them dropped out of school.”⁷³⁰ While the circumstances had changed – penologists in the 1960s now believed that criminals’ life experiences and circumstances were relevant to understanding crime – the President’s Commission explicitly connected ignorance and crime in exactly the same way that the PSAMPP had nearly a century and a half before in that both argued that ignorance caused crime. This belief naturally fed the conclusion that education could lower crime rates by reducing recidivism, which is why educational programming remained such an important part of rehabilitating inmates in the late 1960s just as it had in the late 1820s.

In 1963, 270 inmates (27 percent of the population) took part in SCI-PHA’s academic education programs. Fifty were enrolled in lower academic (elementary school) or pre-high school (middle school) classes, while sixty-six were studying high school level subjects. Twenty-four inmates were enrolled in art classes, while twenty-one took classes in short hand. The other classes – bookkeeping, commercial art, carpentry, typewriter repair, upholstery, speech, and mechanical drawing – each enrolled between twelve and eighteen students.⁷³¹ SCI-PIT’s educational program was similar: 210 students enrolled in a variety of academic and vocational subjects through both in-class instruction and correspondence courses.⁷³²

Educational programming was not limited to Pennsylvania’s state prisons; county penal institutions also offered some educational programs. Urban Studies professor Allen

⁷³⁰ President’s Commission, *The Challenge of Crime*, 387.

⁷³¹ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions*, 65.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 59.

M. Hornblum recalled teaching adult literacy classes at Philadelphia's Detention Center in the early 1970s. He characterized Philadelphia's inmate population at the time as " ... made up primarily of functional illiterates and high school dropouts," which certainly squares with the picture drawn by President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice.⁷³³ Hornblum's classes were part of a larger educational program designed to culminate in high school diplomas.⁷³⁴ Clearly, Hornblum's experience demonstrates that Pennsylvania's penal institutions on both the state and at the county level saw educating inmates as one of their major responsibilities.

Aggressive educational programming was not unique to Pennsylvania; educational programs continued in prisons across the country, just as they had for at least a century and a half. For instance, Paula K. Druker of New York University's Center for Continuing Education described the educational program at the Westchester County Penitentiary in New York State. According to Druker, such programs were grounded in a series of assumptions: " ... that educationally deprived adults lack the skills to find employment; that their understanding of the world around them is limited; and that, because of their inability to compete, they feel and are inadequate."⁷³⁵ Clearly, penal administrators throughout the Commonwealth and around the country viewed educating inmates as one of their responsibilities, and prisons around the United States took up the challenge of supplementing inmates' deficient high school educations.

⁷³³ Allen M. Hornblum, *Acres of Skin: Human Experiments at Holmesburg Prison* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 27.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁷³⁵ Paul K. Druker, "Short-term Education in a Short-term Penal Institution" *Crime & Delinquency* 12, (1966): 58.

America's penal institutions did not stop at offering high school diplomas; by the mid-1950s, U.S. inmates could pursue college degrees as well. It appears that the first college extension program in a U.S. prison originated at Southern Illinois Penitentiary (now Menard Correctional Center). In 1956, Southern Illinois University offered two credit classes. Six years later, the university expanded its offerings, and similar programs began at other U.S. prisons. In 1966, the Ford Foundation awarded The University of California, Berkeley a grant to create a college education program at San Quentin State Penitentiary in San Rafael, California. Historian of education Grace Howard noted that by 1992, all fifty states offered college programs in prisons, and that "... the majority of these efforts [were] community-college based associate degree programs in which instruction is delivered by a variety of means, including live instruction, television, and correspondence."⁷³⁶ Perhaps Iowa State Penitentiary's warden, Percy A. Lainson, best summed up the prevailing enthusiasm for education when he wrote in 1955 that "... every warden who is worth his salt takes pride in his institution, and is ever seeking to build up its educational, vocational and training facilities, its rehabilitative and reformatory programs as well as add to those factors and elements which will provide the prisoner with a greater hope and incentive, and above all prepare him not only to become a free citizen, but also to stay a free citizen."⁷³⁷ Though college education came late to SCI-PHA (according to the *Echo*, the first classes were held in Spring 1963) the

⁷³⁶ Grace Howard "An Historical Perspective of the College Education Program at Oregon State Penitentiary" PhD Diss, Oregon State University, 1992, 1-2.

⁷³⁷ Percy A. Lainson "Prison Administrators and the Penal Press" *The Prison Journal* 35 (1955), 14.

institution was nonetheless in the mainstream of American penal institutions in offering advanced education to inmates.⁷³⁸

Despite the fact that penal education stretched back at least as far as the Jacksonian Era, many of the people who worked at the institution in the 1950s and 1960s considered the emphasis on education revolutionary. For instance, Villanova criminologist James McKenna, who observed psychiatric counseling services at the penitentiary, asserted that the administration “introduced” adult education and “developed” a prison library during this period, when in fact both had been cornerstones of Eastern State’s rehabilitative program in the Jacksonian era.⁷³⁹ According to former guard Bill Moore, who started at SCI-PHA in mid-1957, “. . . at the time when I first started, there was no schooling there. As a matter of fact, there wasn’t really a library there. They had books but they were nothing. And then we had a guy come in from Springfield, a teacher. . . he more or less built that up, the library.”⁷⁴⁰ In reality, SCI-PHA’s library had existed for more than a century, and it contained twelve thousand volumes by the early 1960s.⁷⁴¹ The fact that both McKenna and Moore identify this as the moment when SCI-PHA became an educational institution is telling, because their view of the timing corresponds to the renewed focus on rehabilitation beginning in 1953.

⁷³⁸ Edward T. Miller, “A New Look in Education,” *Eastern Echo*, Winter 1963, 12.

⁷³⁹ James McKenna *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 5.

⁷⁴⁰ Bill Moore, *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁴¹ *Handbook for Inmates*, 3.

“I Learned a Few Little Things:” Curriculum and Delivery at SCI-PHA

Providing inmates with a recognized credential – usually a high school diploma but sometimes an associate’s degree – formed the basis of SCI-PHA’s academic educational program. The inmate handbook informed inmates that “ ... all courses are provided free of charge and a diploma is awarded upon successful completion of a course.”⁷⁴² Reporting in 1960 on the second class of seventeen graduates from the prison’s high school education program, the *Evening Bulletin* noted that the prison provided inmates with the equivalent of a four year high school education, and that it enrolled a variety of young and old inmates serving time for both minor and major offenses.⁷⁴³ Vito Iavecchia, who managed the prison’s print shop, characterized SCI-PHA’s educational opportunities as “good,” recalling that inmates “ ... had a lot of classes in different things, and most of them took advantage of those classes, and a lot of them that were especially good got to teaching some of the classes ... [inmates] learn a lot of things in jail, there’s no doubt about it.”⁷⁴⁴ Bobby Moore recalled “I got diplomas from the institution – for plumbing, for drafting for – well, going to school. Then we took a lot of Bible study courses – they must have had ten or eleven different Bible diplomas.”⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴² Ibid., 3.

⁷⁴³ “17 Doff Prison Garb Briefly, Get High School Diplomas” September 27, 1960 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁷⁴⁴ Vito Iavecchia, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 18.

⁷⁴⁵ Bobby Moore, Ibid., 7.

Of course, inmate learning was not solely about the credential; education had many purposes. One benefit was that SCI-PHA's parole board looked favorably on educational attainment because, as the inmate *Handbook* noted, "... educational enrollment with continuing achievement is recorded as an indication of self-improvement."⁷⁴⁶ In addition, learning was one way of making a long sentence bearable. Bobby Moore devoted himself to getting multiple degrees, in part because "... you had to keep your mind occupied."⁷⁴⁷ He remembered that, "... it was just something to study for ... to occupy your mind ... instead of going to the TV you could go to school at night and learn a little something."⁷⁴⁸ Furthermore, as inmate Frank H. Terres noted in the *Echo*, prison art, photography, and writing classes had the power to transport the inmates over the institution's walls, at least psychologically.⁷⁴⁹ Former inmate Willie Smith remembered, "I learned a few little things ... I was happy that I learned things."⁷⁵⁰ No wonder that the inmates' handbook called education a "privilege" for prisoners in good standing, along with sending and receiving correspondence, recreation, movies and television, newspapers, use of the library, and attending religious services.⁷⁵¹

Naturally, there was on-site education, but much of the inmates' education also took place through a variety of correspondence courses. The course materials were

⁷⁴⁶ *Handbook for Inmates*, 3.

⁷⁴⁷ Bobby Smith, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 6.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴⁹ Frank H. Terres "Expression in Color," *Eastern Echo* Summer 1958, 32.

⁷⁵⁰ Willie Smith, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 45.

⁷⁵¹ *Handbook for Inmates*, 11.

provided by the Scranton based International Correspondence School (I.C.S.) under a non-profit collaboration called the I.C.S. Prison Cooperative Plan, which appeared in 1936. SCI-PHA was one of the first institutions to join the program, and by the mid-1950s, it was one of sixty prisons that I.C.S. serviced. By then, more than 6,000 inmates in institutions nationwide had received degrees through the program. A total of 1,317 inmates had earned diplomas at both SCI-PHA and SCI-G (Graterford) through the I.C.S. Program since 1936 which, inmate Robert D. Heinemann noted with glee, “ ... means that we inmates, instead of using our prison leisure hours to plot new crimes, have among other worthwhile things been busily earning approximately one-fifth of the total number of diplomas granted under the I.C.S. Prison Plan.”⁷⁵²

Instruction at SCI-PHA was not limited to in-class learning and correspondence courses; the Commonwealth tried a number of innovative approaches to meet the inmates’ demand for learning. One of the most interesting educational programs began in 1957 when the BOC contracted with Pittsburgh’s WQED to provide the Commonwealth’s correctional institutions with “ ... high school level education ... by way of films.”⁷⁵³ This contract expanded a much more limited relationship between WQED and two Pittsburgh area institutions, SCI-PIT and the Alleghany County Workhouse. Initially at least, the non-profit educational station agreed to provide the Commonwealth with eighty lessons, ranging from English grammar to math and world history. The films were designed to supplement on-sight instruction when qualified teachers were available and provide the total curriculum when they were not. Initially,

⁷⁵² Robert D. Heinemann “Mr. I.C.S. Retires” *Eastern Echo* June 1956, 5.

⁷⁵³ “State Prisons Get TV School,” *Bulletin*, March 6, 1957.

BOC Commissioner Arthur T. Prasse noted that 49 convicts out of approximately 7,000 throughout Pennsylvania had qualified to take the courses, though the expectation was that this number would swell once the inmates were introduced to the new curriculum.

SCI-PHA's educational program sometimes benefited from help provided by a variety of state and local institutions: the State Department of Public Instruction provided teachers, while the Philadelphia School District loaned books and blackboards. At one point, the school district even let the prison's administrators rummage through and keep materials from a closed public school adjacent to the prison's campus.⁷⁵⁴ As in earlier periods, some of the inmates also helped with classroom instruction; according to the *Evening Bulletin*, former Collingwood school district superintendent Faber E. Stengle lent a hand while he was serving a twelve to fifteen year sentence at the prison for embezzling school district funds.⁷⁵⁵ Partnerships with local colleges and universities, particularly Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania, remained crucial to the prison's curriculum. In general, the institution's educational mission was better supported in terms of manpower and material during this period than at any other since SCI-PHA opened more than a century before.

Vocational Education

Educational programming at SCI-PHA was not limited to academic classes that culminated in a high school diploma; the institution also offered vocational education,

⁷⁵⁴ Bill Moore, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 29.

⁷⁵⁵ "17 Doff Prison Garb Briefly, Get High School Diplomas" September 27, 1960 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

just as it had since it opened in 1829. Labor continued to be a vital part of SCI-PHA's rehabilitative program, which is reflected in the fact that Commissioner Prasse proudly told the *Bulletin* that "... the merit of a prison system can be judged by the size of its prison industry."⁷⁵⁶ SCI-PHA's vocational program can be separated into two broad categories: occupations directly overseen by the prison and those overseen by Correctional Industries (CI), which administered SCI-PHA's print shop, dental laboratory, and laundry.

The inmate *Handbook* called employment with CI a "privileged assignment" that was designed "... to teach habits of industry and...to equip the inmate with experience and working knowledge so that he can qualify for work of a similar nature in outside industry."⁷⁵⁷ CI employed roughly 120 inmates at any one time during this period, so the bulk of prison labor was administered by the prison.⁷⁵⁸ CI's primary focus was the print shop, which handled the state colleges' printing needs and manufactured annual license plate inspection stickers, and the dental laboratory, which manufactured dental products like dentures. Both were designed to provide the institution and the state with needed products (the print shop manufactured menus and manuals while the dental lab created dentures for individuals in state care), but they were also designed to be educational

⁷⁵⁶ "Prison Industry Plan to be Increased," *Bulletin*, December 27, 1953 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁷⁵⁷ *Handbook for Inmates*, 6.

⁷⁵⁸ Vito Iavecchia, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 10.

experiences for the inmates as well. Vito Iavecchia, who oversaw CI's print shop at SCHI-PHA, recalled that his primary function was "... teaching fellows the printing trade"⁷⁵⁹

Both the print shop and the dental laboratory were well respected, and the education they provided created employment opportunities for paroled inmates. McKenna recalled that inmates who had trained in SCHI-PHA's print shop, "... had an opportunity to become apprentices or union members" once they were released.⁷⁶⁰ Iavecchia recalled that he would help some of his paroled printers find jobs in the industry and that "... we very seldom had anybody bounce back because they caused problems for the employer."⁷⁶¹

The prison itself also administered various vocational education programs for the inmates under the auspices of its "Vocational Department." These programs were staffed by guards whose role was to "... instruct inmates in their work so that they [could] become competent and reliable."⁷⁶² The guards' training manual noted that prison personnel "... should not forget that the aim [of the vocational department] is not so much maximum production as it is the instilling of good industrious work habits into the character of the inmates under his supervision."⁷⁶³ These programs had the added benefit that they produced goods for state consumption. Former guard Tom Finn recalled that the administration "... had jobs for people if they wanted to work. And most of the inmates

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁶⁰ James McKenna, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 6.

⁷⁶¹ Vito Iavecchia, Ibid., 7.

⁷⁶² State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia *Manual of Rules, Regulations and Required Duties of Correctional Officers* (Philadelphia: State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia, 1961), 32.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 41.

did work.”⁷⁶⁴ Bob Moore, who worked at the prison in the late 1950s, agreed, noting that while some inmates were idle, “... the majority of them worked.”⁷⁶⁵ Bill Moore, who oversaw the prison’s “hobby shops,” recalled that SCI-PHA had a leather shop, an upholstery shop, a greenhouse, and art studio, all of which were designed to teach them marketable skills for their release.⁷⁶⁶ Some inmates achieved notoriety for their goods, like “Penthouse Pete,” a former safecracker whose skill at working leather attracted a well-heeled client base that included “... topflight politicians, wealthy men and women, Hollywood and Broadway personalities, and nationally known athletes.”⁷⁶⁷ On the other hand, professors Melvin S. Heller and Marvin E. Wolfgang, who were closely associated with SCI-PHA’s psychiatric department, questioned the value of this type of employment, noting that “... these modern jobs [were] of questionable utility in the state employment market.”⁷⁶⁸

SCI-PHA also offered a plethora of hands-on educational opportunities. The administration pressed some inmates into service around the prison maintaining the aging physical plant. The Taskforce on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions noted that “... inmate labor is used on all maintenance projects; the inmates are under the supervision of trained personnel who lay out and direct the work in all phases of a

⁷⁶⁴ Tom Finn, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 17.

⁷⁶⁵ Bill Moore *Easter*, *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁶⁷ “‘Penthouse Pete’ Finds Leather Art Beats Safecracking to Get Wealthy,” *Sunday Bulletin*, July 11, 1954.

⁷⁶⁸ Melvin S. Heller and Marvin E. Wolfgang “The Legacy of Cherry Hill” *Prison Journal* 50 (1970): 42.

maintenance schedule, electrical, plumbing, steam fitting, carpentry, masonry, roofing, and culinary arts.”⁷⁶⁹ Bobby Moore recalled that his first job at SCI-PHA was dusting and sweeping the floors.⁷⁷⁰ William Barnes recalled that he spent a lot of time painting cells and mopping the floors on his cellblock as part of a crew of eight inmates.⁷⁷¹ Using inmates as support staff was nothing new at SCI-PHA; recall that in the nineteenth century, Dickens had noted that at least one inmate served as a nurse tending to sick prisoners, and the penitentiary was investigated during the 1830s when the legislature discovered that female inmates were working as domestics throughout the institution. Just as in the 1930s and 1940s, inmate labor was no longer just about rehabilitation; it also provided inmates with money to spend at the commissary on items like cigarettes, toothpaste, candy or shaving cream.⁷⁷² Prisoners who worked in the print shop made thirty-five cents per hour, which Iavecchia noted was the highest wage paid at SCI-PHA; most prisoners made somewhere around fifteen or twenty cents an hour.⁷⁷³

On the one hand, “Penthouse Pete’s” story demonstrates that the goals underlying penal labor in the Jacksonian period – teaching inmates marketable skills and inculcating a willingness to work – still very much underlay labor education programs in the second half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, it is very difficult to spot the educational or economic value to inmates of manufacturing license plates or soap, which were two

⁷⁶⁹ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions *Penal Institutions*, 63.

⁷⁷⁰ Bobby Moore *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 3.

⁷⁷¹ William Barnes, *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁷² Tom Finn, *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁷³ Vito Iavecchia, *Ibid.*, 10.

industries practiced at Pennsylvania correctional institutions.⁷⁷⁴ In other words, the educational value of prison labor was much more ambiguous at SCI-PHA during the 1950s and 1960s than it was during the 1830s or even the 1890s, which is ironic, given the fact that scholars have roundly condemned post-Civil War penal institutions as “merely” custodial. In fact, for all of its talk about the importance of rehabilitating inmates, the Commonwealth was not above exploiting inmates during this period.

Partnerships

Just as in the earlier period, Eastern State attracted the attention of students and scholars. As Fulmer recalled, “From Eastern’s earliest origins, the design of the program was to have people from the outside coming in. And by the 1960s, there was a constant stream of people coming in....”⁷⁷⁵ Richard Fulmer noted, “There was also so much coming and going of consultants, volunteers, tours and researchers that it was impossible to maintain security, order and routine.”⁷⁷⁶ This was certainly not unique, because many states including New York, California, Wisconsin, and Washington utilized outside experts to staff their educational, medical, and psychiatric departments.⁷⁷⁷ For SCI-PHA, relying on outsiders was old hat; when the institution opened, it had relied on prominent citizens to counsel inmates. In the twentieth century, the institution still relied on

⁷⁷⁴ “‘Penthouse Pete’ Finds Leather Art Beats Safecracking to Get Wealthy,” *Sunday Bulletin*, July 11, 1954.

⁷⁷⁵ Richard Fulmer, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 34.

⁷⁷⁶ Fulmer “The House,” 143.

⁷⁷⁷ Bernard C. Kirby, “An Experiment in Student Interning in Correction” *Crime & Delinquency* 12 (1966): 250.

outsiders – this time credentialed professionals – to assist in rehabilitating inmates. In other words, for all of the excitement in the late 1950s and 1960s about partnerships between penal and academic or medical institutions, the reality is that SCI-PHA had relied on outsiders from the beginning.

SCI-PHA relied heavily on local educational institutions, particularly Temple University, to provide on-site personnel training and psychiatric and medical services. The EDCC provided Temple University's medical students with internship opportunities in psychiatric medicine.⁷⁷⁸ By the late 1950s, SCI-PHA's psychological and medical facilities developed an official relationship with Temple University Hospital and, as Richard Fulmer noted, "... many prominent specialists in both fields either began their careers with prison experience or consulted there at various times."⁷⁷⁹ In September 1959, Temple expanded its University Unit in Law and Psychiatry, creating "... a continuing source of University Psychiatrists, in addition to a built-in consultative service by an established research unit in forensic psychiatry and legal medicine."⁷⁸⁰ The presence of so many well-respected professionals led former prison psychiatrist Arthur Boxer to characterize his time working in the prison as "... an academic experience."⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁸ James McKenna, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 2.

⁷⁷⁹ Fulmer, "The House" Manuscript in the Author's Personal Collection, 152.

⁷⁸⁰ Melvin S. Heller, Michael Morello and Samuel Polsky "The University's Role in Correctional Service and Training" *The Prison Journal* 40 (1960): 28.

⁷⁸¹ Arthur Boxer, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 3.

Full Circle: The Return of Educators as Administrators

That SCI-PHA remained committed to rehabilitation through education during the last years of its institutional life is not surprising given many of its administrators' backgrounds and careers. For instance, Commissioner Arthur T. Prasse's two decades of penal work included three years in juvenile corrections at the State Industrial School for boys as well as well as time at both Pennsylvania's George Junior Republic in Grove City and the Pennsylvania Training School at Morganza, both private juvenile correctional institutions. While not an educator, Prasse's formative experiences were in institutions that were explicitly penal and educational, which likely impacted the way he viewed penology and inmate rehabilitation. According to Richard Fulmer, Prasse was allowed to chart his own course when it came to setting the BOC's policy, which was centered on rehabilitating inmates. Prasse's agenda " ... focused on setting up a central training school for new prison employees and developing a more cohesive relationship between the seven state prisons."⁷⁸² Fulmer noted, while Prasse did not completely embrace modern psychological rehabilitative techniques, "Education, discipline and religion were at the heart of his approach to both running the institutions and changing the behavior of the inmates."⁷⁸³

Alfred Rundle, SCI-PHA's superintendent between 1961 and 1966, also had a strong background in education that shaped his approach to corrections. A 1929 graduate of East Stroudsburg State Teachers College (now Stroudsburg University), Rundle taught for thirteen years at a high school in Burlington City, New Jersey. Following his

⁷⁸² Fulmer, "The House," 126.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 146.

discharge from the Navy in 1946, he was hired to teach a variety of subjects, including English, history, civics, woodworking, and furniture refinishing, at Graterford prison. Rundle became Graterford's deputy warden in 1953 and became SCI-PHA's superintendent in 1961.⁷⁸⁴ Rundle's successor, Joseph R. Brierly (1966-1968), was different. A junior high school dropout who very much fit Cassidy's model of a "professional" prison warden, he learned the trade through on-the-job training. Brierly "prided himself on his toughness," but he also valued academic education, and took classes at Temple University (despite his eighth grade education).⁷⁸⁵ The *Philadelphia Bulletin*, in listing Brierly's qualifications to be superintendent of SCI-PHA in 1966, reported that he had completed a course in psychopathology for penologists at Philadelphia's Psychoanalytic Institution in 1957.⁷⁸⁶ Fulmer noted that Brierly even occasionally *taught* college courses in criminal justice and correctional administration at local colleges, universities, and training academies.⁷⁸⁷ Clearly, despite the fact that Brierly had little formal schooling, he strongly supported SCI-PHA's rehabilitative mission and believed in the importance of professional education.

⁷⁸⁴ Fulmer, "The House," 170.

⁷⁸⁵ Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 97.

⁷⁸⁶ "Deputy Appointed Chief of State Prison Here" *Bulletin* Aug 2, 1966 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁷⁸⁷ Fulmer, "The House," 129.

“By the Inmates, for the Inmates:” *The Eastern Echo*

One of the differences between Eastern State’s approach to rehabilitation in the 1820s and SCI-PHA’s in the 1950s and 1960s was the institution’s relationship with the community. As chapter two made clear, one of the attractions of building penitentiaries was that they separated inmates from society because Jacksonian penologists feared the social changes they saw and believed that society's complexities tempted susceptible people, pushing them towards crime. By the twentieth century, U.S. penologists no longer isolated inmates from the society that they would ultimately rejoin, and this belief was reflected in Thomas Mott Osborne’s attempts to introduce inmate self-government at Sing Sing discussed in the previous chapter. Though Osborne was only partially successful – he was forced out of his position as Sing Sing’s warden after only two years – his ideas about how prisoners should be treated profoundly influenced penal practice for at least the next half-century.

As noted in chapter three, one manifestation of Osborne’s beliefs about prison administration was his support for a penal press, or publications written by and for inmates. In 1955, Iowa State Penitentiary’s warden called penal newspapers “... a mighty weapon for good in its all out effort to create a better understanding between insider and outsider.”⁷⁸⁸ In addition to making the general public better able to understand prisoners, which he believed made it easier for paroled inmates to reenter society, the warden claimed that the prison press served another vital function: “... helping bring about better conditions and programs which help both the inmate and the administrator through the

⁷⁸⁸ Percy A. Lainson, “Prison Administrators and the Penal Press” *Prison Journal* 35 (1955): 14.

uplift in morale.”⁷⁸⁹ SCI-PHA's second inmate publication, a magazine called *Eastern Echo*, appeared during this period, and is a wonderful source of insight regarding inmate attitudes. While in some respects similar to its predecessor, the *Umpire*, the *Echo* displayed some important differences that reflected shifts in penal philosophy during the intervening four decades.

Begun in the 1950s, the *Echo* was not only aimed at inmates, but was intended for distribution outside the institution (the *Umpire* was not), which probably partially explains its didactic tone. Most of the articles showed the institution and its inmates in a positive light by emphasizing their educational achievements. Its pages were filled with inmate written articles like “How Can I Help Myself in Prison?” which counseled inmates to take advantage of the institution’s educational facilities, or “Vocational Training: Rebuilding Typewriters and Wrecked Citizenships.”⁷⁹⁰ The goal seems to have been to appeal to the general public by portraying the inmates as hardworking and energetic workers. One outside audience that the *Echo* pursued with vigor was employers, and the paper’s editors regularly ran articles like “Employer Wanted,” which appeared in the summer of 1958 and implored local employers to hire paroled inmates.⁷⁹¹ Another article from the Winter 1961 issue titled “Call ‘PO-5-1106’” listed the many benefits of hiring paroled inmates, provided the reader with contact information for SCI-PHA’s parole officer, and asserted that employers who did so would be “... performing a

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹⁰ Jerry D. Culp, “How Can I Help Myself While in Prison?” *Eastern Echo* Winter 1965, 15 and “Vocational Training: Rebuilding Typewriters and Wrecked Citizenships” *Eastern Echo* Spring 1962, 8.

⁷⁹¹ Frank H. Terres, “Employer Wanted,” *Eastern Echo*, Winter 1961, 4.

public service.”⁷⁹² Perhaps the most pugnacious appeal was a simple cartoon of a man pointing at the reader above a tagline that read “Hire a parolee.”⁷⁹³

The *Echo* was not simply a soapbox for the administration’s views; while it promoted essentially the same values as the administration, the *Echo*’s staff was very willing to express displeasure if, in their view, the administration exercised its censorship authority too broadly. Historian Leslie C. Patrick-Stamp noted that the *Echo*’s editors “ ... directly confronted some of the most formidable issues with respect to their incarceration.”⁷⁹⁴ In April 1967, the *Echo*’s entire editorial staff resigned rather than revise a proposed article about prison sex, which the director of treatment services Dr. Joseph Mazurkiewicz argued was in “bad taste.” Dr. Mazurkiewicz bristled at suggestions that he was a censor, arguing that that the inmates “ ... didn’t see us as responsible but as illiterates who didn’t appreciate the literary merits of the works.”⁷⁹⁵ Ultimately, discounting the *Eastern Echo* as a source for the inmates’ perspective simply because the administration held a certain amount of editorial control over content is simplistic and naïve. According to former inmate Joe Mucerino, the inmates had “ ... control over what was in the magazine. Of course, I believe the superintendent would editorialize or have final say of what was put in the magazine, but it was done strictly for

⁷⁹² “Call ‘PO-5-1106,” *Eastern Echo*, Winter 1961, 10.

⁷⁹³ “Hire a Parolee” *Eastern Echo*, Winter 1964, 13.

⁷⁹⁴ Leslie C. Patrick-Stamp, “Prison Journal: The Eastern Echo” in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 257.

⁷⁹⁵ “Staff Quits Prison Magazine in Row Over Censorship,” *Evening Bulletin* May 3, 1967 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

the inmates by the inmates.”⁷⁹⁶ While the *Echo*’s content was clearly mediated by the administration, it nonetheless demonstrates that at least some inmates internalized and promoted the self-help approach to rehabilitation that identified inmates as primarily responsible for their own rehabilitation and offered educational programming as the method to achieve that goal.

Same Methods, Similar Problems

Despite the myriad changes at SCI-PHA between 1953 and 1970, many things remained the same. For instance, the prison remained a nasty place. Fulmer recalled that the institution was characterized by “considerable violence.” He noted that, “ ... there were conflicts, there was gambling, there were deaths, there were all the problems you have anywhere, out on the street and in institutions.”⁷⁹⁷ Former inmate Willie Smith recalled seeing an inmate stab another to death after their relationship went sour; he recalled “ ... that was the first killing I saw in the Eastern State Penitentiary. And so it was [repeated] many, many more [times].”⁷⁹⁸ These statements regarding violence are supported by the number of murders and fights that were reported in the local press. In November 1953, Robert Robinson stabbed Emmanuel L. Porter to death in cellblock one, which at that time was the punitive segregation wing.⁷⁹⁹ In April 1958, Charles A. Barr

⁷⁹⁶ Joe Mucerino *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 6.

⁷⁹⁷ Richard Fulmer, *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁹⁸ Willie Smith, *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁹⁹ “Cellmate Slain at Eastern Pen” *Bulletin* Nov. 16, 1953 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

stabbed Edward Huber five times during a knife fight in SCI-PHA's reception inmate center; no reason was given for the fight.⁸⁰⁰ In March 1961, Harry Fricker hanged himself after Warden Banmiller confiscated and killed the inmate's cat as punishment for a riot that broke out the previous January.⁸⁰¹ Six years later, Clarence Young stabbed his cafeteria co-worker, Cornwell Wylie, during an argument at work.⁸⁰² Clearly not all inmates were rehabilitated, despite the administration's best efforts.

The institution was also racked by a number of uprisings during this period. On May 2, 1953, the prison was rocked by two disturbances in a twelve-hour period. Shortly after midnight, inmates in six segregation cells on cellblock one ignited their furniture and bedding in protest after the administration ignored their demands for reentry to the general population, better food, radio and a fairer, more equitable parole program.⁸⁰³ Eleven hours later, thirty-four inmates segregated on cellblock five for "morals offenses" (likely homosexuality) refused to return to their cells from their exercise yard. They only returned to their cells after Warden Tees instructed them to put their complaints in writing and pass it up through the chain, which they did.

In 1961, SCI-PHA was shaken by the largest and one of the most violent prisoner uprisings in the institution's history, an event that increased calls for the prison's closure. Around 8 P.M. on January 8, inmate John Klauzenberg asked a newly hired guard,

⁸⁰⁰ "Convict Slain in Furious Fight at Eastern Pen" *Philadelphia Inquirer* April 13, 1958 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁸⁰¹ "Convict Found Hanged in Pen" *Post* March 2, 1961 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁸⁰² "Convict Charged in Prison Stabbing" March 9, 1967 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁸⁰³ Fulmer, "The House," 138.

Donald Carr, to open another inmate's cell so that Klauzenberg could retrieve his guitar. Once Carr opened the cell, Klauenberg and the other inmate, Harry Shank, overpowered and stabbed the guard, stealing his keys. After freeing a third inmate named Manny Madronal, the trio made their way to Center, where they took the four guards on duty hostage. After exchanging clothes with the guards, the three inmates set about freeing prisoners on cellblocks one (administrative segregation) and fifteen (punitive segregation – Death Row).

Fortunately, Officer Carr was only wounded, and he was able to notify guards in the gatehouse, who in turned called Superintendent Brierly. Brierly immediately activated “Operation Breakout,” a plan for containing a riot that involved the Philadelphia Police Department, Pennsylvania State Troopers, and the Philadelphia Fire Department. Once the rioters realized that the administration was on to them, they changed tactics and tried to release *all* of SCI-PHA's inmates, hoping that they could escape during the ensuing chaos. According to former inmate Barnes, releasing the inmates led to bedlam: some prisoners ransacked the pharmacy while others took the opportunity to “settle scores” with other inmates or with guards.⁸⁰⁴ The “fun” was short lived, because by 10:00 P.M., a contingent of nearly fifty guards, state troopers and municipal police officers stormed the prison, cornering the riot's ringleaders (and their hostages) in the garage on the west side of the campus. The state troopers fired tear gas into the garage, and by 10:20 P.M. the rioters were lined against the wall, buck naked so they could be searched. These episodes of violence, and the countless others, demonstrate that SCI-PHA remained a brutal,

⁸⁰⁴ William Barnes, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 3.

violent, and depressing place even in the best of times, but they also remind us that brutality and rehabilitation were never mutually exclusive. In addition, the civil rights movement raised awareness of racial injustice and caused friction between the institution's largely white administration and its large minority population.

The Challenge of Race

Since the nineteenth century, blacks composed a disproportionately high percentage of the institution's population relative to their percentage of the Commonwealth's population, but never a majority. According to the Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, in 1963 white inmates composed 53.8 percent of SCI-PHA's population while inmates of color amounted to 46.2 percent. This was roughly consistent with the percentages in the nineteenth century. Roosevelt Grant, who began a five and one half year term in 1958 for armed robbery, remembered that, when he arrived, the penitentiary was segregated. Once the prison was desegregated in 1964, black and white inmates mingled well, at least according to former SCI-PHA psychologist Anthony Andrews. He recalled that " ... the inmates did not seem to segregate themselves in the yard. I mean they were interacting. They weren't segregated, and of course there were some that preferred to be with their own race, but there was a lot of interaction with the black and the white that I recall."⁸⁰⁵

This contrasts sharply with other staff and inmates' memories of the time period. Many recall that, even after the prison was officially desegregated, it remained

⁸⁰⁵ Anthony Andrews, *Ibid.*, 25.

unofficially segregated, with very little mixing between the races. Former psychiatrist Arthur Boxer recalled that, “ ... they hung out together...they divided themselves up, as they do anywhere.”⁸⁰⁶ Former inmate John Toth recalled that, even after desegregation, tensions ran high. Toth said “ ... the whole prison was mixed, which always caused a conflict ... if somebody [of one race] brushed against someone [of another], [they might] take offense to it and cause a problem. But that was always the tension all the time, everyday. That was commonplace.”⁸⁰⁷

The Nation of Islam movement, which appeared in American prisons during World War II, exacerbated racial tensions at SCI-PHA during the late-1950s and 1960s. Founded in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad, the Nation of Islam spread quickly to American prisons when the movement’s leaders were tried and convicted for refusing to register for the draft or serve during the war. Historians Nicole Hahn Rafter and Debra L. Stanley accurately summarized the Black Muslim movement as “ ... a militant, nationalistic effort by black prisoners to take control of their own lives.”⁸⁰⁸ It is unknown when the Nation of Islam appeared at SCI-PHA, but certainly by the late 1950s there was a group of black Muslims housed at the institution. They clashed with SCI-PHA’s administration over the fact that, while other groups (Jews, Catholics and Protestants) had dedicated spaces of worship, the Muslims had no mosque. This was not unusual; Rafter and Stanley noted that, at prisons across the country, “ ... prison administrators...fiercely

⁸⁰⁶ Arthur Boxer, *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁰⁷ John Toth, *Ibid.*, 20,

⁸⁰⁸ Nicole Hahn Rafter and Debra L. Stanley, *Prisons in America: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1999), 14.

resisted Muslim requests. They feared change, but even more, they feared black power.”⁸⁰⁹

This was undoubtedly true at SCI-PHA, and in 1959 the administration even banned the prison’s Muslims from practicing Islam after several Muslim inmates attacked correctional officers in the prison kitchen; it is inconceivable that prison administrators would make a similar proclamation if the attackers had been Jewish or Catholic.⁸¹⁰ Bobby Moore, who was not involved with SCI-PHA’s Black Muslim movement, recalled that the administration broke up informal prayer meetings, and complained that black Muslims “messed up the menu” because they refused to eat pork.⁸¹¹

By the early 1960s, SCI-PHA’s Muslim inmates responded with the only tools available to them: the courts. In April 1964, inmate Maurice X. Walker filed a petition in the Common Pleas Court, asserting that SCI-PHA’s administrators were punishing Black Muslims because of their religious beliefs. One particularly explosive charge was that Black Muslims were being segregated in “prison ghettos,” which was entirely possible, given the fact that the prison was still a segregated institution. The District Attorney’s office responded by saying “ ... to the extent that the Black Muslim religion tends to disturb the orderly functions and administrations of the penal institution, they must in turn be regulated by the administrators of the prison.”⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁸¹⁰ Fulmer, “The House,” 153.

⁸¹¹ Bobby Moore, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 23.

⁸¹² “Black Muslim Complains of Persecution in Prison” *Bulletin* April 5, 1964 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

Likely in response to Maurice X. Walker's lawsuit and the gradual disappearance of segregated facilities in America, in 1964 Commissioner Prasse ordered all of the Commonwealth's penal institutions integrated. For sixty years, Eastern State's black inmates had been housed separately from the institution's other inmates, but now they would all be housed together. The Commissioner left it up to the various institutions' administrators to develop strategies for implementing this order. SCI-PHA's administrators decided to assign cells based on where inmates worked, which in Fulmer's words accomplished "... the letter and spirit of the desegregation order."⁸¹³

Yet, the racial turmoil continued. On May 23 1967, twelve Black Muslim inmates attacked another inmate and then a guard during what can only be described as a riot. Once guards regained control over the situation, they stripped the twelve Muslims and placed them in solitary confinement (likely on cellblock fifteen). The Muslims retaliated by filing a federal lawsuit accusing the guards and administrators of violating their civil rights for preventing them from establishing a mosque and for stripping them after the riot.⁸¹⁴ These lawsuits, part of a tidal wave of legal activity at prisons across the country, empowered Black Muslims because it forced U.S. prison administrators to afford Muslims the same respect accorded Jews and Christians. Moreover, as Rafter and Stanley noted, the Black Muslim movement "flowed into" and paved the way for the prisoners' rights movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹⁵ Managing a prison under these

⁸¹³ Fulmer, "The House," 172.

⁸¹⁴ "Five Muslims Attacked Him, Jailer Testifies" October 16, 1967 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁸¹⁵ Rafter and Stanley *Prisons in America*, 14.

circumstances required well-trained and highly skilled guards and administrators, but as chapters three and four made clear, these had never been plentiful.

“Holding a Wolf by the Ears:” Staff Training at SCI-PHA

The Roman emperor Tiberius is supposed to have compared governing his world empire to “holding a wolf by the ears.” Certainly, this is an apt metaphor to describe governing a maximum-security correctional institution that one of its own wardens described as a “tinderbox.”⁸¹⁶ Keeping the prison from erupting into violence was a constant concern, and one of the Deever’s Committee’s key findings was that prison personnel needed better training and pay in order to attract individuals with the skills necessary to pacify and rehabilitate offenders. Specifically, the Deever’s Committee recommended that the State Police training school at Hershey should train all personnel below the rank of warden or superintendent, and that it should supplement the on-site in-service training given at the individual prisons.⁸¹⁷ Training personnel was a particularly pressing problem considering the problem identified in the introduction of SCI-PHA’s *Manual* for guards: “Many of the past failures of American Prisons can be traced to a lack of specific instruction of Officers for a difficult task requiring greater experience and the scientific attitudes necessary to do their jobs.”⁸¹⁸

Since rehabilitation relied on an educated, professional task force, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission recommended in 1968 that the minimum acceptable

⁸¹⁶ “Eastern Pen Pictured as a ‘Tinderbox,’” *Philadelphia Inquirer* May 7 1953, 1.

⁸¹⁷ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions *Penal Institutions*, 33.

⁸¹⁸ State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia, *Manual of*, introduction.

level of education for probation and parole agents should be a four-year college degree coupled with one years' experience; for supervisory positions, applicants should hold a master's degree and have five years experience.⁸¹⁹ This was simply not possible, at least during the early-sixties; the Taskforce on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions noted that the majority of the Commonwealth's probation officers (62 percent) had a high school education or less, while only 27 percent held graduate degrees or were in the process of obtaining them. The numbers for probation officers were somewhat better, though not much: almost half (46 percent) had graduated from college or held graduate degrees, but 39 percent held high school diplomas or less.⁸²⁰ Obviously, Pennsylvania's prison personnel did not come onto the job with the requisite education, so the Commonwealth relied on a combination of on- and off-site training to prepare employees for their jobs.

Introductory training took place at the State Police Training School in Harrisburg (until 1956, when it was moved to Camp Hill), where employees learned “ ... the art of self-defense, the use of defensive weapons, and military courtesy ... [as well as] a working knowledge of the BOC, its Commissioner and members of his staff.”⁸²¹ This was by no means the end of an employee's training; while employed by the Commonwealth, personnel were expected to take part in on-site in-service training. According to Finn Hornum, “ ... in-service training of both the social work and

⁸¹⁹ Pennsylvania Crime Commission, *Task Force Report: Corrections in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: Office of the Attorney General, 1968), 55.

⁸²⁰ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions*, 80.

⁸²¹ State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia, *Manual of*, 1.

psychology departments were [*sic*] carried out and further staff development through the use of student interns and scholarship assistance to staff wanting to complete a higher degree, were [*sic*] provided.”⁸²² Former prison psychologist Anthony Andrews, who was a graduate student at Temple University at the time, recalled leading in-service training for the custodial staff “ ... and many other things that you wouldn’t think would be part of my job description.”⁸²³ Andrews described the in-service training as follows:

...bringing in [new personnel] and giving them an orientation. What it would like to be there as an employee, what they needed to look out for, how they might treat the inmates, what was the appropriate kind of treatment, how they would relate to the inmates and so forth, along those general lines. It was part of a package of orientation. A number of staff did that; I gave a component of it.⁸²⁴

Robert Wink, who worked for five years as a guard beginning in 1960, recalled that he was sent to a juvenile detention facility outside of Harrisburg for training.⁸²⁵

In many ways, Pennsylvania “got serious” about training prison employees during this period. As the last two chapters showed, SCI-PHA had trained its guards during weekly night classes as early as the 1880s, but this was done primarily on an institution-by-institution basis. Seventy years later, the drive toward professionalization demanded a more uniform and comprehensive system of professional education. Here, Pennsylvania turned to outside organizations like universities and advocacy groups to provide on-site education. For instance, in 1955, the Pennsylvania Prison Society and Penn State Social

⁸²² Finn Hornum, “Redefinition, 1923-1970” in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 229.

⁸²³ Anthony Andrews, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 4.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸²⁵ Robert Wink, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 1.

Science Research Center began convening two-day retreats for penal staff, the goal of which was “ ... to unite in cooperative endeavor the resources of private agencies, government (national, state, and local) and the universities.”⁸²⁶

Throughout its existence, the BOC offered a number of professional development opportunities for personnel, starting with orientation training at the institution where the employee would work. The prison issued to all employees copies of both the guards’ *Manual* and the inmates’ *Handbook* and asked new hires to familiarize themselves with all of the institution’s policies and procedures. The next level of training was on-the job training, where new personnel were paired with experienced employees. Ideally, new guards were shifted around the institution until they had served at least a few shifts at each post. This was an informal process, the length “ ... determined by the ability of the officer to learn.”⁸²⁷ Periodically, all officers were required to attend in-service training that was designed to refresh guards’ knowledge of the institutions’ policies and procedures. Like on-the-job training, in-service training was informal in that it was “ ... based on the needs and training requirements of that particular institution.”⁸²⁸ According to the Director of California’s Department of Corrections, Richard McGee, on-the-job and in-service training were the backbone of prison employee education. He asserted “ ... for the most part, training has been conducted on the trade or vocational level, in which

⁸²⁶ John H. Ferguson “Improving Rehabilitation Through Correctional Personnel Training in Pennsylvania” *Prison Journal* vol. 40 (1960), 22.

⁸²⁷ Harry E. Snyder and John J. Kuharig “Training in the Pennsylvania Bureau of Correction” *Prison Journal* 40 (1960): 22.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*

most of the learning takes place through job experience, and through practical in-service training courses.”⁸²⁹

The BOC Officers Training School opened in 1959 in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania and offered prospective officers a two-week curriculum covering a variety of topics including “Organization of the Bureau,” “History of Crime,” “Police Judo,” and “Accounting.”⁸³⁰ According to educational specialist Harry E. Snyder and BOC methods analyst John J. Kuharig, the BOC’s training program had six goals: raise the standards of correctional officers, teach teamwork, instruct guards in their role in the rehabilitative process, raise morale, establish a code of ethics for guards, and make employees proficient in their jobs.⁸³¹

Despite all of these improvements, some felt that employee training was still lacking. Bill Moore, who ran the prison’s hobby shops in the late-1950s, recalled that he would work on the guard force “if they needed help” despite the fact that he had no professional certification or qualification to do so.⁸³² Vito Iavecchia, who oversaw CI’s print shop at SCI-PHA, recalled getting no training for teaching the inmates printing. He said, “I think that Harrisburg sent a high official of Correctional Industries down, and he interviewed me, and that’s the first contact I had.”⁸³³ Ultimately, probation officer Carl Terwilliger was probably correct when he asserted in 1966 that “ ... too often

⁸²⁹ Richard A. McGee, “Professional Education for the Correctional Field” *Crime & Delinquency* 2 (1956): 195.

⁸³⁰ Snyder and Kuharig, “Training in the Pennsylvania Bureau of Correction,” 23.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

⁸³² Bill Moore, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 3.

⁸³³ Vito Iavecchia, Ibid., 23.

[correctional institutions were] content to ignore or sanction inferior performance as long as the façade of professionalism is maintained.”⁸³⁴

Closure

According to historian and social worker Richard Fulmer, who worked at Eastern State during the late 1960s, the penitentiary’s administrators believed that the prison presented “ ... more political and operational problems than any other prison [in Pennsylvania]. The physical structure was terrible and the staff was seen as too lenient with the prisoners.”⁸³⁵ In 1963, the General Assembly’s Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions characterized SCI-PHA as “ ... outmoded and woefully lacking in the equipment and facilities necessary in taking care of [maximum security inmates] [A]n institution of this kind should not be located in the heart of a residential section as it is now in the City of Philadelphia.”⁸³⁶ Later in the study, the Task Force criticized the prison as an “archaic facility,” and noted that “ ... its cells are dark and dingy, office space is at a premium, recreation area inadequate and maintenance and modernization are continuing management problems.”⁸³⁷

Fulmer noted that the architecture made the building less secure. He noted that “ ... you cannot physically secure [Eastern State Penitentiary]. There are nooks and

⁸³⁴ Carl Terwilliger, “The Nonprofessional in Correction” *Crime & Delinquency* vol. 12 (1966), 280.

⁸³⁵ Fulmer, “The House,” 143.

⁸³⁶ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions, Probation, and Parole* (Harrisburg, PA: General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1963), ix.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

crannies. There are doorways everywhere. To get from one place in the institution to the other, there are always at least five or six ways to go ... I mean there are always a hundred ways to get anywhere.”⁸³⁸ McKenna expanded on Fulmer’s observation, recalling, “There was a lot of free movement within the institution.”⁸³⁹ Former inmate Joe Corvi recalled the atmosphere as “relaxed,” and he remembered that, whereas inmates needed escorts or passes to get around the campus at Graterford (SCI-G), at SCI-PHA, you could “ ... walk the way you want[ed] to go.”⁸⁴⁰

This was ironic, given the fact that Eastern State’s architecture was originally designed to maintain security by making it possible to survey the entire institution from one location. By the mid-twentieth century, this onetime advantage had become a serious disadvantage. SCI-PHA’s hub and spoke architecture, designed to separate inmates from society and each other, had been cutting edge in the 1820s when the building was erected. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, penal philosophy had changed, and penologists advocated “community-based” corrections that kept the inmates in close contact with each other and the wider world. The Pennsylvania Crime Commission voiced this new paradigm when it asserted “ ... solid ties must be created between the offender and the community to aid his successful regeneration into society.”⁸⁴¹

According to Johnston, the new emphasis was on smaller institutions “ ... where men are led rather than pushed into rehabilitation.” Writing in 1961, he noted that “ ...

⁸³⁸ Richard Fulmer, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 12.

⁸³⁹ James McKenna, *Ibid*, 3.

⁸⁴⁰ Joe Corvi, *Ibid*. 4.

⁸⁴¹ Pennsylvania Crime Commission, *Task Force Report*, 51.

almost every reform of recent years has resulted in the elimination of some of the prison like qualities of the prison,” starting with the dreary, dungeon like architecture.⁸⁴² In the same vein, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission called architecture “a frank expression” of the building’s purpose and noted that “ ... the Bastille-like, maximum security designs that predominate among our state institutions are an obvious reflection of their original function to secure and isolate mass prison populations. Such physical plants frustrate the realization of rehabilitative ideals.”⁸⁴³

SCI-PHA’s administrators worked very hard to maintain the building’s appearance; inmates were detailed to repaint every wall at least once a year, and Bill Moore recalled that “It was a clean prison, and they took pride in keeping it clean.”⁸⁴⁴ William Barnes remembered that each block had seven or eight block workers who scrubbed the floors every day. According to Barnes, “I couldn’t say you could eat off the floor, but that cliché stands, you know?”⁸⁴⁵ The Taskforce on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, which was generally critical of SCI-PHA, nevertheless noted “ ... daily housekeeping is maintained to insure cleanliness and orderly living.”⁸⁴⁶ Unfortunately, no amount of whitewash or elbow grease could make up for the fact that, by the early 1960s, the building was nearly a century and a half old and therefore could not adequately function as a state prison.

⁸⁴² Norman Johnston, “The Changing Face of Correctional Architecture” *Prison Journal* 41 (1961): 14.

⁸⁴³ Pennsylvania Crime Commission, *Task Force*, 11.

⁸⁴⁴ Bill Moore, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 38.

⁸⁴⁵ William Barnes, *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁴⁶ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions*, 63.

For instance, the guard stations on the prison's corner turrets had no bathroom facilities, which posed a serious problem for guards who were required to remain at their posts during their eight-hour shifts. Willie Sutton recalled in his memoirs that guards assigned to the corner turrets used to climb the towers' stairs with their lunches in one hand and a bucket in the other.⁸⁴⁷ Raymond Holstein, who lived nearby the prison, recalled that the guards used to dump buckets of urine and feces over the prison's wall; while he could not remember anyone ever being hit, he recalled that "... you could obviously smell what was going on when you went by."⁸⁴⁸ It is ironic that, in the 1950s and 1960s, guards were still defecating in buckets given the fact that the prison was the first municipal building in the United States to have indoor plumbing and that the prisoners had toilets before the President of the United States. In addition, the prison was infested with rats, which is one of the reasons why the administration allowed inmates to keep cats as pets. Once the administration discontinued that practice as punishment for the 1961 riot, the number of rats shot up and the quality of life at the penitentiary dropped even further.⁸⁴⁹

In the midst of all of these changes, the prison remained what it had always been: a lightning rod for criticism and controversy. Despite the antiquated facilities and unsanitary conditions, in March 1959, Assistant District Attorney Juanita Kidd Stout actually criticized SCI-PHA for being too "luxurious." Among the alleged "luxuries" that

⁸⁴⁷ Willie Sutton with Edward Linn *Where the Money Was: The Memoirs of a Bank Robber* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 159.

⁸⁴⁸ Raymond Holstein, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 10.

⁸⁴⁹ Willie Smith, *Ibid.*, 16.

inmates enjoyed were exemptions from income tax on the profits of their labor, the fact that movies were screened for the prisoners three times a week along with two hours of television daily, and the fact that prison administrators regularly held musical performances and sporting events. She even alleged that prison administrators occasionally provided inmates with floorshows from local nightclubs, though no evidence has been found to substantiate this claim.⁸⁵⁰

ADA Stout's criticisms of SCI-PHA reflected a debate that had raged since the institution opened between those who believed that it was torturous and those who felt it coddled inmates. Sociologist Negley K. Teeters, who was intimately familiar with conditions at SCI-PHA after a career spent observing the institution, argued that people who called prisons "country clubs" were "... ignorant of even the fundamentals of penology."⁸⁵¹ Johnston sensed a "... continual trend towards the amelioration of the harshness of past prison life" from the eighteenth century forward.⁸⁵² On the other hand, Michel Foucault argued that the "progress" penal historians were so proud of was merely substitution of ghastly spiritual punishments for grotesque physical ones.⁸⁵³ In either case, SCI-PHA was still at the center of a debate about the appropriate balance of punishment and penitence that it had started nearly a century and a half before.

⁸⁵⁰ "Assistant DA Lists 'Luxuries' At Eastern Penitentiary" March 20, 1958 Clipping contained in *Bulletin Collection*, Urban Archives, Temple University.

⁸⁵¹ Teeters, "The Dilemma of Prison Riots" *Prison Journal* vol. 33 (1953), 18.

⁸⁵² Norman Johnston *The Human Cage: A Brief History of Prison Architecture* (New York: Walker and Company, 1973), 53.

⁸⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1995), introduction.

Adding to SCI-PHA's problems was the fact that Pennsylvania's inmate population dropped considerably after 1963, which meant that by 1968 the number of vacant cells in the Commonwealth's other prisons exceeded the number of inmates housed at SCI-PHA.⁸⁵⁴ For instance, the combined population at SCI-PHA and the EDCC dropped from 1,119 in 1961 to 822 in 1966. It dropped even further the following year, to 764, before creeping up slightly, to 806 in 1969, the last full year that SCI-PHA functioned as a state prison.⁸⁵⁵

The 1961 riot raised questions about SCI-PHA's future, and focused attention on the fact that the one hundred and thirty year old prison was simply no longer an acceptable site for housing maximum-security prisoners. According to Cohen, it "... spurred renewed criticism" of the antiquated prison, and shortly thereafter the BOC appointed a task force to study the situation and produce recommendations about SCI-PHA's future.⁸⁵⁶ The Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions specifically mentioned the 1961 riot as its *raison d'être*, and while the report noted that there was no record of any residents being harmed by inmates, it said that "... the State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia should be discontinued as a maximum security prison for maximum security general prison population."⁸⁵⁷ Partially in response to the task force's recommendations, Pennsylvania's legislature voted in 1965 to replace SCI-

⁸⁵⁴ Fulmer, "The House," 179.

⁸⁵⁵ Jeffrey A. Cohen "Redefinition 1953-1970," in Marianna Thomas (ed.), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 236.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸⁵⁷ Task Force on Eastern and Western Correctional Institutions, *Penal Institutions*, 63.

PHA with a new institution in a more remote location. According to Norman Johnston, the legislature envisioned a five-part institution that would include a diagnostic and classification center, a medical facility, a correctional treatment center, an academy for training correctional personnel, and a facility for correctional research.⁸⁵⁸ In sum, this new facility would actually be designed to fill all of SCI-PHA's functions, and would do so in a less ad-hoc fashion.

Former inmate John Toth recalled that, once the administration announced that the prison would close, he was very apprehensive. He said, "It was a very disturbing thing. It was like being unearthed."⁸⁵⁹ Ray Bednarek recalled that many inmates "... sat down in their cells and cried when this place was going to be shut-down. They didn't want to go to Pittsburgh and they didn't want to go to Belfont....They wanted to stay at Eastern."⁸⁶⁰ Iavecchia remembered, "I don't think [the inmates] like moving, and they sort of liked the Philadelphia area because most of them were from the Philadelphia area."⁸⁶¹ On the other hand, Wesley Boyd, who was in the EDCC at the time, did not even realize the prison was closing until the day he was transferred to Graterford; he was one of the last five inmates to leave SCI-PHA.⁸⁶²

Ordering the institution closed was one thing; actually doing it was another. Before SCI-PHA could be closed, the legislature had ordered that an appropriate tract of

⁸⁵⁸ Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 97.

⁸⁵⁹ John Toth, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site Oral History Collection*, 38.

⁸⁶⁰ Ray and Steve Bednarek, *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁶¹ Vito Iavecchia, *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁶² Wesley Boyd, *Ibid.*, 11.

land be purchased for the new correctional facility. Unfortunately, communities were not enthused at the prospect of receiving a huge state correctional institution, and Republican legislators from one proposed site in Downingtown succeeded in blocking the state from acquiring land in that area for the new penal complex.⁸⁶³ Meanwhile, SCI-PHA muddled along, existing in limbo. In 1968, the Commonwealth consolidated the EDCC and SCI; the two institutions were no longer legally separate, and henceforth Eastern State was to function as a “correctional treatment center,” rather than a maximum-security prison. According to Johnston, “Inmates found to be intractable, including the ‘hardcore’ and those on death row, [were] transferred out.”⁸⁶⁴ This evolution brought Eastern State’s history full circle: from a reformatory institution in the nineteenth century to a militaristic one in the early twentieth century and finally back to rehabilitation in its twilight days.

Conclusion

Driven by multiple riots, the prison crisis of the early 1950s initiated a period of introspection that resulted in a return to SCI-PHA’s rehabilitative roots, at least in some respects. Certainly, administrators believed that inmates could be rehabilitated to a much greater degree than their predecessors twenty years before. As always, the primary method of rehabilitation was education, in this case supplemented by enhanced psychological and psychiatric services. On the other hand, much had changed about the prison’s philosophy of rehabilitation. Whereas the Jacksonians believed that inmates should be removed from their milieu, twentieth century penologists embraced society as a

⁸⁶³ Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 97.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

model for rehabilitation and sought to build greater connections between the community and the prison. Moreover, whereas Jacksonians had expected penitentiaries to reform inmates, by the mid-twentieth century, the locus of rehabilitation had clearly shifted to the inmate, who was expected to use the institution's services to rehabilitate himself. Unfortunately, overcrowding and incomplete employee training coupled with racial tension strained SCI-PHA's resources and ultimately demonstrated that the institution could no longer effectively function as a maximum-security prison.

CONCLUSION “WHAT WORKS?”

After the Commonwealth’s last inmates were transferred out of Eastern State in April 1970, the City of Philadelphia briefly used the former state prison to house prisoners to relieve overcrowding at Holmesburg following a bloody riot. This was only a temporary measure, however, and by the end of 1971 “Philadelphia’s Bastille” once again fell silent. The abandoned state prison was a paradox: on the one hand, Eastern State occupied an entire city block (over eleven acres), making the site incredibly attractive for redevelopment. On the other hand, Philadelphia had named the prison a historic site in 1958 and the federal government designated the site a National Historic Landmark in 1965, so redeveloping it was not a simple matter. Worse, the site was so big and complex that tearing it down would be incredibly expensive: one 1980 study put the costs of demolition at an astonishing three million dollars.⁸⁶⁵

Nonetheless, a variety of people floated proposals for redeveloping the site. For instance, in 1974, Philadelphia Mayor Franz Rizzo suggested consolidating the City’s Criminal Court, while the Philadelphia Planning Commission offered a number of possible uses, including a museum, a youth hostel, and a shopping center.⁸⁶⁶ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there were myriad redevelopment proposals, most of which nodded to Eastern State’s status as a historic site by incorporating some elements of the prison into the buildings’ designs (usually part of the prison’s faux medieval architecture and at

⁸⁶⁵ Dennis R. Montagna, “Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary: These Stone Walls Do Not a Shopping Center Make” *Changing Places: Remaking Institutional Buildings* ed. Lynda H. Schneekloth, Marcia F. Feurstein and Barbara A. Campagna (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 265)

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 266

least one of the cellblocks). Each of these proposals failed for one reason or another, and the abandoned site slowly decayed. Vegetation sprang up throughout the Eastern State's campus (by 1989 some trees had grown large enough to be visible over the prison's walls), clogging the prison's drainage systems. Consequently, water backed-up into the labyrinth of tunnels underneath the cellblocks, and then into the cellblocks themselves, slowly eroding the building.

It was not just the building that seemed under siege; Eastern State's philosophical legacy increasingly came under attack in the 1970s. In the spring of 1974, sociologist Robert Martinson published a provocative article titled "What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform" in *Public Interest*. Martinson noted that the America had entered "... one of its sporadic fits of attentiveness to the conditions of our prisons"⁸⁶⁷ due to a number of prison riots during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Consequently, New York State hired Martinson to survey prisons throughout the country in order to discover what recent rehabilitative programs or approaches had succeeded in reducing recidivism; literally "what works?" Martinson's answer – nothing – was likely not what New York State wanted to hear (the state actually refused to publish the study and refused to allow Martinson to do so until an attorney named Joseph Alan Kaplan successfully sued in the Bronx Supreme Court to compel the state to release the report).⁸⁶⁸ Martinson's conclusions were a stinging rebuke to two centuries of penology that was predicated on

⁸⁶⁷ Robert Martinson, "What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform," *Public Interest* 35 (Spring, 1974): 22.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

two notions: first, that offenders could be reformed or rehabilitated and second, that penal institutions were educational institutions.

Martinson was not the only scholar to question the efficacy of penal education programs in the 1960s and 1970s, and by 2003 penologists Charles B.A. Ubah and Robert L. Robinson, Jr. had divided proponents and opponents of these programs into two groups. According to Ubah and Robertson, penal education programs are based on various “theories of individual change,” which “... focus directly on the individual as the point of analysis and only indirectly on the larger society.”⁸⁶⁹ In other words, supporters of penal education tend to ignore or underestimate the role of social factors (racism, sexism, poverty, etc.) in pushing individuals to commit crime. This worldview dovetails with the philosophical bases of Eastern State’s educational program from roughly the 1910s forward, which emphasized that individual inmates could “chose” to rehabilitate themselves by availing themselves of the institution’s educational opportunities.

Ubah and Robinson call criticism of this view “pessimistic criticism,”⁸⁷⁰ noting that pessimistic critics argue that penal education programs should be abolished since “nothing works,” a position often identified with the political right in the United States. They note the federal government’s abolition of Pell Grants for inmates in the early 1990s, first as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (1993) and then as part of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act (1994) was driven by pessimistic criticism of educational programs efficacy. Ubah and Robertson’s analysis suggests that, while many penologists, perhaps even a majority, believe that certain types

⁸⁶⁹ Charles B.A. Ubah and Robert L. Robinson, Jr., “A Grounded Look at the Debate Over Prison-Based Education: Optimistic Theory Versus Pessimistic Worldview.” *Prison Journal* 83 (June, 2003): 116.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

of penal education programs effectively reduce recidivism and therefore promote “rehabilitation,” a significant minority do not support these programs. Thus, in the last thirty-five years, a serious and sustained critique of educational programming has developed.

Just as Martinson’s attack on America’s penal education system was published, the number of incarcerated Americans exploded. In 1972, two years after Eastern State closed as a state prison, the United States incarcerated approximately 200,000 people out of a population of 209,896,021 (.00095 percent of the population). By 2003, the number of Americans behind bars had swelled to 2.1 million out of a population of roughly 290 million (.00722 percent of the population).⁸⁷¹ By 2009, *Philadelphia Weekly* reported that one out of every one hundred Americans – a breathtaking 1 percent of the population – was incarcerated. Even worse, the *Weekly* noted that one in every in every thirty-one Americans is “...under some form of correctional control:” parole, halfway houses, and prison.⁸⁷² Looking at these figures, one is hard pressed to dispute the Sentencing Project’s executive director’s assertion that “...the U.S. has now emerged as the undisputed leader in the race to incarcerate.”⁸⁷³

Despite the fact that these developments all occurred after Eastern State’s closure in 1970, I believe that the preceding chapters have much to offer in terms of understanding the possibilities and perils of incarceration in the United States. As this dissertation has made clear, education was the cornerstone of the penitentiary’s approach

⁸⁷¹ Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 10.

⁸⁷² Daniel Denvir, “Hard Times” *Philadelphia Weekly* March 18-24, 2009, pg. 13.

⁸⁷³ Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*, 10.

to changing inmate behavior for nearly a century and a half. This is not changed: consider the Prison University Project, founded in 2003 to provide free college-level education to San Quentin's inmates. Put another way, prisons remain educational institutions, a role they have filled for at least two hundred years.

This does not mean that the educational programming has remained the same. As this study has demonstrated, Eastern State's curriculum was closely tied to both the public education system and the labor market at any given time. Initially, the penitentiary's curriculum looked very much like the early nineteenth-century public education: a type of apprenticeship supplemented by academic learning that took place in a distinctly religious context. As the emphasis in public education shifted away from overt religiosity and toward vocational education in the 1880s and 1890s, Eastern State's administrators modified the penitentiary's curriculum accordingly. Finally, when credential-driven academic education eclipsed vocational education in the early twentieth century, Eastern State's administrators also embraced that change.

One particularly interesting revelation is the cyclical nature of penal reform. Ever since the shift to incarceration in the late eighteenth-century, the primary method of reforming or rehabilitating inmates has been education. Though the curriculum has changed in response philosophical and economic changes, penal administrators' efforts to change inmates have always relied on educational programming. The penitentiary was so thoroughly an educational institution that even when the purpose of educational programming – rehabilitation – fell out of vogue at Eastern State, the administrators continued aggressively educating inmates. Though the gap between penal administrators

and reformers widened after the Civil War, one thing both groups (usually) agreed upon was that America's prisons should be educational institutions.

One need only look at the emergence of "supermax" prisons over the last twenty-five years to appreciate the cyclical nature of American corrections. These institutions deal with inmates who present some sort of administrative problem by implementing a program eerily reminiscent of the Pennsylvania System: inmates remain in their cells twenty-three hours a day and exercise in outdoor cages. Atul Gawande, writing in the *New Yorker*, recently called this program "isolation," but his own examples clearly dispute that characterization, because inmates are (usually) allowed to receive mail, are able to talk with prisoners in adjacent cells, and can telephone (four calls per month) and have visitation (four visits per month) privileges with good behavior.⁸⁷⁴ Obviously, the point is not that supermaxes hold prisoners in strict isolation; obviously they do not. The point is that, almost a century after it disappeared in the United States, supermaxes have partially resuscitated the forms of Pennsylvania System (thought not its goals) as one method of dealing with the country's exploding inmate population. In the last quarter century, states across the union have built sixty of these institutions, and they now house at least twenty-five thousand inmates.⁸⁷⁵

Supermax prisons are one illustration of what I have termed reformers' "historical amnesia," or reformers' belief that their innovations are truly revolutionary. Historical amnesia has obscured scholars from recognizing how central educational programming has always been to America's penal institutions since at least the eighteenth-century.

⁸⁷⁴ Atul Gawande, "Hellhole" *New Yorker* March 30, 2009.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.

Each succeeding generation of penal reformers has damned contemporary penal institutions for their failure to “actually” educate inmates and believed itself revolutionary in arguing that prisons should be schools as well as holding facilities. Rereading Wines and Dwight’s 1867 indictment of America’s penal system, I am struck by how similar it is to Austin MacCormick’s 1931 study of penal education in the United States and the 1968 report of President Johnson’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice: same basic assumptions, same basic goals, same basic ideas about how to reach those goals.

At their core, of course, is more educational programming, which the authors of all three reports believed would lower recidivism and ease inmates’ transition back into the outside world. Of course, this was exactly the same argument that Benjamin Rush and William White made in the 1780s and that Roberts Vaux articulated in the 1820s, and it was this set of assumptions about the connection between crime and ignorance that has guided America’s approach to penology for more than two centuries.

This is not to argue that nothing has changed since Eastern State Penitentiary opened in 1829. As I have shown throughout this study, while the commitment to prisoner education remained consistent, content delivery changed dramatically, as did theories about the locus of deviance and models for reforming and rehabilitating inmates. Supermax prisons are a case in point: while Gawande mistakenly characterized them as isolative institutions, he correctly notes that supermax prisons are centers of punishment, not rehabilitation. Yet, ironically, these institutions actually achieve some of the Philadelphia Society For Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prison’s goals. Gawande interviewed inmates who had been held in supermax prisons, and one noted that “He

brooded incessantly, thinking back on all the mistakes he'd made in his life, his regrets, his offences against God and family."⁸⁷⁶ One hundred eighty years later, we are literally right back where we started.

Eastern State's story also illustrates another important point about American corrections: unmet expectations. As I demonstrated through this study, Eastern State's reformatory and rehabilitative programs faced multiple hurdles and were therefore never practiced in the ways their designers had intended. For instance, the penitentiary was never able to actually implement the Pennsylvania System because of its overwhelming complexity. Even after the penitentiary officially abandoned the Pennsylvania System in 1913, its various rehabilitative strategies were hampered by shortages of trained, professional staff and by legal restrictions on inmate labor. In other words, Eastern State's history perfectly illustrates the wide chasm between philosophy and practice that doomed many penal systems of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries.

In sum, for all its philosophical, architectural, and administrative idiosyncrasies, Eastern State Penitentiary has a great deal to teach us about the promises and pitfalls of rehabilitation through incarceration. Though its story does not tell answer Robert Martinson's question – what works? – it certainly expands our understanding of what does not, and that is a pretty good start.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

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