

Brentsville Jailor

The Brentsville jailor was not the best job but certainly one with job security. His pay for the most part was regulated by the state of Virginia. Over the years, each jailor found creative ways to supplement his earnings.

In the 1830s, he was allowed 21 cents for every person he received into the jail when first committed, and another 21 cents when the prisoner was released from his custody. By 1887, his fees for these services had increased to 25 cents for both actions. Additionally, the jailor also received 40 cents per day for “dieting” each prisoner but only 30 cents each if he had more than three prisoners and 25 cents each if he had more than 10. The allowance to the jailor for the maintenance and care of a “lunatic” could not exceed 50 cents per day and not to exceed 30 dollars a year for clothing. This was a generous amount for clothing as there is nothing in the records to indicate the jailor ever spent more than 15 dollars a year on any inmate. Sometimes, these inmates were in the county jail for months as the state asylums were always filled to capacity. He also received pay for such services as providing ice to the court in the summer, wood for the stove in the winter, and unlocking the courthouse for church, as well as the maintenance and supplies used at the jail.

The jailor submitted his expense account monthly to the court to be verified and paid. These submissions were usually on small pieces of paper and not in any consistent format. As no ledger was provided and minimal auditing was performed, overpayments and duplicate payments were made. It is not known if the overcharges were creative bookkeeping or honest mistakes. The only times on record that the jailor’s expenses were challenged by the court were in 1856 and 1859. In 1856, a \$35.50 claim for the nursing and dieting of Mary Kehoe and Eliza Rainey in jail for lunacy and, in 1859, for the care of the condemned slave Lucy and slave Brent. In both cases, a sworn affidavit was signed by Mary A. Goodwin that she had provided the care for the prisoners. It appears that Mary had worked at the jail for years, when both her husband and son-in-law were jailors.

George Millan appears to be the first jailor at the Brentsville jail and John Tyler, the last. The first inmate, as far as this writer can determine, was Enoch Calvert, a man arrested for highway robbery. From that point on, for over 70 years, the jailor was not without work. In just the first four years of the jail, he housed four prisoners being tried for murder, slaves of both sexes accused of felonies, debtors, people adjudged to be lunatics, the often incarcerated Manassa Russell, and just the run-of-the-mill inmates. Millan and the other jailors who followed must have found it occasionally difficult to keep the races and genders separated, as there were as many as 10 or more prisoners at the same time but only six cells to house them.

Three of the first four murder cases generated a lot of press and changed Brentsville into a place where the hotels and barrooms were always full when the court was in session. James Burgess, the first person to be charged and tried for murder, has the dubious distinction of being the first and only white person hung in Brentsville. The second murder trial was Dennis McCarty, a wealthy and controversial man from Loudoun County. He killed a very likeable

James Beatty and was sentenced to the penitentiary. The other two people charged with murder were Edward Potter and William Winkfield.

In the hundreds of cases of the people who occupied the jail as prisoners in the years that followed, not much was written about the jailor. He was just a man in the shadows who submitted his expenses about every month to the court for payment.

Ron Turner