

And these are the people who are objecting, Vitek said.

Vitek said he was able to expand to the work-release program only with "diplomatic relationships." And since four years ago the program has about tripled in size.

"The department should be complimented for expanding when, in fact, it looked like we wouldn't be able to survive."

he said, however, that the Legislature did not appropriate enough money for more inmates because at the time the bill was considered it was widely believed that the prison population would be decreasing—as an aftermath of 1960s empathy and sympathy for the criminal offender. Since then, however, "The American public has almost taken a reverse attitude toward the criminal." And judges are becoming tougher.

The trustee dormitory for 200 inmates, who are generally older and more reliable, is to be made into educational space.

Vitek said he does not know what he is going to do with the men in the trustee dorm unless he is directed to build more community based homes which he doesn't think will happen.

"The Legislature has not made a total commitment to community based corrections. The Legislature will not take a 'public be damned attitude.'"

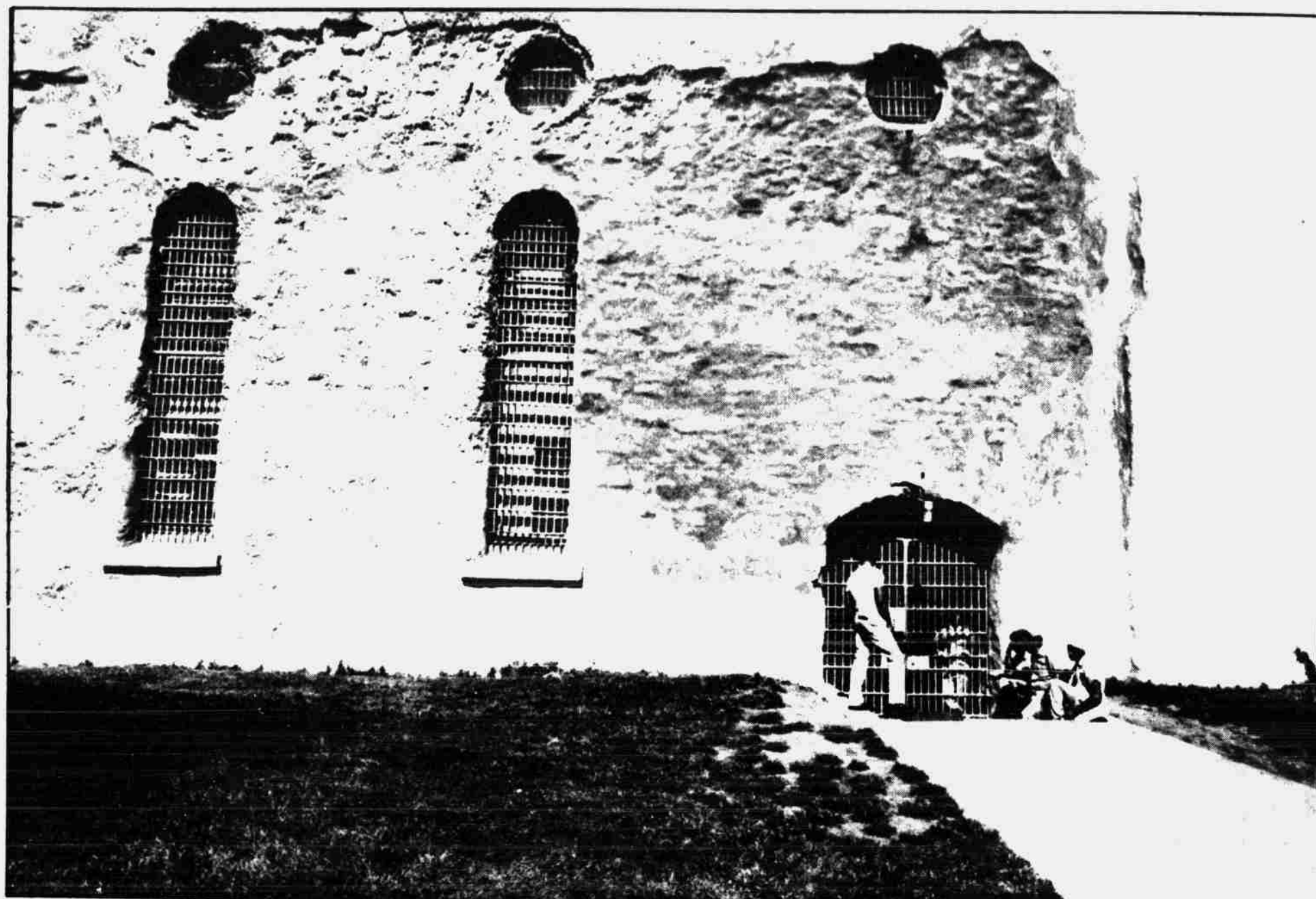
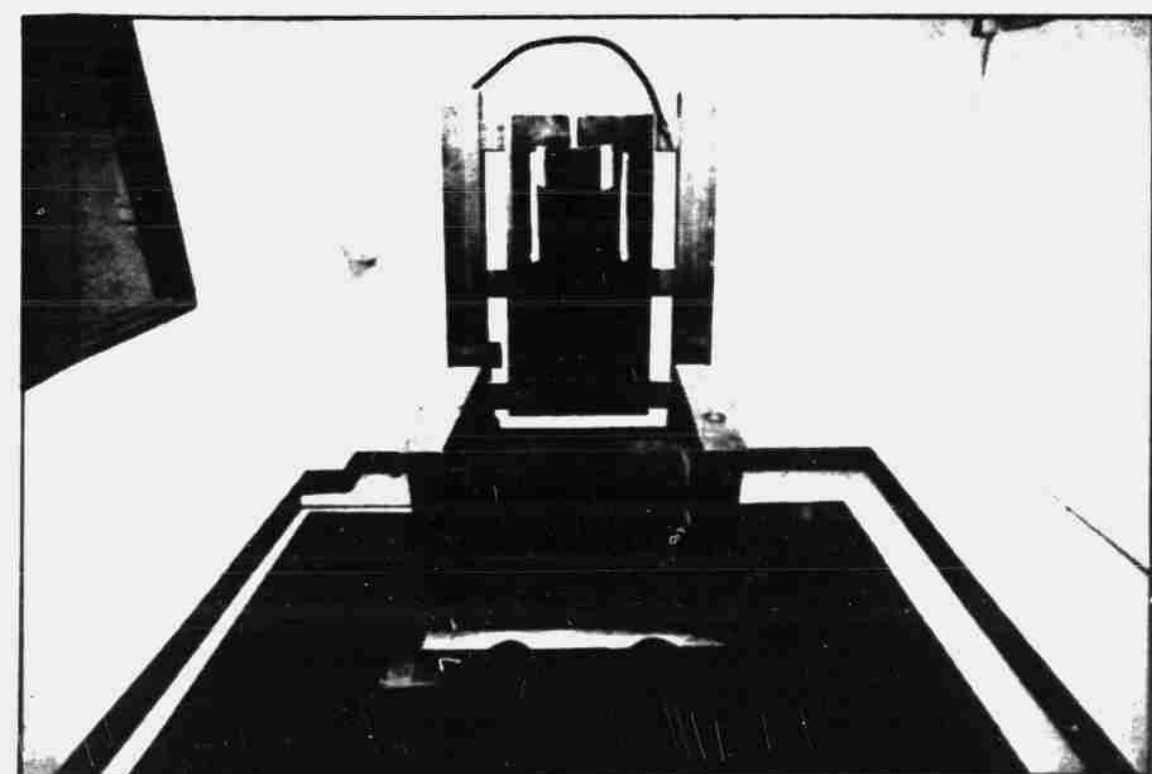
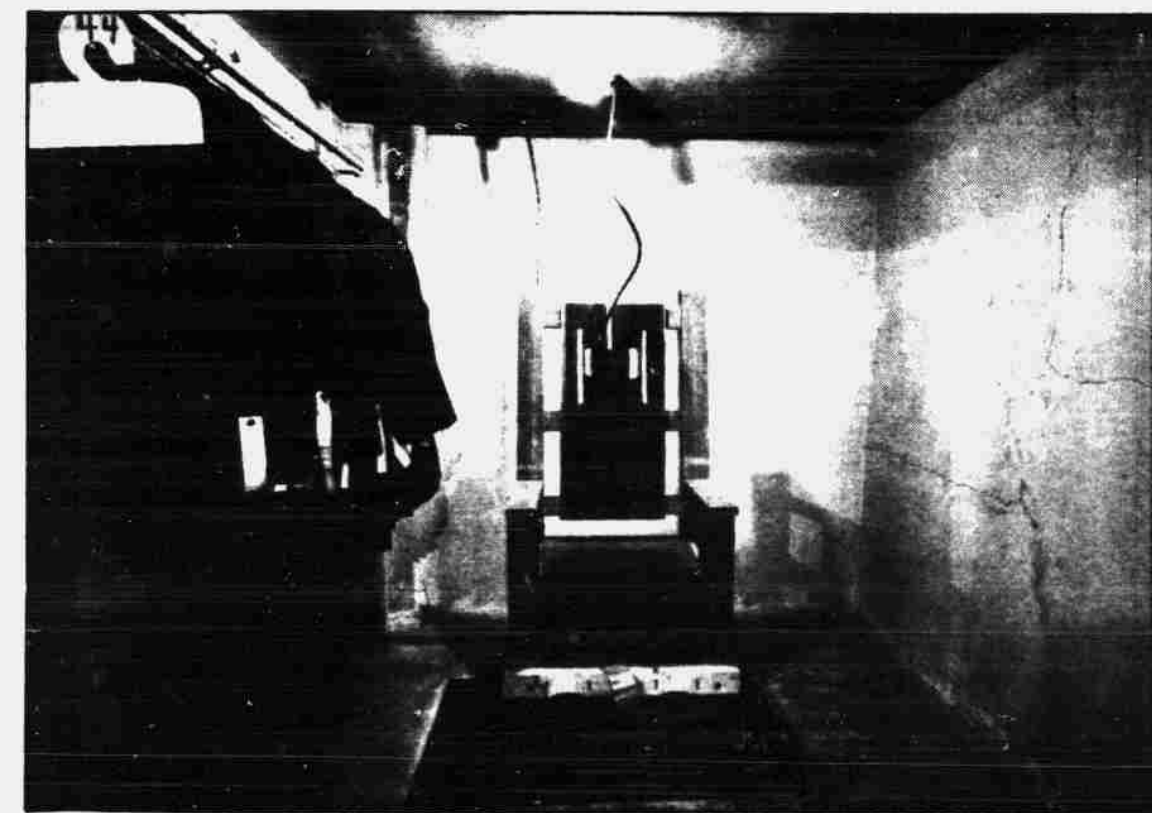


Photo by Ted Kirk

The cellblocks of the penitentiary were built more than 100 years ago. A new penitentiary will be constructed within five years.

umber prepared for future use



Photos by Ted Kirk

The execution chamber at the penitentiary has been remodeled. The top picture shows the electric chair as it was when Charles Starkweather died in 1959. The bottom shows as it is today.

warden, deputy warden, the executive of the prison and his assistants, a clergyman and six other persons chosen by the warden including three members of the press.

The identity of the executioner is kept confidential, but Vitek said it is always a professional who knows what he is doing and can execute quickly and efficiently so there is little pain.

"We have some real kooks who write in and ask to do it," Vitek said. "But once you approach someone seriously to do the work, they start backing off."

Nebraska has not always executed by electrocution. From 1903 to 1913, eight men were hanged.

The first to die was Gottlieb Neigenfind, a 28-year-old farmer who pleaded guilty to murder in 1902 and was hanged in the prison yard on March 13, 1903.

The last to be hanged was Albert Prince, a 24-year-old who fatally stabbed Deputy Warden Davis in 1912 while serving a 12-year sentence for assault with intent to kill.

Both are now inhabitants of "Grasshopper Hill," the prison cemetery. About 80 inmates are buried there. Inmates who were unwanted by relatives and friends.

Although the little cemetery on the hill appears tranquil from a distance a closer inspection shows the callousness of yesterday. More than half of the graves are marked by tombstones inscribed with a number only or are without inscription.

Nebraskans are not the only people buried on "the Hill." During the late 1870s and early 1880s prisoners were also housed here for the Wyoming Territory, as well as for New Mexico. James Whitebread was the first person buried here, back in 1874. He died at 23 while serving a life sentence for murder from Dixon City. Fitzgerald, William A. a Marine Corps veteran was the last person laid in this plot. He died May 30, 1958.

four of the graves contain the remains fathom

of women. The first is Sara J. Overton. She was committed in 1887 for a term of 25 years for the murder of her husband. She was the mother of nine children and died by her own hand about nine months after her arrival at the prison. The second was Effie Crakaal, who was received in 1891 with a term of 20 years for aiding to rape. She was 20 years old when committed and died after serving ten years.

Dora Moore was sentenced to a term of 10 years for murder and entered the prison in 1892. Upon commitment she listed her occupation as "Sporting Woman." She died at age 22. The last woman buried on Grasshopper Hill was Evelyn Winters, a 29-year-old drug addict from Douglas county, who was sentenced to a term of two to three years for grand larceny. She died in 1930.

Inmates are no longer buried on "the Hill." They are sent to the medical school for dissection if the family does not want the body, according to Vitek.

In 1920, Nebraska changed to the electric chair for executions and two Howard farmers, Allen V. Grammer, 22, and Allson Cole, 21, were the first to initiate it on Dec. 20, 1920. In all, 12 men have died in the electric chair, all convicted of first degree murder.

Electrocution is considered the most humane manner of execution, Vitek said. If the executioner is efficient, the 1,500 to 2,500 volt renders the body senseless immediately and there is no pain.

"There have been cases where the job has been botched," Vitek said, "and it can be grotesque. Sometimes there is still movement in the body after the shock but it is probably nerves."

In the New Hampshire prison where he once worked, a hanging was "so botched the man thrashed like a chicken for 20 minutes while he strangled to death."

"Electrocution is definitely the best way."