The Production of Military Supplies at the Alabama State Penitentiary During the Civil War

BRETT J. DERBES

The confederacy seemed to expand for soldiers on far-flung fields during the Civil War, but for inmates in the Alabama State Penitentiary, it remained limited to their cell, workshop, and prison yard. Nonetheless, prisoners participated in the war by supplying soldiers with crucial wartime supplies that reached far beyond the prison walls. The Union naval blockade of the southern coast disrupted trade, which increased the demand for goods, required expanded domestic production, and pushed extant manufactories to the limit. The penitentiary in Wetumpka had operated workshops using inmate labor during the antebellum era that the lessees now converted to produce military supplies for Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. The largely unknown penitentiary workshops contributed to Alabama’s manufacturing and industrial capabilities, and utilized a cost-effective, available, and reliable source of labor. The production of prison goods thus assisted Confederate soldiers’ ability to wage war, made the penitentiary a profitable enterprise, and contributed revenue to the State Treasury.

The study of Confederate supply and logistics is essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the Confederacy during the Civil War. Inadequate southern industry, transportation, and communication greatly contributed to shortages of all types. Prison labor competed with antebellum local private businessmen, and the sale of prison goods was not a profitable antebellum enterprise. When the country erupted in Civil War, the workshops turned to manufacturing a variety of military supplies, including knapsacks, shoes, wagon covers, and a variety of tents. The

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1 For more information on the movement of soldiers, civilians, and enslaved African Americans across the South during the Civil War see, Yael A. Sternhell, Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South (Cambridge, 2012).
variety and amount of canvas goods produced at the penitentiary workshops depended largely on manpower, the amount paid per item at the Montgomery Depot, and the availability of materials. In 1863, however, Governor Thomas H. Watts pardoned some inmates to serve in the Confederate military, undermining production. As the war dragged on, a shortage of raw materials also affected the major canvas supplier in Tallassee, which halted the manufacture of tents and wagon covers by the summer of 1864. In the spring of 1865, Union forces under the command of General James H. Wilson targeted Confederate manufactories in Central Alabama, overtook the penitentiary, and released all the remaining inmates.

Several works already explore the establishment of penitentiaries in the United States during the antebellum era, while other books investigate industry in the Confederacy. Yet, none provide a detailed analysis of the production of military supplies by inmate labor in workshops at the Alabama State Penitentiary. On October 25, 1935, at the first annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, in Birmingham, Alabama, Charles W. Ramsdell brought attention to the extremely important but neglected subjects of supply and logistics within Confederate historiography. Yet, the daunting prospect of collecting scattered receipts, reports, and private account books delayed examinations of the contributions of state penitentiaries to Confederate supply.²

Robert David Ward and William Warren Rogers notably investigated interstate cooperation between Mississippi and Alabama regarding the transfer and confinement of inmates during the Civil War. They produced a comprehensive examination of the antebellum penal system and first state penitentiary, and discovered that Alabama was an integral part of the national movement for prison reform. Their work included valuable information regarding wartime management of the facility, but devoted only limited attention to the quality, quantity, and variety of prison goods manufactured during the Civil War. Similarly, Mary Ann Neeley’s Presidential Address to the

Alabama Historical Association in 1990 described the establishment, living conditions, management, manufacturing, and finances of the penitentiary, but limited her study to the first decade of operation. Neeley noted that public demand for moral reform and legislators’ desire to create a self-sustaining enterprise drove the construction of a house of incarceration that included workshops.3

The largely unexplored wartime production of military supplies with inmate labor depended on the establishment of a state penitentiary and expansion of prison workshops. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the prewar history of the Alabama State Penitentiary. While the territory of Alabama achieved statehood in 1819, it lacked a prison system for nearly twenty years. Governor John Gayle, who opposed the death penalty, whipping post, branding iron, and pillory, noted that other states had successfully offset the expense of building state penitentiaries by employing the inmates in prison workshops. From 1831 through 1834, Gayle introduced legislation to create a more civilized criminal code that included a state penitentiary.4

The construction of a house of incarceration finally was approved by the General Assembly on January 26, 1839, during the administration of Governor Arthur P. Bagby. The legislation stipulated that the penitentiary “should be located at a place not more than fifty


miles from the center of the state to be selected by a joint vote of the legislature,” and appropriated $30,000 for the purchase of land and construction. The bill further “authorized the selection of a committee of three to prepare a code of criminal law, adapted to the penitentiary system of punishment and a set of rule suitable for the organization of the prison.” The General Assembly considered the towns of Wetumpka, Centreville, Montevallo, and Marion, which all met the geographic requirement.\(^5\)

The General Assembly ultimately selected East Wetumpka as the site for the prison. The building commissioners visited the State Prison of Tennessee, which supplied the model for the house of incarceration in Alabama. The General Assembly then awarded the contract to construct the penitentiary buildings to William H. Thomas, of Nashville, Tennessee. A Masonic ceremony celebrated the laying of the cornerstone on March 4, 1840. The prison commissioners received the keys upon the completion of the prison on October 27, 1841, at a public celebration and dinner. William Hogan became the first warden of the penitentiary, soon nicknamed “the Walls.” The *Wetumpka Argus* described the red brick prison as “having some architectural beauty.” The main building, ornamented with white marble, faced the north. The penitentiary encompassed two acres of land entirely enclosed by brick walls of 20 to 25 feet in height. Construction costs totaled $84,889.\(^6\)


\(^6\) Ward and Rogers, *Alabama’s Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865*, 50-2, 60. On May 2, 1839, William Thomas received a contract signed by all three building commissioners, but McWhorter’s appeals to the General Assembly delayed construction. *Wetumpka Argus*, February 22, 1843; Neeley, “Painful Circumstances,” 4-5. The warden and his family resided on the first floor. Two cell house wings were eighty-five feet in length and contained three stories, which held one hundred and four cells. Elmore County Heritage Book Committee, *The Heritage of Elmore County*, 204-5; *Wetumpka Argus*, May 15, 1839, June 19, 1839. Thomas advertised to hire sixty to seventy men to construct the prison, which included ten or fifteen stone quarry men, ten or fifteen stonemasons, five or six carpenters and one blacksmith. The ad called for thirteen or fifteen experienced brick moulders. Additionally, Thomas desired to purchase mules, wagons, drays, lime, corn, fodder, bacon, and three or four yoke of oxen. *Wetumpka Argus*, December 11, 1839. January 15, 1840, March 4, 1840.
In January 1842, the first inmate arrived at the penitentiary. William Garrett of New York was a harness maker sentenced to twenty years for harboring a runaway slave. By March 1842, the inmate population had increased to seventeen, and it grew to 64 by November 1843, including twelve inmates transferred from Mobile County (see Table 1). In their first report, the inspectors strongly suggested the construction of a suitable hospitable and the purchase of medicines, hospital stores, books, and medical instruments. The inmates meanwhile labored in a variety of occupations in the workshops that included wagon, shoe, cabinet, harness, and saddle making, as well as blacksmithing, coopering, tanning, painting, tailoring, and cooking. By November 1844, the workshops sold $6,543.87 worth of goods, including 25,546 cigars.7

The General Assembly hoped that the sale of prison goods could make the institution a financially self-sustaining enterprise, but the cost of maintenance exceeded revenue and the legislators grew increasingly dissatisfied. From 1841 to 1845, maintenance costs totaled $53,546.44, while receipts from products totaled only $21,565.75. The difference caused the legislature to reconsider the mode of operating the penitentiary. On May 15, 1846, it authorized John G. Graham of Coosa County to lease the facility at cost of $500 per annum from 1846 to 1852. Regarding the new lessee, the inspectors stated, "we are highly pleased with him as an officer . . . we hope, if he discharges his duties to the State and the convicts, that he will at the same time promote his individual interests by the lucrative employment of convict labor." The inspectors reported that Graham

7 Neeley, “Painful Circumstances,” 6; Acts of Alabama, 1846, 9-13. In November of 1841, John Watson, J. M. Armstrong, and S. S. Simmons became the inspectors. Ward and Rogers, Alabama’s Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865, 61-2, 64, 70-3, 86. Female prisoners were prohibited from being whipped. By October 1843 the penitentiary workshops included eleven trades. The convicts were dispersed among those trades with ten working on boots and shoes, eight on wagon making, and five on hats. On October 14, 1844, the wooden shops housing the tannery were destroyed by fire. Neeley, “Painful Circumstances,” 5; Elmore County Heritage Book Committee, Heritage of Elmore County, 205. William Garrett was pardoned by the State Legislature after his guilt was questioned and substantial evidence could not be produced. Report of the Inspectors of the Penitentiary (Montgomery, 1848), 9.
spent $4,396.00 in the construction of large, safe, and permanent workshops.\(^8\)

The first annual report on March 28, 1847, identified existing prison industries as a blacksmith shop, coach and cabinet shop, shoe shop, hatter shop, tailor shop, cooper shop, cigar shop, brickyard, and tan yard. The report noted that the inmate population consisted of 167 white men, one white woman, and three persons of color (see Table 1). Penitentiary improvements during 1848 also included the construction of two brick buildings for a chapel and additional workshops, as well as a third wooden building. During her tour of southern penitentiaries and asylums, celebrated reformer Dorothea L. Dix visited the prison and donated a collection of nearly 300 books of the prison library, which was later enlarged with religious tracts donated by Governor Henry W. Collier in 1851, as well as an appropriation of $100 from the General Assembly.\(^9\)

In 1849 the Wetumpka *Daily State Guard* reported that the lessee operated the penitentiary workshops as a “financially advantageous” manufacturing center that included experienced workmen as supervisors. The inmates produced brogans, ladies’ and gentle-

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\(^9\) Ward and Rogers, *Alabama’s Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865*, 76-7, 88, 90, 98. The three two-story buildings sat on the north (measuring 185 feet by 30 feet), west (45 feet by 34 feet) and south (30 feet by 90 feet) sides of the yard. *Report of the Inspectors of the Penitentiary, 1846*, 28; *Report of the Inspectors of the Penitentiary* (Montgomery: McCormick and Walsh, 1847), 6-7, 8-9, 13, 16, 28; Neeley, “Painful Circumstances,” 7, 9-10; *Jones v. Graham*, XXI, *Alabama Reports* (1852), 275-77; *Reports of the Inspectors of the Alabama Penitentiary to the General Assembly at its Third Biennial Session in the City of Montgomery, 1851*, (Montgomery, 1851), 23-5; Lucille Griffith, *Alabama: A Documentary History to 1900*, (Tuscaloosa, 1968), 361; Richard F. Selcer, *Civil War America, 1850-1875* (New York, 2006), 289-90. Dorothea Lynde Dix embarked on a forty-six year crusade to study the harsh treatment of inmates and suggest reforms at jails, asylums, and poorhouses. She traveled over 10,000 miles to examine hundreds of institutions. During the Civil War she became superintendent of all Union hospitals, which mean she held the highest government post by any woman during the war.
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<th>White Female</th>
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* The first total number is prior to all releases, pardons, discharges, and deaths.
** The population figure for 1863 included the 25 inmates transferred from the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

men’s fine morocco and calfskin shoes and boots, wool and beaver hats, barrels, cigars, furniture, road wagons, harnesses, plows, and other blacksmithing goods. Inmate labor also provided tailoring, sign and ornamental painting, milling, stone and marble cutting and polishing, and woodworking. Warden Graham purchased a steam engine at a cost of nearly $600 for stone and woodworking.10

During the 1850s, Warden Graham constructed a new hospital building, replaced wooden shanties that housed storerooms and small shops, and repaired the blacksmith and wood working shops damaged by a fire in January 1850. On May 30, 1851, the Alabama Daily Journal reported, “Nearly every branch of industry is carried on within its walls, and the presumption is that the lessee is making money.” Yet, not all citizens were pleased with the productivity of the facility and suggested alternative uses for inmate labor. In a December letter to the editor, Philander suggested, “I, for one, would have them placed on our rivers, above the falls . . . in the construction of dams and locks . . . The only problem to be solved is, can the convicts be governed, while thus employed!”11

As Warden Graham’s lease of the penitentiary neared its end, the inspectors urged the state to resume control of the institution. During the final weeks of Graham’s lease at least two major disturbances occurred at the penitentiary. Overseeing inmate labor in the workshops was a dangerous occupation for prison employees, especially the guards. On April 6, 1852, convict Nimrod L. Nash refused to do any work and assaulted an officer. While defending himself the guard delivered a blow to the convict’s head that resulted in his death the following day. The next day, another unruly inmate named John Wilson attacked the Sergeant of the Guard with a piece of iron in the blacksmith shop. When the workshop overseer attempted to assist the officer, inmate John Hill assaulted him with a

sledgehammer. Several other inmates forcefully subdued both Wilson and Hill. The chaotic disturbance concluded when Hill employed a shop razor to inflict a terrible gash in his throat from ear to ear, from which he died after several days. The subsequent lessees now saw the dangers of employing inmates in mechanical trades and relocated unruly prisoners to other workshops.  

Dr. Meriwether Gaines Moore and Dr. Fleming Jordan co-leased the penitentiary from May 18, 1852 until April 12, 1858, for $650 per annum. Moore, a Georgia native, was a physician and graduate of the University of Virginia who later served as warden of the penitentiary during the Civil War (see Illustration 2). Jordan, another Georgian, was a physician and wealthy planter in Madison County who owned 134 slaves on the eve of the Civil War. The new lessees focused inmate labor on the production of bagging, rope, and twine. Moore and Jordan also repaired the walls and walkways, constructed a two-story brick cellblock building on the south side of the yard, and built a large frame shed next to the brick building on the north side at a cost of $4,693.64. For several years the penitentiary inspectors suggested that separate quarters be built for female inmates, who were collectively housed in a small and poorly ventilated room that formerly served as the hospital.

Dr. Ambrose Burrows, a physician from New York, obtained the subsequent lease for an annual fee of $1,550.00 a year and served

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as warden from April 13, 1858, until his abrupt death four years later. The goods manufactured at the prison sold at the penitentiary and Burrows, Holt & Co. in Montgomery. On April 10, 1860, the Alabama Daily Confederation reported that the lessees “furnish the best of carriages, buggies, wagons, saddles, shoes, harness, window sashes, doors, wardrobes and all such things, on the most reasonable terms.” Warden Burrows warned the legislature that “the present number of convicts more than fill the cells in the institution.” Inmates ranged in age from seventeen to seventy years old, but the average inmate was 30 years old, male, and white. The prisoners committed twenty-eight different crimes, but the most common offenses were murder, larceny, negro stealing, burglary, robbery, manslaughter, and attempt to kill. The prisoners’ previous occupations included 45 professions from rat catcher to physician, but the most common were 56 farmers, 57 laborers, sixteen sailors, thirteen carpenters, eight shoemakers, and six blacksmiths. Clearly, the majority of the inmates were middle aged, unskilled white males, who required training to work in the various prison workshops. Meanwhile, skilled inmates with previous experience as blacksmiths, carpenters, shoe makers, coopers, machinists, millwrights, and wagon makers often became workshop overseers and trained other inmates.¹⁴

Prisoners accessed newspapers and magazines through the prison library, and newly incarcerated inmates brought information regarding national events from outside of the walls. Arguments over the expansion of slavery and the political turmoil of the 1850s culminated with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency on November 6, 1860. On January 11, the delegates in Montgomery voted 61 to 39 in favor of secession, and Alabama became the fourth southern state to leave the union. The bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12 led President Lincoln to call for 75,000 recruits to end

¹⁴ Ward and Rogers, Alabama’s Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865, 109; Alabama Daily Confederation, February 17, 1860, April 10, 1860. The penitentiary reports from 1858 to 1865 have not been located at any public or private library or archive. U. S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Schedule 1, Free Inhabitants, NARA, roll M653_7, p. 115-20. The 1860 census identified 144 of the 219 prisoners as native to southern states, while seventy-three were from northern states or foreign countries.
the rebellion. Alabamians responded to the threat of federal invasion by enlisting in the Confederate Army. Those soldiers immediately required a variety of wartime supplies, which became harder to obtain as the United States Navy tightened its blockade of 3,549 miles of Confederate coastline on April 30, 1861, especially complicating trade at Mobile Bay. Shortages plagued the Confederacy throughout the Civil War, and demand for goods manufactured at the state penitentiary increased.  

Warden Burrows initiated the transition of inmate labor to the production of wartime supplies. During the summer of 1861 he contracted with the Confederate Ordnance Department in Montgomery to provide knapsacks, tents, and wagon covers. Alabama Governor Andrew B. Moore complained in July that 3,000 soldiers camped at Auburn “have been delayed by the difficulty which exists in procuring tents . . . The 3,000 troops will require at least 600 ordinary tents.” Assistant Quartermaster Major James L. Calhoun replied that it would take weeks to supply the tents due to the absence of a contract for the cloth. Governor Moore pointed out the existence of three factories within 25 miles of Montgomery at Tallassee, Autaugaville, and Prattville that could turn out 5,000 yards a day of tent cloth. The facility in Tallassee proved crucial to the workshops at the penitentiary.

The discovery of thirty-eight itemized wartime receipts for goods received at the Montgomery Depot from the Alabama State Peniten-

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15 Joseph W. Danielson, War’s Desolating Scourge: The Union’s Occupation of North Alabama (Lawrence, 2012), 6-7, 12, 15, 17, 20; Selcer, Civil War America, 1850-1875, 231, 251. Alabama organized 63 infantry companies, sixteen cavalry companies, and 20 artillery companies composed of 107,547 soldiers who represented 2.8 percent of the entire Confederate Army. Walter F. Fleming, Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama (New York, 1905), 27-8, 37, 79, 81-5, 149; Mary Elizabeth Massey, Ersatz in the Confederacy: Shortages and Substitutes on the Southern Homefront (Columbia, 1993), 51-3, 161. For more information on blockade runners, see Stephen R. Wise, Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War (Columbia, 1988).

tiary reveal the quantity and value of the products of inmate labor. These receipts collectively display trends in the variety of canvas goods manufactured and the impact of inflation on the price paid per item. During 1861, inmates manufactured seven types of tents along with the necessary tent poles. The prison workshops fulfilled five orders during 1861 that averaged 731 tents at a profit of $3,469.85. On September 14, 1861, Calhoun received the first order of prison goods, which consisted of 609 small tents, 151 wall tents, four Sibley tents, one large Sibley tent, one extra set of wall tent poles, eleven extra sets of small tent poles, and one sample tent. The supplies totaled $11,271.75, but after repaying a credit for 29,940 yards of canvas the penitentiary profited $6,181.95. On October 23, 1861, Calhoun purchased an additional 572 small tents, 141 wall tents, three hospital tents, seven guard tents, six Sibley tents, and seven wagon covers. These orders demonstrate that Warden Burrows focused on the production of small tents and wall tents, but the workshops also produced a limited number of larger tents. The Montgomery Depot paid $11.25 per small tent, $28 per wall tent, and $155 per hospital tent. Additionally, the penitentiary workshops produced a other goods including 24 single draws [sic], six wagon feed troughs, 103 sacks of corn, 59 collars, 2 sets of six-horse harness, and 72 spittoons. On December 28, 1861, the Confederate Ordnance Department paid warden Burrows $1,908.00 for 1272 knapsacks delivered to Capt. Charles G. Wagner at the Montgomery Arsenal. The penitentiary workshops did not supply any additional knapsacks for the remainder of the war. The depot only paid $1.50 per knapsack, while the production of small and wall tents earned the penitentiary more than ten times that amount. The manufacture of canvas items represented the most profitable goods, yet the other workshops produced a select number of other items. The total value of goods produced during 1861 amounted to $17,349.25.17

17 “A. Burrows,” Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65, NARA M346, group 109, roll 0125. According to the receipts, 383 knapsacks arrived on September 30, and 889 knapsacks arrived on December 14. Montgomery Daily Mail, November 8, 1860; Confederate States to Dr. A. Burrows, December 28, 1861, NARA M346, group 109, roll 125; Elmore County Heritage Book Committee, Heritage of Elmore County, 205.
The production of knapsacks, tents, and wagon covers required large amounts of canvas material. Unlike the state prisons in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, the Alabama State Penitentiary did not operate a textile mill. The earliest receipts from Warden Burrows to Calhoun thus indicate that the penitentiary purchased the material through the Quartermaster Department, but did not specify an initial source of the material. The manufacturing town of Tallassee, located only 22 miles east of Wetumpka, included the textile mills of Barnett, Micon, and Co., which produced hundreds of thousands of yards of canvas, osnaburg, linsey, shirting, sheeting, drilling, brown muslin, and thread for the Confederate Quartermaster Department. Correspondence from Barnett, Micon, and Co. to Major Calhoun at the Montgomery Depot stated on February 17, 1862, “We agree to continue to deliver tent cloth to the Alabama Penitentiary . . . to the extent of fifty-one thousand nine hundred and thirty-two yards at a rate of twenty-five cents per yard.” The price paid by the Confederate Quartermaster Department for tent cloth increased dramatically from $0.17 per yard in August of 1861 to $2.45 per yard in September 1864. Certainly, the fluctuating cost of canvas influenced the variety and amount of tents and wagon covers manufactured.

Warden Burrows delivered two final shipments of prison goods to the Montgomery Depot during his lease of penitentiary. The prison workshops averaged 744 tents per receipt during his lease, and the facility profited $17,349.25. It is noteworthy that the Montgomery Depot reduced the price paid for wall tents from $28 to $15.25 in February 1862, and in response the prison workshops did not supply any tents for four months (see Table 2). The price paid for wall tents gradually increased throughout the war as rampant inflation of the

18 “Barnett, Micon and Co.,” Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65, NARA M346, group 109, roll 0044. Within a month of onset of war, on May 11, 1861, Barnett, Micon, and Co. agreed to supply 50,000 yards of tent cloth and 15,000 yards of wool drilling to Richmond, Virginia. On August 24, 1861, A. Q. M. Maj. J. B. Ferguson wrote to Barnett, Micon, and Co. from Richmond to request an additional 70,000 yards of tent cloth.
### Table 2

**Tents Manufactured at the Alabama State Penitentiary, 1861-1864**

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<th>Receipt Date</th>
<th>Small Tents</th>
<th>Wall Tents</th>
<th>Large Wall Tents</th>
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<th>Sibley Tents</th>
<th>Large Sibley Tents</th>
<th>Hospital Tents</th>
<th>Guard Tents</th>
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**Totals** | 3,358 | 3,007 | 108 | 1,967 | 17 | 17 | 7 | 10 | 580 | 5,839 |

Confederate currency occurred, but the price paid for wall tents only reached $25 in the final months of production. The Montgomery Depot paid significantly higher prices for hospital tents and six-horse harnesses, yet the penitentiary workshops produced few of those items. Clearly, the hospital tents required larger amounts of canvas, while harnesses could not be mass-produced as quickly. Additionally, demand for those products may not have equaled that of the smaller tents.\textsuperscript{19}

Warden Burrows’ lease ended prematurely as a result of the dangers of employing inmates in close proximity to deadly tools and weapons. On March 15, 1862, a convicted murderer from Poland named Harman Camiskie viciously attacked and killed the warden. In the days prior to the attack, Burrows had whipped the convict for violating prison rules. Camiskie found an opportunity to enact revenge while working in the carpentry shop with an axe. He caught Burrows in a vulnerable moment while he was inspecting a harness and nearly decapitated the warden by striking him on the back of the neck. Camiskie also severely injured a Major Wood, the foreman of the woodshop. Two other inmates, Disaboro Rano and Georgie Barrett, restrained Camiskie following the attack. They received pardons and were released from the penitentiary by a special order of Governor John Gill Shorter. At Camiskie’s trial in September, he admitted to killing Borrows and claimed that he felt no remorse for the murder. On October 17, 1862, Camiskie was hanged in the prison yard with the guards and other inmates in attendance.\textsuperscript{20}

Following the murder of Warden Burrows, the commanders of the Montgomery Depot paid for two shipments of prison goods to his estate. On May 19, 1862, a Captain Copeland received a shipment of 70 wooden barrels valued at $43.75, which represented the least profitable order of the entire war. On August 4, 1862, Calhoun received 1,028 pairs of shoes from the prison workshops specifically designated for the “use of army.” The order represented the single

\textsuperscript{19} “A. Burrows,” Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65.
\textsuperscript{20} Ward and Rogers, Alabama’s Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865, 110-12; Montgomery Advertiser, March 16, 1862; Augusta Chronicle, March 17, 1862; Mobile Register, September 11, 1862, November 15, 1862; Montgomery Daily Mail, October 19, 1862.
Warden Meriwether Gaines Moore, Undated. Courtesy of Mary Peck and the Elmore County Museum, Wetumpka.
largest shipment of prison-made shoes sent to Calhoun, who paid $7,453.00 to Burrows’ estate. Conversely, an order for one hundred empty wooden boxes on February 25 provided a meager profit of only $62.50. Clearly, the barrel, box, and shoe orders initiated prior to Burrow’s death but did not arrive in Montgomery until several months later. The limited number of those goods most likely resulted from a combination of a shortage of raw materials and low number of inmates skilled in those professions.21

Following the death of Burrows, the Alabama General Assembly took control of the penitentiary. Governor Shorter appointed Dr. Moore, a previous lessee, as the new warden (see Illustration 2). In his annual message the governor valued the equipment and tools of the penitentiary at $33,649.33, and approved $5,250.00 for additional provisions and supplies. Within eight months the new warden paid the loan back and reported the penitentiary account held nearly $27,000.00. Governor Shorter acknowledged that “a handsome amount has been realized from the labor of the convicts.”22

Moore served as warden for the remainder of the Civil War. Under his guidance the inmate labor of the prison workshops continued to supply the Montgomery Depot. The available purchase receipts of the Moore era reveal a shift away from the production of small tents to “Stonewall tents” as well as the continued manufacture of wall tents (see Table 2). It remains unclear whether the penitentiary continued to purchase tent cloth from the Montgomery Depot or directly from Barnett, Micon, and Co., but the receipts no longer note payment for material on credit. The single largest receipt of the war occurred on May 20, 1862, when the Montgomery Depot received 1,023 bell tents and 283 wall tents valued at $18,637.75. The production of bell tents was short-lived; it lasted for only four months before the canvas was allocated for the manufacture of Stonewall tents and wagon covers. Four receipts during 1862 account for the manufacture of 580 “Morgan tents.” The Morgan tent was minimally profitable

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21 Ward and Rogers, *Alabama’s Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865*, 112-13; Message of Governor Shorter, 1862, ADAH.

since the Montgomery Depot paid only $7 per tent in comparison to the $15.25 paid for wall tents or $14 for Stonewall tents. For the remainder of the war the prison workshops primarily produced wall and Stonewall tents.\textsuperscript{23}

The Montgomery Depot’s records did not indicate all the units that received penitentiary goods, but it is clear that Confederate officers from other states requested materials from the depot. Calhoun’s “Abstract of Articles Issued on Special Requisitions at Montgomery in the Quarter Ending on the 31\textsuperscript{st} of October” revealed that Brig. Gen. E. D. Tracy of Georgia requested six wall tents, and Brig. Gen. S. B. Maxey of Texas requested four wall tents. From May to December 1862, the inmates manufactured an average of 748 tents per receipt for a total profit of $88,591.75. The cost of canvas from Barnett, Micon, and Co. increased from $0.20 per yard in January to $0.70 in November. Yet, the price paid per tent by the Montgomery Depot did not increase until several months into 1863.\textsuperscript{24}

As the war extended into 1863, the Union blockade of the coast tightened; the availability of raw materials gradually decreased as the inflation of Confederate currency increased. The prison maintained production of wall and Stonewall tents, but it also dramatically increased the number of wagon covers, as well as goods manufactured in the blacksmithing and carpentry workshops. During the early months of 1863 the canvas allotted to wagon covers resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of wall tents produced. The price of

\textsuperscript{23} “Mary G. Moore,” Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65, NARA M346, group 109, roll 0708. The origin of Stonewall and Morgan tents remains unclear, but the name may refer to either patentees or as a reference to the notable Confederate officers.

wall tents increased from $15.25 to $20, while the price of Stonewall tents reached $17.50. The prison workshops manufactured a limited number of large wall tents during the summer, which secured $33.33 each from the Montgomery Depot. Throughout 1863 the workshops supplied 1,342 canvas wagon covers as the price offered by the depot increased from $7 in January to $10 in October. The blacksmith and carpentry shops produced a variety of goods, including iron horseshoes, nails, and axles, as well as wooden standards and buckets. An order on May 7 included eight four-horse wagons and the furnishing of iron axles for two four-horse wagons costing $1,420.00. Clearly, the prison workshops incurred no shortage of canvas during the early months of 1863, but the sporadic production of blacksmith and carpentry goods highlighted the competition for vital raw materials. Warden Moore could not have foreseen the upcoming challenges posed by the Union Army.²⁵

In the spring of 1863, Mississippi and Alabama demonstrated uncommon interstate cooperation regarding the confinement of inmates from separate state penitentiaries. As the Union Army under the direction of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman approached Jackson, Mississippi, state officials faced a crisis over relocating the convicts in the penitentiary. Governor John J. Pettus insisted that Mississippi’s convicts would not be taken or released by Union forces. On May 2, 1863, Pettus telegraphed Alabama Governor John G. Shorter, writing that “Twenty-three (23) [sic] convicts in the Mississippi penitentiary disloyal and dangerous men. Will you receive them temporarily in your penitentiary? In case of necessity I will send them under guard. Answer by telegram John J. Pettus.” Governor Shorter immediately responded, “Send your convicts here under guard I will receive them.” Warden Moore traveled to Montgomery to consult with Governor Shorter, who suggested the Mississippi convicts be kept in solitary confinement until further notice.²⁶

²⁵ “Mary G. Moore,” Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65; Elmore County Heritage Book Committee, Heritage of Elmore County, 205.
²⁶ Ward and Rogers, “Mississippi Prisoners in the Alabama Penitentiary,” 44-6. Forty inmates received pardons and were mustered into the Confederate army, while elderly prisoners were simply released. Other inmates were distributed among the county jails.
In the midst of the transfer, Governor Shorter wrote a lengthy official correspondence to Gen. Braxton Bragg’s Chief of Staff, Brig. Gen. William Whann Mackall, on May 18, 1863, describing the manufacturing capabilities of Alabama. Shorter stated, “East of Montgomery, and a few miles north the Montgomery and West Point Railroad, and on the Tallapoosa River, is Tallassee, another manufacturing town from which the Confederate Government is drawing all the tent cloth manufactured into tents at the State Penitentiary, and from which the State has received the greatest quantity of the material for clothing her troops in the Confederate service.” Indeed, Barnett, Micon, and Co. delivered a seemingly endless supply of canvas and various other textiles to the Montgomery Depot throughout the war.27

Meanwhile, the Mississippi convicts traveled in chains under armed guard for three days, over nearly 300 miles by railroad and steamship, from Jackson to Montgomery. Governor Shorter notified Warden Moore when the inmates arrived in the state capital on May 8, and within two days they joined the prison population of Alabama. The penitentiary inspectors objected to Shorter’s decision and noted the absence of any provision in Alabama law that permitted prisoners convicted in another state to serve their sentences within the state. The inspectors suggested that Warden Moore held no legal standing to release, control, or employ the Mississippi prisoners.28

Throughout the transfer of the Mississippi prisoners, production continued at the penitentiary workshops. On June 2, 1863, Calhoun received three large tents designated “for General Johnston,” and two large tents “for General Adams.” The second largest receipt of

the war, on June 30, consisted of several hundred tents and wagon covers, 20 four-horse wagons at a cost of $175 each, and five sets of iron axles that accounted for a profit of $16,395. It is noteworthy that the high water mark of penitentiary workshop production coincided with the Confederate losses at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in the early days of July 1863.29

As the tide turned against the Confederacy, the need for additional soldiers led Governor Shorter to consider pardoning Alabama inmates who agreed to serve in the Confederate army. Governor Pettus did not allow the offer to be extended to the Mississippi prisoners. Throughout the summer and fall Warden Moore regularly conferred with Shorter regarding the treatment, work, and release of the Mississippi prisoners. On August 29, 1863, the Alabama legislature authorized the detention and supervision of convicts from other states. After nearly ten months the warden released the Mississippi prisoners from solitary confinement. Nonetheless, due to the growing shortages of raw materials, they never labored in the workshops.30

A significant decline in production occurred during the fall of 1863 (see Table 2). The cost of canvas from Barnett, Micon, and Co. increased from $0.70 per yard in June to $1.00 per yard by November. The increase in the cost of canvas directly affected the production of tents and wagon covers during the exceptionally cold fall and winter of 1863. The penitentiary workshops manufactured 3,181 small tent poles and 1,541 wall tent poles during the lull in tent production. A correspondence from Calhoun to Maj. A. M. Barbour on September 21, 1863, stated, “Can furnish neither blankets, shoes, nor tents. None on hand.” The final receipt of 1863, on October 30, supplied 123 wall tents, 134 Stonewall tents, and 100 wagon covers. The monthly shipments of prison goods throughout 1863 averaged only 372 tents, which was a dramatic decline from the average of 748

from the previous year. Yet, the inflation of Confederate currency and combined sale of tents, wagon covers, and various items from the blacksmith and carpentry shops amounted to $129,429.52 for the year.\textsuperscript{31}

The penitentiary workshops only supplied goods to the Montgomery Depot for three months in 1864, as the cost of canvas from Barnett, Micon, and Co. continued to rise. The price for wall tents increased from $20 to $25, large wall tents rose from $33.33 to $50, and Stonewall tents escalated from $17.50 to $22.50. Still, throughout the early months of 1864 the number of wall tents manufactured decreased, with only 38 produced in February. Warden Moore noted an increasing scarcity of raw materials and a rising number of idle inmates. The carpentry shop only manufactured 104 water buckets from January to March. The final receipt for penitentiary goods, on March 31, documented the largest delivery of canvas goods, consisting of 288 Stonewall tents, 136 wall tents, 200 wagon covers, and fifteen large wall tents. (see Table 2). During 1864 the penitentiary workshops only averaged 325 tents, and the receipts totaled $64,195.00. Warden Moore averaged 475 tents per receipt as compared to Warden Burrows 744 during 1861. Throughout the war Barnett, Micon, and Co. supplied 1,020,432 yards of canvas to the Montgomery Depot, valued at $640,855.00. Remarkably, the cost of canvas increased from $0.17 per yard in August 1861, to $2.45 per yard in September 1864. Clearly, the company operated as the largest regional supplier of canvas, and its proximity to the penitentiary facilitated the production of thousands of tents in the prison workshops.\textsuperscript{32}


While the Alabama State Penitentiary manufactured a variety of military goods, delivering those supplies to soldiers in the field was another matter. Confederate Quartermaster General A. C. Myers began structuring a basic system of distributing military supplies while in Montgomery during April 1861. He appointed assistant quartermasters responsible for purchasing and manufacturing military supplies in Charleston, Montgomery, New Orleans, and San Antonio on April 2. Clearly, the Montgomery Depot became operational by the summer 1861, with Calhoun in command of the facility. Yet General Myers did not issue a circular until March 24, 1863 that outlined the distribution of goods and location of main depots. In August 1863, General Alexander R. Lawton became the second Quartermaster General of the Confederacy. Lawton instructed Assistant Quartermaster George W. Cunningham of Atlanta to inspect all the depots to “Ascertain how far the resources of the country have been made productive.” Cunningham’s report revealed chaotic conditions existed in the departments across the Lower South. He determined that the Confederate government only obtained eight million of the twenty million yards of cloth produced annually.\(^{33}\)

The inadequate and disjointed system of railroads in the Lower South complicated the delivery of supplies to and from the depots. In 1860 Alabama operated 643 miles of railroads, which varied in quality and lacked a uniform gauge of railing. At least sixteen different railroads operated within the state, yet Montgomery was not completely connected to Selma to the west or Mobile to the south. Existing lines connected the capital to Atlanta and Columbus, Georgia, to the east and Pensacola, Florida, to the south. Critical gaps posed major obstacles to railroad transportation across Alabama, especially the incomplete central route from Meridian, Mississippi, to Selma and Montgomery. The Alabama State Penitentiary in Wetumpka benefitted from its location on the Coosa River, and

prison goods could be shipped the short distance to the Montgomery Depot by riverboat or wagon, but further transportation of supplies to soldiers depended on the chaotic railways. Alabama’s railroads also suffered from excessive wear from extraordinary traffic and a shortage of maintenance material. Union Brig. Gen. Alexander Asboth on September 11, 1864 noted a typical wartime dilemma, “The Montgomery, Opelika, and West Point Railroad was repaired but again partially destroyed by Sherman’s force.” By the summer of 1864 several Union generals targeted Alabama’s railroads for destruction.\textsuperscript{34}

The Alabama State Penitentiary was fortunate that production remained unaffected by invading Union forces until the final year of the war. During the winter of 1864 to 1865, nearly 13,000 Union cavalrymen gathered at Gravelly Springs in northwestern Alabama under the command of Brig. General James H. Wilson, who led a destructive raid through the middle of the state along three routes towards Montgomery. The purpose of the raid was to destroy or occupy Confederate stores, depots, factories, mines, and ironworks, as well as to create a diversion for a Union campaign targeting Mobile. In mid-April 1865, Warden Moore fled Wetumpka ahead of advancing Federal troops. On April 13, 1865, a skirmish occurred at Wetumpka. Captain F. S. Whiting with Companies H and M of the Fourth Iowa Cavalry proceeded to Grey’s Ferry on the Tallapoosa River with orders to destroy the bridge over the Coosa River at Wetumpka. Captain Whiting’s soldiers were unsuccessful in destroying the bridge, but they assisted Major John F. Weston and a small detachment of the Fourth Kentucky Cavalry in capturing three steamboats and their cargoes of 60 bales of cotton, 12,000 pounds of bacon, 1,100 sacks of

corn, and 50 sacks of salt. Whiting, Weston, and their troops engaged in a heavy skirmish with the Confederate Eighth Alabama Cavalry, who were driven from their camp near Wetumpka.\textsuperscript{35}

Another skirmish that directly threatened the prison occurred at Wetumpka on May 4, 1865, which coincided with the surrender of the Confederate forces in the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and eastern Louisiana. Details of the skirmish are not available, but Union soldiers of the Sixteenth Army Corps under the command of Maj. Gen. Andrew J. Smith occupied central Alabama in early May 1865. It remains unclear whether Union soldiers under the command of Whiting, Weston, or a subordinate officer of General Wilson opened the doors of the penitentiary, but what is known is that Union forces freed the remaining Alabama and Mississippi prisoners. An inmate named Marooney refused to leave and protected the property and machinery until the appropriate Alabama officials arrived and resumed control.\textsuperscript{36}

After the war, Moore resumed his position as warden until June of 1866, when Governor Robert M. Patton transferred the lease to Smith and McMillan. The inmate population of the penitentiary shifted dramatically from a white majority before the war to African-American majority afterwards. The Emancipation Proclamation and the 14th Amendment guaranteed citizenship to African Americans, which allowed their prosecution in the courts and confinement in the penitentiary. Governor Patton approved a loan of $1,500 to the new lessees to repair the machinery at the prison workshops, but few repairs occurred and the loan remained an outstanding debt. Poor


management by the new lessees led to the dismantling of machinery in the workshops along with a considerable financial loss to the state.  

Following the war, the General Assembly also allowed the penitentiary lessees to hire out inmates outside of the penitentiary, which began the system of convict leasing in Alabama during Reconstruction. The convict leasing system was profitable and assisted in rebuilding railroads destroyed during the war. Inmates worked at farm camps and in coalmines operated by the state. On July 5, 1866, Governor Patton appointed Baker Kyle as Inspector of the Penitentiary. He became the first high ranking African American prison official in Alabama history. The convict leasing system remained in operation until legislation passed in 1923 prohibited the leasing of any state convict.

The Alabama State Penitentiary operated as a house of incarceration for nearly 100 years. The opportunity to sell goods manufactured in the prison workshops to the Montgomery Depot during the Civil War allowed the facility to finally become a profitable enterprise. The receipts from the Montgomery Depot reveal the scale of the production of military supplies at the prison workshops. Those receipts document that 13,895 tents, 2,712 wagon covers, and 1,272 knapsacks were manufactured during the war (see Table 2). The inmates produced a wide variety of other wartime supplies, but those items were not supplied in regular or large quantities. The Montgomery Depot receipts document that the sale of prison goods from the Alabama State Penitentiary amounted to $299,565.58 during the Civil War.

38 Elmore County Heritage Book Committee, *Heritage of Elmore County*, 205; For more information on convict leasing in Alabama following the Civil War see, Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia, 1996); Milfred C. Fierce, *Slavery Revisited: Blacks and the Southern Convict Lease System, 1865-1933* (New York, 1994).
The Great Flood of the Alabama State Penitentiary, April 8, 1938.

Courtesy of the Elmore County Museum, Wetumpka.
The whirlwind of the Civil War engulfed soldiers, civilians, slaves, and prisoners in Alabama. Confederate military demands and the Union naval blockade required the domestic production of a myriad of supplies from uniforms, blankets, and tents to wagons, ammunition, and firearms. The mass production of military supplies at the Alabama State Penitentiary was part of the Confederacy’s effort to mobilize and fight a modern war. Historians of the Confederate home front have focused on the experiences of loyal citizens, Unionists, indigent families, women, children, slaves, and free people of color. The wartime contributions of inmates at state penitentiaries, however, remained hidden within the walls.

The General Assembly’s decision to adopt the Auburn system of prison management proved valuable to Alabama and the Confederacy as a whole. Antebellum manufacturing gradually increased in Alabama, and across the south, but on the eve of the war southern industry remained limited and localized. The Alabama State Penitentiary workshops struggled to compete with private industry prior to the war, but they became a profitable supplier of tents, wagon covers, shoes, and other supplies to the Confederate army following the onset of hostilities. The prison’s proximity to raw materials in Tallassee and the main Confederate depot in Montgomery allowed the workshops to flourish during the war. From September 1861 to March 1864, large amounts of prison goods arrived at the Montgomery Depot nearly every month. The inmates offered a cheap, reliable, and controllable source of labor to manufacture necessary items. The Confederate military contracted with the prison workshops for crucial supplies, while the lessees and wardens focused primarily on profit. The wartime supplies manufactured at the Alabama State Penitentiary furthered Confederate soldiers’ ability to contend with environmental hardships that exacerbated the leading killer of the

*Elmore County*, 206-7. On January 23, 1931, a fire destroyed a portion of the penitentiary. On April 8, 1938, a devastating flood further damaged the facility. By 1941 the penitentiary only held women, and a new women’s prison was constructed and renamed the Julia Tutwiler Prison in December 1942. The original penitentiary sat abandoned and portions of the land were sold by 1945. The site, used by the State Department of Transportation as a storage lot until the 1960s, is designated by a historical marker.
war, disease. Ultimately, the workshops were not capable of supplying all of the tents, wagon covers, shoes, or other materials required for Alabama’s Confederate soldiers to conduct the war. Yet, the inmates of the Alabama State Penitentiary significantly contributed to the war effort and the Alabama Treasury throughout nearly the entire conflict.
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