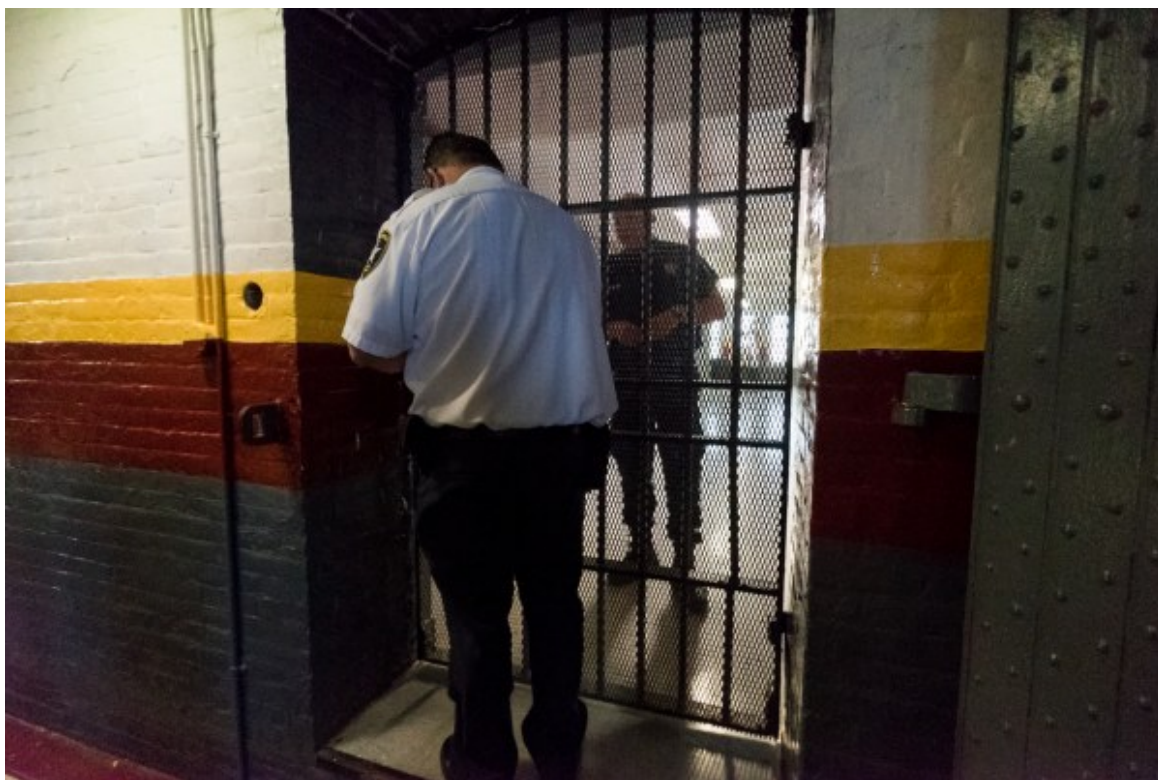


# Inside the Walls of Ash Street Jail, Past and Present Coexist

New Bedford residents young and old passing by the exterior walls of Ash Street Jail have surely wondered what it looks like on the inside. Though the facility is the oldest operating jail in the United States, many would be surprised to find the number of 21st century features within.



Cell doors are still the original steel bar gates and still operated by a two-stage manual locking system.

A recent tour of the jail, led by 25-year veteran (most of which spent at Ash Street) Captain John Murphy and Jonathan Darling, Bristol County Sheriff's Office public information officer, exposed some of the surprising coexistence of history and modernity.

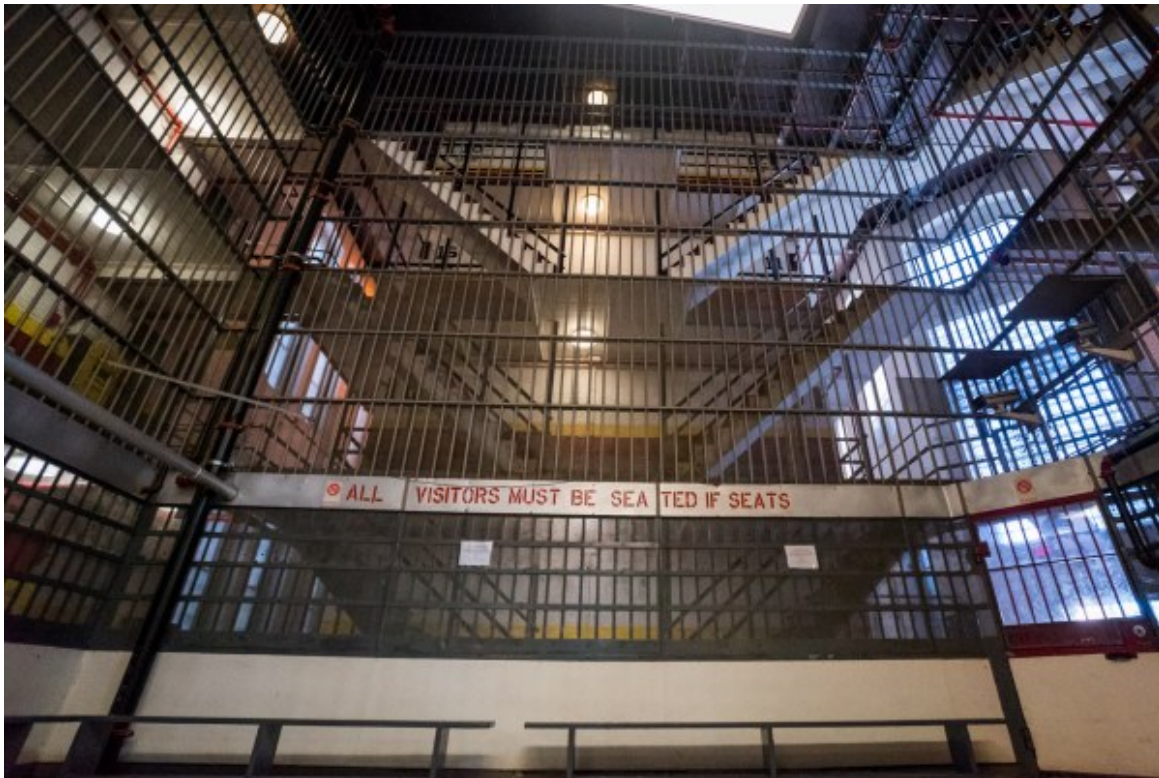
Built in 1888, much of Ash Street's features have remained the same for over 120 years. Murphy told us that since he began

working there in 1991, he had never see a floor board, cell gate or brick replaced.

Cell doors are still the original steel bar gates and still operated by a two-stage manual locking system. Each door can be locked and unlocked by a large metal key. An entire cell block can also be locked or unlocked by a manual lever located at the end of each row of cells.

The only electronic component involved with the jail cells is a wand operated by the correctional officer. It buzzes every 15 minutes to remind them to perform their scheduled rounds. Upon completion of each section of cells, they scan a chip uniquely assigned to themselves and then "check off" each section by placing the magnetic base of the wand into a corresponding magnet on the wall at the end of each row. This keeps a digital log of each round.

Another unique piece of technology used by the facility is a Cellsense detector, located in the courtyard just before entering back into the jail. The detector is highly sensitive to cellphones and other contraband prisoners may try to conceal.



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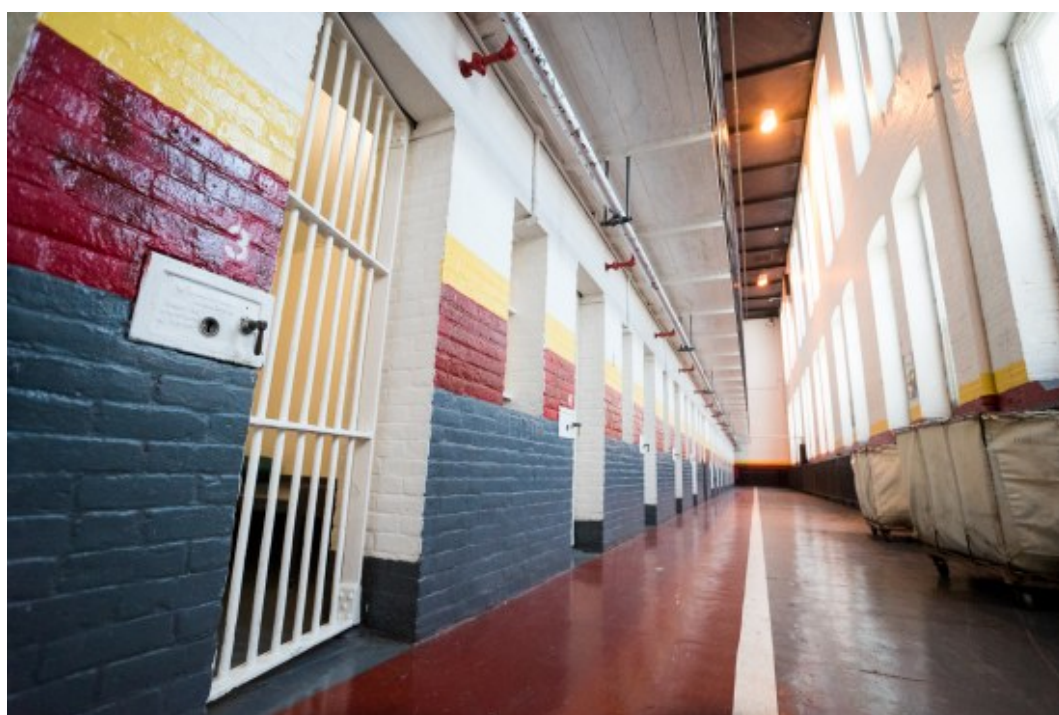
As time goes on, trends among offenders that end up in the jail tend to change. Murphy said when he started at the jail, the regional section, where individuals spend their time between being arrested and processed and appearing before a court magistrate, would often be filled with drunks that were sleeping off the night. Now, he says, many of those spending a night in regionals are high on opioids and watched very closely by officers.

The medical bay is stocked with the overdose-reversing drug, Narcan, and officers are beginning to carry it on their person as well. The most recent graduating class of correctional officers were the first to receive first responder training, and it will continue among future classes as well as annual in-service training for current officers.

The jail has also received a state grant to offer extensive addiction and treatment education. Through partnerships with Seven Hills and AdCare, the jail offers classes to inmates and

also attempts to educate those who only spend the night in regionals, handing out booklets and pamphlets with information on available treatment assistance.

The Ash Street Jail is also utilizing modern technology from a cost-saving perspective. Through state and federal assistance, the jail is in process of insulating the roof, which itself was just recently replaced, in an effort to save heating costs. They are also cutting costs by installing instant water heaters, eliminating the need for a boiler system to heat up water for showers and other inmate uses. In water savings, timers are being installed in toilets and sinks that will limit water flow to a pre-determined time. This will prevent water waste as well as possible flooding of cells.



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In the modern era of operating a jail, officials are constantly struggling to keep up with new technological advances within the general public that could potentially lead to trouble within facility walls.

With the increased popularity of drones, Darling said there is

concern across the country about what it means for the security of jails and prisons. Murphy said a resident told an officer one day she spotted a drone near the courtyard, but he said there was no incident and it was likely trying to take pictures.

However, Darling added that the BCSO is working to address potential issues with drones and that it's something they are aware of.

"In the jail system, you shut down one angle, they open up another," Murphy said.

*All photographs by Josh Souza.*

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