



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

## Guide to the House of Correction records

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**Repository:** City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division  
**Title:** House of Correction records  
**Collection No.:** 8502.001  
**Dates:** (Bulk, 1878-1960) 1848-1979  
**Quantity:** 37.0 Cubic feet (148 Volumes, 1 Document Case)

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### Biographical/Historical note

In October of 1823, a House of Correction was organized temporarily in the North Jail on Leverett Street for the confinement and labor of lewd, idle and disorderly persons sentenced by the Police Court. Chapter 28 of the Acts of 1824 established the House of Correction in the City of Boston as the House of Correction for the County of Suffolk. The Justices of the Police Court had the authority and power to order commitments to the House of Correction according to the provisions of an act, entitled “an act for suppressing and punishing rogues, vagabonds, common beggars, and other idle, disorderly, and lewd persons,” passed on 26 Mar 1788. A new building was erected in 1825 at South Boston for the House of Correction. However, the move to the new

building was delayed because of the success of the House of Correction in the Jail on Leverett Street.

In 1833, the City Council finally ordered the removal of the House of Correction on Leverett Street and Governor's Island to South Boston. The House of Correction was located in South Boston until 1896. By Chapter 536 sec. 15 of the Acts of 1896, the House of Correction at South Boston ceased to be a house of correction after all the prisoners sentenced there were transferred to the former House of Industry on Deer Island, which was designated the House of Correction at Deer Island, or discharged. The last inmates were transferred from the South Boston facility by October 1902. The House of Correction was located on Deer Island until 1991 when it was transferred to its current location at South Bay.

The House of Correction (at the Leverett St. Jail and then South Boston) was under the control of the Overseers of the House of Correction from 1823 through 1857. In 1857, the Board of Directors of Public Institutions took over responsibility for all public institutions including the House of Correction at South Boston. In 1889, the Board of Commissioners of Public Institutions replaced the Board of Directors. In 1895, the Institutions Commissioner succeeded the Board of Commissioners. In 1897, the Penal Institutions Department was established and given control of both the House of Correction at South Boston and the recently converted Deer Island House of Correction. In 1920, all the independent institution departments were consolidated in the Institutions Department, and control of the Deer Island House of Correction passed to the Institutions Department. The Penal Institutions Department was re-established in 1924 as a separate entity from the Institutions Department and once again assumed control of the Deer Island House of Correction. In 1991, the Penal Institutions Department was abolished, and chapter 138 of the Acts of 1991, sections 356-363, placed the House of Correction in the charge of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Office. The House of Correction houses inmates convicted of crimes with sentences of 2 ½ years or less.

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## Scope and Contents note

The records for the House of Correction range in date from 1848 through 1970, with the bulk of the dates covering 1878 through 1970. Both the House of Correction at South Boston and the Deer Island House of Correction are represented. The records consist entirely of large volumes including Registers, Indexes, Log Books, various Financial Records, as well as Pardons and Permits.

The Registers, in addition to an inmate register, include records of inmate personal property, commitments and discharges, inmate conduct, deaths, and visitors. There are both indexes to the inmate registers and indexes to warrants. The Log Books consist of records that offer far less descriptive information about the inmates in the House of Correction. These include the Daily Reports of the Receiving Office, a log of inmate movement into and out of the facility, a record of punishments, a record of Work Change, and record of assigned work detail. The Financial Records consist of an assortment of account books that offer a disjointed glimpse of the financial workings of the House of Correction. The Pardons contain a bound volume of actual pardons as well as a list of pardons granted and pardons refused. Finally, the Permits are a set of volumes that provide a record of those inmates who received permission to be at liberty for the remainder of their sentence.

With the use of the Record of Inmate Conduct, the Registers of Inmates, the Indexes to the Registers of Inmates, and the Daily Report of Commitments and Discharges one is able to piece together an almost complete record of all the male inmates who entered the House of Correction from 1878 through 1970. The only gaps in this record are October 1903 through April 1904 and July 1909 through April 1911, for which there are no records for male inmates. The record of female inmates is complete from 1878 through 1919. However, from 1920 onwards there are no records for female inmates.

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## Arrangement note

All the volumes in this collection have been numbered sequentially from 1 to 148, based on their original shelf order, for inventory purposes. This volume number is the number that appears in the container list on the left hand side of the finding aid. Since the volumes were numbered as an initial processing task, certain volume numbers appear "out of order." This, however, is not the case. Upon further processing, the shelf order of the volumes was rearranged to facilitate co-location of volumes from the same series and sub-series therefore resulting in the appearance in the finding aid of certain volumes being "out of order."

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### Series I: Financial Records

This series contains a miscellaneous group of financial records for the House of Correction at Deer Island. There is one volume, "Classified Expenditures," that provides a yearly accounting of expenditures for the Penal Institutions Department and the House of Correction from 1913 through 1921. After 1921, this volume only has numbers for the House of Correction through 1931. There are two volumes for fines, "Fines Paid" and "Record of Fines," that cover the years 1897-1927.

The House of Correction operated a number of different steamboats as a means of transporting goods, personnel, and inmates between the facility on Deer Island and other various locations. The Steamboat Monitor was one of these ships; there is an account book covering its activities for the years 1907-1913. There is also a journal for another unidentified steamboat for the period of May 1931 through February 1946. There is one account book for the House Correction that provides a record of the businesses and people with whom the House of Correction had accounts. This volume covers the years 1917-1929. In addition to this general account book, there are three account books for the Industries within the House of Correction for 1905-1935. These account books provide a record of the costs and income associated with the House of Correction's Industries.

#### Volume

1	Classified Expenditures, 1913-1931
2	Fines Paid, 1897 February - 1924 September
3	Record of Fines, 1924 September - 1927 April
50	Steamboat Monitor's Account Book, 1907-1913
4	Steamboat Journal [name not known], 1931 May - 1946 February
5	Account Book for House of Correction, 1917-1929
Volumes	
6-8	Industries Account Journals, 1905 May - 1935 March (3 Volumes)

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### Series II: Indexes, 1892 - 1974

The majority of these volumes are indexes for the registers of inmates for the House of Correction at both South Boston and Deer Island. The indexes provide an alphabetical listing of inmates by surname within each year and month. The indexes also provide the following data on each inmate: Number, Name, Date of Commitment, Offense, Sentence, No. of Times [Committed], Former No., and Discharged. The indexes from later years also list what court the inmate came from and how

the inmate was discharged. There are indexes for both Males and Females; however, some indexes record inmates of both genders. The final three volumes listed here are indexes to Warrants. These indexes provide Name, Warrant No., Received Date, Received From, Warrant For, and the Disposition of the Warrant.

Volume	
9	Index to Inmates Register, Male/Female, South Boston, 1892 - 1902 (1 Volume)
Volumes	
10-12	Index to Inmates Register, Females, 1899 October - 1919 December (3 Volumes)
13-17	Index to Inmates Register [Males], 1915-1941, with gaps (5 Volumes)
18-19	Index to Inmates Register Males, 1955 - 1970 (2 Volumes)
20-22	Index to Warrants for Individuals, 1925 - 1935, 1944 - 1974 (3 Volumes)

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### Series III: Log Books, 1889 - 1945

This series is an artificial grouping of various types of logbooks. The Daily Report of Receiving Office is a daily record of the number of prisoners in the House of Correction including the number of inmates discharged, remaining, and committed as well as the specific number of inmates in each location of the facility. The Daily Log of Inmates Into and Out of the House of Correction contains the date, name, and sentence/fine for each inmate entering or leaving the House of Correction for that date. The Punishment Record log contains the date and time for the beginning and end of an inmate's punishment, the inmate's name, the offence that called for punishment, the name of the guard who reported the infraction, and the subsequent punishment. The Record of Work Change contains the date, inmate name, the inmate's old job and the inmate's new job. The Transfer Book records the movement of inmates within the House of Correction including date, name, and the locations between which the inmate was transferred. The Supply List is simply a list of supplies for the House of Correction. Finally, there are the Work Detail logs. These differ from the Record of Work Change in that they record the initial work assignment for an inmate upon entrance into the House of Correction. The Work Detail logs record date, name, age, offense, sentence/fine, assigned work detail, and the inmate's location within the House of Correction.

Volumes	
23-38	Daily Report of Receiving Office, 1930-1945 (16 Volumes)
Volume	
52	[Daily Log of Inmates Into and Out-of HOC], 1926 January - 1927 April
39	Punishment Record Book, 1889 April 1 - 1900 May 1
Volumes	
40-48	Record of Work Change, 1931 May - 1943 September; 1975 January - 1980 January (9 Volumes )
Volume	
49	Transfer Book, 1934-1937
40	[Supply List], 1903
50, 147	Work Detail, 1931 February - 1933 December (2 Volumes)

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**Series IV: Pardons, 1848 - 1897**

The first volume contains pardons for inmates in the House of Correction, from 1860 through 1897. The actual documents have been collected and bound together to form this volume. The first four documents, however, are warrants for individuals from 1848 and 1852. The second volume contains a monthly list of pardons granted and pardons refused from February 1896 through January 1897. It contains the date of the grant or refusal, the inmate's name, the inmate's location, the date of the original sentence, and the sentence. There is also an alphabetical index to the list of pardons at the beginning of this volume.

Volume	
51	Pardons Issued for Inmates, 1848-1897, (Bulk, 1860-1897) (1 Volume)
52	Record of Pardons Granted and Refused, 1896 February - 1897 January (1 Volume)

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**Series V: Permits, 1924 - 1945**

These volumes contain a record of those inmates who received parole for the remainder of their sentences. The records cover the years 1924-1945 except for the dates September 1935 through August 1937. The volume(s) with these dates is not present. There is no index to these volumes and the information (name and date) within is in straight chronological order.

Volumes	
53-61	"Permits to be at Liberty" for the Remainder of Sentence, 1924 - 1935 August, 1937 September - 1945 (9 Volumes)

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**Series VI: Registers****Register of Inmate Personal Property, 1916 - 1959**

These volumes contain a record of the personal property of each individual inmate who entered the house of correction. The following data is included: name, sentence, physical description of inmate, birthplace and current address, inventory of clothing and personal affects, occupation, and date of discharge. These registers cover the dates August 1916 through December 1959. The only exceptions are April 1932 through May 1937 and May 1948 through July 1949. The volumes covering these dates are not present. The entries are in chronological order and there is no index.

Volumes	
62-67	1916 August - 1926 April (6 Volumes)
68-76	1926 May - 1936 December (9 Volumes)
77-85	1936 December - 1948 April (9 Volumes)
86-93	1949 August - 1959 December (8 Volumes)

**Register of Discharged Inmates, 1938 - 1951**

This register is a monthly accounting of discharged inmates covering 1938 through July 1951. It includes inmate number, name, and date of commitment, sentence, and discharge.

Volume

1938 - 1951 July (1 Volume)

**Daily Report of Commitments and Discharges, 1920 - 1960**

These volumes are a daily record of every inmate who entered and left the House of Correction for that particular date from 1920-1960. The only year not represented is 1958. The entries are in chronological order and there is no index for these volumes. The list of Commitments includes register number, name, court, offence, fine and/or sentence, expiration of sentence, and former number (although these last two are generally not used.) The list of Discharges includes register number, name, and the reason for the discharge.

Volumes

95-102	1920 - 1927 (8 Volumes)
103-116	1928 - 1941 (14 Volumes)
117-132	1942 - 1957 (16 Volumes)
133-134	1959 - 1960 (2 Volumes)

**Register of Inmates, 1882 - 1915, 1955 - 1979**

These volumes are the record of all inmates who entered the House of Correction. They cover the dates 1882-1915 (with gaps) and 1955-1979. Registers exist for both the South Boston and Deer Island Houses of Correction. The entries are chronological. The entries for November 1901 through April 1902 are duplicated in two separate volumes. These registers contain the following: name, age, color, birthplace, marital status, read and write, date, court, wherefore, number of mittimus, sentence, fine, former register number, number of times incarcerated, date of discharge, reason for discharge, and remarks. The "remarks" sections usually states the inmate's occupation.

Volume

135	1882 September - 1892 November (1 Volume)
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Volumes

136-137	1898 February - 1902 April (2 Volumes)
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Volume

138	1901 November - 1903 October (1 Volume)
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Volumes

139-141	1904 April - 1909 July (3 Volumes)
142-143	1911 April - 1915 September (2 Volumes)
144-145	1955 January - 1979 August (2 Volumes)

**Record of Inmate Conduct, 1878 - 1889**

These two volumes record inmate conduct for inmates in the South Boston House of Correction. Although it was only necessary to keep this record for those inmates with sentences greater than four months, these two volumes appear to have a record for every inmate during the years covered. In addition, entries for the same inmate will be found in both the Register of Inmates and these volumes for overlapping years. This record was used to determine how much time could be taken off an inmate's sentence. Based on the length of the sentence and the amount of good conduct versus the number of times punished a specific number of days could be subtracted from an inmate's sentence. This record provides register number, name, date committed, offence, number of warrant, sentence, expiration of sentence, number of days subtracted, number of days punished, and the date of discharge. The entries are chronological according to the date of commitment.

Volume  
146 1878 - 1886 December (1 Volume)  
147 1886 December - 1889 April (1 Volume)

**Register of Deaths, 1898 - 1989**

This register records the deaths of inmates at the Deer Island House of Correction from 1898-1987. It includes register number, name, age, date of death, disease or cause of death, and the date the body was removed from or interred at Deer Island.

Volume  
148 1898 - 1989 (1 Volume)

**Visitor Register, 1921 - 1924**

This register provides a record of the inmates who received visitors during their sentence. The entries are alphabetical by inmate last name and then chronological by date of visit. The entries record the inmate's name, the date of the visit, the name(s) of the visitor(s), and the visitor(s)'s address. This volume was also re-used as a record of "[Work Change](#)" from August through December 1933. The work change entries are found on the pages not used for recording inmate visits. They are daily entries consisting of inmate name, location from, and location to information. The location entries are recorded in shorthand.

Volume  
42 1921 March - 1924 June (1 Volume)

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