

Guide to the Convict Hard Labor Records

Prepared by Kevin Burge, 2006



Baldwin County Department of Archives and History

Bay Minette, AL 36507

A project of the Baldwin County Department of Archives and History

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Collection Summary

Creator: Baldwin County Probate Office
Title: Convict Hard Labor Collection
Dates: 1897-1933
Quantity: 1 cubic foot
Location: A12A5
Abstract: During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Alabama generated a significant portion of its revenue, close to ten percent, from the leasing of convicts to individuals and corporations. Because companies had no vested interest in convicts, viewing them only as a cheap source of easily discarded and replaced labor, the conditions were often deplorable and prisoners were routinely beaten for low productivity. Furthermore, because the demand for convict labor was so high, an unusually high number of cases tried resulted in sentences to hard labor. The judges justified hard labor as a means of repaying court costs associated with trying a prisoner. Common charges resulting in hard labor were larceny, assault, vagrancy, riding a train without a ticket, and adultery, or fornication. Although the convict leasing system existed prior to the Civil War, many Southern states used it to circumvent the thirteenth amendment. Not surprisingly, a disproportionate number of African Americans were sentenced to hard labor. Bowing to pressure from activist groups enraged over poor working conditions and prisoner deaths, the Alabama legislature officially banned the practice of convict leasing on July 1, 1928, becoming the last state to do so.

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Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Acquisition Information

No Information Available

Processing Information

The archives received the documents within the collection scattered throughout several boxes. There was no original order and many of the documents were loose at the onset of processing. The processor grouped similar items together, placing all documents within acid free folders and storage containers. Furthermore, all metal fasteners were removed from the documents. The Prisoner Feed Bills were too large to fit completely inside the folders, and the processor believed they might become damaged by the weight of the other folders. Therefore, they were removed from the rest of the collection and placed in their own box. With the exceptions of minor tears, slight discoloration from age, and rust spots from old metal fasteners, the collection is in excellent condition.

Index Terms

Researchers seeking materials on related subjects, people, and issues should search the catalog by using these terms.

Subjects:

Convict Labor Alabama
Convict Leasing
Reports of Sentences
Hard Labor Transcripts
Feeding Bills

Corporations:

Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company
Vredenburg Saw Mill Company

Persons:

Charles Hall
G.W. Humphries
J.H.H. Smith
James Voltz

Scope and Contents

The Convict Hard Labor Collection consists of documents from the Baldwin County Probate's Office ranging from 1897-1933, and includes correspondence, bills for feeding prisoners, charges levied against prisoners, reports of sentencing, hard labor transcripts, contracts, and prisoner receipts from the Vredenburg Saw Mill Company. The materials are contained within eleven folders in two boxes.

Arrangement

The Collection consists of two boxes

Box 1: Reports of Sentence, Charges, Hard Labor Transcripts, Correspondence, and Notification of Sentence Completion and Repayment, 1897-1933

Box 2: Bills for the Feeding of Prisoners, 1927-1931

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

There are no restrictions on access to these papers.

Restrictions on Use

Researchers are responsible for addressing copyright issues on materials not in the public domain.

Inventory

Accession #: BCP000306

Convict Hard Labor Collection

Box 1: Reports of Sentence, Charges, Hard Labor Transcripts, Correspondence, and Notification of Sentence Completion and Repayment, 1897-1933.

Folder

- 1 Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company Correspondence
- 2 Reports of Sentence, 1901-1910
- 3 Reports of Sentence, 1911-1918
- 4 Reports of Sentence, 1927-1928
- 5 Notification of Sentence Completion and Repayment, 1903-1927
- 6 Vredenburg Saw Mill Company- Contracts and Payments for Prisoners,
1917-1921
- 7 Charges, 1928-1931
- 8 Charges, 1931-1933

Box 2: Bills for the Feeding of Prisoners, 1927-1931**Folder**

- 1 Bills for Feeding of Prisoners, 1927-1928
- 2 Bills for Feeding of Prisoners, 1929
- 3 Bills for Feeding of Prisoners, 1930-1931