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## OPEN INSTITUTIONS

OPEN INSTITUTIONS IN THE  
STATE OF NEW JERSEY (U.S.A.)

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and Agencies of the State of New Jersey, Trenton (N. J.)



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Although the notion of the open institution as an integral part of the correctional system of any jurisdiction seems to be an anomaly, it has, nevertheless taken firm root in many States.

Several different types of open institutions exist in the United States; they can, however, be divided into two main categories:

1. Honour or work camps for adult offenders, and
2. Minimum security reformatories or training schools for men and women.

**1. Honour or work camps for adult offenders**

Adult offenders are transferred from a closed institution to an honour work camp only after careful selection and usually for not more than a portion of their term. Sometimes these institutions are called parole camps because they provide an opportunity to determine whether the offender is ready for conditional release or full parole.

The history of the prison camp which is now an established part of the prison system of many States goes back almost half a century. The lumber camps in northern Wisconsin and Michigan, the forestry camps in California, the work camps in some of the States on the North Atlantic Seaboard have passed well beyond the stage of experiment. As long as they have been carefully supervised and as long as no political or other extraneous influence has been brought to bear upon the transfer of men to such institutions, they have essentially been successful.

When the Federal prisons became overburdened by the greatly increased number of prisoners owing to the passage of several new Federal penal statutes such as the White Slave Act, the Anti-Narcotic Act, the Prohibition Act, and the Act making it a crime to transfer a stolen automobile from one

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In accordance with the tradition of past Congresses, it has been possible to secure the co-operation of certain national prison administrations for the printing of documentation for the First United Nations Congress on the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders, which is from an historical point of view the Thirteenth International Penal and Penitentiary Congress. Thus the present report has been generously printed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons of the United States of America, in the prison printing plant at Leavenworth, Kansas.

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state to another, the Federal Bureau of Prisons set up what was probably one of the most ambitious prison camp systems ever established. At one time there were as many as ten of these institutions, most of which were situated on government property and populated by what might be classified as a less dangerous type of offender. The Prohibition Act and its attempted enforcement brought large numbers of prisoners into the Federal prisons who were not particularly vicious and who were satisfactory candidates for the open institutions. At present half a dozen of these institutions are administered by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and their success illustrates the usefulness of the open institution.

The theory underlying this type of open institution is that, at least as far as adult prisoners are concerned, there is an easily ascertainable proportion of offenders who will not abuse the trust placed in them if they are transferred to a less drastic place of confinement than the average prison. Only men who have been tested in a maximum or minimum security institution and who are known to the prison authorities are transferred. Moreover, these institutions may be reserved for offenders who have served most of their term and would not run the risk of an additional sentence.

It is, of course, necessary that camps should be under good management and intelligent supervision and also provide work. If the men were to have unlimited privileges such institutions would be without value. If, however, transfer to a work camp is considered a reward for good conduct, and if the offender receives remuneration for his work so that he has a small sum of money at his disposal when released on parole, it must be agreed that these camps serve a useful purpose. Although occasionally a mistake may be made and a "big shot" or influential gangster may obtain a transfer to a prison camp thus giving rise to criticism by the prison administrator or the Classification Board, public opinion generally has accepted the principle of the open institution.

A statement by Governor Robert B. Meyner of New Jersey may be indicative of present-day public opinion in this respect:

"One of my predecessors in New Jersey, ex-Governor Edge, felt strongly about this and made a start by using prison labour on the Leesburg Farm. Acquisition by the

State of the Wharton tract and Island Beach offers another opportunity to get selected prisoners out of their cells and into the sunshine. The Wharton tract could be reforested and improved by prison labor; at Island Beach, facilities for public use of this great natural resource could be developed. If we but look around us, we can find many uses for convicted men, within and without prison walls, which will not only be most beneficial to them, but which will produce many valuable services for the people of the whole State."

## 2. The minimum security reformatory or training school for young men and women

The minimum security reformatory or training school for young men and women differs substantially from the open institution for the adult offender. Committal is usually made directly from the juvenile or the local criminal court and it is not always possible to gain a knowledge of the offender and to make a careful study of his capacities, his self-reliance and his sense of responsibility. It is with respect to this type of open institution that in recent years some doubt has arisen in the minds of penologists and of the public.

The theory relating to these institutions is a sound one, namely, that there should be some semi-secure institutions which will provide a certain control without imposing a complete, around-the-clock lock-up for the inmates.

While some states have used probation to a very large extent, it must be realized that this is the very minimum of all minimum security measures and that, particularly in the case of the young offender, it is desirable to provide a type of correctional treatment which imposes greater restraint than probation. As a result, boys' schools, open reformatories and camps for juveniles and adolescents have been established and much success has been attained.

Treatment in such institutions is based on the theory that, while it may be relatively easy to control the offender in a maximum security institution, the very fact of his rigorous confinement is apt to reduce rather than to increase, his powers of self-reliance. After adjusting to a close-custody institution, he will have to readjust completely at the time of parole. If therefore, he can be taught self-reliance during his

reformatory term, he will have taken a long step towards rehabilitation. It is recognized that this method is full of risks and that escapes and breaches of trust must be expected. The programme of many progressive states is, however, well planned and provides for several graduated types of restraint, i.e., a maximum security prison, a branch prison surrounded by a fence instead of a wall, a closed reformatory which does not have the forbidding aspect of a prison, but is surrounded by a low wall or a fence, and an open reformatory to which carefully selected offenders may be sent. These institutions are supplemented by prison camps and well-supervised probation and parole services.

As mentioned above, there are two important differences between the categories of offenders which are sent to open institutions for adults and those which are sent to minimum security reformatories for young men and women: First, the latter are usually reserved for the restive and undisciplined offender between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, and secondly, owing to the manner of their committal, there is no opportunity for a more extensive study of their personalities.

In the last few years, these factors have resulted in an inordinately large number of escapes, so that doubt has arisen among the authorities in charge of these institutions and the heads of prison systems, as well as the newspapers and the neighbouring communities, whether younger offenders should be given the opportunity of going to an "honour institution". The Children's Village, near New York, which is perhaps the best known and most highly regarded institution in the United States for the younger type of juvenile offender, has been plagued by a very large number of runaways. A report by the local chief of police, quoted in the newspaper, stated that, in one year, there had been 600 escapes from this institution, although it had only 430 inmates. Similar reports came from schools for juveniles, junior reformatories and open institutions all over the country.

Events at Annandale, New Jersey, may illustrate what occurred in other institutions, since this thirty-year old institution is well-known in the United States and certain countries of Europe, and considered typical of the open institution for the adolescent offender.

The institution looks very much like a boy's school. There are neither walls, nor fences, nor obvious bars on the windows and the whole institution has a campus-like look which immediately impresses the visitor. This skilfully administered institution has received young men who, while they are not considered capable of adjustment to probation, could not be sent to a closed institution without considerable damage to their personality. A few years ago, the number of escapes began to increase rapidly until, in one year, fifty-two boys had run away from the institution. Moreover, they were not content with running away (although most of them were brought back promptly), but in several instances they stole cars in the neighbourhood and on one occasion, they badly beat up a storekeeper with the butt of a gun they had stolen from him.

These events greatly disturbed the neighbourhood. Mass meetings were held, there were threats of new legislation, so that the institution, after a very careful attempt to explain its policy to the community, agreed to take such precautions as sounding a warning whistle whenever an inmate escaped, urging more careful selection of candidates and increasing the watch around the buildings of the institution. Agitation persisted, however, and the Board of Managers of the institution, together with the State Board of Control, inquired into the situation in other States and found that a general tendency to put a fence around the "open" institution had developed.<sup>1</sup>

The arguments for fencing in Annandale which were put before the State Board, were as follows:

1. The boys admitted at this time were much more rebellious and difficult to handle than when Annandale was established. Figures were adduced to show that there was a higher percentage of boys with a low mental level, or of boys having experienced inferior environmental influences.
2. The institution could not thrive without the support and the confidence of the neighbourhood and the neighbourhood was clamouring for greater protection.
3. The absence of a fence and the constant anxiety about escapes resulted in a more rigid discipline inside the institution, thus contributing to the destruction of the real pur-

<sup>1</sup> See Annex A.

pose of the reformatory. The situation would be greatly improved if there were a fence. (This seemed to be a fairly general reaction in institutions of this kind throughout the United States.)

4. There was interference with the programme of education and rehabilitation because the officers' attention was focused on preventing escapes rather than on the rehabilitative process. Moreover, a great deal of the time of the staff was spent in apprehending runaways.

On the other hand, the following arguments in favour of a completely open institution, were given:<sup>2</sup>

1. The character of the boys had not changed particularly; however, more extensive psychiatric services, better diagnostic facilities and more complete social histories disclosed facts that were hitherto unknown with reference to these boys.

2. In a graduated correctional system such as that of the State of New Jersey, provision should be made for maximum, medium and minimum security institutions. If, through improper classification or careless court committal boys had been sent to Annandale who did not belong there, they could and should be transferred to a medium security institution.

3. There was in the New Jersey correctional system an institution with greater safeguards, and that institution should receive boys who could not respond to the discipline at Annandale.

4. The development of self-reliance and character in a boy was of sufficient importance for the community to bear with occasional escapes.

5. To erect a fence around the institution would completely change its character and alter the psychological reaction of the boys and young men committed to it. The result of such a measure would simply be two closed-in reformatories in the State of New Jersey, and less variation in the institutional treatment available.

<sup>2</sup> For a statement in this connexion, see Annex B.

6. The argument that a fence would help in the improvement of conditions in the institution was alleged not to have been borne out by experiences in other institutions where fences had been erected.

7. An even larger number of escapes than there had been at Annandale had occurred at institutions where fences had been erected.

In June 1953 the decision to erect a fence at Annandale was taken. An interesting development followed, however. The necessary construction materials could not be acquired immediately and, when a new State Administration was elected early in 1954, the new Governor suggested that the whole project be re-examined. As a result, up to the present time, the fence has not been built and the institution has continued to function as a completely open institution. It should be noted, moreover, that from 10 June 1953 to 30 June 1954, out of a population of 550 young men, there was one escape. The boy got no further than three miles from the institution and was returned to it within a few hours. From July to November 1954, there has only been one escape in which two boys participated. They were also promptly returned to the institution. It is inexplicable that a year in which there were very numerous escapes from this open institution should be followed by one in which there were almost none in spite of a large inmate population and in spite of the fact that during the same period two men escaped from the walled State Prison and eight men got away from the other reformatory. Could it be possible that men in prison respond to a challenge and are, therefore, more intent upon escaping when it is difficult to do so?

Whether a fence is eventually built at Annandale—as has been the case in many institutions of this type—or not, may not be as important as it seems. The erection of a wire fence, whatever its height, cannot destroy the considerable benefit derived from this type of a congregate treatment. As compared to the traditional prison with double-locked, steel-barred cells and a forty-foot wall, Annandale, whether surrounded by a fence or not, may justly be referred to as an open institution. It is an institution where attempt is made to open the boy's mind to the good use which he can make of his future, and to open the mind of the public to the importance of considerate

and rehabilitative treatment for the young offender. The open institution is an established part of the American correctional system and whether it is 100 per cent open or only 95 per cent, it is a monument to progressive penology and holds out hope for the rehabilitation of the adolescent offender which could never be achieved in a close custody prison.

**ANNEX A  
REPLIES TO A QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE TYPE OF ENCLOSURE USED IN  
OPEN INSTITUTIONS**

| <b>INSTITUTION</b>                             | <b>AGE OF POPULATION</b>                | <b>TYPE OF COMMITMENT</b>   | <b>TYPE OF ENCLOSURE</b>   | <b>COMMENTS</b>  |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Wallkill Prison,<br>New York.                  | 18-50 years<br>(average<br>age over 26) | Transferred from adult<br>prisons.  | Not custodial fences   | "I believe that the reactor<br>of any kind of a fence around<br>the property would have a<br>very bad psychological ef-<br>fect."  |
| Indiana Reformatory<br>Pendelton, Indiana.     | 16-30 years                             | Court committals.   | Stone wall and 10 ft. fence<br>around outside dormitory.<br>(one-seventh of population<br>housed outside dormitory.) | "The will to escape could<br>hardly be retarded by the<br>mere presence of a fence."   |
| Colorado Reformatory<br>Buena Vista, Colorado. | 16-26 years                             | Mostly court committal, few<br>transfers.<br>Penitentiary and Industrial<br>School. | Fence around Recreation ar-<br>ea (cell block and Adminis-<br>tration Building, plus fence<br>enclosed institution.) | "I do not believe that over<br>5% of the population would<br>try to escape if we were to<br>take the fence down but I<br>cannot see how we could keep<br>track of "in and out ac-<br>counts" without the gates." |
| Soledad Prison,<br>California.                 | 18 years up                             | Transfers only.   | 12 ft. chain link  | "A fence absolutely neces-<br>sary."   |
| Kansas State Industrial<br>Reformatory         | 16-25 years                             | Court and transfers from<br>other institutions.                                     | 30 ft. stone wall  | "We could not get along<br>without our wall."  |
| Camp Hill                                      | 15-25 years                             | Adult and juvenile court.   | 12 ft. fence   | "We are of the opinion that<br>the lowering of the average<br>age of our population will<br>increase the number of es-<br>cape risks."   |
| Marion Training School,<br>Ohio.               | 16-25 years                             | Transfers from other institu-<br>tions only.  | 12 ft. fence   | "We feel that the presence<br>of a fence, guarded, definite-<br>ly minimizes the possibility<br>of escape."  |

## ANNEX B

"For a number of generations the State of New Jersey has acquired favorable notice throughout the country and throughout the World as being one of the very few States to develop a classified system of correctional treatment. In that system the institution at Annandale has held rank as a unique, humane and forward-looking institution. Throughout the nations of western Europe the Annandale plan has been commented on and is beginning to be imitated in some of the Scandinavian countries.

It is an institution like this that offers to the court, whether with reference to juveniles or young first offenders, the opportunity to try an offender out under limited supervision with the emphasis put upon stimulating self-reliance and responsibility with his own character.

It is important that there should be some type of supervision that would be more effective than mere probation with its necessarily extremely limited and intermittent supervision and complete sequestration of individuals of all types. Annandale offered this interim type of treatment. If a wall is placed around it, it will differ from Bordentown Reformatory only in the degree of its restraint but it will still depend upon physical rather than moral restraint and it is this fact that seems to me to indicate that we have taken a backward step.

It is quite possible the judges have made mistakes in committing men to Annandale who cannot be trusted therein. The answer to this is: the judges can be educated to a clearer understanding of the importance of the commitment. It has been said that 450 is many boys to keep in this completely open type of supervision. My answer to this is: It would be better to keep 350 or 300 or even 200 boys in the real Annandale type of supervision rather than lose the benefit of the whole project. It has been said that we are getting a different, much more rebellious type of young man now than we ever had. I am old enough to have heard this explanation over many, many years. It might just as well be true that we do not have the scientific and sympathetic understanding of

young men that is necessary to operate an institution like the traditional Annandale.

It has been said that more freedom can be afforded and greater success attained with reformatory methods if restraint can be diminished within the compound. This is a statement of questionable veracity. It does not seem to have developed that way in other institutions that have fences. Even suppose it were necessary with reference to a proportion of Annandale to keep them within the dormitories or locked up in rooms or even under close surveillance, this type of man could very easily be eliminated from Annandale rather than emulate the doubtful policy of Charles Lamb's householder who continually burned his house down in order to roast a pig.

I believe we are hasty in ordering the expenditure of \$130,000 to build a fence around an honor institution. It would seem to be much more practical to work with the judges to get careful selection and if that failed, to amend the law requiring the commitment of all adolescent offenders to Bordentown but preserve Annandale as a transfer institution to whom the selected and tested individuals from Bordentown can be either immediately or eventually transferred.

The fundamental thesis of penology in which New Jersey has so continually shared is that men are rehabilitated or restored not through emphasizing their danger or their worst faculties but by cultivating through self-reliance and good example the best that is in them."

This archiving project is a collaborative effort between United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology. Any comments or questions should be directed to Cindy J. Smith at [CJSmithphd@comcast.net](mailto:CJSmithphd@comcast.net) or Emil Wandzilak at [emil.wandzilak@unodc.org](mailto:emil.wandzilak@unodc.org).