

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

### *Second of four columns*

Two “cages” in the basement of the town hall at 31 South Main Street served as the local “lock-up.” These facilities were reached by a set of steep wooden stairs and were lighted by two small basement windows high on the walls. As is true of any basement or below-grade facility, it was damp in the summer.

The lock-up was used not only for prisoners, but as far as space would allow, for what we would refer to today as the homeless population. In times of economic difficulties or on cold winter nights, the lock-up could be quite full with vagrants, hobos, migrants and other people on the margins. In 1908 the record only shows that 10 prisoners were incarcerated. In 1916 about 50 prisoners (no women or children) and about 50 “lodgers” used the jail. The records from 1925 note that the number of prisoners per night fluctuated between one and eleven. Many of the arrests were for intoxication. During the first six months of 1926 there were 43 prisoners in the lock-up and 63 lodgers. 1927 showed 93 detainees.

Those two “cages” that served as the local “lock-up” were the topic of considerable disagreement between the town and the state for about 15 years between 1916 and 1931. A 1916 letter from the state recommended that the lighting be improved and that wash basins and toilets be installed in the cells. At that time the only available sanitary facilities were in another room. The state inspector noted that when these changes were done, the site would be a “credible lock-up.” There followed an exchange of letters between then Perinton Supervisor Fletcher Diefendorf and the state inspector about possible changes. The supervisor proposed that “slop pails” be put in the cells, but indicated that “closets and lavatories freely accessible to prisoners... would be abused.” The state responded with “we don’t know where you get your authority for such a statement” and stated that all modern jails had facilities. They recommended “vitreous ware” toilets. The state also questioned the lighting and the proximity of the cells to the walls. The final letter in the series, dated May 17, 1917, stated that the lock-up, due to its being mostly underground, could not be approved and should be closed.

By 1921, the town had added a sink and toilet to each of the two cells and had enlarged the windows. A state letter from that year seemed to imply that all was in order. Nevertheless, by 1925 the state was again recommending that a new lock-up be built to deal with dampness and a rough floor, the lack of a good fire escape, the danger of the steep stairs, leaky toilets, inadequate bedding, and a lack of general cleanliness.

State criticism of the Fairport lock-up continued until 1931 when the state Commissioner of Corrections finally closed the facility. Fortunately, after purchasing the municipal building from the town of Perinton in 1930, the village of Fairport was planning extensive renovations, which included the construction of a new jail as well as a fire hall. Architect Henry Martin planned a first-floor jail that would have four cells, three for men and one for women, with three solid walls and a barred front. Each cell would be equipped with a steel bunk, adequate bedding, toilet, sink, and drinking fountain. Windows would provide sufficient light. The construction was completed in 1931 and the lock-up met all the necessary state criteria. The 1931 lock-up remained in use until the 1982 move of the department into the old fire department facility next to the Municipal Building. Today’s well-lighted, stainless steel equipped cells would have pleased the inspectors of the 1920’s and 1930’s.