

## *The Jailhouse*

*Located near the Strawberry River, one hundred thirty five years ago, a jail was built in the town of Powhatan. The year was 1873, at that moment in time, they had a lot of the same types of crimes that would put you in prison today, like theft and murder. Back then you would also go to jail for working on the Sabbath day (Sunday), coming in and disturbing church services, or stealing hogs. They did not go to jail for the crimes connected to driving, like speeding and recklessness.*

*In those days, if you were thrown in prison, you would have a lot worse time than nowadays. In those days, your cell would be five feet by seven feet, your bed would be a small pile of straw, and your toilet would be a bucket. The only window you would have would be ten-inch wide slits with iron bars.*

*Punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a lot worse than nowadays punishment. The Lawrence County grand jury determined if the jail was too hard on their prisoners or too easy. Whenever these judges would come to the jail, they kept saying that the jail conditions were too extremely mean. The jailor was not responsible for the prisoners food, water, and clothing. A relative or a good town's person would have to provide those necessities. There was no warmth in the jail until a stove was installed in about 1895. There were seven hangings, one lynching, and two suicides in this particular jail.*

*The style of the 1873 jail is "military block house." You should not assume saying "military block house" means there was military conduct here, but it just means*

that it is the style. The roof of the jail is odd, since the style of the jail is "block house." The roof has circulation of air through a type of raised vent in the center of the ceiling. When it was first built in 1873, there were seven small cells, and an additional larger cell was added in 1895. The walls of the jail were two feet thick. The blocks are hand hewn limestone from the area. The blocks were carried in oxen carts to Powhatan from the farm of Ephrim Sharp. In all the years of the jail, only two people escaped, in the early twentieth century. Realizing their mistake, they turned themselves in after waiting the whole night in front of the courthouse.

To get to Powhatan State Park, you must travel to northeast Arkansas. Powhatan State Park is located near Walnut Ridge. It is only 203.67 miles from Arkadelphia, Arkansas, 360.84 miles from Tulsa, Oklahoma, 103.71 miles from Memphis, Tennessee, and 226.59 miles from St. Louis, Missouri.

Ever since a part of the jail's stone wall collapsed in 1930, the jail has become many different but useful buildings. The jail became a honey processing plant, then an auto-repair garage, movie theater, and a canning kitchen where women were taught to use pressure cookers during the Depression years. Today it is owned by the Powhatan State Park, for people from all around the world to go and admire it.

## References

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