

TEHACHAPI.

ADDRESS GIVEN BY MISS GRACE E. BARNEBERG
AT THE CONVENTION OF THE CALIFORNIA
FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS, AT RIVERSIDE,
MAY 9, 1934.

PROLOGUE.

When a woman breaks the law, she is withdrawn from society, and in the great majority of the prisons in the world, she simply sits and waits until the time comes for her to return. Matrons are few in number, underpaid and without training. In several of the prisons there are no matrons other than the warden's wives, and in a few prisons, prisoners are designated as matrons. In California, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma and Georgia we find the semi-independent prison for women. They are kept in buildings apart, but are entirely under the jurisdiction of the men's prison. In many of the states, however, there are successful independent prisons for women. Among them are the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women which first offered industrial training to women prisoners and is superintended at the present time by one of whom we are all proud, Dr. Miriam Van Waters; and the Minnesota Institution for Women which is the only institution of its kind paying a wage and the only one that is self supporting in the United States.

HISTORY. The women's clubs of California, together with individuals interested in criminology have worked for the past twelve years for the establishment of a separate penal institution for women. The Legislature of 1927 passed a law establishing a commission to study conditions of women's prisons, not only in California, but in other progressive states as well.

The report that was presented to the Legislature of 1929 resulted in the passage of a bill which created the so-called California Institution for Women. Complying with the new law, the Governor appointed a Board of Trustees, consisting of three women and two men, and the first work of that new group was the selection of a site.

The Board of Trustees worked for eight months - looking for a suitable location. Over one hundred sites were listed, and approximately half of that number were visited and closely studied. When all was said and done, there seemed to be one which met all the requirements set up by the Federal Government better than any other. It was an acreage in Kern County, eleven miles from Tehachapi and fifty miles from Bakersfield. For it was paid \$110,000.00 or \$65.37 per acre.

LOCATION. This property consists of a little over 1682 acres, one thousand of which are good farm land and the remainder grazing land. It occupies the northern end of Cummings Valley, a fertile, level stretch of country, seven and a half miles long by three miles wide, and is approximately 3700 feet in elevation. Of the mountains surrounding the valley, Cummings Mountain is one of the highest. It stands directly to the rear of the buildings, and is snow covered for several months of the year.

This property, you may be interested to learn, was known as the Brito Ranch for over seventy years. Three generations of Britos lived there. Grandfather Brito, during his prime, was a member of the Board of Supervisors of Kern County. His son, during his active years, was also one of the Supervisors of Kern County; and his grandson, Perry Brito, from whose mother the property was purchased, is serving today as a member of the Board of Supervisors.

SECLUSION. Why did the Board of Trustees finally decide on the Brite Ranch as a location for the new Institution for Women? First, there was the seclusion so necessary for such an institution. Cummings Valley is a quiet little valley, reached only by one county road which loses itself there. There is no through road. The buildings are visible from only one point on this county road, about three miles away. The public road does not touch the state's property at any point, the entrance to it being by a stub road owned by the State.

TRANSPORTATION. The Board of Trustees liked the Brite Ranch because of transportation facilities. The Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Railroads both serve Tehachapi, and a fine gravel road connects Tehachapi with Cummings Valley.

PUBLIC UTILITIES. The Brite Ranch was a most favorable location when the question of public utilities was considered. It seemed almost unbelievable to find that the main line of the Southern California Gas Company and also the main line of the Southern California Edison Co. ran across what had been selected as the building site. Not even a connection charge had to be made.

CLIMATE The Board of Trustees liked the climate of Cummings Valley, and their opinion was based not only on a careful study of the Weather Bureau reports, but upon the result of the investigation made by the State through the Agricultural Commissioner of Kern County. The climate is a temperate one; it has four distinct seasons; it is high, dry and healthful.

WATER. The question of water was, of course, of primary importance, and this was well taken care of by two sources of water supply; first, a large natural spring at one end of the property flowing from thirty-five to fifty thousand gallons per day, that had not gone dry in the seventy years the Brites had lived there; second, a large well at the other end of the property capable of pumping approximately eight hundred gallons a minute. Exhaustive studies by state engineers as to the watershed, watertable and rainfall of previous years, were all satisfactory to the State authorities.

FERTILITY. Of the thousand acres of good farming land of this ranch, six hundred are exceptionally fine for the raising of vegetables. The report of the Agricultural Commissioner of Kern County says of it, "I have seen some of the finest crops of alfalfa, potatoes and cabbage growing on this land that I have ever noted anywhere" and a committee of State Senators, sent to investigate this site in 1931, accompanied by farm experts, state in the Senate Journal of May 5, 1931, that "The soil of the valley is of a sandy loam, and suitable for the raising of vegetables of all kinds, and fruits such as apples and pearsthere is an abundance of water for the full capacity of such an institution, including water for irrigating such quantity of land as may be needed for the institution The Committee further reports that no better site could be selected in the State."

There are many other proofs of the fertility of this land, among them an exhibit of potatoes grown there, 220 hundred pound sacks to the acre, one of the exhibits of the Kern County Chamber of Commerce in Bakersfield.

STAFF. One of the most important features of a women's prison is its personnel. The Institution should be close enough to towns of sufficient size to afford possibilities of recreation for the staff when off duty. Bakersfield, a town with good stores and theatres, is fifty miles from this site, and Los Angeles one hundred and thirty over good paved roads. With free time properly proportioned both of these places are within reach for recreation.

COMMUNITY WELCOME. A final and very important reason why the Board of Trustees chose the Brite Ranch was because Kern County extended a warm welcome. Citizens throughout the County wanted the institution and did everything possible to help in the founding of it. They had no State Institution, and are one of the large tax paying counties of the state.

BUILDINGS. Following the purchase of the Brite Ranch, the State Architect was authorized to proceed with the plans for the buildings. These were to be five in number - an administration building and four cottages, following the general plan of the Federal Institution for Women at Alderson, West Virginia. That institution, built on the cottage unit plan, was intended as a model for the states to follow. The number of buildings was reduced to four when, at a joint meeting with the State Board of Prison Directors, that Board expressed the greatest unwillingness to send women felons to Tehachapi if there were not at least "one real jail building". Therefore the cost of two of the cottages was thrown into one larger building called the Detention Building, which has barred windows, similar to those used at the Mendocino State Hospital for the Criminal Insane, and steel doors which are covered with oak veneering. When these plans were completed they were sent to the superintendents of like institutions all over the country, to expert penologists, and also to the American Prison Congress, then in session, where a round table discussion upon them was held. Practically all of the suggestions offered were incorporated in the revised plans, so that the Board felt that the final result was a combination of the best penological thought in the country.

DEDICATION. The buildings were finished and dedicated in May 1932, by the Governor of the State, and on the same day ground was broken for an industrial building. This industrial building is small, because of lack of funds, but it was hoped would be a temporary one, pending another appropriation by the Legislature.

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPINION. Early in June 1932 the State Prison Board asked the Board of Trustees to come to San Quentin to talk over the various problems relative to moving the women from one institution to another. The question arose as to which Board should be responsible for the safety of the women during the actual act of transportation. As no decision could be reached, it was decided to pass the matter to the Attorney General for an opinion. It was several days before an answer came and when it did it was a terrible shock to the Board of Trustees. The Attorney General ruled that no women could be moved from San Quentin because, judging from the contents of the bill which created the Institution, it was inferred that the new institution was to be a reformatory and not a prison.

Let me say a word about this bill which created the institution. It was written by two prominent attorneys - one from San Francisco and one from Los Angeles, and was patterned after a very splendid Massachusetts law. After the bill was introduced in the Legislature, it went into the hands of the judicial committees of both houses and was closely scrutinized as to its constitutionality by twenty-nine attorneys; it was several times in the office of the Attorney General relative to major and minor points; for instance, before the property was paid for the Attorney General was consulted as to the legality of such an act; and before a payment was made on construction work, the Attorney General's office was again consulted; and a queer thing about all this is that ten years earlier, in 1922, the Attorney General rendered a decision directly opposite to that rendered in 1932. At

the earlier date he ruled that it was legal to remove women felons from San Quentin to another institution which was in no sense a prison. I refer to the California Industrial Farm at Sonoma, since discontinued. Four women felons were sent there from San Quentin.

As a result of this unexpected decision operations at San Quentin, relative to moving the women, were naturally brought to a standstill, but operations at Tehachapi had to be continued. The industrial building was under construction - four buildings were just completed - heating and lighting plants had been installed - hundreds of yards of linoleum had been laid - equipment and furniture had been ordered, and much of it was on the way; hundreds of trees and shrubs had been planted around the buildings; there was a complete set-up for an industrial farm; machinery had been bought; acres had been put into truck gardens, a large part of which had been planted to Idaho russets; four acres of pear and apple orchards had been put in the pink of condition; hundreds of incubator chicks had been purchased with the necessary equipment for raising for same; there was the beginning of a piggery of pure bred stock; there were about seventy-five turkeys, and since the State buys over ten thousand pounds of turkeys during the holidays for the State Institutions, and since turkeys thrive in Cummings Valley, it was hoped that the prison women might have the supplying of State Institutions with turkeys as one of their projects; three mares had been purchased as part of the industrial set-up, and one Guernsey cow which was supposed to be the nucleus of a fine herd which would eventually be large enough to take care of institutional needs. Operations at Tehachapi had to continue, and continue for ten long months. Who paid the expenses of all this unnecessary upkeep? The taxpayers of California.

Although it may seem that many courses of action might have been taken at this time, as a matter of fact practically the only thing that was legally possible was to wait until the next meeting of the Legislature and amend the law. In April of 1933 that was done, and three buildings, the Administration Building, the Detention Building and Cottage A were turned over to the administration of the State Prison Board, and that group of buildings became legally known as the Female-Department-of-San-Quentin-Prison-situated-at-the-California-Institution-for-Women-in-the-County-of-Kern.

During the meeting of the Legislature of 1933, and subsequent to the passage of the prison bill, another bill, a budget bill, was passed. In it was an appropriation of One Hundred Thousand Dollars for the maintenance of the California Institution for Women for the next biennium - this money to be administered presumably by the Board of Trustees of the Institution, but in July of 1933, at a joint meeting of the Prison Board and the Institution Board in San Francisco, it was learned that the Attorney General had made another decision which turned over the administration of the hundred thousand dollars to the Prison Board.

On September first, 1933, the first contingent of women, twenty-six in number, arrived at Tehachapi from San Quentin. They were brought there in a prison car, with windows barred and guards at all the doors. Such groups continued to arrive at different intervals until the whole population was moved. Instead of the skilled woman superintendent, required by the law, a man, a former prison guard, was sent to take charge of the place. Five men guards accompanied him. A few weeks ago the man warden was removed and a woman, Miss Josephine Jackson, put in charge, but all employees and inmates are still under the jurisdiction of the warden of San Quentin.

In a very recent issue of the Press there appeared a statement relative to a report sent by the State Prison Board to the Governor of California regarding Tehachapi. I would like here to answer their criticisms of the Institutions.

The State Prison Board claim there is not room to properly house the inmates, and I claim that the housing facilities are not being used at present to their maximum capacity. The ranch house which is a short distance away could be used, it seems to me, for paroled women who are waiting for positions on the outside. This would at least relieve the present congestion since they have a population of 166 and room for 160. The farm house is comfortable with its eight rooms and four baths. What disposition is being made of that building today? It is the residence of one man, the Captain of the Guards -- and three Chinamen to cook for and care for him.

The second complaint made by the State Prison Board is that the Industrial Building is insufficient to properly provide an adequate system for furnishing the inmates training for occupational trades. We will admit that the Industrial Building is small, but with a trained person in charge could be used just as small factories are used. In one section there are twelve power sewing machines installed, besides machines for the making of flags. Those twelve power sewing machines were carefully chosen by an experienced superintendent of a garment factory with the view to giving the women the best all around training as power machine operators.

In another section of the Industrial Building is the laundry, and it was originally planned that all laundry work was to be done as it is done in commercial laundries. When I visited this place late in February I found that the machinery was either not properly installed or completely out of commission. Some of the equipment had never been installed and stood on the laundry floor in crates.

The Board of Prison Directors in their report to the Governor state that while the original sponsors of the California Institution for Women favored the employment of inmates on the ranch property, they, the State Prison Board, feel that such occupations will not tend to furnish inmates a trade at which they can be employed upon their release. In answer to that I wish to state that the farm was never intended to be primarily vocational. The value of outdoor work for women lies mainly in its therapeutic value; it also is most valuable in teaching habits of industry; and it is also most valuable in helping to make an institution self-supporting. Even though we say that the farm is not intended to be primarily vocational, nevertheless, there may be an inmate here and there whose real line of interest might be in horticulture, poultry raising, dairying or truck gardening. None of them are beyond the ability of a woman these days.

The Institution is well equipped to give all the vocational training relative to what is known as household skills -- that is, cooking, cleaning, waiting on table, bedmaking, etc. The hospital furnishes a wonderful opportunity for anyone who wants to take up nursing as a profession upon release. I contend there is not a lack of equipment -- rather there is a lack of efficiency in the personnel.

Up to February of this year (1934) the jurisdiction of the Prison Board was confined to the area within the prison fence, where were situated the buildings of the Prison. In February the Prison Board requested the

Board of Trustees to turn over to them the farm house also. That may not seem to mean a great deal to the outsider, but it meant the last remnant of authority in connection with the property still held by the Institution Board, as under an agreement entered into between the two boards, the farm-house and the farm property was to be in the care of the Institution Board, and to take away the farm house meant that the Institution Board would have no rights whatever on the property. The Institution Board offered to board the guards at the farm house, since it was for this purpose that the Prison Board had asked for this house, but the Prison Board refused the offer, and on March 6th passed a resolution taking over the entire property, thus entirely eliminating the Board of Trustees from any jurisdiction over any part of the property.

Friends, after what I have told you, do you realize that the courage of organized womanhood in California is being put to the test right now? We set a definite goal in the past, a most worthwhile goal, and during the years have been directing our best effort toward it. Are we going to fall by the wayside because it is easier than keeping up the struggle? No, we are going straight ahead, and definitely and surely, if it takes fifty years, realize our dream -- an industrial farm for our women prisoners -- an institution which shall become, because of its two objectives -- rehabilitation and self-support -- an honor and a glory to the State of California.