

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

- 1886- Wyoming's Ninth Legislative Assembly appropriates a sum not to exceed \$100,000 to erect a penitentiary in or near the City of Rawlins.
- 1888- Land North of Rawlins is purchased from the Union Pacific Railway Company. Construction begins. W.E. Ware, a Salt Lake City architect is retained.
- 1894- Work closed awaiting further legislative appropriations and better weather. Building sat in custodial status.
- 1901- The Wyoming State Penitentiary opens in December. The cell house is complete with 104 cells, no electricity or running water, and inadequate heating.
- 1903- Prisoner James Williams escapes, is recaptured, and is killed in his cell attempting another escape.
- 1904- Overcrowding requires thirty-two additional cells be built onto the west end of the cell house.
- 1906- Construction of a "dungeon-house" for the punishment of incorrigibles is completed.
- 1907- Guard Ed Samuelson is killed by gun and dynamite-toting prisoner #600, Adam Eckert, for refusing to give up his keys.
- 1909- Annie Bruce, the last female inmate to be incarcerated at the facility, is transferred to Canyon City Colorado. Miss Bruce was sent to prison for killing her father with a poisoned plum pie.



Inmates were fed at steel tables in the kitchen cafeteria.

- 1911- Guard W.F. Carrick is shot and killed his third night on duty, foiling an escape attempt.
- 1912- Joseph Seng is executed on May 24, 1912 on the Julien Gallows, the same apparatus used to hang Tom Horn in Cheyenne in 1903. The broom factory is burnt down by prisoners. Frank Wigfall, held for the rape of an elderly Rawlins woman, is lynched by the other inmates. On two consecutive days, nearly thirty inmates escape through the wooden stockade, killing Rawlins resident, Charles Stressner. Three inmates (Paseo, Baxtrum, and Richardson) are killed before they are returned to the penitentiary.
- 1913- J. Warren Jenkins is fined and then executed by hanging.
- 1915- The existing concrete walls and associated towers were finally completed to prevent any more mass escapes.
- 1916- Willard Flanders, W.P. Palmer, and Oscar White are hanged on the prison's unique gallows. William Carlisle, the last great train robber, is received at the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins.
- 1917- Broom factory contract is terminated. New shirt factory brings twice as much revenue to the State.
- 1919- William Carlisle escapes in a shirt crate, robs another train, and while unarmed is shot by a posse. He is treated for his gunshot wounds in the prison hospital.
- 1921- Yee Geow is executed by hanging on March 11, 1921. Al Biscaro takes two hostages demanding four women and a car. Relenting on his demands, he flees the penitentiary in the doctor's car and commits suicide before being overtaken by a posse. The hostages escaped and were mostly unharmed.

- 1923- The shirt factory is burnt down and promptly rebuilt.
- 1927- Serious overcrowding persists. In January, five inmates escape by sawing bars from a window on the south side of the cell house. Two other convicts use a can opener to dig mortar and escape out the roof. In February, 44 inmates refuse to work in protest of dungeon treatment.
- 1930- Another cell block addition on the west end is built to house approximately eighty men. George Brownfield and Charles Aragon are hanged.
- 1933- Talton Talor is the last man to be hanged by the state of Wyoming.
- 1934- The federal Hawes-Cooper law prohibits the sale or transportation of prison manufactured goods from one state to another. This was the demise of the shirt factory, ending an era of significant revenue.
- 1935- The state penitentiary purchases a woolen mill at Oconto, Wisconsin for a new prison industry.
- 1936- William Carlisle is released and later publishes "Lone Bandit". A controversial gas chamber was installed by the Eaton Metal Products Company of Denver, Colorado to replace hanging as Wyoming's method of execution.
- 1937- Perry H. Carroll was the first man executed by the State of Wyoming using hydrocyanic-acid gas. The gas chamber was first tested with a pig.
- 1940- Stanley Lantzer is executed with lethal gas.
- 1942- The outbreak of World War II curtailed any major construction projects owing to material shortages and diminished prison population. Under the direction of Jack Masson, the prison woolen mill produces the highest quality wool blankets for the military and was awarded the "Navy E".
- 1944- Cleveland Brown is executed with lethal gas.
- 1945- Federal prisoner, Henry Ruhl, is executed with lethal gas.
- 1949- A new manufacturing facility is built into the old woolen mill for production of license plates.



**Cell 10
Tier 2**

Inmate paintings adorn the walls throughout the prison.

**Cell 1
Tier 2**

The original cell block consisted of 5'x7' cells that housed two men on bunk beds in the early years.



- 1950- Cell Block B is constructed, adding 124 cells to the facility.
- 1955- Eighty inmates, armed with kitchen knives and "prepared to hold out for a week", seized three guards as hostages in a full scale riot. Father John Meyer negotiated a peaceful return to normalcy in the prison.
- 1959- Four inmates dig an elaborate escape tunnel from the death house to the west wall.
- 1964- Dr. Cecil Shaw, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, develops courses in reading, writing, arithmetic and social studies; a state diploma is awarded.
- 1965- Andrew Pixley is the last man executed in the penitentiary's gas chamber. At the age of twenty-two, he is also the youngest man to be executed during the prison's eighty year operation.
- 1966- Cell Block C (Segregation Unit) is constructed with thirty-six cells for serious discipline cases. The "Old Hole" is converted to additional classroom space.
- 1969- The Gymnasium and Chapel complex were completed on the second story of C Block.
- 1975- The area above the shower room that had been converted to a recreation area is closed following the death of an officer killed by inmates.
- 1978- Hot water is installed in Cell Block A. Tower guards switch from rifles to shotguns after a bullet fired at an escaping inmate narrowly misses a thirteen-year-old girl in her home.
- 1981- The original Wyoming State Penitentiary is closed after serving the state for eighty years.
- 1987- The movie "Prison" is made on location.
- 1988- The Old Pen Joint Powers Board assumes ownership of the "Old Pen".



The existing concrete walls and associated towers were built following a mass escape of 28 inmates in 1912.

80 YEARS OF HISTORY BEHIND BARS

While outlaws roamed the windswept high plains, canyons and mountains of post-Civil War Wyoming, the Territorial Legislature was planning a state-of-the-art penitentiary at Rawlins in anticipation of statehood. This new Wyoming State Penitentiary, which served from 1901 until 1981, would send a strong message to free-wheeling desperados: Wyoming would NO LONGER be a haven for the lawless.

The Old Pen, as the Wyoming Frontier Prison is affectionately called today, is “haunted by history”. Tales of great train robbers, wily escapes and of women driven to crimes of passion are told on the regularly scheduled guided tours offered daily from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Group tours and off season tours are also available.

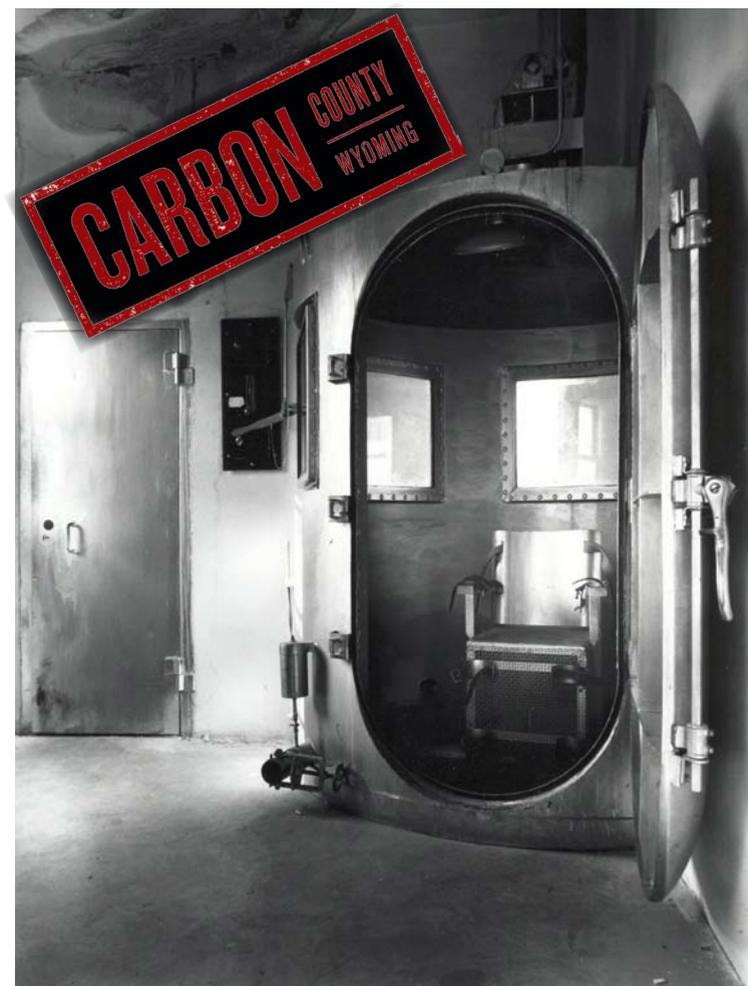
Visitors may browse through history in the prison museum where historical information sits side-by-side with confiscated inmate-made weapons and an exhibit of the movie, “Prison”, filmed on location in 1987.

The Old Pen Gift Shop offers souvenirs and western gifts. The proceeds from the tours and gift shop are used to support the Historic Site with restoration efforts and operational costs.



The Friends of the Old Pen are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 1991 to support the Wyoming Frontier Prison in our efforts to preserve and share the history of our great historic site. This is a membership based organization, and the support of this group has been immensely helpful over the years. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Friends of the Old Pen, please visit wyomingfrontierprison.org for more information.

You can also write to:
Friends of the Old Pen
500 W. Walnut St.
Rawlins, WY 82301



Guided Tours, Museum, Gift Shop & Nature Area

Stand inside a dark tiny cell, sit in the Gas Chamber, and fill your senses with the history of old Wyoming. Observe inmate artwork with an ominous message and walk within the great stone walls. Explore the 49.5 acre facility where approximately 13,500 inmates lived and worked, under often brutal conditions, over the 80 year operation of Wyoming's first state penitentiary.

WYOMING FRONTIER PRISON RAWLINS WYOMING

