

Old Clay County Jail

Home of the Clay County Historical Archives — A service of Clay County Clerk of Court Tara S. Green

The Old Clay County Jail was built in 1894 and used until 1972. A smaller jail, located nearby where the Center for the Aging is now in Green Cove Springs, preceded this building. Built of wood in 1874 and falling apart, that original jail building was plagued by escapes. A new jail was needed. This is the second oldest, still standing jail in the state of Florida, with St. Augustine being the first/oldest.

The 1894 Clay County Jail is constructed of red brick but, in 1963, was painted white. However, the red brick showed through the white paint and the jail appeared pink. Sherriff Jennings Murree had to have it repainted several times over. Constructed of one-foot-thick brick walls, there are sixteen (16) jail cells in various sizes with a Maximum Security wing upstairs. The jail was built by the Pauly Jail Company which is still in business today. The jail held men, women, juveniles and the mentally ill.

There have been at least two escapes from the Old Clay County Jail. One involved Billy Joe Krebb who made a key out of a spoon in 1964. He let himself and the other prisoners out of their cells. However, the make-shift key didn't work for the main front door of the jail, so the would-be escapees were stuck—and, of course, put back in their cells.

There were seven (7) executions here between 1894 and 1916. All were on a scaffold by hanging. The giant oak trees on the lawn were saplings then, not used to hang anyone.

The jailers lived in the building's section that is now the Clay County Historical Archives. Several children were born here including Jerri Knight Williams, the first female mayor of Green Cove Springs. Her father was Will Knight, Chief Deputy of Sheriff John P. Hall. The Hinson brothers grew up in the jail as well. They became prison guards. One was a death row guard in Raiford, present for the execution of Ted Bundy. The Archives Reading Room was the booking room/dispatch. The Archives Specialist's office was the jailer's bedroom. There was a *Cool Hand Luke* style sweat box out back. This archaic punishment technique was once used by prisons as a method of solitary confinement.

The jail is reportedly haunted. *Ghost Hunters* filmed an episode here. Unexplained phenomena witnessed by visitors and others through the years is not uncommon at the old jail.



Believe it or not, the jail food decades ago was really decent, with fresh vegetables, eggs, meat and coffee prepared most days by the jailer's wife. Despite decent meals, this jail was nowhere anyone wished to be. No air conditioning in those days and little ventilation in the South's sweltering summer months,

combined with disease and the cries of the insane and desperate, made conditions hard to tolerate for most inmates. For more information, visit www.clayclerk.com or call the Archives office at 904-371-0027.