"Looking From The Inside"

by Larry Carlin

Justice was swift—if not always just—in those "good old days." Deputy sheriffs were honest-to-god lawmen, judges were tough, their decisions final and criminals were arrested, booked, brought to trial and punished in a jail, that symbol of law, order and civilization, stood solid and stoic, the center of the criminal justice system, proclaiming to all that the good guys were in charge.

It was called the "1911 jail." Built at 1050 Front Street to replace the old gerry-built 1890 jail and courthouse, it stood as the symbol of law and order in San Diego County. It also represented the Sheriff's Department for, in addition to the jail, this grand old building contained offices for the Sheriff and Chief Deputy as well as the business and records divisions. Right behind it were patrol deputies' quarters and the general services division. The 1911 jail was, in that simpler time, *the* Sheriff's Department, and it stood almost indestructible, recording events for the next 50 years. Indestructible indeed, it became a major task to knock it down with a giant wrecking ball. This was quite unlike an earlier single story jail, built in Old Town on Morena Street, with defective cement which nearly washed away during the first good rain.

Four stories high, the upper floor was constructed with an overhead tunnel that went directly to the Superior Court. One story below, in the basement, were the gallows. Perhaps sensibilities had changed by the time the "1911 jail" was designed. The old 1890 jail had a gallows in the court yard and dungeons in the basement. There were no dungeons in the 1911 jail!

Prisioners feared only one thing more than the basement; that was taking the overhead passageway to "Hanging John Hewicker's" court. "Hanging John" had a fierce reputation. In 1976 ABC Television did a documentary on justice in America and Hewicker was cited as an example of the unequal (i.e., stiff) justice given to convicted criminals across the nation.

Perhaps Hewicker's most feared (and certainly controversial) sentences were those given to prisoners found guilty of sex crimes. In some cases, so the story goes, he ordered "double bilateral orchendectomies"—removal of both testicles. And rumor had it that he kept samples of these sentences in bottles in a closet in his chambers, silent floating reminders of early 20th century justice.

Hewickers wasn't the only tough judge. One deputy, newly assigned as bailiff, was ordered by his judge to "throw that S.O.B. out of here." (It's not clear whether the judge's anger was directed at a defendant or his attorney.) The deputy firmly and in his most professional manner took the offender by the arm and started to escort him out of the court when he heard the judge's gavel banging and the judge roar, "Deputy, when I say 'throw' I want him airborne until he hits those doors!"

The stories that old 1911 Jail can tell are recorded in large, leather-bound ledgers—the booking logs. Each prisoner brought to jail was given one line on which was recorded the date, his name and charge, the arresting deputy, the sentence and disposition. Simple, straight-forward—commit a crime, go to jail, go to court, and, if guilty, get punished. One of the more curious dispositions in the log read "taken out and not returned."

Working in the old 1911 Jail, like today, had its advantages and disadvantages. Take the food, for example. Then, as today, deputies were fed in the jail. That's the good news. Unfortunately, one of the cooks, a retired marine, enjoyed feeding the deputies colored scrambled eggs—blue, green, and red. If that wasn't bad enough, they had to put up with Captain Earl Riley who managed to eat his eggs while smoking his cigar—the cigar never left his mouth.

Deputies working the jail in those days did everything when it came to handling prisoners since there were few non-sworn staff. They booked, classified prints and handled all of the records in addition to supervising inmates. Trusties assisted them, and one of the trusty positions was "outside trusty." He kept the huge solid brass doors leading into the jail as shiny as a mirror. He would also wash a deputy's car for 25 cents and wax it for 50 cents. Deputies could also get a haircut and shoe shine for a dime.

And, of course, deputies will be deputies. When things were slow in the jail the senior deputies would make the junior deputies watch the inmates while they went to the kitchen on the top floor to look at the Ludin Hotel, always worth a few minutes of nightly entertainment. The Ludin Hotel was not exactly first class. Rowdy tenants lighted mattresses and threw them out the windows; hookers yelled from windows, and, occasionally, a hooker and her John would forget to pull the shades. Down on the Mezzanine the cell block windows looked out onto "Liberty Row"—a collection of bars whose main clientele were sailors on leave. Deputies could look out the windows to see drunks, hookers

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and all sorts of interesting characters, some of whom were shortly to be housed and hosted by these deputies.

During the 1950's it became the 1911 Jail's turn to give way to yet another jail—the Central Detention Facility. The city and county were growing, the Sheriff's Department was growing, and it was time to build a new jail. CDF was designed to handle 200 more prisoners (the 1911 Jail could accommodate 400 inmates) and was completed in 1960. Captain Leland McPhie moved as facility commander across the street to 222 West "C" Street, and he ran the jail until his retirement. He was succeeded by Captain John Duffy.

Sheriff Duffy, Assistant Sheriff Powell, Commander Galt, Assistant Sheriff Hill, Commander Nichols, Captains Jones and Decker, and now Captain Roache have all commanded CDF, the immediate successor to that old 1911 Jail.

And times have changed these past 70 plus years—new jails, new deputies, new ideas. Over 50 percent of the Department's sworn staff work in six detention facilities. Two-hundred civilians are an integral part of the detention bureau. Third-generation jails, modular patrol, professionalism, minimum standards, inmate rights, liability and litigation are part of today's detention deputy's vocabulary.

Justice may not be as swift. Judges may not be as tough. Criminals may not be so easily punished. And jails may not have gallows in their basements. But deputy sheriffs are still lawmen (and law women) and the good guys are still-in charge. The Sheriff's Department and the Detention Bureau have come a long way since the 1911 Jail was built 74 years ago. And, there are many more stories to tell.