United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form  

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections  

1. Name  

historic  Properties Associated with the Oconee County Penal System  Thematic  

and/or common  

2. Location  

street & number  ___ not for publication  

city, town  Walhalla  ___ vicinity of  ___ congressional district  

state  SC  code  county  Oconee  code  

3. Classification  

Category  Ownership  Status  Present Use  

___ district  ___ public  ___ occupied  ___ agriculture  ___ museum  

___ building(s)  ___ private  ___ unoccupied  ___ commercial  ___ park  

___ structure  ___ both  ___ work in progress  ___ educational  ___ private residence  

___ site  Public Acquisition  Accessible  ___ entertainment  ___ religious  

___ object  ___ in process  ___ yes: restricted  ___ government  ___ scientific  

X thematic  ___ being considered  ___ yes: unrestricted  ___ industrial  ___ transportation  

___ group  ___ no  ___ military  ___ other: vacant  

4. Owner of Property  

name  Oconee County  

street & number  West Main Street  

city, town  Walhalla  ___ vicinity of  state  South Carolina 29691  

5. Location of Legal Description  

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  Oconee County Courthouse  

street & number  West Main Street  

city, town  Walhalla  state  South Carolina 29691  

6. Representation in Existing Surveys  

Inventory of Historic Places in South Carolina  has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes  X  no  

date  1981  ___ federal  X  state  ___ county  ___ local  

depository for survey records  South Carolina Department of Archives and History  

city, town  Columbia  state  South Carolina 29211
7. Description

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<tr>
<td>____ good</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>moved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X fair</td>
<td>ruins</td>
<td>date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ unexposed</td>
<td>unaltered</td>
<td>NA for jail on wheels</td>
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The nomination for the Properties Associated with the Oconee County Penal System includes two properties located within the city limits of Walhalla, the county seat of Oconee County, South Carolina. The properties are the Oconee County Jail, a two-story, brick building constructed between 1901 and 1906, and a jail on wheels, the only remaining one of several metal cages on wheels used as quarters for convicts serving on the county chain gang in the early twentieth century. Although alterations were made to the rear of the jail and it was stuccoed in the 1930s, and the cage is now located on the property of the modern law enforcement center rather than on a work site, both the jail and the cage retain sufficient integrity to convey their historical associations.

Additional Information: The penal system in Oconee County conformed to the county penal system which was enforced throughout South Carolina in the early twentieth century. The county jails of the state were intended for the detention of persons awaiting trial in state courts who were unable to pay bond. If a person was convicted, he was sentenced to serve at hard labor, usually on the county chain gang. Female convicts and convicts not wanted by the county authorities were sent to the state penitentiary. Most convicts served their sentences on the county chain gangs. For example, in 1916, 3266 persons were committed to county chain gangs, while the population of the penitentiary in 1916 was 211.1

Like other early twentieth century South Carolina jails, the Oconee County Jail consisted of two sections, the jailer's residence and the jail department. The front portion of the jail served as the jailer's residence and the prisoners were kept in the rear wing.2

The county chain gangs were located near the roads on which they were working. Guards usually lived in tents; the convicts' quarters were generally cages, cars, or tents. Cages were used in Oconee County. The cages and cars were on wheels and were usually about seven feet wide, seven feet high, and eighteen feet long. The cars had wooden sides; the cages, which were more common, were made of iron or steel strips, about two inches wide, woven in three- to five-inch squares.3 In December 1916 visits to some county chain gangs by representatives of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina revealed that at least fourteen other counties in addition to Oconee were using cages as quarters for convicts on their chain gangs.4

The resources included in this nomination, the Oconee County Jail and the Oconee County Cage, are the only remaining properties associated with the early twentieth century Oconee County penal system.
Architecture: The Oconee County Jail is a locally important public building which incorporates several elements of neo-medieval design. The stepped and crenellated parapet, the asymmetrical plan with projecting polygonal bays, and the suggestion of a tower are direct architectural references to the popular conception of a medieval castle. It is likely that this architectural quotation was a deliberate attempt to relate the building's incarcerative function with the image of a medieval donjon, keep, and stronghold. The Oconee County Jail bears a striking resemblance to the Anderson County Jail, which was built ca. 1898 and designed by noted architect Frank P. Milburn. Milburn was known to re-use plans (the plans for the Forsyth County Courthouse in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, were re-used to build the Anderson County Courthouse in Anderson, South Carolina, ca. 1898)*, and it is possible that the Oconee County Jail was built from plans by Milburn.

Included in the nomination for the Properties Associated with the Oconee County Penal System are the Oconee County Jail, a two-story, brick building constructed between 1901 and 1906, and a jail on wheels, a metal cage on wheels which was used in the early twentieth century to quarter prisoners serving time on the chain gang. The properties are located within the city limits of Walhalla, the county seat of Oconee County, South Carolina. Together these two resources are historically significant as visual reminders of the main components of the early twentieth century penal system in Oconee County and the state, the jail and the chain gang. Oconee County is the only county known to retain both an early jail and a cage or car for chain gang members in a basically unaltered state. In addition, the Oconee County Jail is a locally significant architectural design.

Social History: The Oconee County Jail and the Oconee County Cage reveal information about the treatment of criminals in Oconee County and in the state in the early twentieth century. Since prisoners in county jails were generally persons awaiting trial who were presumably innocent under the law, the social ideal was to hold them for appearance at court, yet prevent them from suffering physically or morally. Life on the county chain gangs was harder. Since idleness was considered detrimental to the character of criminals and since crime was expensive and harmful to society, labor on chain gangs was intended to reform convicts while at the same time not prove physically injurious. The convicts wore leg chains and usually worked from sunrise to sunset. Living conditions were harsh. The cage was one facet of these harsh conditions.
Properties Associated with the Oconee County Penal System

Footnotes


3"County Chain Gangs," Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 1 (December 1915): 141.


5"What It Means to Be a Prisoner," p. 5.


7 Keowee Courier (Walhalla, S.C.), 8 February, 29 May 1868.

8 Ibid., 21 May, 17 September 1869.


10 Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, Passed at the Regular Session, January - February 1902, p. 1207.


13"County Chain Gangs," Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 1 (December 1915): 160.

14"Our Third Inspections of the County Chain Gangs," Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 3 (December 1917): 175.

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property  see individual inventory forms
Quadrangle name  see individual inventory forms
Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A Zone  Easting  Northing
B Zone  Easting  Northing
C Zone  Easting  Northing
D Zone  Easting  Northing
E Zone  Easting  Northing
F Zone  Easting  Northing
G Zone  Easting  Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification

see individual inventory forms

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title

Mary Watson
John Wells

South Carolina Department of Archives and History

organization

date July 13, 1982

street & number 1430 Senate Street

telephone (803) 758-5816

city or town Columbia

state South Carolina 29211

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

   national  state  X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Charles E. Lee
State Historic Preservation Officer

date Sept 7, 1982

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Keeper of the National Register

Chief of Registration
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, Passed at the Regular Session, January-February 1901.

Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, Passed at the Regular Session, January-February 1902.

"County Chain Gangs." Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 1 (December 1915): 135-165.

"County Jails." Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 1 (December 1915): 98-134.

"Crime and Its Treatment in South Carolina." Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Public Welfare 3 (June 1922): 3-76.


Keowee Courier, 8 February, 29 May 1868; 21 May, 17 September 1869.

"Our Third Inspections of the County Chain Gangs." Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 3 (December 1917): 124-89.


"The Treatment of Convicts on Some County Chain Gangs." Quarterly Bulletin of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina 3 (March 1917): 31-72.


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name  Oconee County Penal System Thematic Resources
State  South Carolina

Nomination/Type of Review

1. Oconee County Cage  Substantive Review  Keeper  Leon J. Hague  11/16/82
   Attest  Patrick Andrews  11/10/82

2. Oconee County Jail  Keeper  Leon J. Hague  11/16/82
   Attest  Matthew B. Burns  11/16/82

3.  Keeper  
   Attest  

4.  Keeper  
   Attest  

5.  Keeper  
   Attest  

6.  Keeper  
   Attest  

7.  Keeper  
   Attest  

8.  Keeper  
   Attest  

9.  Keeper  
   Attest  

10. Keeper  
   Attest  