

Forty-seven Years Prison Experience

Autobiography of J.S. Murray



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'The Oregon Boot'

The Oregon boot, formerly called the Gardiner Shackle, was invented by warden J. C. Gardner, he being granted a patent on it in July, 1866. Nearly all prisoners wore them at the time to prevent their escape. Evidently the shackles were made right in the penitentiary machine shop, and weighed anywhere from five to twenty-eight pounds each, and consisted of a heavy iron band which was locked around one ankle and rested on an iron ring or band which in turn was fastened to bottom of shoe in step to keep the shackle from injuring the ankle. With the weight of this on one foot and not on the other, make it impossible for the prisoner to walk or run very fast. In fact it was with great difficulty that he was able to move about at all. The early prison wardens seemed to be of the opinion that it would be impossible to hold the prisoners without them. When Mr. Berry took over the superintendency from Mr. W. H. Watkinds in 1872, he continued to use them, and Mr. Gardner obtained from the court a restraining order preventing their use without proper payment to Mr. Gardner. The Oregon legislature therefore, made an appropriation for that purpose, as Superintendent Berry stated he did not feel at liberty to compel his officers to hold the convicts and work them without the privilege of their use. During the next several years, these shackles were both cursed and discussed by both officers and prisoners. Superintendent Watkinds had this to say about them: "A great wrong we are compelled to put on the prisoners for want of sufficient ^{walls} is the Gardiner shackles. We are necessarily compelled to iron them, so they cannot scale the walls. There are prisoners who have worn this instrument of torture, known inside the prison as 'man killers', until they are broken down in health and constitution. Young and strong men, with this steady weight, which pulls all day on their loins, yield after a few years, leaving the prison broken down physically, not from over-work or underfeeding

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but simply from lugging about a lot of iron to keep them from scaling the fences that are no protection without. Men lay in the hospital for weeks wearing these things, suffering great pains and begging to be relieved from the load. Your Excellency ordered a year ago, that but as few as possible be ironed. This has been complied with, but leaves many yet really and literally ironed down. Oregon State Prison is the only place in the United States where this mode of murdering men by inches is practiced. It is murder, and of the worst type. Another consideration is, that a convict with the irons off, can do a great deal more labor than with them on."

Dr. A. H. Belt, prison physician at the time, has this to say about the shackle: "A great tendency to disease of the kidney and weakness of the back with loss of muscular power in the lower limbs, seems to be due to the wearing of what is called the Gardiner shackle. This is not a conclusion on a single instance but is the result of examination of every case that has been under my care. The rule has been that a few months only, are necessary to destroy the health and consequent usefulness of every one that has been subjected to their use; and, in a few years, at such a rate of deterioration, would destroy life. My impression is that while there may be speedier ways of ending life, there are none that is surer. I would respectfully submit, that if other means could be devised that would be equally safe, they be left ^{off} as soon as practicable."

Superintendent B. F. Burch, in a report to Governor Chadwick, dated September 1, 1878, states in part: "Heretofore it has been the practice to keep a large number of men heavily shackled to prevent escape, which render them unfit for manual labor, injuring their constitution, and hold them, as it were, by brute force. This principal I believe to be wrong. Such punishment can never lead to reformation, hence I determined to dispense with them except as a punishment, believing, as has been

demonstrated, they could be kept without it. Placing the shackles before them as a punishment for violation of prison rules,, I have been successful in keeping all but three, which three were trusties."

Dr. James A. Richardson, prison physician, reporting in September 1876; "Kidney and spinal troubles have been quite common--induced in some cases, I think, by wearing the Gardiner shackles. The continued application of this great weight, from six to twenty-eight pounds, to the lower extremities destroy the muscular power of the lower limbs. But I think the most serious evil is this, with from six to twenty-eight pounds of cold iron around the ankles, the prisoner must of necessity, with the ordinary supply of bedding furnished the prisoner, suffer with cold feet and limbs during the night, which in this climate, is always cool, and the effect of continually cold extremities cannot result otherwise than disastrously to the health of the convicts. I would therefore, in the strongest terms, recommend that means be adopted at the earliest possible moment to dispense altogether with the Gardiner Shackle."

The penitentiary has one of the 'Oregon Boots' at the present time which is used only in extra ordinary cases in moving desperate prisoners from one place to another to prevent any possible escape. Many of the sheriffs' offices of the state also possess one of these boots. A Supply house in Spokane, Washington, makes them for sale.

In this connectkon, a lady called at the Superintendent's office at the penitentiary April 27, 1927, and stated that her father, W. H. Leininger, a former propietor of the Commercial Hotel in McCormack Building, in Salem, was the inventor of the "Oregon Boot". She said this was about 1875. It is quite/that ^{possible} Mr. Leininger placed some refinements on the boot such as lock, nickel plating, etc. at that time as apparently these shackles as first used were welded around the ankles of the inmates and kept there during their incarceration. Warden Gardner, as above stated secured his patent in 1866..