

New Prison Designs Stress Human Elements: New Prison Designs Emphasize Human Elements

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

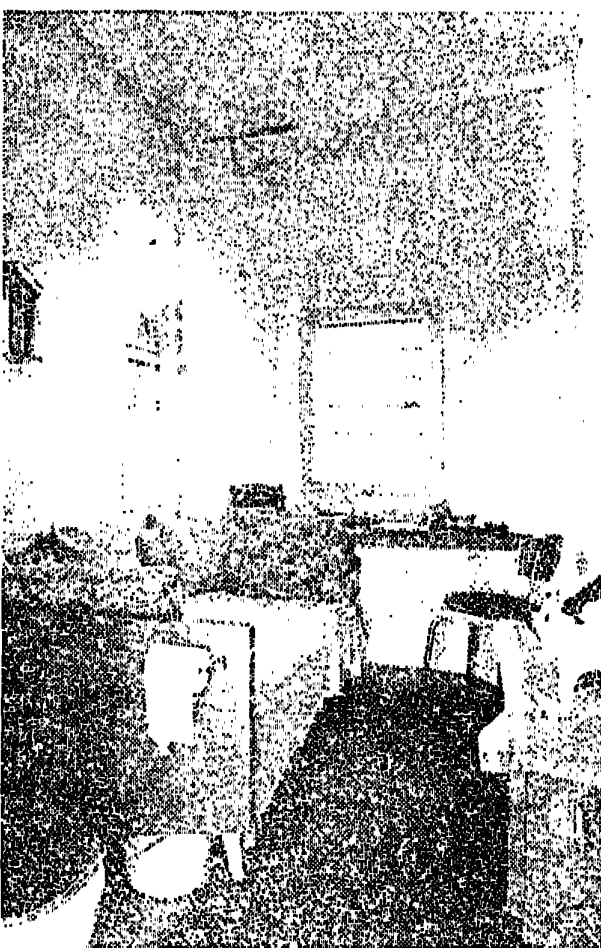
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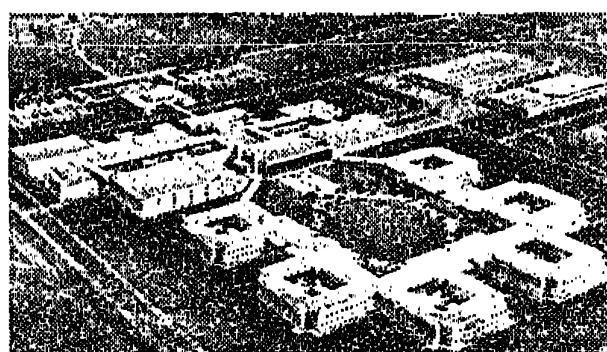


Typical housing unit in the new New Jersey State Prison at Leesburg. Cells, right, open on glass-walled corridor which, in turn, opens onto a landscaped central courtyard. The \$16-million complex has a capacity of 504 men.

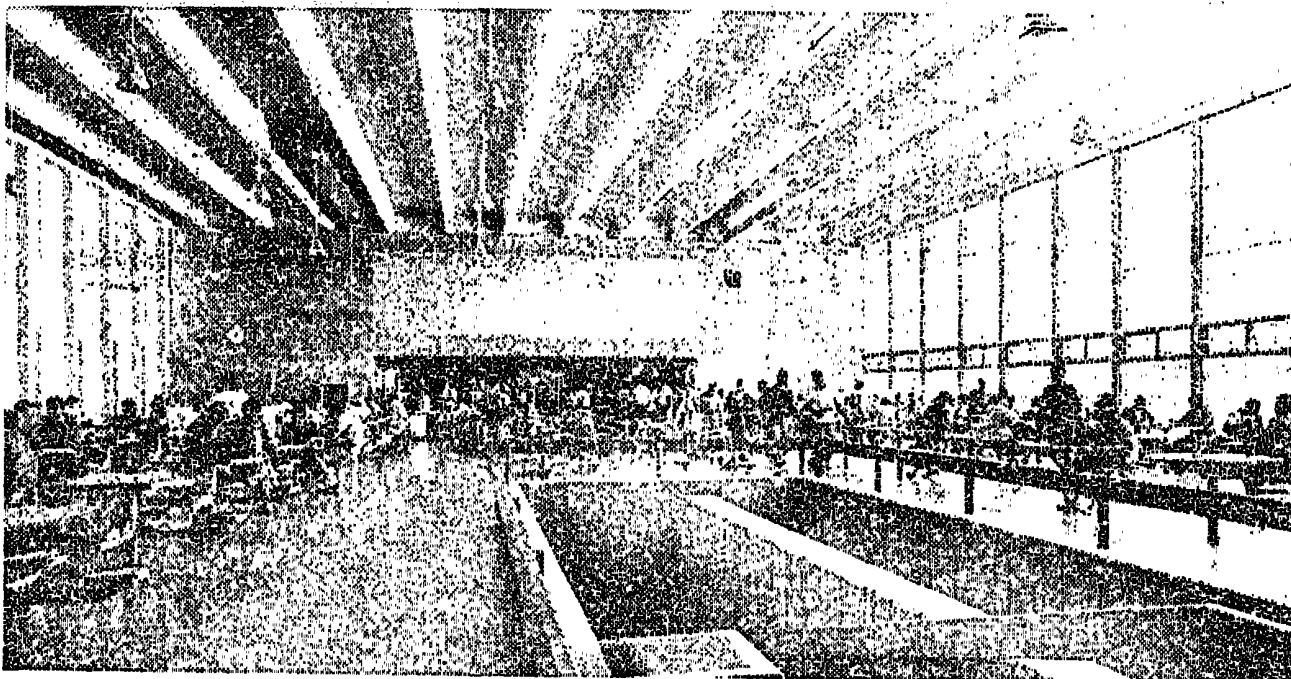


An inmate's room at Leesburg, with decoration added by prisoner. Louvered windows open five and a half inches. Six inches, width of human head, is no longer "secure."

Right: Leesburg's dining pavilion is raised for the view



Prison is situated south of Vineland, near Delaware Bay



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In the agony of the Attica aftermath, the one fact universally agreed on by penologists and sociologists is the need for prison reform. The events at Attica took place at one of the "newer" and "better" New York State maximum-security prisons, completed in 1931. For the 40

years since it was built, Attica has been considered out of date by these experts, along with most

of the country's other penal institutions.

Attempts at liberalized program reforms have been made within archaic buildings where environment is measured not by its effect on men, but by the strength of steel. The difference between a maximum- and medium-security prison is defined by the time it takes to cut through a steel bar, or by the height of a wall. The standard design criteria of prison architecture have had little to do with the lives of men.

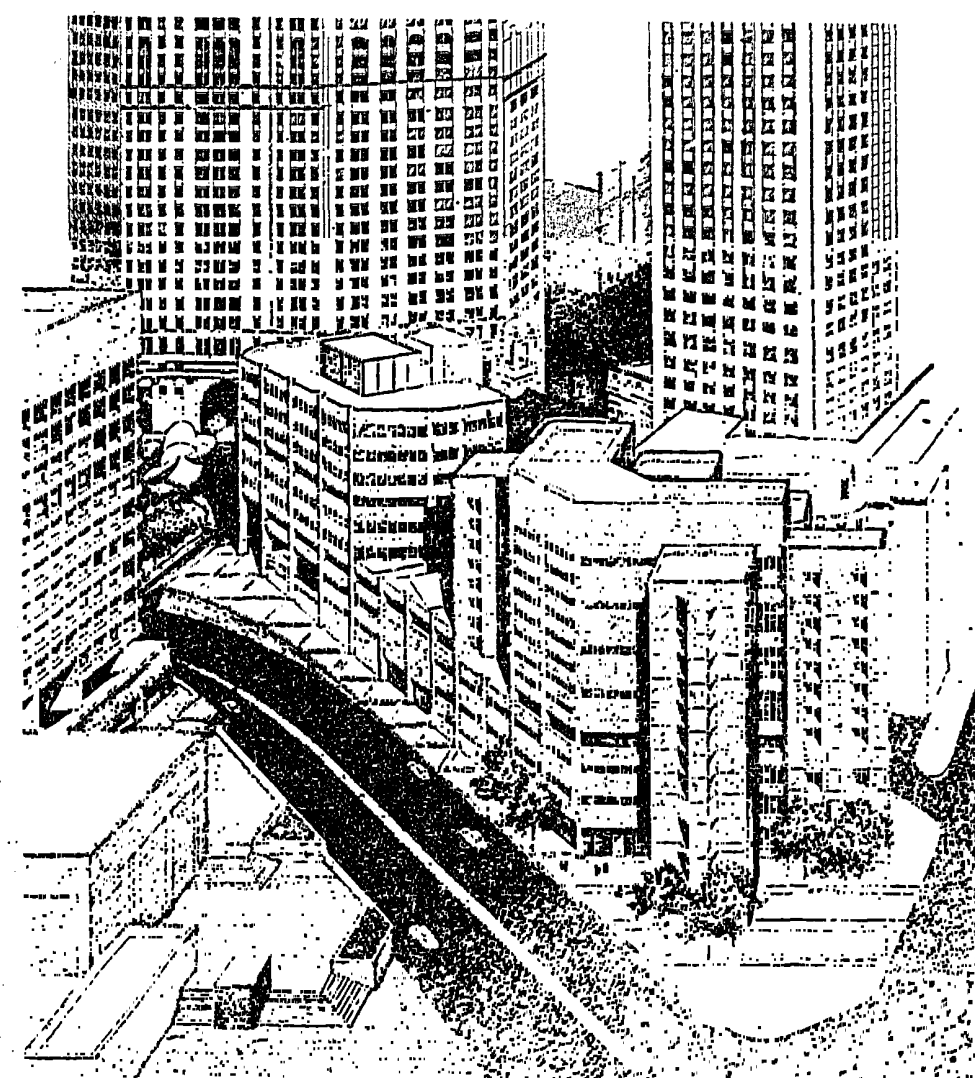
Change is coming—too late for the Attica Correctional Facility. A few structures are beginning to appear that represent a complete break with traditional prison design. But their numbers barely touch the problem, and even their innovations are already being debated by experts who are increasingly unsure of the answers.

New Prisons Planned

New York will have one of the most progressive of the new correctional institutions, to be started in lower Manhattan later this year.

The Metropolitan Correctional Center that will replace the old West Street jail will pioneer advanced principles of penal design and prisoner treatment. It is in the vanguard of a group of such institutions planned for American cities by Federal authorities.

The New Jersey State prison at Leesburg, between Atlantic City and Cape May,



Drawing of the Metropolitan Correctional Center, to be built on Park Row later this year. At left is new Police Headquarters and at left rear is the Municipal Building.

completed this year, is being spotlighted as a showcase of new theories and practice. Other examples are in governmental pipelines now, but with political and bureaucratic delays, they can often take 10 to 15 years to materialize.

The design of the new institutions is much more than cosmetic. It does not just add new facades and materials to outmoded concepts. It starts with basic changes in social philosophy and functions and

in custodial and treatment programs. This radically revises plans and layouts and the kinds of facilities provided and how they are used. It even changes the hardware. It ends with a completely different type of building.

Near Other Facilities

New York City's Metropolitan Correctional Center, designed by Gruzen and Partners, will incorporate the most advanced theories of prison architecture.

Situated behind the Federal Courthouse at Foley Square and next to the new Police Headquarters, it will be bounded by Duane and Pearl Streets, Cardinal Hayes Place and Park Row. The correctional facility will cover the north half of the site; the south half will be occupied by Federal offices for the United States Attorney. It will be designed by the same architects.

The \$12-million building will house 400 detainees, most of them waiting for trials. It will consist of a central administrative section and two "towers." The towers are organized into vertical facilities for "functional unit programs," which divide inmates into small groups.

The functional unit consists of a "living unit" with 16 cells in two split-level rows opening onto a central, double-story community

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space. Each is served by its own feeding and recreational facilities and staff.

Incoming prisoners will be professionally evaluated and segregated so that juveniles and hard-core offenders, for example, are separated. There will be a halfway house and drug-detoxification units.

Supervision will be as much through caseworkers as by guards. Each unit stresses human scale and relationships. Because the process includes pre-trial and pre-sentencing observation and study, with counseling and agency referral, it is meant to be a preventive as well as a rehabilitative tool.

Security will be less visually and psychologically disturbing. Since the building will be air-conditioned, windows can be of plastic or glass. Heavy plastic panels may substitute for interior barred gates.

The innovations already completed and in use at the \$16-million, 504-man prison at Leesburg are of particular interest.

'Secure Yet Viable'

The facility was proposed as a result of New Jersey prison riots in 1952. The architects, also Gruzen and Partners, were commissioned in 1958, and the rest is a 13-year political and financial obstacle race, tempered by ambivalent public attitudes toward the handling of criminals.

Leesburg had to be built in two stages, which raised costs. The architects were assisted throughout by a panel of progressive New Jersey correction officials.

The assignment was "to

create a secure yet viable environment aimed at alleviating the oppressive sense of confinement." Its primary objective, like New York's Metropolitan Correction Center, is to "prepare the inmate for responsible community living." The approach is "problem solving" rather than purely custodial.

Facilities include provisions for professional diagnosis and treatment. A community-like complex of living units, united with services through comparatively free circulation, restores, rather than destroys, a sense of normal life situations. The cells are in six connected "housing units" in the form of open squares enclosing partly planted courts. The six units surround a large open courtyard with trees.

Each cell has its door on a glass-walled corridor around the court. But the criteria of conventional penal design are unavoidable: the louvers have a 5-and-a-half-inch opening; six inches, the width of the human head, is no longer "secure."

Buildings Form Wall

The housing units are joined by a glass-walled dining pavilion, raised for a view of the landscape. Work and recreation facilities are reached from this complex by arcade-like walks, without the need for mass herding down corridors. The visitors' room has no barriers or screens.

Security is achieved largely through the plan. The linking of the buildings turns them into an insurmountable wall. A specially shaped overhang would defy Houdini.

Landscape design is by

Paul Friedberg and Associates; the reinforced concrete structures have been engineered by Lev Zetlin and Associates.

Leesburg has its critics and supporters. It has been assailed as a "country club," hailed as a breakthrough in penology and scored as already out of date. One unexpected side effect is that the guards are said to like it better, and inmates benefit.

According to the architect, Jordan Gruzen: "Punishment is taking a person out of society. To make the nature of the confinement punitive as well is double and unwarranted punishment. The objective should not be to make men unfit to rejoin society."

'The Central Reality'

But the problem goes deeper. There are experts who say that the reform and rehabilitation debate misses "the central reality of the inmates' life."

That reality has little to do with how many hours of liberalized education, recreation and consultation are given. According to Richard R. Korn and Lloyd W. McCorkle, in their book, "Criminology and Penology," these statistics are meaningless.

What matters more, they contend, is the total prison environment, and how the prisoner experiences it. Fear, exploitation and brutalization among the inmates is now the rule. The basic issue is "how he manages to live in and relate to" this violent and desperate prison subculture—in short, what they call the "survival quotient."

There are others who believe that there should be no institutional prison environ-

ment at all. They say that it has never worked, and that with the violence and volatility of changing social problems there is no hope in prisons for the future. They contend that expensive new buildings, no matter how improved the design at the moment, only lock in failure and future obsolescence through their permanence and massive investment.

Flexibility Is Urged

One alternate prescription gaining currency among critics is decentralization. Ronald and Joanne Goldfarb, authors of an internationally researched study of prisons about to be published, called "After Conviction," advocates the breakup of correctional facilities and greater flexibility, with detention and treatment of small groups within the community. The authors emphasize preventive techniques and intensive research.

The Goldfarbs call for the use of existing buildings or temporary structures, adaptable and expendable as needs change.

"Not one more penny should go for one more brick for building correctional institutions," they say. "There should be no architecture."

The decentralization theory leaves serious questions about technique, cost, practicality and the sheer logistics of handling the prisoner population. If buildings are to be constructed, anything less than the new designs seems unthinkable when weighed against existing conditions. They are the very least that enlightened architects, utilizing new knowledge of the social and behavioral sciences, can provide.