

🗝️ OLD IDAHO PENITENTIARY TIMELINE

1863 – Idaho organizes as a territory with the capital at Lewiston. Act signed by President Lincoln. County jails at Lewiston and Idaho City are designated as territorial prison locations. Territorial capital moves from Lewiston to Boise in 1864.

1869 – By Act of Congress, land one mile east of Boise is set aside for territorial prison. Site is chosen because of the nearby sandstone quarry, which provides material for additional buildings and work for convicts at prison.

1870 – In April, construction begins on the territorial prison. Work is completed in January of 1871. There are 42 cells for prisoners.

1872 – The first 11 prisoners are incarcerated at the territorial prison in March.

1878 – Tambiago, a Bannock Indian from Fort Hall, is convicted and executed at the prison for a federal crime of killing Alexander Rhoden, a teamster. Until 1899, all other executions are carried out at the county seats.

1885 – Youngest inmate, James Oscar Baker, age 10, enters prison. He receives a pardon after serving less than one year for manslaughter.

1887 – First female inmate, Henebe, a Blackfoot Indian is sent to the prison for manslaughter.



1889 – Congress appropriates money for construction of a second cellhouse at the prison. Upon its completion, there are 42 additional cells for prisoners.

1890 – Idaho joins the Union as the 43rd state; Territorial Prison becomes State Prison.

1894 – Administration building and the wall are completed at the prison.

1898 – The prison dining hall, designed by inmate George Hamilton, is completed. Hamilton receives early parole and commits suicide in Nampa.

1899 – Construction begins on a larger third cellhouse. This cellhouse is later divided into two cellhouses (completed in 1906 and 1928).

1902 – Inmate Josie Kensler causes political scandal by claiming warden forced her to have an abortion.

1905 – Construction begins for new state capitol building with sandstone quarried by convicts at the prison quarry.

- 1906** – Female prisoners are moved into the warden’s former house and a wall to enclose the area is constructed.
- 1908** – Harry Orchard begins life imprisonment for assassinating former governor Frank Steunenberg. Orchard serves 46 years and dies in 1954 at age 86.
- 1920** – New Women’s Ward dormitory with space for 14 females is completed.
- 1921** – Lyda Southard, “Idaho’s Lady Bluebeard,” begins a 20 year sentence for poisoning her fourth husband. She escapes in 1931, but is recaptured after 15 months.
- 1923** – Solitary Confinement Building is constructed for punishment of inmates who break prison rules. Shirt factory building is constructed at the prison and used until 1933, when interstate commerce laws force its closure. Building is then used for many other purposes.
- 1926** – “Siberia” cells for individual inmates are added to solitary confinement.
- 1931** – Sallyport is constructed and tunnel area through Administration Building is closed off with doors. Prior to this, the only entrance to prison yard was through tunnel area.
- 1935** – A near-riot in the dining hall is first major disturbance at the prison.
- 1950** – A fifth cellhouse is constructed to house 320 inmates and ease overcrowding.
- 1952** – Riot begins in multi-purpose building when four “ringleaders” are placed in solitary confinement for infraction of rules. Riot lasts five hours, until firing of tear gas.
- 1954** – Sixth cellhouse, Maximum Security, is constructed with a gallows room on the second floor.
- 1963** – Idaho state legislature appropriates funds for a new correctional facility to be located south of Boise.
- 1966** – A non-violent protest strike, involving 300 convicts, lasts one day. The riot begins after the Commissary is closed because of counterfeit prison money circulating within the prison.
- 1971** – Prisoners riot and during the riot, a fire destroys the Social Services building.
- 1973** – In March, inmates riot and the prison dining hall and chapel are gutted by fire. Prisoners begin move to completed part of new correctional facility south of Boise.
- 1973** – In December, the last remaining prisoners at the Old Penitentiary are transferred to new correctional facility south of Boise.
- 1974** – The Old Idaho Penitentiary is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its historical significance as a Territorial Prison.
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