# Fuqua Liked by Convicts For Making Prison Life Comfortable As Possible

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*The New Orleans Item* Thursday; January 31, 1924 (P. 14)

*This is the third of a series of three intimate stories about Henry L. Fuqua, his life and his home, by a member of The Item Staff.*

"Yes, my life has been pretty well bound up with the state penitentiary, with my grandfather, my father and my husband all holding positions as manager of it," said Mrs. Henry L. Fuqua as she sat in the comfortable little sitting room of the Fuqua family home on St. Napoleon street, Baton Rouge, La. There was a grate fire burning cheerily, although the window facing the sun was open and a soft breeze stirred the curtains. Bookcases, filled with well-worn volumes, were there, and Mrs. Fuqua's work basket, and Nunky, the old fox terrier, curled up on a cushion.

"I'll tell you as much as I can about the penitentiary and my husband's work there. Just as long as you don't puzzle me with questions about politics and the issues of the election. I am glad to answer you. But I don't know anything about politics and I'm not ashamed of not knowing. I'm not one of these women who think they know as much about running the state as the men. I'm a wife and mother and I'll help my husband all I can without taking any active part in politics.

**Abolished The Stripe**

"As to the penitentiary, one of the first things Mr. Fuqua did when he was appointed to office by Governor Pleasant in 1916 was to abolish the stripe and adopt an ordinary khaki uniform. Then he established the honor system and by that the sentences are shortened and a better spirit prevails among the men.

"Just think of all the stories you read in the papers, of mutinies among convicts in other states. You'll find them tunneling their way out and making their escape. In Kentucky, only a few months ago, prisoners barricaded themselves in the dining room of the jail and fought off the guards for days. Things like that don't happen in a penitentiary where there is the honor system.

"You see, Mr. Fuqua believes that there are lots worse crimes than murder. Murder is generally committed when a man is insane with anger or with drink. Having a horrible temper doesn't necessarily mean that a man has criminal instincts. And a man who is sentenced to life, and put on his honor in the penitentiary, and knows that by good behavior he is going to get out years earlier, will act like a man, honorably.

**Clean Clothes and Baths**

"And Mr. Fuqua believes too, that clean clothes and baths and good food are going to make a convict feel more like a man and less like a criminal, so he started in to work for these things.

"As soon as he was appointed to office, and orders came to scrap the old penitentiary, which stood in the city here, where the Community club now stands, Mr. Fuqua was told that he could have all the brick and materials which he could obtain and carry away within a year.

"This saved him lots of expense in building the receiving station on the 40 acres of land outside of the city. He had plenty of convict labor, and, with the bricks saved from the old penitentiary, the building of the new receiving station was constructed. They were able to use all the slate, the iron bars, and lots of other materials."

But the period which Mrs. Fuqua remembers most vividly in connection with her husband's work is the time of the flood at Angola two years ago.

**Strain Terrific**

"From the very first moment of danger, Mr. Fuqua was on the job at Angola, fighting with all the men and materials at his disposal to keep back the river. The penitentiary had had a large debt, and he had decreased that, but he knew that, in case of flood, there would be a tremendous loss, and more money would have to be raised to rebuild and replant the plantation. He was away from home for a month, fighting night and day, and the strain was terrific. But it was a losing fight. When he finally came home, he looked broken, and my heart ached for him."

Angola, one of the three plantations which make up the state penitentiary, and which is 60 miles north of Baton Rouge, is the only one of the three which takes care of both men and women. It was originally purchased by the board of control, which took the place of the office of manager in 1901, as a cotton plantation, but, owing to the boll weevil invasion, it was necessary to change it from cotton to cane. In 1911 a huge sugar house was built, with a capacity for grinding and manufacturing from 1,000 to 1,200 tons of cane a day. It is one of the largest and most modern plants of its size in the state.

**Knows How To Work**

"But doesn't Mr. Fuqua have to know a tremendous lot about plantation work and chemistry and market conditions to run three huge plantations and make them pay?" Mrs. Fuqua was asked.

"Of course he does," his wife said proudly, "but what especially fits him for the job is the fact that he's a first class business man and has a tremendous knowledge of human psychology, although he would call it human nature. And he knows what work is, too, and can pitch in with the rest of them.

"Just look at the way he had to meet the crisis that the flood made in the affairs of the penitentiary! Out there working night and day with the waters of the flood creeping up on them hour by hour. And when they saw that their fight was hopeless and that they would have to desert the plantation, he gave up in time to get a steamship there to take the convicts down the river and to save the stock and the equipment. Of course, a great deal was lost.

Tools had been left in the cane where the laborers had dropped them, and, of course, all the crops were lost.

"The furnishings of the houses were strung up to the ceilings or roofs of the buildings, so they were saved.

**Flood Subsides**

"When the flood finally subsided and the work of rebuilding was begun, it was found that most of the houses, aside from being muddy and water-soaked, were intact.

"Mr. Fuqua, in spite of the nerve-racking toil he had been through, even found something to laugh about. But he laughed more to keep me from despairing about him than anything else. I remember he told me about an old mother pig, and her entire litter, floating unconcernedly down the river to their new home, grunting, happy and comfortable. Floods were nothing in their lives. Chickens and mules and pigs and cows, everything was saved. And the convicts all helped with a will, and not one of them escaped or tried to.

"The entire camp was moved to the property where the new university now is being built, and the men were put to work there, building new quarters. The women were removed to the receiving station so that they would have shelter and would not have to undergo the hardships of the men."

How tents were thrown up, how land was cleared, food and shelter found for the stock as well as the men, how all the farmers from the neighborhood gladly contributed everything they could in the way of machinery and help for the planting of new crops, not of cane, but of vegetables and sweet potatoes for the men—this was an engrossing story.

**Can't Drive Auto**

We visited the receiving station that afternoon to see with our own eyes the work which had been done. "I'd be glad to take you out there myself," Mrs. Fuqua told us, "but I don't know how to drive—that's old-fashioned of me too, isn't it?—and the boy is off today. I've visited the place often with my husband, and I find the work engrossing."

It was with much interest that we took a cab and drove over roads, which were yellow in the sun, and dappled along those stretches where magnolia trees spread their shade.

The receiving station, situated three miles east of the city limits, has one long building in the shape of an ell. In the bend of the ell is the office, like a light house with windows on all sides. It is fitted with several high old desks at which it would be impossible to sit except on the very highest stools, and several old cupboards which any collector of antiques would appreciate.

Captain M. E. Garrison, who has charge of the station, met us at the huge iron gate and took us through the garden into his office. He mourned the loss of his flowers through the cold spell several weeks before and assured us that our visit should have been in the spring.

Captain Garrison is a young man with a lean tanned face and steady eyes. He lives in a little cottage to the south of the station with his wife and child. At the time of our visit there were 49 white men at the station and 48 negroes.

**Captain Likes Work**

Captain Garrison likes his work and is proud to have served under Mr. Fuqua. "Since I've been here I've had 289 men pass through my hands to the various plantations and I have never lost a man. All the other captains of the various camps—that's what we call the penitentiary plantations—can say the same thing, and it's all because of the honor system."

As soon as a prisoner is brought to the receiving station, he is put in the hospital for a thorough physical examination. All the camps have hospitals attached to them, but the one at the receiving station is fitted with operating room, X-ray machines, sterilizing apparatus, drugs and beds. Only emergency cases are taken care of at the camp hospitals: patients with serious ailments are sent to the receiving station. Many patients whose condition does not allow them to work in the fields or about the plantations are kept at the receiving station during their entire term.

**Mere Boy In Prison**

There's 16-year-old Jimmy, for instance (that isn't his name but we'll call him that) who was sentenced to 15 years for manslaughter. Under the honor system, he will be out in two and a half years. Captain Garrison pointed him out proudly.

"When that boy came in here he wasn't able to read or write, and now he spends all his spare time over his books and writes a letter home every week. He'll have learned a trade by the time he gets out."

The boy of whom he was talking was dressed in a clean khaki suit, with a jockey cap pulled down over his eyes. His was a position as trusty, and he was perched in a little tower which overlooked a vegetable patch, lazily playing with a puppy. Down in the garden men were at work, and in the yard below him half a dozen of the laundry squad were sitting on logs around a huge black cauldron, hung from sticks, in which they were boiling clothes. The men talked desultorily, and, aside from the occasional cackle of a hen or bark of a dog, a brooding silence hung over the place. It was like a day in spring, that makes men dream.

**Uniforms In Stacks**

We went through the sewing room, where there were a long line of machines. On the shelves in stacks were bright, clean uniforms, light one for summer, and heavy ones for winter.

"Everybody changes his clothes and bathes twice a week, and we have a barber shop which the men use three times a week," said the captain. "Men in the fields can take a shower every night.

"One rule was made and insisted on—that the inmates take off their work clothes and wear sleeping garments. They were provided with two sheets and pillow cases and towels. Things like these bolster up a man's self-respect. And its things like these that Mr. Fuqua has been doing for the men since he came into office.

"He was out here about three times a week, in between his visits to his other plantations. Sometimes you'd wonder how he managed to get all his work done, but he was always a man who made you think he could accomplish the impossible.

"The men all know him and love him, and he's a friend to all. We're missing him out here."

Then there was the supply room, where sugar and rice and coffee were kept in white wooden bins that looked clean enough to eat out of. Food was stacked on shelves and through the windows at each end of the room the afternoon sun poured. The library and rest room came next. One entire wall was lined with shelves of books and there were tables with magazines and a phonograph. In the next room was the chapel, where services are held every Sunday by various denominations.

**One Prisoner a Druggist**

The upstairs of this end of the ell was taken up by the hospital.

"We don't even need to have a resident doctor," the captain told us, "owing to the fact that one of our prisoners is a druggist and has studied medicine and surgery."

Three men in spotless white uniforms, looking like internes in a hospital, were working over a man with a broken leg when we came into the white ward, and the man whom Captain Garrison had pointed out as the druggist hastened to apologize for the plaster of paris and bandages strewn around the floor. We were glad to learn that the patient had been given morphine as soon as the accident occurred, and had also been given ether during the setting of the broken limb.

Other men lay around languidly reading, but none seemed very sick and the room had a cheerful look.

In the kitchen, the first room at the other end of the ell, a big black cook, dressed in a white apron and white hat, prepared us a cup of strong black coffee and welcomed our inspection of his cupboards and kitchen stove.

**Kitchen is Spotless**

The dining room was quite as spotless, and the unpainted wooden tables were as white as snow. What made for cheerfulness in all these rooms were the windows at each end. Next to the dining room was a room in which half a dozen boys were making shoes out of soft, pliable leather, and we thought of the stiff paper shoes which were put on us at Occoquan.

Small, crisp loaves of white bread were being raked out of the oven in the bakery. The oven, Captain Garrison explained, was one of those which had been in use in the army, but which they had bricked and cemented over until it was as good as new. From the look of the deep brown loaf, we judged that there was no complaining as to the way that oven baked.

By now we had seen everything there was to be seen around the jail and had found everything spotless, and working smoothly in spite of the fact that our visit was totally unexpected. We could not help but think of the three above mentioned jails with their dirt and squalor and graft.

For the last seven years, Henry L. Fuqua has had the management of these plantations which make up the Louisiana state penitentiary.

"By their works you shall know them," Mrs. Fuqua had said simply, in talking of her husband.