

"MINNESOTA STATE PRISON" \*

in

FIFTY YEARS

IN THE

NORTHWEST

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND APPENDIX CONTAINING

REMINISCENCES, INCIDENTS AND NOTES

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## MINNESOTA STATE PRISON.

At the organization of Minnesota Territory Congress appropriated \$5,000 for a territorial prison. The legislature expended the money thus appropriated in building a prison at Stillwater. The site was located by a commission appointed by the legislature in 1849, consisting of John McKusick, E. A. C. Hatch and Lewis Robert. The commission was also authorized to locate the Territorial University and select a site in St. Paul for the capitol. Their task was not completed until the ensuing [411] year. Their selection of a location for the university and of a site for the capitol were satisfactory, but it was generally conceded that the site for the prison was badly chosen. The ground, nine acres, was mostly quagmire, and was, moreover, crowded in a ravine between high bluffs. However, it was convenient to the lake and steamboat landing, and was well watered with pure spring water.

In 1851 Jesse Taylor, F. R. Delano, Martin Mower, J. E. McKusick, and Jacob Fisher entered into contract with the commissioners, under the firm name of Jesse Taylor & Co., to build one stone wing of the prison buildings, to be inclosed with a stone wall. The dimensions of the wing were 30x40 feet and three stories high. In 1853 an addition was built, and Francis R. Delano was appointed warden. Until 1858 the expenditure of the public money used in building and other expenses was under the control of the warden. Under state rule the warden was relieved of this burden of responsibility. The legislature has provided that prisoners might be received in the penitentiary not yet convicted of crime, on condition that their board should be defrayed by the countries from which they were sent. When this expense was not promptly met by the counties the prisoners thus held were set at liberty. The Washington county grand jury investigated the matter and memorialized the ensuing legislature, which effected a

change in the laws regarding such commitments. Wings were added to the prison, walls were built, shops and other accessories added from year to year, and appropriations were made from time to time. In 1870 an appropriation of \$74,000 was made for extending the building. Outside companies were permitted to build shops and manufactories within the prison limits that they might avail themselves of convict labor.

The following are the wardens who have served since the prison was built: Territorial, F. R. Delano; state government: Francis O. J. Smith, appointed March 4, 1858; Henry N. Setzer, Aug. 4, 1858; John S. Proctor, Jan. 1, 1860; Joshua L. Taylor, Feb. 16, 1868; A. C. Webber, March 16, 1870; Henry A. Jackman, Oct. 10, 1870; John A. Reid, Aug. 3, 1874; H. G. Stordock, 1887. [412]

The following table shows the number of convicts each year up to the present time:

1853		1870	39
1854	2	1871	60
1855	8	1872	59
1856	1	1873	64
1857		1874	93
1858	2	1875	96
1859	5	1876	90
1860	16	1877	145
1861	12	1878	218
1862	7	1879	254
1863	8	1880	254
1864	7	1881	247
1865	11	1882	279
1866	29	1883	301
1867	36	1884	356
1868	31	1885	395
1869	47	1886, Mar. 31	416

The prison on the whole has been well and humanely managed. There have been occasional outbreaks, easily suppressed, or cases of individual insubordination, two or three with fatal results to the insubordinates.

The prison buildings have been several times visited by damaging and disastrous fires. The most serious were in 1884. The first occurred January 8th, by which the large workshop and machinery owned by the State and the Northwestern Car Company were destroyed. The second occurred January 26th, and destroyed the main prison buildings, including the cells, from which the prisoners were rescued with the greatest difficulty. One perished of suffocation. On this occasion guards, prison officials and some of the convicts displayed heroism worthy of the highest commendation. The convicts on the whole behaved well. Mr. Reid, the warden of the prison, behaved with great coolness and decision, and so averted what might have been a fearful disaster. ■

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**Related article: "Minnesota State Prison (1909)." (MLHP, 2012).**



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