

Special Writer for Oregonian Upholds Head of Penitentiary

Legislature, Construction of Building and Subordinate Officials Are Blamed For Recent Outbreak

(The following signed article appeared in the August 20th number of the Oregonian, Newport, and is an explanatory and of interest on account of the opportunity of the writer to judge and size up the situation.)

The most sensational news published in Oregon since the escape of Tracey and Merrill in 1902 from the Oregon penitentiary at Salem broke August 12 at the same place with the killing of two guards, Hofman and Sweeney, the serious wounding of another, Savage, the killing of Convict Bert "Oregon" Jones, the slight wounding of Convict Tom Murray and the escape of Murray, Ellsworth Kelley and James Willos. The facts in this now notorious case have been pub-

lished as they have been ascertained.

The writer passed three days and two nights in the warden's office at the penitentiary, occasionally going out to interview possemen when clues of apparent interest turned up, as he was one of The Oregonian's reporters assigned to the story. While he was there he had an opportunity to listen to various discussions between the warden, A. M. Dalrymple, Governor Pierce and subordinate officials, and to inspect the premises and converse with the warden, whose shifts on duty last about 20 hours daily in the warden's chair.

There yet remains many things

to be cleared up and this contains no brief for Dalrymple, responsible for the penitentiary administration, but may shed light on points not yet generally understood by the public at large.

When committees are appointed to inspect the state prison, when men of influence visit the prison, and when anybody not familiar to the convicts appear inside the premises, the prisoners, naturally anxious to create a good impression, arouse sympathy and possibly pave the way to a pardon or more lenient rules, behave so well that their conduct would be fitting in the most exacting surroundings.

About 500 men are confined and of these there are 40 who, according to those in control, are as desperate as the escaped men. Thus the guards are in the position of men handling high explosives, in constant danger of an explosion. The psychological effect of confining men is to make their wits sharper and their acts more cunning as their only thoughts are of release or escape.

There are the usual forms of punishment to undergo for infraction of rules and then there are men who, by their good behavior and proper conduct, have been made "trusties" after sufficient time has elapsed to get a reasonable knowledge of their character. The flax yards and lack of funds for employees make it necessary at Salem to appoint more than the average number of "trusties" in order to conduct the various departments. Gardeners, farmers, stable and garage men, one or two

bookkeepers and others at present enjoy these special privileges. Special privileges to one convict means that all not receiving the same are envious, and, led by the hard-boiled chronic trouble-makers, unprivileged convicts devise methods of making the "trusties" miserable; it may be a slur cast, a bump against a wall or a spit in their coffee or soup when the guard is not looking, etc. "Trusties" should be confined separately as they have shown that they desire to act right and give no trouble.

A man's crime does not decide his character. A murderer may have no criminal instincts. He may have lost his temper in a fight over his sweetheart; whereas a thief may plan always to get something for nothing regardless of the inconvenience and suffering he may cause innocent persons. Second degree murderers seem to make the best behaved convicts.

The Oregon state penitentiary is so far behind the times in everything that the legislature is to blame. It is probably only a question of time before there will be a general delivery of all the convicts who wish to depart. There is a single, instead of a double gate and clearway, one door automatically closed when the other is open, in the fence leading into the grounds and part occupied by the warden and administration, which is connected by open door with the arsenal and turnkey's room. The arsenal is simply several closets with steel doors in the wall of the turnkey's room. Unlike elsewhere, guards going to towers or from them pass inside the prison yard.

The turnkey and warden alike are subject to attacks from "trusties" and any visitors; and the identification of visitors, who might be dangerous ex-convicts or unknown crooks, is impossible as, like in other state prisons, there are visiting hours. A group overpowering the warden or turnkey can take both the arsenal keys and the keys opening the door leading from the turnkey's room into the interior of the prison where the 500 convicts are confined.

Unlike other penitentiaries there is no guard's post at the gate in Salem and the front part con-

taining the warden's office and directly in front of that is obscured from the two guard towers, as was shown when the four convicts slid down a rope unobserved. That the arsenal should be in a separate building outside, that the administration building should be outside the prison and that the "trusties" and first-term prisoners should be segregated from the other prisoners and their evil influence, has been advocated by Warden Dalrymple and other wardens who preceded him.

The guards are paid only \$90 a month and that is hardly sufficient to attract many able-bodied, reliable men, especially as the state pays no pensions to their families if guards are killed or injured while on duty. While the warden's salary is small it is greater than that of subordinates and therefore any guard might be ambitious to succeed the warden if trouble should arise and the warden be forced to resign. That is inside politics. A promise to desperate convicts might easily start trouble of this nature.

In the present administration such politics have been suspected by the warden, whose long experience in the commissary department under other administrations before he became warden, have made it easy for Dalrymple to detect irregularities inside the penitentiary walls.

Dalrymple stayed at his post almost incessantly for five days and nights, directing through giving out information to various headquarters of possemen, such as Captain Hendricks of the militia, Deputy Warden J. W. Little, various sheriffs and chiefs of police, game wardens who voluntarily enlisted in the search and others of no official standing. He was impartial to criticism, doing what he thought was best. Across the

street his wife was in danger of a nervous breakdown and needed his attention, but he stayed at his post and never relinquished his authority as administrator of the state's obsolete penal institution.

In conversation with the warden the writer developed points of interest overlooked by those prone to criticize. The parole officer and the guard on No. 7 tower have resigned. Tom White has not yet explained his attitude in the matter to the writer's knowledge and the guard on No. 2 tower, said to have deserted his post, might clear up some matters. Let it be hoped that the truth will come out and the guards which behaved well will not be blamed for any who acted otherwise in the greatest outrage in the history of the Oregon penitentiary.

JOSEPH PATTERSON.
August 19, 1925.

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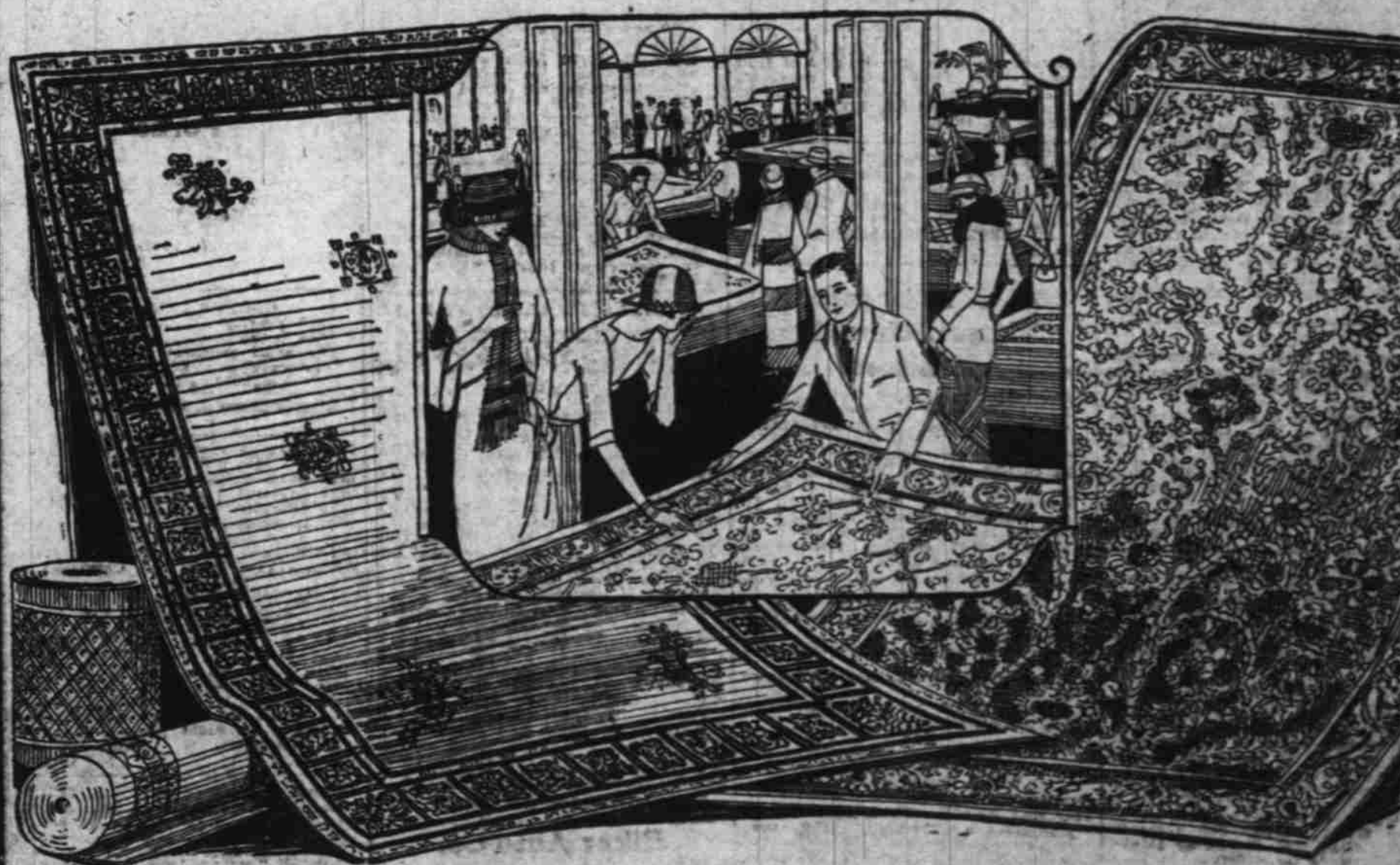
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