ANGOLA — Landscaped grounds, new and renovated buildings, and a large staff of professional security personnel at the Louisiana State Penitentiary here today present a stark contrast to the state prison which began decades ago.

Gone are the dilapidated, overcrowded dormitories, the infamous Red Hat Cellblock which housed dangerous and unruly convicts, the sugarcane fields and mill, whipping blocks and armed inmate guards.

But today’s state penitentiary, now considered by some state corrections officials to be one of the safest and most progressive in the country, has a history tainted with bloodshed and political and administrative corruption. It is only within the last 10 years that it finally has attained credibility.

Louisiana’s first state prison was opened in Baton Rouge in 1835, thus providing convicts a break from being incarcerated.
Angola

(Continued from 1A)

"Stone Henry," according to Carleton Between 1910 and 1914, when Puys was elected governor, a number of changes took place at Angola. Deciding to cut expenses, Puys fired most of the "free" guards in 1913 and replaced them with armed convicts, including Henry L. Long as prison manager to be trustworthy. The controversial inmate-guard practice was continued at Angola until the early 1930s. During the 1910s, the financially beleaguered prison system was referred to by the state as a "pernicious grant." Puys continued to play an active role in the operations of the prison, and the state continued to be reluctant to fund the opposite correctional system.

When Gov. Henry P. Long took office, the state's leasing system was in its infancy. Seeking to entice the prison system to a state-owned system, the state considered opening a new prison - naming the prison in private firm. While in 1914, he leased the prison in a new facility on a 10-year lease which he would serve to the state government, but convicted criminals as well.

By 1916, Governor Long's called for the leasing of the penal system. A state-owned prison was to be engaged in a new venture - leasing the prisons to private firms. In 1914, the state leased the prison to the state's leasing system, which was to be administered by the Department of Corrections. However, after less than 10 years of the lease system's beginning, the state became concerned that the prison, which was disclosed in 1914 as an "inadequate" state prison, was not only a poor prison, but a "dangerous" one.

The leasing of the penal system resulted in a virtual legislature for the convicts, especially during the 1920s. As Mark T. Carleton, in his book "Prison and Punishment: A History of the Louisiana State Penitentiary," said the levee system opened the door to incredible possibilities for James, who leased the state prisoners out as not being free. James and his business associates used the convicts to raise and railroad construction projects, and by 1917, they had established a virtual legislature as field officials.

Carleton wrote that his research discovered the convict-lease system but "to the degree of conviction, the less" was spent for clothing, food and shelter for the convicts to lessen expenses; James worked the men, some women and juveniles, from daylight to dark, and discipline was more than brutal.

The Baton Rouge-based prisons was taken over by James, who leased men to convict私营 to camps at the Angola plantation and to other leases, including leas a cane and railroad work sites.

While the state considered a prison system an "expensive luxury," James already used the system to make money.

Although official information and statistics collected during the convict-lease years are scarce, Carleton wrote that between 1917 and 1918, when the state ended the lease program, some 10,000 were leasing per year.

The convict-lease system officially ended with the state's leasing system in 1919, but was totally abolished by 1921. The result was the convict-lease system was a failure in operating the Angola State Penitentiary

In 1922, an additional 10,000 acres of adjacent land was purchased, increasing the plantation's size to exactly 18,400 acres.

The Baton Rouge facility was kept as a hospital, receiving stations and maximum-security facility until it was sold in the state in 1918. Angola then became the primary state facility until the convict-lease system was ended. Between 1910 and 1914, the Angola plantation was leased to the United States and remained a prison.

In 1916, Governor Long's leasing scheme was abandoned in the state's leasing scheme. In 1917, the state ended the leasing scheme, and Angola was purchased by the state for $25,000. In 1918, the state purchased the Angola plantation, and Angola became the primary state facility.

Between 1928 and 1940, when Long's leasing system was ended, the state leased Angola, including a license-plate factory, sugar mill, cannery and abattoir, according to state records. By 1928, sugar production was the main concern to the state.

The range of inmate guards was expanded, and Carleton estimated that the number of convicts leased from 10,000 in 1917 to 20,000 in 1928. The state continued to lease Angola, and Angola was labeled "The Heart of the South." During the 1940s, industry was established at Angola and included a food processing plant, sugar mill, and food and a food processing mill.

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During the 1948-52 term of Gov. Earl K. Long.

Not an advocate of the prison system, and resentful of the financial burden placed upon the state, Earl Long did little to improve the squalid living conditions and harsh work days at the prison, according to Carleton.

But in 1951 national attention was focused on Angola when a group of inmates, primarily white inmates, began assembling the teardrop in their cells to protest against the brutality and adverse living and working conditions at the prison. The self-mutilation spread to as many as 37 inmates, and Earl Long was forced to appoint a citizens committee to investigate conditions at the prison.

The committee determined the slashings were the result of "physical, mental, emotional and moral" brutality, according to newspaper accounts. The committee made 20 recommendations including the establishment of vocational training and education programs and a post-penal supervision program; the appointment of a qualified penologist to be placed in charge of Angola; the abolishment of corporal punishment and use of dungeons; the relocation of the women's prison, which consisted of one overcrowded, dilapidated dormitory at Angola; and the segregation of first offenders and "Incorrigibles, perverts, and other abnormal inmates."

When he took office in 1952, Gov. Robert F. Kennon began incorporating some of the committee's recommendations, increased the prison's budget and obtained a $4 million bond issue to finance needed construction at the prison.

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With an inmate population of about 2,600, Walker said, they witnessed a change in attitude by the inmates when education and training programs were implemented.

Walker, after the resignation of Sigler, served as warden from 1958 until his resignation in 1964.

Although he and Sigler were able to improve working, living and training conditions at Angola, and were implementing some of the committee's recommendations following the head-slashing incidents, the correction was short-lived.

When Gov. Jimmie Davis took office in 1956, Walker said, "that's when we had a lot of problems." Not an advocate of the prison, Davis cut the budget at Angola, and Walker said that things slowly began deteriorating to the point "where it looked like it had in the '40s."

"We already had a problem hiring good guards, because of the low pay and the problem and the low pay, and I remember us doing long stretches of 12-13-hour days," Walker said. "Sigler and the rest of us had tried to do our best, but it was impossible. The state was broke, there was a lot of politics involved."

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