

Appomattox County Historical Society

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Appomattox County Jails

By Bob Jamerson

When construction began this summer on a new jail for Appomattox County the thought occurred to this writer to dig into the past just to see how many jails we have had since Appomattox county was formed. I once assumed the jail building at Old Appomattox County Court House (which now belongs to the National Park Service) was Jail No. 1. With a small amount of research I learned this was not true.

The Lynchburg Virginia newspaper states on September 8, 1845, Dr. Joel Walker Flood, J. McDearmon, David Robertson, John Johns and William Trent a committee of five persons advertised for bids for proposed "New Jail" at Appomattox County Court House.

The jail was to be a house forty by twenty feet, two stories high and twenty feet from the foundation. This jail was to have four rooms, two below and two above, with a passage of eight feet. It was to be built of "Hammered Dressed Rock Solid Masonry." The rocks were to be secured with iron doweling pins, the walls to be two feet thick, each room was to have two windows, two by two feet, with iron grates and one outer door faced with sheet iron one half inch thick. The floors were to be hand hewn oak logs, ten or twelve inches wide and six inches thick.

The advertisement for "Proposal For Building A Jail" included what appeared to be an alternate bid for a building of approximately the same size as above to be built of hewn oak logs secured by dowel pins. The logs were to be of sound heart oak, hand hewn, ten by ten inches. The interior of this alternate log building was to be faced with sheet iron one half inch thick.

The specifications for both buildings called for the roof to be strong, well constructed and covered with tin. There was to be a chimney at each end of the building with a fireplace in each of the four rooms of the jail.

It is not clear which of the above jails was built. We have found no record of who the successful [bidder] was nor have we found any record that tells us whether Jail No. 1 was built of stone or hand hewn oak logs. The bids were advertised on the Lynchburg Virginian during September 1845. These bids were to be received at Appomattox Court House during the October term of Court. A careful search of the Lynchburg newspapers during October, November and December of 1845 reveals nothing further on the construction of Jail No. 1. However, we know this crudely built jail that stood directly across the road from Jail No. 2 in the Appomattox Court House Historical Park served our county until about 1870.

Jail No. 2 is believed to have been under construction at the time of Lee's surrender in 1865. It is said to have been completed about 1870. We have found nothing at the Appomattox Court House Park Office or in the newspapers on file in Lynchburg, Virginia as to who built Jail No. 2, how much it cost or exactly when it was started. Jail No. 2 is still standing at the Appomattox County Historical Park and is well maintained by the National Park Service. This building was used by our county until about 1896.

On October 12, 1895, Willis H. Ligon, Charles T. Moses and Sterling Crawford Stratton, the then board of supervisors, voted to approve plans by Wilson & Seay, architects of Lynchburg, Virginia for Jail No. 3 which is still a part of Court House Square. A contract was awarded C. W. Hancock for the brick work and wood work totaling \$2,182.00. On the same day a contract was awarded Champion Iron Company of Hunter, Ohio for the iron work at a cost of \$2,315.00 making the total cost of the jail \$4,457.00. The Appomattox and Buckingham Times, November 1, 1895, simply states "Ground was broken this week for the new jail."

On May 11, 1932, Don Moses reported an addition was needed to the existing jail. Plans for alterations and additions to the jail were prepared by architects Johnson & Brannon. Bids were received on August 11, 1932 and this contract was awarded to C. W. Hancock & Sons for the sum of \$4,380.00.

A contract of approximately \$400,000.00 was awarded to J. E. Jamerson & Sons for Jail No. 4 in the spring of 1980. This structure is now under way directly behind Jail No. 3 in Court House Square.

It is hoped the board of supervisors will allow Jail No. 3 to remain intact. The design is unique and this quaint old building is a landmark. The Appomattox County Historical Society has expressed an interest in seeing this building preserved and we sincerely hope it will be used for the very first museum for our county.