

Town's first jails met some problems

By Willa Soncarty

Registrar, Frontier Historical Society
and Museum

"If the recommendation of Mayor Parks is taken in regard to the removal of the old city pound, it will be as good a thing as the city ever did."

— Avalanche Echo, April 5, 1900

When Elijah Cravens committed Glenwood Springs' first murder in August of 1885, Glenwood Springs had no jail in which to hold the accused. Although the need for a place of incarceration was recognized, it would take a few months before town officials could begin the process of making a city jail a reality.

With little money in the city's coffers, the town had to rely on the generosity of its citizens. That generosity came in January of 1886 from Judge William Gelder, officer of the Defiance Town and Land Company, who donated two lots near today's 823 Blake Avenue to the town of Glenwood Springs. This would be the site for the jail.

After one unsuccessful round of bids, on Feb. 15, 1886, council sent out a new request for the construction the jail. The building was to be 12-foot-square or smaller, to include three cells and a reception room, and to cost no more than \$300. When the bids were opened on Feb. 20, 1886, Jerome B. Hardcastle was selected to construct the jail for a cost of \$250, payable in town warrants. Hardcastle's work was completed by March 15, 1886.

However, by February 1888, Glenwood Springs' jail was too small, and the town explored renting jail space from Garfield County, which had previously completed construction of its new courthouse and jail facility. However, the county's old jail building was no longer needed, so the town of Glenwood Springs purchased the county's old jail for \$100, and paid the costs of moving it to the town's jail site.



Glenwood Springs Mayor Barnette Napier inherited the problems of the town's jail when he took office in April of 1901. The poor condition of the facility, as well as poor deportment from the inmates at the jail prompted Blake Avenue residents to petition the city for the jail's removal from the site. By 1904, the council had removed the jail from Blake Avenue and in its place built a community bandstand.

Photo Courtesy Frontier
Historical Society

As the years progressed, the original jail structure received two additions — one on the north and one on the south side. The old county jail building likewise received an addition to its west side. Over time, the site's operations expanded to include the jail, the city dog pound, and a corral for the holding of livestock.

However, as time passed, Blake Avenue grew into a fine residential district, with the jail and pound facilities no longer fitting with the neighborhood's character. Foul language often emitted from the jail. Residents petitioned city officials in April of 1900 for the jail's removal. This was followed by a visit from the Colorado Board of Corrections, which reported on the facility's poor conditions.

Property owners again petitioned the city in 1901. In early 1902, council agreed to swap the jail property for two lots in the 800 Block of Cooper Avenue owned by Channing Sweet. Plans were made for a new city hall and jail facility

on the Cooper Avenue site.

However, during the transaction it was found that the city's jail property had "owner unknown" listed on the Garfield County Assessor's records, and the property had been sold for taxes. While the error was being corrected, council was informed by the city attorney that city property could not be swapped without a two-thirds vote of the taxpaying electors. The swap deal fell through.

By 1904, the jail and pound had been removed from Blake Avenue, and in 1909, taxpayers agreed to sell the property. The original jail building was used for other city purposes, and currently stands at today's Veltus Park.

"Frontier Diary" is provided to the Post Independent by the Frontier Historical Society and Museum, 1001 Colorado Ave., Glenwood Springs. Winter hours are 1-4 p.m. Monday and Thursday through Saturday. For more information, call 945-4448.