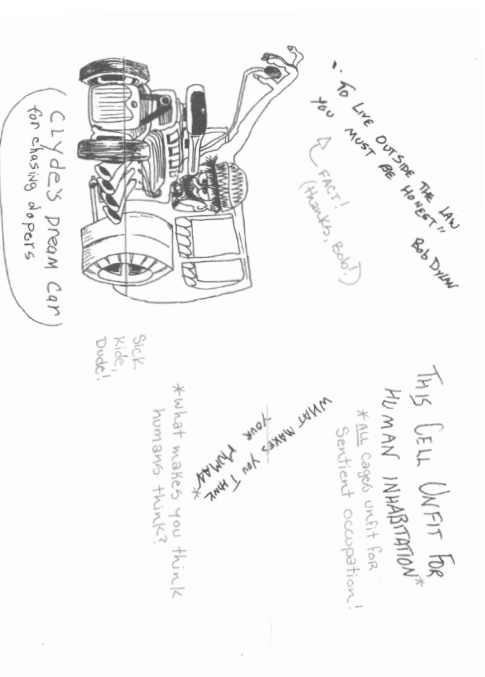


When Ojai's four-cell jail closed in the early 1970s, some of the people imprisoned there left their mark—literally. This zine documents graffiti from Ojai's jail walls and shares reflections on the historic graffiti from people who are incarcerated today.

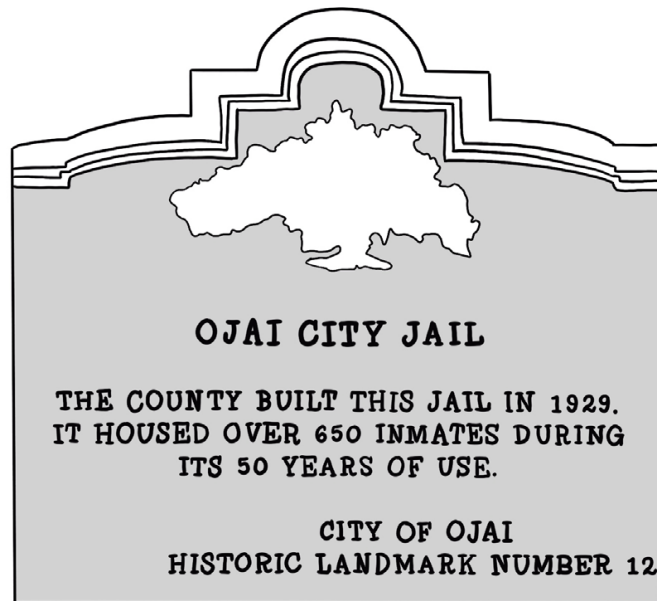


Grffiti from the Ojai jail, annotated by current California prisoner Laura Luttrell

Commissioned by the Ojai Jail Arts Initiative

First printing: September 2022





“It squats under the shady oaks of Ojai’s Libbey Park, a windowless concrete bunker with 8-inch-thick walls and a formidable steel door.”

— *Los Angeles Times*, 2001

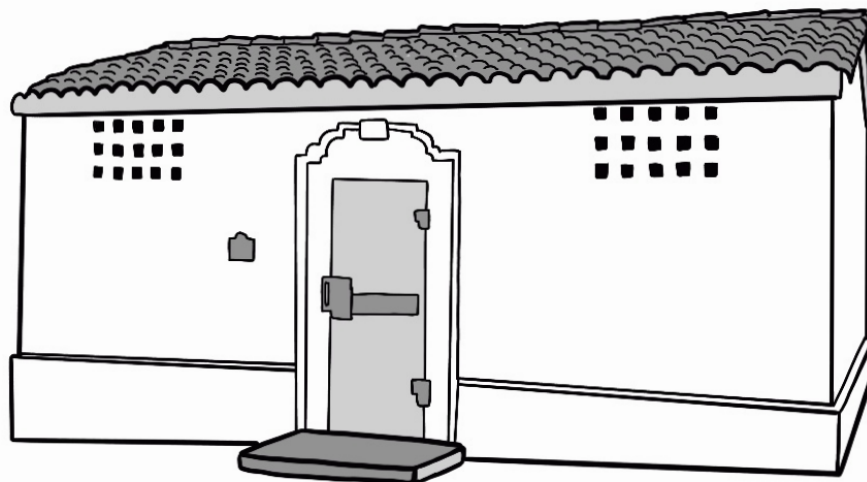
When I was growing up in Ojai, the old jail was a mysterious building. The beige concrete box built in 1929 sits right in the middle of a popular park. It’s difficult to see inside and only open to the public one day a year—on Ojai Day, the annual town celebration. The atmosphere on Ojai Day is festive, but when I got to step inside the jail, I was always immediately spooked. The jail is chilly, even on hot days, and two severe metal bunk beds hang on chains in four cells next to a tiny toilet and sink. Shafts of light come in through small squares cut high in the concrete. It feels sad and dark. I often wondered about the people imprisoned in the jail. What would it have felt like to be locked in this cold, echoey box for days, weeks, or months?

Some of the 650 people imprisoned in the jail left their mark—literally. Poems, names, jokes, complaints, and drawings are penciled and etched onto the cell walls. When the county closed in the early 1970s, relocating prisoners to a larger and more modern jail in Ventura, the graffiti remained. Now, it feels like a time capsule from fifty years ago. The drawings and words express the humanity of the people imprisoned in the Ojai jail. Looking at the graffiti, you can see people who were counting the days, laughing at the police, and quoting Bob Dylan.

At its most basic level, graffiti says, "I exist." In a society that dehumanizes the millions of people we imprison, locking them away and trying to erase their existence, even writing your name on a cell wall is a profound expression of resistance. To me, it felt important to document and share this graffiti. With this zine, the words scrawled on the Ojai jail walls can be read more than once a year—and by people all over the world.

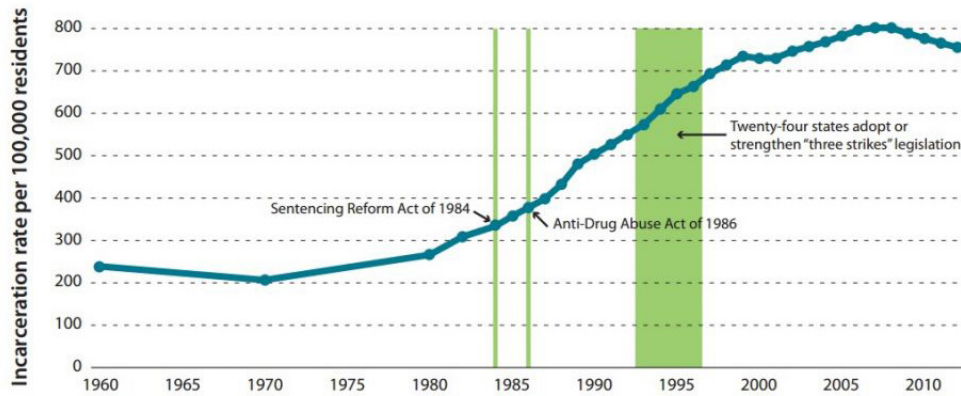
Since the Ojai jail closed in the early 1970s, the number of people incarcerated in the United States has exploded. Punitive politics, the War on Drugs, and the continued racial biases of the U.S. justice and policing systems led to a 700% increase in the incarceration rate from 1972 and 2009. While the number of people in prisons and jails has dropped somewhat since its peak in 2009, we still have the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. The system is built on racial inequality and injustice: one in three Black men and one in six Latinx men in the United States will be incarcerated during their lifetime (compared to one in ten white men).

With this project, I wanted to connect the history of the Ojai jail to our current reality of mass incarceration. Via snail mail, I asked people currently incarcerated in California to respond to the Ojai jail graffiti and asked what they would like to write on a cell wall for people to see 50 years from now. I hope what comes through in this zine is that the people we put in jail, whether it's in 1969 or today, are real people, with real lives, feelings, and dreams. This jail isn't just an old-timey box, but the predecessor of the cages we continue to put millions of people in today. — *Editor Sarah Mirk*



Incarceration Rate in the United States, 1960 - 2012

Federal policies, such as the Sentencing Reform Act, and state policies, such as "three strikes" legislation, were major contributing factors to the 222 percent increase in the incarceration rate between 1980 and 2012.



Sources: Austin et al. 2000; Cahalan 1986; personal communication with E. Ann Carson, Bureau of Justice Statistics, January 24, 2014; Census Bureau 2001; Glaze 2010, 2011; Glaze and Herberman 2013; Raphael and Stoll 2013; Sabol, Couture, and Harrison 2007; Sabol, West, and Cooper 2010; authors' calculations.



INCARCERATION RATES

COMPARING CALIFORNIA AND FOUNDING NATO COUNTRIES



Incarceration rates per 100,000 population

Chart source: PrisonPolicy.org // Incarceration data sources: Sentencingproject.org

What's in this zine?

- Graffiti from the Ojai jail, redrawn by artist Kevin Roper
- Responses to Ojai jail graffiti by currently incarcerated Californians
- Essay on graffiti in prison by incarcerated artist Kit Brixton
- Poem by incarcerated writer Horace Thomas
- List of contributors and acknowledgements

How this zine was made

In Spring 2022, the Ojai Jail Arts Initiative set up a tour of the jail for me, where I took photos of all the graffiti on the cell walls. I then reached out to the Oregon Justice Resource Center, who connected me with a formerly incarcerated artist, Kevin Roper. Kevin redrew the graffiti from my photos and drew the zine cover. I made copies of his graffiti drawings, wrote a letter explaining the project, and snail-mailed the art out to fifty incarcerated Californians, whose addresses I got from A.B.O. Comix (a collective of creators and activists who work to amplify the voices of LGBTQ prisoners through art). People mailed back their hand-written responses, which took the form of drawings, poetry, personal stories, and testaments to their continued existence. I also asked one of my pen pals, zine-maker Kit Brixton, to pen a short essay about his thoughts on why people write graffiti on the walls of jails and prisons despite the possibly steep punishments for such an act. All the incarcerated people who contributed to this zine will receive a free copy, and were mailed a booklet of postage stamps as an honorarium for their contribution. Kevin and Kit were also paid for their work.

Let's see some Ojai jail graffiti!

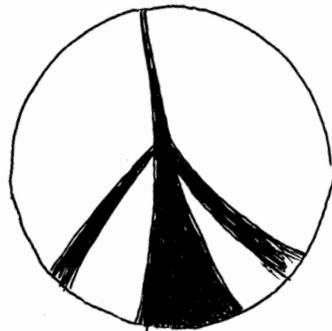


HERE I SIT
IN THIS COLDCELL
THE ONLY SOUND
I HEAR IS THAT
FUCKING BELL

JOHN OGLETREE

2-17-69

6-10-69



GUGGENMOS

MAPLE
YA 69

April 23, 1969

BILLY ROGERS
3-16-69

THIS CELL UNFIT FOR
HUMAN INHABITATION

JOHN OBLETREC 13 DAYS
JUNE 69

MAPLE
CVA

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK
YOUR HUMAN

GARY H GUGGENMOS
JULY 15, 1969
AUG 14, 1969
AUG 29, 1969

3 TIMES TO MANY
JULY IS CONTRIBUTING WEED
AUG POSSESSION OF WEED
AUG 29 SALES OF WEED



officer Bennit
is a baby bird in
a crash helmet



Gai RD
SATS

2-17-69
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

1-5 yr
wanna me
in the force

"TO LIVE OUTSIDE THE LAW
YOU MUST BE HONEST"
Bob Dylan

Forbidden
area

LIFE STINKS TODAY
JEFF Gasburg
"68"

THE FIRST MATE
HE GOT SPONED
HE WENT TO THE
CAPTAINS HOME.
HE FOUND HIS
STASH AND IT
WASNT JUST
HASH. HE HAD
WEED AND SPEED

G. G.

I STARTED FROM THE TOP,
NOW I'M FALLING TO THE END,
UNDESTINED TO BE DESTINED
FOR MY LIFE WILL NEVER END
KERRY IS MY NAME
AND FAITH MY ONLY NATION
TIME AND SPACE MY DWELLING PLACE,
AND DEATH MY DESTINATION
KERRY DONALD O'CONNOR

BLAIR 30 DAYS JAN-19-1969
FEB-17-1969

Bye-Bye
Barbra

Steffey
JUNE 6, 1969
JULY 18, 1969
BACK IN
AUGUST 15 DAYS

CRIN 60 DAYS

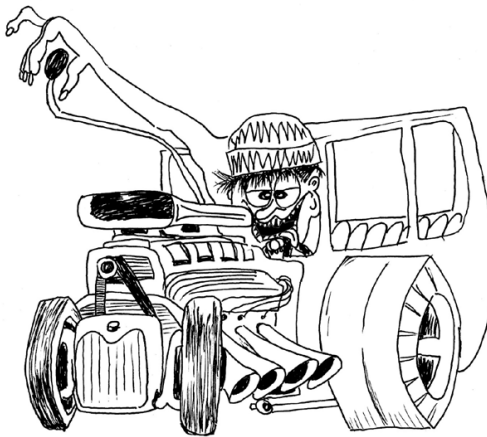
||||| ||||| |||||
||||| ||||| |||||

DANNY
J.V.D.A.

{ SARGEANT MEADOWS IS
OFFICER CLYDE CRASHCOP BENNETT IS

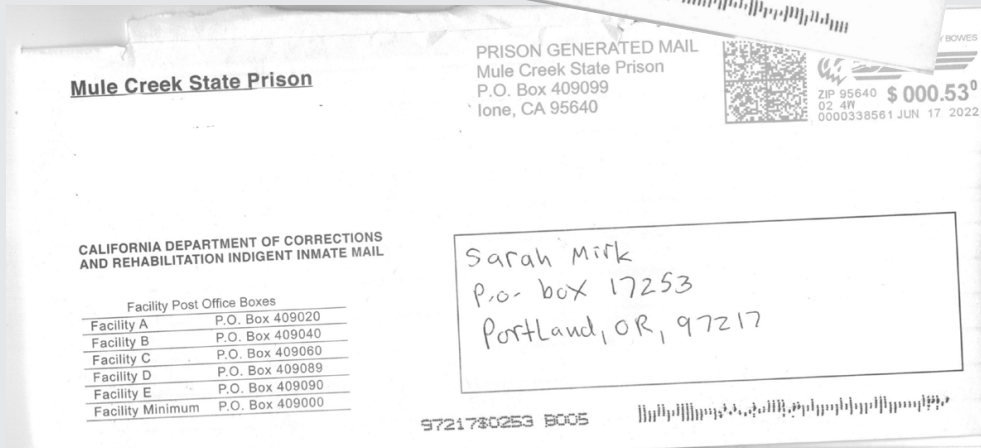
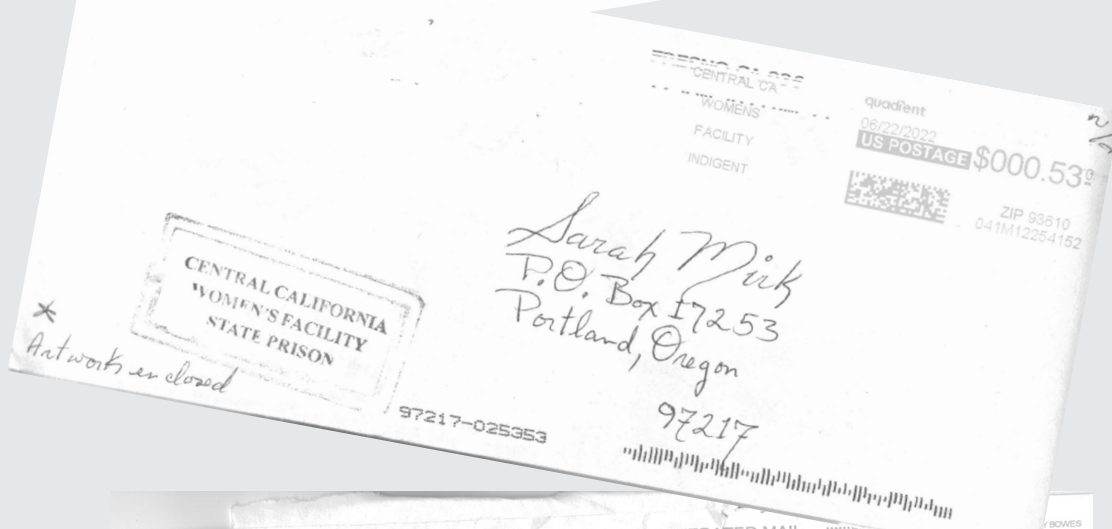
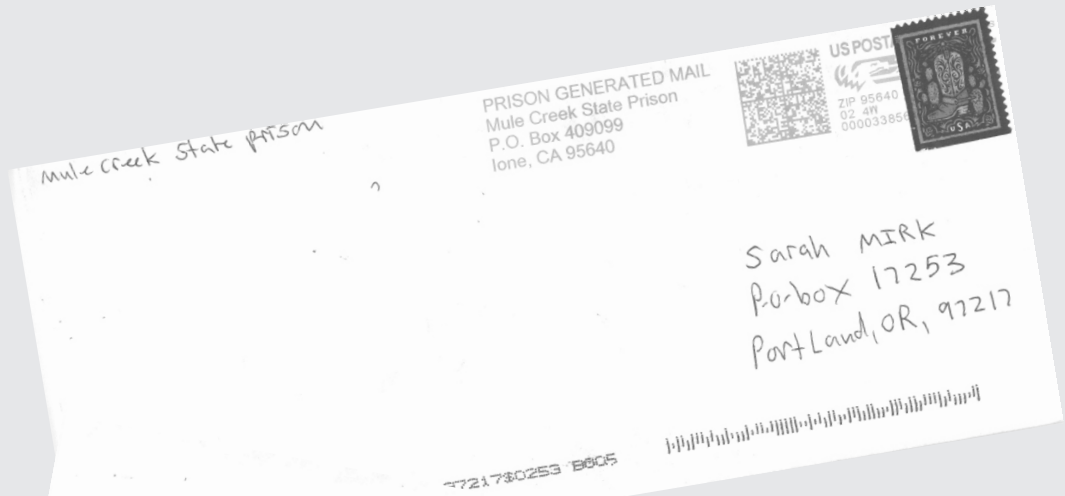
- (A) A RUTHLESS, CHILDMINDED, SADISTIC
- (B) A PIG WITH COMMON HATRED FOR HUMANITY
- (C) AN IMAGE OF A BALD HEADED BABY BIRD (CLYDE)

I, KERRY DONALD OKONNER HEREBY
CAST SPELLS ON THE BOTH OF YOU.
FEBRUARY 17, 1969

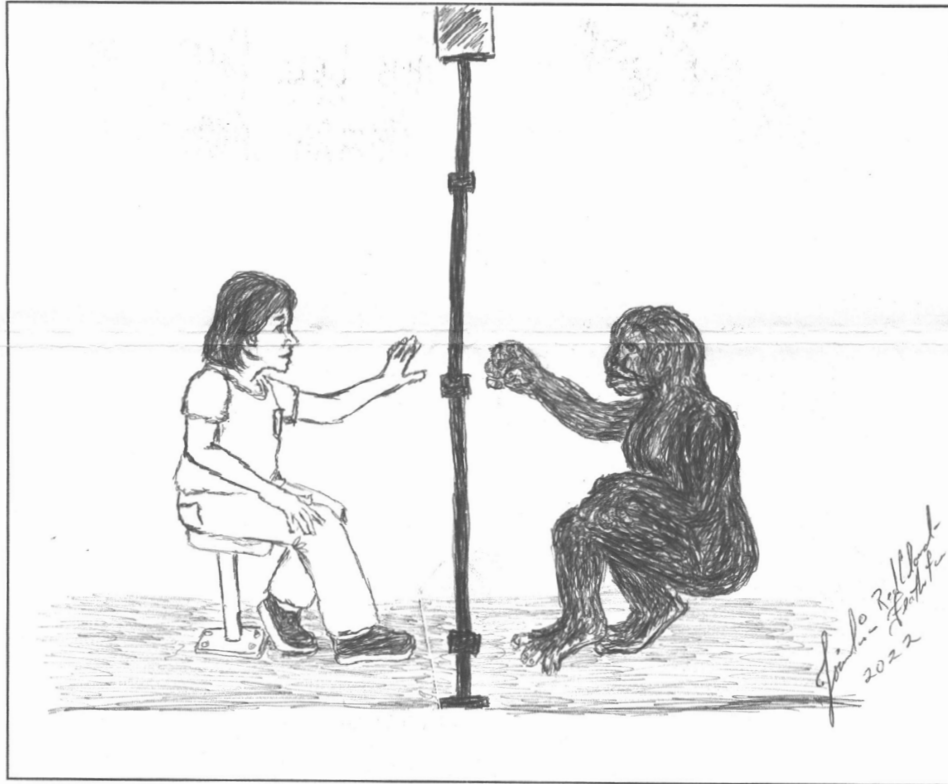


Clyde's dream car
for chasing dopers

Incarcerated Californians respond to the Ojai jail graffiti



If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?



Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

Where does humanity start, and when does it end?

Your name or pseudonym: Who visits who?

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?



Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

It's quite obvious that the main themes are anti-authoritarianism - anarchy-feminism, prison abolition, freedom/liberty, and revolutionary prisoner solidarity & action! I helped cofound the FireAnt Collective in 2017 along with some other anarchist prisoners - Eric King, Sean Swann, Michael Kimble, - and outside comrades of Maine ARA & Bloomington ABC.

Your name or pseudonym:

Jennifer Amelia Rose
<http://betweenthebars.org/blogs/490/>
<https://solidarity-international/>

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

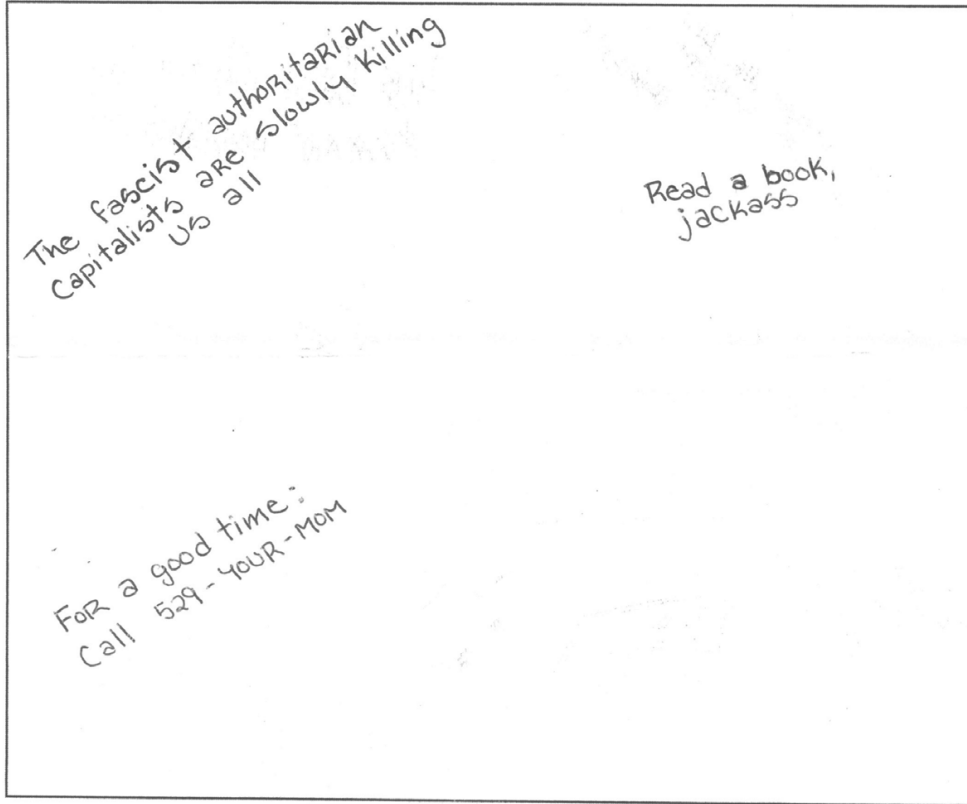
1. even in A HELL like Prison you can start making THE right decisions and choices which could eventually land you in Heaven.
2. I would not wish Prison on my worst Enemy because to do so would be punishing his entire family to.
3. out of all Places I found my one true love in Prison.

Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

no matter what never stop fighting for freedom, Love, Equality, Family, and anything else you believe is worth fighting for.

Your name or pseudonym: Rene Guy.

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?



Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

I ♥ graffiti, it's like an open ongoing conversation, little tags. Public art. Public critique. Public lol. Public feels. Public display...

Direct Democracy

Except it's important to tell when it might be dangerous to counter-point / cover another's mark 😊

Your name or pseudonym: Laura Lutrell Purviance

Thanks for reaching out, Sarah! Give Ojai my love ♥

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

the english historian, sir thomas askeine may, writing in the middle of the 19th century, observed: "next in importance to personal freedom, is immunity from suspicions and jealous observation men may be without restraints upon their liberty; they may pass to and from at pleasure; but if their steps are tracked, by spies and informers, their words noted down, for crimination, their associates watched as conspirators - who shall say that they are free? nothing is more revolting... than espionage which forms part of the administrative system of continental despotisms. It haunts men like an evil genius, chills their gaiety, restrains their wit, casts a shadow over their friendships and brights their domestic hearth. The freedom of a country may be measured by its immunity from this baleful agency" white v. Davis (1975)

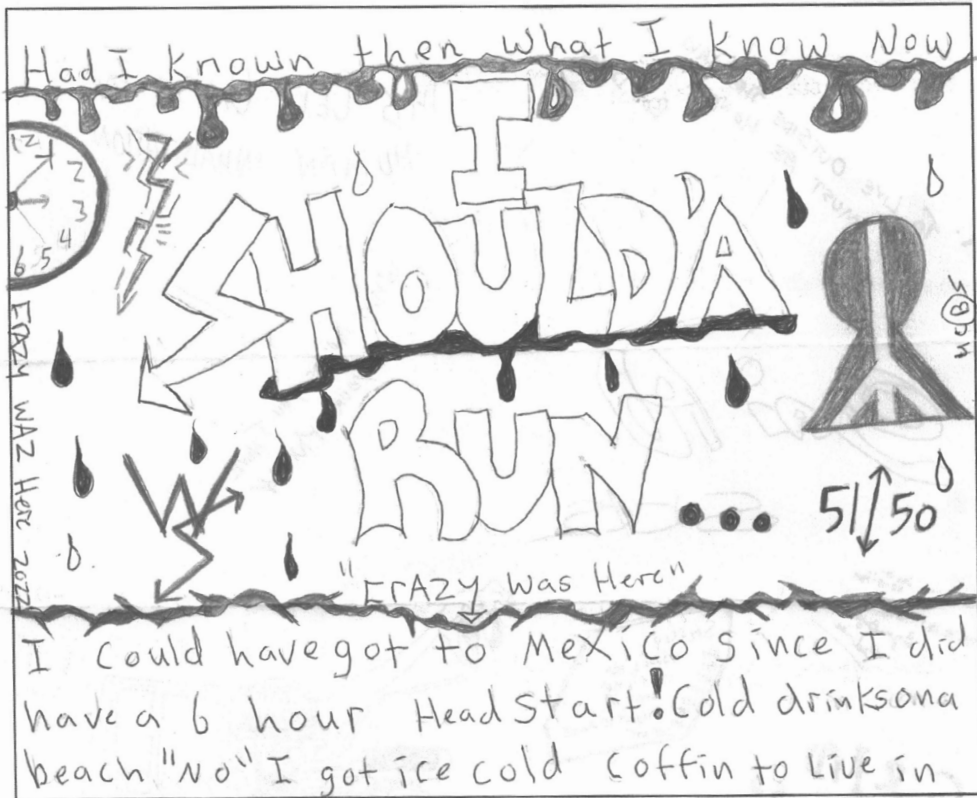
13CAL 38 757

Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

I just wanted to share a window of my character - plight with you Sarah, some people "only" see us for our crimes but we are so much more!!

bullet proof respects to you.

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

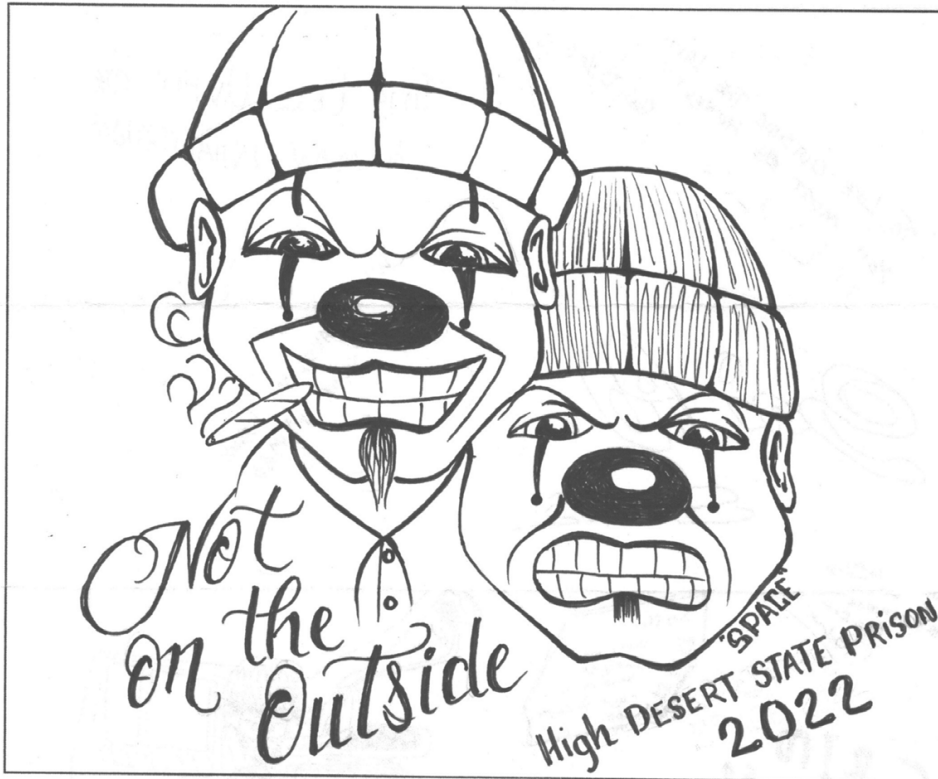


Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

I refuse to die quietly in a cell. I am Not a Voiceless faceless Man, I scream and shout thru the 24 publishers who push me forward and prick me up. Fuck 'em, fight 'em out Never give up. When the world forgot me I decided to Advocate, advocate and prove we are not Worthless. I dedicated my life to Altruism and philanthropy in prison. I refuse to go quietly into the night.

Your name or pseudonym: Steven J. Levy

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?



Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

HERE IS MY INFO: QUENTIN BEALER #BA-4415 (AKA) SPACE
H.D.S.P./A5-103
P.O. BOX 3030 OR AT GETTINGOUT.COM
SUSANVILLE, CA 96127


Im From a small town called Red Bluff in CA Im
Now doing 25 to life in High Desert State Prison. You asked
if you could do anything for me. Well if you know anyone
looking for a pen pal I could use one. Im LGBTQ
49 yrs old white and all alone. Im a artist also I draw
Thats why you got my address from ABO comix.

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

I am an ex-gang member (street), one of the "founding Original Gangster's" of the South-Central Los Angeles "Hoover Crips" formed in 1973, I do NOT gangbang any longer (since 1997), we O/G's don't strike-up (write) on wall's no more, but if I "did" write something on the wall's of a Jail/Prison cell, it would go somethin' like this . . .

CRIME DON'T PAY!

(But, if you commit one, and get caught for it)

YOU WILL! 

" I WAS HERE, AND I DIDN'T LIKE IT, SO IF YOU ARE "NOW" INSIDE THIS CELL, PLEASE LEAVE THIS CELL JUST LIKE I LEFT IT. . .

COLD, DARK, LONELY, & HOPEFULLY, ALWAYS"

EMPTY!  (Good Luck!)

Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

What I think one should write on a Jail/Prison cell wall, is something that's a WARNING, or something encouraging, like I did above. . .

Graffiti in general on Jail wall's normally read's about the occupant's mind-set at that time i.e., gang, racist, sexist, or INSANITY. Me, I've been incarcerated for (25) consecutive year's, my 9'x 11' feet cell wall's are ALWAYS clean, because this cell is my HOME, not a place to ADVERTISE nothing.

Your name or pseudonym: MAINE 

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

Your family or who you have loves you stop hurting them being selfish, how many times have you been to jail? how old are you? did you have fun? this isn't fun it's a waste of time your life and all your doing is hurting your loved ones every day and the year by year, it's time to change while you have your chance some people can't have a chance you don't want to be that, change man -- it's easy being bad, and getting in trouble, --- do something New, hard, a challenge, --- enjoy life get out man ---

Your family needs you!!!

Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

Yea, I'm just going threw a lot lot rite now. --- & I'm stupid done with it all, I've hurt people used people & lost people that were good people. --- I've never felt so alone and all I can do is blame myself I still have a chance too. --- so I'm doing all I can to wake up and get out & stay out & try to fix my wrongs on the outside as well as my inside

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

LANDAN, JACKSON

♡ 3 ♡
|

JAZZIE PARADIZE SCOTT

we love god

god IS good ALL

The Time

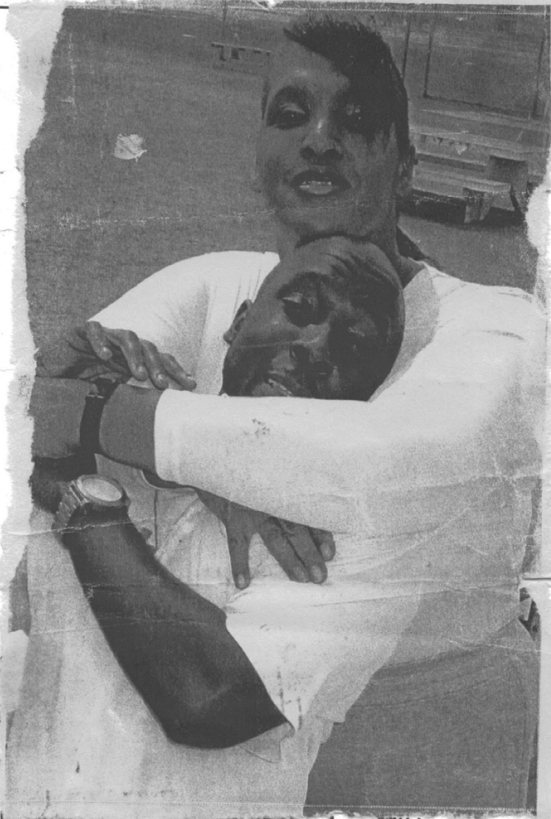
2022 IN

CMF.

CALIFORNIA medical
Facility

AND

VACAVILLE CA,
95696



Is there anything you want to say about what you saw above or about graffiti in general?

♡ Hi we love god to day AND ♡
♡ god IS good ALL The Time 2022 ♡
♡ I go Home IN 2023 - jail (2013) ^{in incarcerated}
♡ my NAME IS JAZZIE PARADIZE SCOTT Im 49 9/5
♡ B-DAY Im live in CMF VACAVILLE CA 95696.
Your name or pseudonym: JAZZIE PARADIZE SCOTT

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

"Do OR Die!"
The L.A. County JAIL
True untold story.
By: Gold Finger
Johnnie Kempf, Jr

In the year 1998 I was confined in the most deadliest jail in the United States, known to man as the Los Angeles County Jail, where some of Los Angeles' most brutal suspects are located.

One day under a dim light, inside my jail cell. I sat quietly on an old mildewed mattress, unleashing twisted thoughts. I found a broken pencil. I had no stationary so I wrote notes on toilet paper to begin my manuscript. I searched my memory bank, in essence of my wonder years. My book is based on the perils of my youth. I, along with "M.P" my sidekick, as we grew up in the hood. A known historic landmark. For the notorious Compton Crip Gang. I loved the smell of money. So I learned the traffic of hustling: In later chapters, I face off with legendary dangerous minds. Gambling and shooting dice. I became acquainted with angel dust, experiencing hallucinogenic twists and turns. My story is genuine. Leaving you breathless—yearning for more.

Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

NO NOT Really Im truly not A good
Art - graffiti DRAWER
Im A professional writer BASICALLY

Your name or pseudonym:

Gold Finger

Thank you

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?

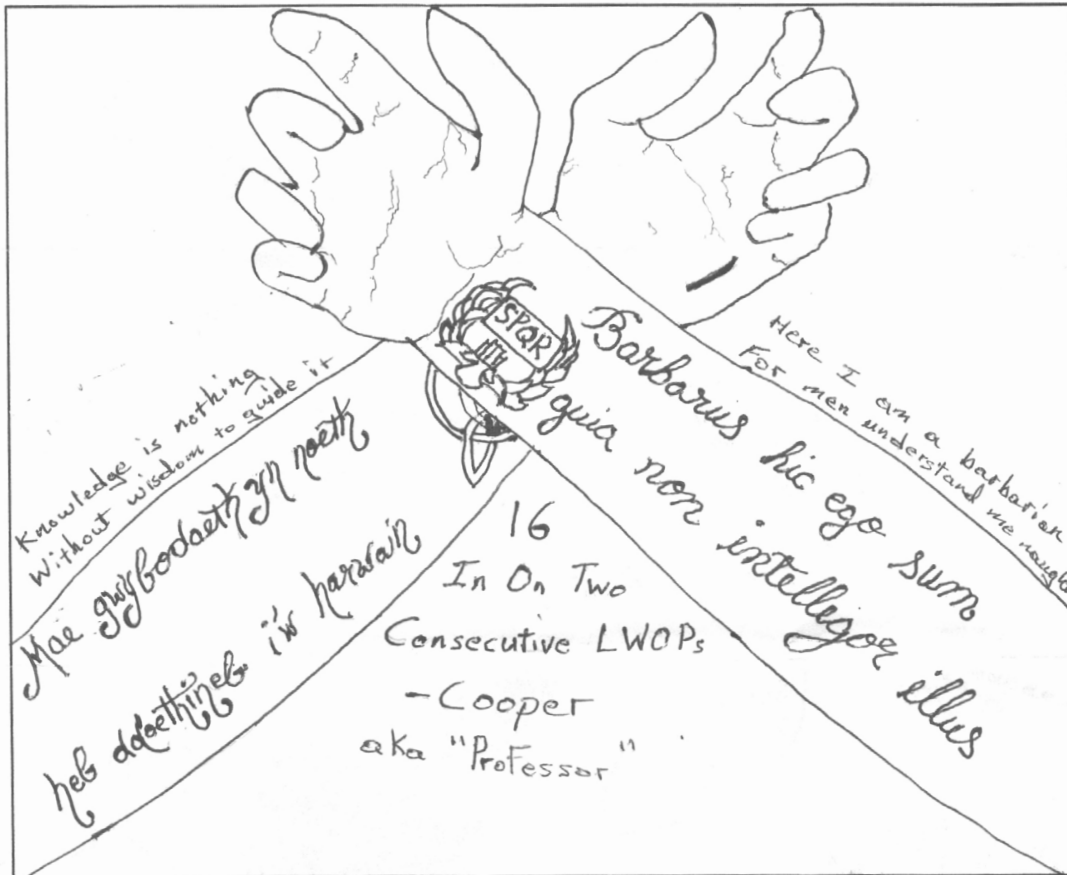


Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

NONE

Your name or pseudonym: Zeni D. Dukes

If you could, what would you write or draw on the wall of a cell for people to see 50 years in the future?



Is there anything you want to say about what you drew above or about graffiti in general?

I draw my tattooed arms in every cell I'm in. The only thing that changes is the number of years I'm in.

Your name or pseudonym: Jason Cooper

Essay by Kit Brixton

Getting locked up is like dying. Some agent denizen Ferris you away to a hidden land that is confusing, unfamiliar, and possibly frightening. With everything stripped away and gone, the only thing left is to make a mark to let others know you were there and you existed. Art and graffiti history converge to show how human it is to leave some writing or picture for others to see.



There is a superstition that anywhere you leave your mark... you are destined to return. There is so much graffiti around, that only a few let it bother them. Most of the graffiti that I've seen is in temporary holding cells, solitary confinement, and shared restrooms. There are reasons for this, but the writing is mostly meant for inmates out of the view of guards.

Graffiti in lock up takes great effort to create. Gouges in the hard surfaces require something sharp and pointy like a staple. A small golf pencil or pen insert can be just as hard to acquire. Frequently, there is no paper and the walls are the only place to jot something down.

Graffiti can bring the ire of system as well. A creator can be threatened with a new charge of

destroying government property. Some guards take it personally; as if the artist defaced the guard's own home, instead of the inmates' temporary one. Works may also be used for a group punishment. Other inmates being held responsible for the graffiti, are forced to clean, or remove it.

In Men's Facilities; crosses, stars, and skulls are common sites. They are simple and fast to draw. Ideas that link inmates to the outside world are often referenced as well. Names, initials, and dates are very popular. The carceral world distorts time, where the clichéd tally marks are a pragmatic way to keep track of days, months, and years. Religious symbols, gang affiliations, or neighborhoods are found as well. It is a community connection of sorts, a remembrance that you are not alone in the world, and a symbol for anyone that may come after you.

My favorite finds are in the oldest or difficult to reach spots. The oldest I've seen is... "Sisk, 55505-203, Bank Robbery, 4-13-62". Several inmates have added their own information over the years. I find humor in site specific drawings. A smiley face using old holes as eyes, a rat pecking from a crack, a Munchain scream scratched into old paint, or goofy puns and jokes. I am always amazed at the literary like quotations... "Be yourself, everyone is too busy being someone else."

Wherever we find ourselves, graffiti is one form of self-expression meant to be shared. It is shared across time, space, and emotions. It encapsulates an exact individual's experience at a given time.



Poem by Horace Thomas

ROT 4-21-09 STATE

BY HORACE THOMAS

LAVISH NIGHTS
IN YOUR CELL
WHILE YOU ROT
AND DIE IN HELL.

HEARTLESS GUARDS
WHO CARRY THE KEYS
THEY WILL QUICKLY
BEAT YOU TO YOUR KNEES. --

IT'S A GAME OF
LIFE AND DEATH
EVEN YOUR SOUL
IS UNDER ARREST. --

IT'S A FIGHT
FEW WILL WIN
BUT A FIGHT
ONE MUST BEGIN!

HORACE THOMAS IS A FREELANCE
POET/WRITER CURRENTLY
INCARCERATED IN CALIFORNIA
STATE PRISON SALINAS VALLEY.

Contributors

Cover artist Kevin Roper

Entering prison at the age of 18 and serving 33 years, I became a self taught artist (although I did take one art class where I fought with the instructor). The system held me frozen, expecting silence and death. I found I am drawn to pieces that reveal movement and life. I became a versatile artist, working in most anything from pencil to wood. I found joy in the challenge of trying new medias. One joy I found was being able to volunteer to teach art while inside, which led to a passionate experience of where creativity meets life, believing that people can always grow, and in helping others embrace their own creativity they find themselves. To me art is not just about what you create, but how it connects you to others.

Essayist Kit Brixton

I'm a queer, gender-nonconforming anarcho-punk artist and author serving life in prison who finds happiness in many forms of creative expression.

Editor Sarah Mirk

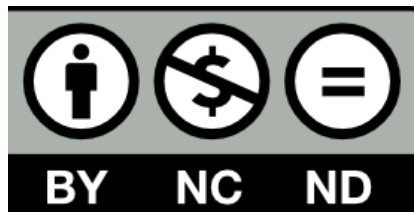
I'm a comics journalist, teacher, author, and somewhat obsessive zine-maker. I'm an editor at comics publication The Nib and a digital producer at Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting, where my work on comics series *In/Vulnerable: Stories of Inequity Amid Pandemic* won a Robert F. Kennedy journalism award. I've written several books, including graphic nonfiction anthology *Guantanamo Voices: True Stories from the World's Most Infamous Prison*. My work centers on collaboration, socially engaged art, and complicating historical narratives. After growing up in Ojai, I now live in Portland, Oregon.

Contributors

Quentin Bealer
Lil Cee Cee
Jason Cooper
Levi D. Dukes
JoanLisa Redcloud Featherson
Goldfinger
Rene Guy
Maine
Summer Monroe
Steven J. Levy
Laura Lutrell Purviance
Janette R.
Jennifer Amelia Rose
Jazzie Paradise Scott
Horace Thomas

Thank you!

All the contributors!
A.B.O Comix
Bart's Books
Oregon Justice Resource Center
Ojai Historic Preservation Commission
The Ojai Jail Arts Initiative curators:
Matt Henriksen, Elizabeth Herring, & Teddy Nava



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Los Angeles Times

OJAI : Fate of Old Jail Divides Officials

By Caitlin Rother | Oct. 23, 1992

Not one of the 600 prisoners who were locked up in the squat cinder-block building behind Libbey Bowl in Ojai ever escaped. The light came in through the side of the jail, and the heavy door closed like a vault. Just like in Alcatraz, said a park supervisor, smiling.

“You couldn’t get out of there if you wanted to,” said Elizabeth McAllister, chairwoman of the Ojai Historic Preservation Commission. The building, which served as the city jail from the 1920s until the 1970s, is now used by the city Department of Public Works to store fencing for events in the 30-acre Libbey Park. Some council members and landscape planners see the building as an eyesore that should be replaced with picnic tables. James Loebel, who has served on the council for 24 years, said his opinion has not changed during his tenure.

“I believe it is in the wrong spot, and I think it’s an ugly building and I think it detracts from the park as a whole,” Loebel said. “I’ve always thought so and I always will.” But McAllister is leading a fight to restore the square white structure and educate people about its history.

“I think it reflects the history of social order in the valley,” McAllister said. “When you think we had this little tiny jail up until the 1970s, it shows how times have changed.”

McAllister and the commission want to see the building cleaned up and become the focal point of information about Ojai history. Free-standing signs could be stuck into the ground, they say, revealing facts about historic sites. For example, the Ojai Trail, which runs next to the jail, was once a railroad track that transported oranges to Ventura, McAllister said. The biking and walking trail starts at Foster Park, heads through Ojai and Libbey Park before it turns into a horse trail that ends at Soule Park.

Since history repeats itself, it is not surprising that this is not the first time that the battle over the jail has been fought.

The argument began 20 years ago when the original master plan called for demolition of the jail.

“It happens to be in a place that just doesn’t help the park as a park,” said Robert Royston, the Mill Valley landscape architect who designed the original and recent plan. “It’s visually in the way.”

The debate started up again after Royston repeated his recommendation that the jail be demolished. The council has approved the plan, leaving the jail issue for more discussion.

Landmark Status Urged for Former Ojai Jail

By Tracy Wilson | May 20, 2001

It squats under the shady oaks of Ojai's Libbey Park, a windowless concrete bunker with 8-inch-thick walls and a formidable steel door. The old city jail, a beige box built in the 1920s, may lack the architectural grace of the town's Mission-style arcade or the stately beauty of the post office tower. But members of the Ojai Historic Preservation Commission say the tiny lockup matches those structures in historic value, and they want it preserved as a city landmark. In a report that will go to the City Council this summer, preservationists say the jail has a colorful history and represents how Ojai dealt with crime in an earlier era.

"It is somewhat unique," said commission Chairman Terry Hill, a longtime Ojai resident. From the time it opened in the 1920s to its closure in the early 1970s, four-cell jail served as the town's sole detention facility. It housed about 650 small-time offenders over those years, without a single escape. By day, inmates worked on maintenance projects in the park or around town. At night, they were locked two-to-a-cell, sleeping on bunks that dangled from ceiling chains. Over the years, inmates scrawled graffiti on the concrete walls, and much of their writing remains there today, including lyrics from Bob Dylan songs and a musing that "LSD is here to stay."

After the 1970s, the old jail, which measures 23 feet across and 15 feet wide, was occasionally used when newer police facilities in town were full. Now, most people who are arrested are taken to Ventura County's main jail in Ventura. The push to preserve the old jail began years ago when a landscape architect hired by the city described the building as "atrocious" and recommended knocking it down.

Commissioner Betty McAllister was horrified. "I just felt it was part of our history," she said recently. The drive is not without precedent. Across California, historians have moved to preserve law-and-order landmarks as reminders of efforts to tame the lawlessness that went hand-in-hand with westward expansion. Of course, there is Alcatraz, the former maximum-security federal prison built on a rocky island in San Francisco Bay. It housed some of the nation's most notorious inmates.

The prisoners held in Ojai's little jail were far from infamous. McAllister writes in the draft report that in the early 1920s, most inmates were "fighters, drunks or horse thieves."

The concrete jail replaced a wood jail built in 1873 by Constable Andrew Vancuren. According to historians, the townspeople replaced Vancuren--and he refused to let them have the jail. The original wood jail was moved and now stands behind Cold Springs Tavern in Santa Barbara County, Hill said. "That one got away from Ojai before we really had a focus on what historic buildings really mean to us," Hill said. Preservationists aren't about to let that happen again.

In recent years, volunteers have renovated the city jail's interior, carefully preserving the graffiti, wash basins and toilets. They also have repainted the outside walls and erected an informational kiosk and metal benches.

The steel door was recently welded shut to prevent vandalism--though preservationists hope to open the jail during special events in the future.



Illustrations by Maine