

Board of Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary State Documents

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Finding aid written in English

Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of the State Library

Forum Building
607 South Drive
Harrisburg, PA, 17120

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Summary Information

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Scope and Contents

The Board of the Eastern State Penitentiary was created to oversee the administration and conditions of the correctional institution, and to ensure that penal law was being upheld. In the early years of the institution, the Board was also responsible for researching the efficacy of solitary confinement in the Pennsylvania system. The Board was responsible for reporting to the Governor and General Assembly of Pennsylvania the annual review, including prison statistics, improvements, and happenings.

The publications of the Board of the Eastern State Penitentiary contain annual reports and other topical reports. Selected topics from these publications include prison discipline, reconvictions, and annual prison statistics and demographic information. The bulk of the current material is dated from 1829 to 1929.

Biographical / Historical

Construction of the Eastern State Penitentiary was authorized by legislation passed by the General Assembly on March 21, 1821. Governor Joseph Hiester appointed eleven building commissioners to oversee the project, which began in 1823. The new prison received its first prisoners in 1829, though the entire building was not completed until 1836. The design for the Eastern State Penitentiary, later called Cherry Hill, was subsequently emulated in corrections facilities constructed in Belgium, China, England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia. In the 1920's, Pennsylvania's major prison facilities were placed under the jurisdiction of the old Department of Welfare, along with mental health facilities and juvenile institutions. It was during this time that the Board was likely dissolved in favor of Department authority. Major renovations were conducted to the facility over the years and a last modernization took place during the late 1930s that resulted in increasing the total number of cells to 945 from the original 400. In 1953, the facility was renamed the State Correctional Institution at Philadelphia. Eastern State Penitentiary became a National Historic Landmark in 1965 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970, the same year the last prisoners were transferred from Cherry Hill to Graterford. Now owned by the City of Philadelphia, the Eastern State Penitentiary reopened as a Penology Museum in 1994 and is managed by a board-supervised 501(c)(3) non-profit, officially called Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Inc.

Legacy Agency Names and Related Agencies

Department of Welfare (former parent agency)

General

Annual reports of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary from 1835 to 1912 (intermittent) are available on the Internet Archive:

<https://archive.org/search?query=report+eastern+state+penitentiary+pennsylvania>. The annual reports from 1843 to 1953 are combined into one entity.

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Controlled Access Headings

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