

# History Of The 1897 Jail



The imposing, red brick structure which has stood on Preston Street in downtown Richmond for almost 100 years was Fort Bend County's third jail. In November of 1896, L.T. Noyes, a Houston contractor and agent for Diebold Safe and Lock Company of Canton, Ohio, was awarded an \$18 thousand contract to build a jail which would include sheriff's living quarters. Forty-year bonds at five percent were issued for \$20 thousand to cover building and furnishing expenses.

The building was accepted on April 5, 1897, when C.W. Parnell was Sheriff. Built of red brick and McNeal limestone, the interior and exterior red clay and mortar walls carry the load of concrete floors, although the sheriff's living quarters on the first floor had conventional wood deck and joist flooring. The basement, a rarity in this environment was refinished with cement in 1899 because of regular flooding. The refinishing cost was \$100.

The actual entry to the jail facility was on the first level, front right side, through an iron door. The foyer, stairs to the cell blocks upstairs, and the sheriff's office were separated from his living quarters by another iron door. Food, often prepared by the sheriff's wife, was passed through a small metal door into the foyer area, to be taken up to the prisoners. Persons going to the second floor passed through an iron gate before ascending the curved narrow stairway. Instead of bars, iron lattice-work covered the inside of windows and formed cells. Two large, two-story rooms on either side of the second floor housed double-decker cell blocks. In the center section were more cells and the gallows. Individual cells and areas for solitary confinement were on the second and third floors. This was the Fort Bend County Jail until another one was built in 1955.

In 1996 a suggestion was made to renovate the 1897 jail building and use it as a police department building and the focal point for future downtown renovation. The renovated building had an addition added to the original building connected by an atrium. The new addition houses administrative offices, detention areas, and evidence storage facilities. The renovated area houses patrol, detectives, dispatchers, records and a training room. The front portion of the building was set up as a museum. On the second floor a catwalk was incorporated to the new administrative annex creating an atrium effect on the first floor between the original structure and the new annex. Some of the original cells, and the gallows, were retained due to their historic significance.

To schedule a tour of the 1897 Jail please contact [Master Sergeant Lowell Neinast](mailto:Lowell.Neinast@fortbendcountytx.gov) by email or at 281-342-2849 ext 15.