PRISON PRODUCTIONS: TEXTILES AND OTHER MILITARY SUPPLIES FROM
STATE PENITENTIARIES IN THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI THEATER
DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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This thesis examines the state penitentiaries of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas that became sources of wartime supplies during the Civil War. A shortage of industry in the southwest forced the Confederacy to use all manufactories efficiently. Penitentiary workshops and textile mills supplied a variety of cloth, wood, and iron products, but have received minimal attention in studies of logistics.

Penitentiary textile mills became the largest domestic supplier of cloth to Confederate quartermasters, aid societies, citizens, slaves, and indigent families. This study examines how penitentiary workshops converted to wartime production and determines their contribution to the Confederate war effort. The identification of those who produced, purchased, distributed, and used penitentiary goods will enhance our knowledge of overall Confederate supply.
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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Floyd F. Troha Sr. Thank you for teaching me the value of hard work, to always put forth my best effort, and the importance of completing every task that is undertaken.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the battle of Shiloh, Colonel John C. Moore, regimental commander of the Second Texas Infantry, requisitioned “properly colored” uniforms from the quartermaster depot at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The requested uniforms were produced at a workshop in the Texas State Penitentiary, but were constructed of low quality, white undyed cloth. The workshop initially had produced uniforms of excellent quality, but as the war continued, machinery wore out and dyes became unavailable. Colonel Moore recalled, “I shall never forget the men’s consternation and many exclamations not quoted in the Bible, such as, ‘Well, I’ll be damned!’ and, ‘Don’t them things beat hell!’ Another soldier exclaimed, “Do the generals expect us to be killed, and want us to wear our shrouds?” The viciousness of the Texan attack at Shiloh caused one Federal prisoner to remember that regiment as “…them hell-cats that went into battle dressed in their grave clothes.”¹

What Confederate military officials requested from their quartermasters was not always what they received when they were supplied with goods from state penitentiaries. The introduction of state penitentiaries across the southern United States during the early nineteenth century offered antebellum state governments an opportunity to benefit financially from the investment. Workshops operated with inmate labor were initially constructed to relieve overcrowded county jails, assist in the reformation of inmates, and make the penitentiaries self-sustaining enterprises. The decision to invest in large-scale workshops contributed to the expansion of early southern industry. State penitentiaries in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas operated workshops that produced essential goods to

civilians, slaves, local aid societies, indigent families, and eventually Confederate soldiers. When the country erupted in Civil War, workshops across the Confederacy shifted to the production of vital wartime supplies, especially within states west of the Mississippi River.

The study of Confederate supply and logistics is essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the Confederacy during the Civil War. Inadequate southern industry, transportation, and communication greatly contributed to shortages of all types. Available studies of Trans-Mississippi state prisons focus on general history, notorious corruption, and issues of reform but devote little attention to the topic of Confederate supply. Examinations of Civil War prisons are dominated by a fascination with Union and Confederate military stockades and camps. These temporary facilities held prisoners of war and are excluded from this study since they were not involved in the penitentiary workshop industry.

Existing examinations of state penitentiaries provide little information about Confederate supply and the Quartermaster Department. In 1921 Charles W. Ramsdell discussed the challenges to and failure of the Confederate government to use the available facilities efficiently. He asserted, “The sole purpose was to get supplies for the army at as reasonable a cost as possible – to exploit the factories, no to develop them for the benefit of the community at large.” In 1936 Ramsdell addressed the Southern Historical Association to bring attention again to the extremely important but neglected subjects of supply and logistics within Confederate historiography. Although examinations of the Ordnance, Subsistence, Transportation, and Quartermaster Departments were later undertaken, the daunting prospect of collecting scattered receipts, reports, and private account books
delayed an effective examination of the contributions of state penitentiaries to Confederate supply.²

More general studies have tended to bypass the subject of wartime prison workshops. Robert L. Kerby produced an excellent overview of the war west of the Mississippi River in Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-1865 (1972), in which he examined the various military bureaus established to meet the needs of civilians and soldiers. Mark T. Carleton's Politics and Punishment: The History of the Louisiana State Penal System (1971) provided a broad study of the relationship between Louisiana's penal system and the larger history of the state. This book emphasized the corruption and greed in a penal system controlled by politicians who emphasized the pursuit of profit as a primary motive from 1835 through 1968. A useful general history of the Texas prison system was Penology for Profit: A History of the Texas Prison System, 1867-1912 (1988), written by Donald R. Walker. He showed how geography and location encouraged convict leasing that dominated the Texas penal system for nearly fifty years. The author included insights on greed, corruption, and reform of the prison system, but provided limited information on the early years of the facility.³

There has not been a general history published on the Arkansas State Penitentiary that includes the influential early years at the original facility. Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime (1976) by Michael B. Dougan was the first

² Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Control of Manufacturing by the Confederate Government," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 8 (December 1921): 231, 249.
book published on the Confederacy in Arkansas in nearly a century and supplied a badly needed account of internal conflict during the war. He offered an overview of supply within the state, but only briefly mentioned the contributions of the state penitentiary. Mark K. Christ edited *Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas* (1994), a collection of well-written essays on the Civil War in Arkansas and its effect on the people, but it gave only minimal attention to the role of the state penitentiary in Confederate supply. Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland edited a collection of essays on little examined topics by prominent historians titled *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders* (2000) that provided limited information on manufacturing and industry in Arkansas, but the state penitentiary is not mentioned.4

Prior to the 1960s the study of Confederate supply received the same minimal attention from historians as the Trans-Mississippi Department received from the Confederate government during the war. Then James L. Nichols filled a void with *The Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi* (1964), which examined the efforts of Confederate quartermasters in the Trans-Mississippi Department. Nichols examined clothing, equipage, tax-in-kind policies, the Cotton Bureau, transportation, and financial issues within the region. Shortly thereafter, Richard D. Goff wrote *Confederate Supply* (1969), explaining the development, execution, and effect of Confederate supply policies within the Quartermaster, Subsistence, Medical, and Ordnance departments, as well as the Niter and Mining Bureau. His book discussed the Confederacy as a whole and did not

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Goff and Nichols dominated the study of Confederate logistics prior to the emergence of *Confederate Industry: Manufacturers and Quartermasters in the Civil War* (2002) by Harold S. Wilson. His detailed study examined Confederate struggles to control industrial output, Union efforts to destroy it, and attempts to supplement domestic output with imports. The book notes the manufacture of wartime materials at state penitentiaries, but does not develop that topic fully. Clayton E. Jewett provided an excellent overview with *Texas in the Confederacy: An Experiment in Nation Building* (2002). He asserted that Texans were primarily concerned with the protection of their property and commercial opportunities within the state. In one chapter he examined how Texas industry, including the Texas State Penitentiary, produced vital materials including textiles, salt, and iron. The most recent scholarship on Texas prisons has been *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire* (2010) by Robert Perkinson. He carefully examined the Texas prison system from the age of slavery to the age of incarceration decade by decade, but did not emphasize the pivotal early years of the state facility.

Like studies of the Trans-Mississippi and state prisons in the region, there are few examinations of manufacturing at southern state penitentiaries. Studies of manufacturing at Trans-Mississippi facilities are almost non-existent. This study will fill a void in the historiography of Confederate supply in the Trans-Mississippi through an investigation of the state penitentiary workshops and manufactured goods produced by inmate labor.

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Published government records, governors’ papers, financial reports, private account books, Confederate records, and local newspapers provide the foundation for a comprehensive look at the workshops. These sources help determine output levels of the workshops during the war. An understanding of those output levels will help advance knowledge of the war in general, the war in the Trans-Mississippi, and the story of logistics in American military history.

The production of manufactured goods by inmate labor is an interesting yet generally unexplored aspect of home-front contributions to wartime supply. The experience of inmate factory laborers provides a unique perspective on the Civil War homefront. The workshops in Louisiana and Texas produced textiles, shoes, leatherwork, wagons, carriages, small carpentry items, and blacksmithing services. The state penitentiary in Arkansas manufactured a wider variety of military supplies, such as gun carriages, wagons, caissons, tents, harness, boots, shoes, clothing, cartridge boxes, belts, camp chests, stools, and cots. The refusal of states in the Trans-Mississippi to invest heavily in southern industry prior to the war limited manufacturing capacity, but production at workshops in state prisons was pushed to the limit.

This investigation draws comparisons between facilities within the Trans-Mississippi and attempt to understand their overall contribution to the local economies. What was the quality, quantity, and variety of goods manufactured in the numerous workshops within these state penitentiaries? How were the products marketed, and who purchased them? How important was this prison industry in supplying the Confederate military? Did these workshops operate efficiently, as a disorganized mess, or something in between? What does the story of production at state penitentiary workshops reveal about
the ability of a rural, agricultural society to mobilize and fight a modern war? And finally, did the Confederates measure up to the challenges they faced?
CHAPTER 2

PRODUCTION AT THE LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY IN BATON ROUGE

The Louisiana State Penitentiary was the first penal institution established in the
Confederate states west of the Mississippi River, and the facility served as a model for other
states in the region. The penitentiary in Baton Rouge followed the example of prisons in
Mississippi and Georgia in the decision to build workshops operated by inmate labor. An
investigation of production at the workshops is essential to understanding the impact of
the prison on the local community, the Confederate Trans-Mississippi Department, and the
Confederacy as a whole. The Louisiana State Penitentiary operated as the largest single
textile manufacturer in the state, and it supplied most of the cloth manufactured for
soldiers and civilians in 1861-1862.

The winter months were often miserable for soldiers, and those of 1863-1864 were
among the coldest on record in Louisiana state history. Brutal temperatures created
intense hardship for some Confederate soldiers who relied on the army to provide winter
clothes, shoes, blankets, tents, and a myriad of other manufactured goods. On June 20,
1863, Lieutenant Theophilus Perry of the 28th Texas Cavalry (dismounted) wrote to his
wife that even in the summer, “some of the men have not changed suits in four weeks . . . A
number of our men have been left at Monroe on account of being barefooted.” Shoes wore
out quickly, and soldiers sometimes left trails of bloody footprints as they marched. Prior
to the harsh winter of 1863, the Union Army seized the state penitentiaries in Baton Rouge,
Louisiana, and Little Rock, Arkansas. These valuable manufacturing facilities ceased
production, and a noticeable decline in the availability of clothing, tents, blankets, shoes,
and wagons resulted in the Trans-Mississippi. Such shortages of crucial supplies
contributed to the leading cause of death of Confederate soldiers throughout the Civil War, disease.\(^7\)

Ironically, the widespread sickness of inmates in parish (county) jails was a factor in the decision to build a state penitentiary in Louisiana in the early 1830s. The state initially confined state prisoners in a colonial-era Spanish jail in New Orleans with a capacity of 135 prisoners. During a visit to the New Orleans jail in 1831, the famous French political observer Alexis de Tocqueville commented:

> We saw there men thrown in pell-mell with swine, in the midst of excrement and filth. In locking up criminals, no thought is given to making them better but simply to taming their wickedness; they are chained like wild beasts; they are not refined but brutalized . . . The place contained condemned criminals in New Orleans and could not by any stretch of the imagination be a called a prison: it's a frightful cesspool into which they are dumped and which is suitable only for those unclean animals one finds there with them. It is noteworthy that all those detained there are not slaves: it's the prison of free men. . . .\(^8\)

On January 3, 1832, Governor Andre B. Roman led the call for a new house of correction. Following weeks of debate, an “Act to Establish the Louisiana Penitentiary” passed on March 16, 1832. The state purchased appropriate land in Baton Rouge and approved a building plan that emulated the penitentiary in Wethersfield, Connecticut. In addition, the legislature adopted the Auburn system of prison management that consisted

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of absolute silence, shop labor during the daytime, and solitary confinement at night.\textsuperscript{9}

In June 1833 nearly one hundred convicts from the parish jail in New Orleans began construction on the state penitentiary in Baton Rouge. The facility consisted of a three-story brick structure along St. Anthony Street between what is now Florida Street and Laurel Street. The north wing contained a hospital, provision room, workshops, and the original warden house on the southwest corner. The state purchased an additional eight acres to allow expansion of the prison yard, garden, and workshops. In 1834 state inspectors first recommended the manufacture of cotton bagging, and by 1840 the inmates labored in textile production, tailoring, shoe shops, brick manufacturing, leather tanning, joinery, carpentry, forge work, cabinet making, painting, and blacksmithing.\textsuperscript{10}

By October 1849 the workshops included a bagging and rope factory, a cotton and wool factory, a foundry, a finishing shop, a shoemaker shop, and a brick shop. The penitentiary that year sold $67,152.56 worth of goods for a profit of $16,737.41 after expenses and payment to the state. The prison also accrued large debts due to mismanagement and state loans for rebuilding the facility. As a result a contract to lease the penitentiary was approved on October 2 for a term of five years to the private firm of McHatton, Pratt, & Company. A few envious legislators favored state control, but the


\textsuperscript{10} Foster, “Slaves of the State,” 44-45. The building measured 154 feet wide from north to south, 244 feet long from East to West, and was completely surrounded by a 24-foot-high wall. The facility consisted of a U-shaped complex that included a lower cell house of two hundred, 7-foot-by-3.5-foot cells, and an upper cell house of 240 cells. Stout, “Origin and Early History of the Louisiana Penitentiary,” 29, 31-32, 35-36, 46-47; Hahn and Wurtzburg, \textit{Hard Labor}, 3; \textit{Louisiana Times Picayune}, July 27, 1841, August 17, 1841, January 15, 1843, February 21, 1843, March 15, 1843, October 2, 1844; \textit{Annual Report, 1854}, 22-23.
majority preferred the reliability of lessee payments to financial risk.\textsuperscript{11}

The 1850s were a period of modernization and expansion for the textile mill in Baton Rouge. In 1852 the penitentiary sold $57,968.82 of sheeting, twills, linseys, and yarns for a profit of $8,639.67. The following year an appropriation of $40,000 allowed the factory to expand the textile factory to 2,300 spindles and 60 looms that produced 2,000 yards of cloth per day. In 1853 the facility sold 1,003,038 yards of cotton and woolen cloth, and nearly 2,500,000 bricks. Prison goods yielded $102,530.90 in sales that resulted in a profit of $44,791.44 (see Table 1). The lessees were encouraged by the profits, and the state legislature appropriated funds to facilitate further expansion (see Table 1). By 1856 the legislature and lessees had invested $143,000 in machinery, tools, and raw material for the workshops.\textsuperscript{12}

A major setback occurred on June 2, 1856, when a fire in the pickery completely destroyed the cotton factory, foundry, and carpenter shop. The fire provided an opportunity to modernize and expand the textile mill to the production levels reached during the Civil War. An investment of nearly $125,000 facilitated the purchase of the most modern machinery, and the building of new structures, including a factory building, engine house, dressing room, fire-proof pickery, cotton warehouse, stable, granary, washhouse, and separate cells for female inmates. The lessees noted, “with the aid of the foundry and

\textsuperscript{11} Foster, “Slaves of the State,” 46. When the lease with McHatton, Pratt, & Company expired in 1849, the state entered into a new contract with McHatton, Ward, & Company until 1855. This lease required the firm to pay 25 percent of total profits, or a minimum annual fee of $1,000. Stout, “Origin and Early History of the Louisiana Penitentiary,” 58-59, 66; Carleton, Politics and Punishment, 10; Hahn and Wurtzburg, Hard Labor, 5.

\textsuperscript{12} Report of the Board of Control of the Louisiana Penitentiary to the General Assembly, January 1, 1852 (New Orleans: Emile La Sere, 1852), 2, 5, 6, 8; Appendix, Report of the Board of Directors of the Louisiana Penitentiary, January 2, 1854 (New Orleans: Emile La Sere, 1854), 4-6; Annual Report, 1854, 6; Foster, “Slaves of the State,” 46; Message of Robert C. Wickliffe, Governor of the State of Louisiana Together with an Appendix Containing the Report of the Penitentiary Agents for the Year 1856 (Baton Rouge: Printed at the Office of the Daily Advocate, 1857), 23.
finishing shop, and other mechanical branches, which we have now in complete operation, we are fully prepared to repair or make anew any part of the cotton machinery that may be damaged or broken; thus enabling us to maintain, in its present perfection, the entire machinery of the factory." The lessees purchased new machinery from eastern cities with a line of credit supplied by the Louisiana State Bank. In 1856 the penitentiary sold $85,817.38 of goods that resulted in a profit of $54,956.92.13

Inmates fabricated the necessary bricks and provided the labor required to construct the new structures in 1857. Despite the use of inmate labor, the new additions cost $36,122.31 more than the funds appropriated. Improvements to the workshops included two steam engines, two hundred looms, and a fire-proof cotton warehouse to store up to 1,200 bales. In addition, $14,576.80 was spent on the construction of a water reservoir. The workshops required 20,000 gallons of water daily, and the reservoir was expected to hold 3,214,230 gallons that would supply enough water for at least 160 days. The financial panic of 1857 affected the sale of penitentiary goods and resulted in nearly $36,923.28 of stock remaining on hand at the penitentiary. Nonetheless, the sale of goods produced at least $134,248.38 in revenue, providing a profit of $65,374.75 (see Table 1).14

The rapid expansion of the workshops at the penitentiary during 1857 outpaced the number of inmates, but was pivotal to the expansion of the textile mill. The mill was the most lucrative use of inmate labor, the most reliable source of profit, and subject to fewer contingencies than the other workshops. The factory consisted of 5,632 spindles and 200

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looms that produced nearly 12,000 yard of cotton goods per day with a consumption of fifteen bales of cotton. In 1860 Louisiana plantations produced about one-sixth of all cotton grown in the U. S., and supplied about one-third of all cotton exports. Additionally, wool was purchased from local farms as well as from Texas.\footnote{Annual Report, 1858, 3-6, 20-21, 26. A spindle is a wooden spike weighted at one end with a wheel and an optional hook at the other end. It is used for spinning wool and other fibers into thread. A loom is a machine or frame used to weave cloth. The earliest looms featured vertical warp yarns affixed to two ends of the frame, while the horizontal weft yarns were manually woven through.}

The penitentiary workshops sold goods locally and established reputations as reliable suppliers. The state’s leading newspaper was enthusiastic: “The successful introduction of cotton manufacture into our State Penitentiary, shows how profitable this species of industry may be made at the South . . . the profits of the institution are large.” By the onset of the Civil War, the Louisiana State Penitentiary was a model institution, and the workshops produced annual sales of $117,624.\footnote{Louisiana Times Picayune, May 12, 1859, August 10, 1859; Report of the Board of Control of the Louisiana Penitentiary to the General Assembly, December 31, 1859 (Baton Rouge: J. M. Taylor, 1859), 4-6, 15-16; Louisiana Times Picayune, September 11, 1861; Hahn and Wurtzburg, Hard Labor, 6.}

Shortages plagued the Confederacy throughout the Civil War, and demand for goods from state penitentiaries was constant. The United States Navy instituted a blockade of 3,549 miles of Confederate coastline on April 30, 1861, and it reached New Orleans by July. Southern manufacturers struggled to meet the demands of the Confederacy, and a system of blockade running developed in order to import unavailable products. However, supplemental clothing was not a high priority item for blockade-runners in the Trans-Mississippi Department, and shortages were offset to a considerable degree through
increased production at the penitentiary workshops.\textsuperscript{17}

The Confederate Trans-Mississippi Department extended over 600,000 square miles of Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas, as well as the territories of Arizona and New Mexico. In 1860 the population of the region totaled 1,785,759 people, most of whom resided in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. By November 1861 Louisiana enrolled 23,577 soldiers in Confederate service who required uniforms, blankets, tents, and a myriad of other goods. According to the \textit{New Orleans Picayune}, “the Pelicans have done better in proportion to their population than any other Confederate state outside Virginia.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Confederate Quartermaster Department was responsible for supplying these soldiers with uniforms and other necessary equipment. The official allowance of clothing averaged twenty-five articles per year, and was issued twice a year to soldiers. The allowance included one soldier hat, one forage cap, one uniform coat, two sack coats, two pairs of drawers, three flannel shirts, four pairs of boots, four pairs of stockings, two blankets, three pairs of trousers, and two pairs of trousers the second year. As the war


The penitentiary workshops became a leading supplier of cloth to the Quartermaster Department in Louisiana. A typical uniform lasted only weeks or months, depending on the quality and construction. Soldiers typically procured their initial uniform from relatives or local aid societies, but ultimately depended on quartermasters who struggled to meet wartime demands. Cloth, thread, sewing needles, and spinning wheels became precious commodities across the South. Wearing homespun cloth was considered a sign of Confederate patriotism, and it became the most common material for clothing during the war.\footnote{Richard N. Current, ed., \textit{Encyclopedia of the Confederacy}, 4 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 1:356; Baton Rouge \textit{Daily Advocate}, May 16, 1861.}

Demand for clothing placed tremendous pressure on the penitentiary workshops to supply soldiers, civilians, and slaves across the state. The Confederate States Clothing Manufactory in New Orleans produced uniforms from cloth manufactured at the penitentiary. Private apparel shops that previously marketed to the public were suddenly flooded with military orders and adjusted to meet the needs of the military. The textile mill at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, the most reliable large-scale producer of a variety of textiles in southern Louisiana, supplied these businesses with cloth.\footnote{Winters, \textit{Civil War in Louisiana}, 60; New Orleans \textit{Daily Picayune}, April 2, June 16, 1861, February 8, 28, 1862; New Orleans \textit{Daily Crescent}, February 8, 1862.}

In 1860 the sale of penitentiary goods increased as the textile factory sold 1,757,315
yards of cotton cloth, and 3,276 bales of osnaburg, twills, linseys, and jean fabric. Meanwhile, the shoe shop produced at least sixty pairs of brogans in a single month. The brickyard sold 2,268,805 bricks, and the cooper shop produced a large number of carriages, wagons, and wheelbarrows. The foundry and blacksmith fabricated pig iron, bar iron, sheet iron, sheet brass, sheet copper, and castings useful in repairing the textile and hemp factory. The workshops sold at least $474,841.27 in products from 1860 to 1861, for a profit of $36,401.89. The lessees reported an additional $158,909.68 of stock on hand at the penitentiary, at Menard & Vignaud clothing store, and in route to St. Louis that would eventually yield considerable profits.  

With the onset of the Civil War, the Baton Rouge textile mill expanded to produce several varieties of finished cloth, including shirting, burlaps, and osnaburg available for sale on site or through private merchants. Sales to the U.S. military were non-existent before the war, but the conflict opened a new market for penitentiary workshop products. Indeed, Confederate quartermasters in Louisiana purchased upwards of two-thirds of the goods manufactured at the penitentiary during the war. By September 1861 the workshops spun enough wool yarn to produce 30,000 pairs of woolen socks. The Louisiana Times Picayune reported, “Each man is provided one red flannel shirt, one cotton shirt, one plaid linsey shirt, to be worn over the cotton shirt, and the materials were all of very good quality, bran [sic] new, and manufactured at the Baton Rouge Penitentiary.” The variety of textiles produced at the penitentiary mill effectively supplied Louisiana’s needs.

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22 Report of the Board of Control of the Louisiana Penitentiary to the General Assembly, January 1861 (Baton Rouge: J. M. Taylor, 1861), 3-5, 12, 15-16; Report of the Special Committee of the Louisiana Penitentiary Appointed to Examine the Books, Accounts, and Vouchers, and All Matters Connected there with to the Legislature of the State of Louisiana (Baton Rouge: J. M. Taylor, 1861), 3. A twill is a versatile fabric distinguishable by diagonal ribs on its face, and a soft, smooth finish. Gabardine, serge, and denim are all examples of twill fabrics. Osnaburg is a coarse, strong, plain-weave, medium to heavy fabric that is usually made of cotton. Linsey is a coarse linen fabric.
Confederate soldiers with clothes, blanks, and tents.\textsuperscript{23}

State contractors in Baton Rouge delivered uniforms to the Third Louisiana Infantry Regiment in September 1861. These uniforms were described by Sergeant W. H. Tunnard as, “manufactured in the State Penitentiary, and were of a substantial material known as jeans, being of greyish-blue color, with the exception of Company K, which was dark brown. The outfit infused a new feeling and spirit amongst the men.” The frock coats issued during the first year of the war were lined in plaid linsey and padded in the shoulders. An early uniform worn by the Louisiana Crescent Regiment was a seven-button, single-breasted frock coat constructed of a light grey jean cloth with pale yellow lining on the collar and chevron-style cuffs. The trousers were pale blue jean with pale yellow lining down the seams and dark metal buttons. In late 1861 Louisiana began to issue shell jackets of brown or light-blue grey penitentiary cloth.\textsuperscript{24}

On April 1, 1862, S. M. Hart & Company provided an inventory and appraisal of goods on hand at the facility. It detailed an abundance of raw materials, replacement parts, and belts on hand. In anticipation of the Union occupation of Baton Rouge later in 1862, some inmates were relocated, and much of the workshop machinery was shipped by river transport and railroad to Clinton, Louisiana, for temporary storage.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23}Louisiana \textit{Times Picayune}, September 11, 1861, October 3, 1861, December 5, 1861, December 7, 1861; Hahn and Wurtzburg, \textit{Hard Labor}, 6. Burlap is a densely constructed, heavy-weight, plain-weave fabric with a coarse texture. Shirting is a plain-weave fabric with even or close to even thread counts and often made of cotton.


\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Inventory and Appraisement}, 1862.
The inventory of materials on hand offers insight into the production capabilities of the penitentiary workshops during the war. As of April 1862 the textile factory held 891 bales of cotton and at least $44,293.51 of cotton and wool, either in process or on looms. The tailor shop contained twine for tents, tent poles, enameled cloth, 74 common tents, 51 pairs of linsey pants, and 36 linsey shirts. The brickyard fired 853,864 bricks, while the foundry and blacksmith contained large amounts of scrap iron, castings, iron ties, wrought iron, brass sheeting, and copper sheeting. The carpenter and cooper shop contained a turning lathe, one circular saw, seven workbenches, two iron vices, four moulding planes, two joining planes, and numerous other tools. These shops produced 449 water buckets and dippers, 54 wheelbarrows, and at least 1,500 cart bodies and wheelbarrow wheels. The machine shop and foundry contained three forges, two workbenches, three vices, a grindstone, a gear-cutting engine, one upright drilling machine, one planing machine, three turning engines, and one brass furnace. The penitentiary workshops appear to have been well equipped and able to contribute considerably to Confederate supply.

The penitentiary textile mill sometimes supplied cloth to ladies aid societies that organized to sew uniforms for soldiers and clothing for home use. In Baton Rouge the Campaign Sewing Society worked tirelessly at the church of Reverend W. R. M. Linfield to produce 1,771 pieces of clothing within a single month. Homespun became the most common material for clothing during the war. A popular Civil War song entitled, “The Homespun Dress,” celebrated southern girls who wore homespun and supported the southern cause. Ladies aid societies across Louisiana were often supplied cloth from the

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26 Ibid., 3-8, 10-11.
penitentiary.27

The lessees personally donated generous amounts of material to clothe Louisiana Confederate units throughout the war. The secretary of the Campaign Sewing Society reported, “We also tender our hearty thanks to Messrs. Pike and Hart, and the many merchants, of the place, who so generously supplies us with material for the outfit of four companies. We are happy to say that we were enabled to supply them with every necessary article, and have yet on hand nearly enough to fit out another company.” In May 1861 McHatton, Pike & Company donated the cloth to outfit Captain Henry A. Rauhman’s Company. Similarly, Governor Thomas O. Moore spent $11,845.42 from his personal account to purchase prison cloth for Confederate volunteers.28

The penitentiary textile mill also supplied large amounts of yarn to local aid societies for the knitting of socks for the soldiers. In June 1861 the lessees donated a bale of spun yarn to the family members of Confederate soldiers from Baton Rouge. The renewal of home manufacturing was essential to providing clothing to civilians, soldiers, quartermasters, and slaves during the war. The home manufacturing industry in Louisiana


28 Baton Rouge Daily Advocate, May 3, 1861; Louisiana Times Picayune, December 7, 1861; Winters, Civil War in Louisiana, 59; Clara E. Solomon, “Diary of a New Orleans Girl, 1861-1862” (typescript, Louisiana Room, Louisiana State University Library), 48. Several companies hired scores of females to manufacture drawers; they were paid $1.25 for each dozen pairs made.
benefited from the availability of penitentiary goods.²⁹

The penitentiary workshops were operated primarily by male prisoners. The inmate population rose steadily at the penitentiary from 91 in 1835, to 343 by 1860 (see Table 2). Inmates were overwhelmingly twenty to forty years old, born in southern states, convicted of violent crimes, and serving life sentences. The most common crimes committed included murder, larceny, robbery, manslaughter, burglary, and offenses, “against white people.” The revised statutes of the penitentiary in 1852 stated that inmates convicted of crimes that resulted in a life sentence should not be employed alongside other inmates. They additionally called for all black convicts, whether slave or free, to work separately and apart from white inmates. The state legislature insisted that the penitentiary workshops operate segregated, but the lessees responded that the statute was impractical and would disrupt productivity.³⁰

The workshops kept the inmates occupied during the daylight hours and employed them in occupations that benefited the Confederacy. The engine room required six inmates to operate the two steam engines that powered the workshops. The cotton and wool factory required 240 inmates to operate at full capacity: 4 in the pickery, 8 in the lap room, 46 in the carding room, 81 in the spinning rooms, 12 in the dressing room, 74 along with 6 overseers in the weaving room, and 9 in the press room. Additional inmates were employed in the kitchen, hospital, and other workshops. A shortage of inmates forced the textile mill to operate below full capacity at times during the war. The production of cloth at the penitentiary could have been maximized through an increase in incarceration or

²⁹ Baton Rouge Daily Advocate, June 25, 1861; Nichols, Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi, 23.
³⁰ Report, 1852, 7; Annual Report, 1854, 22-23; Appendix Report, 1854, 3-4, 8-14, 17-18.
through supplemental slave labor at the mill.31

State legislators understood the potential for prisoners to cause trouble while working in the shops. As a result, the Louisiana legislature implemented regulations to keep inmates occupied and isolated as much as possible. Amos Adams, Chairman of the Committee on the Penitentiary, suggested the avoidance of anything other than solitary confinement. He insisted, “By holding them together during the night, the cell becomes a place where deeds of darkness and plans for escape are concocted, and where the novice in crime is educated and prepared for darker deeds when his time in prison shall expire and be turned loose again.”32

A small penitentiary library was introduced in the early 1850s as a method to improve the temperament and productivity of the inmates. The famous Northern penologist Dorothea L. Dix visited the penitentiary and supplied the library with sixty dollars' worth of new reading materials. Chaplain A. E. Goodwin suggested the purchase of more literature in foreign languages, as well as Bibles in various languages. The lessees invested one hundred dollars to purchase volumes for the library including multiple copies of Harpers Monthly, Scientific American, Illustrated Journal Universal, Arthur’s Home Gazette, and Metropolitan. The additional reading material improved the discipline and mood of the inmates, as well as informed them of news from outside the walls.33

Some inmates had previous employment as blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, wheelwrights, tailors, harness makers, machinists, and engineers, but nearly 175 inmates

32 Report, 1852, 1-2; Report, 1861, 59, 67; Burk Foster, Wilbert Rideau and Douglas Dennis, The Wall is Strong: Corrections in Louisiana (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995).
33 Annual Report, 1854, 3, 17. The physician recommended enlarging the hospital. The chaplain suggested an appropriation to fund a school teacher to assist in the education and reformation of the inmates.
reported no occupation upon entering the facility. They were required to learn necessary
skills before being employed in the workshops. The increased mobility of inmates in the
workshops facilitated incidents of sabotage, fires, internal revolts, and the spread of
disease.34

Production was sometimes affected by the illnesses of inmates. Outbreaks of small
pox temporarily halted production during 1851 and 1855, and physician G. W. Christine
reported that nearly one-fourth of the inmates were stricken in 1854. The following year,
physician Thomas J. Buffington noted that the inmates slept on mattresses laid directly on
damp and dirty floors, and recommended that cots or elevated folding beds would add to
their cleanliness and health. Another penitentiary physician, F. M. Hereford, recommended
the addition of cisterns to help avoid outbreaks of disease in the summer months. These
outbreaks of disease incapacitated inmates and reduced productivity in the workshops.35

While inmates labored at the Baton Rouge spindles and looms, Confederate
quartermasters slowly established a depot system in the distant Trans-Mississippi
Department. The earliest depots were located at Baton Rouge and Little Rock in late 1861.
In 1862 Quartermaster A. C. Myers additionally designated Monroe, Little Rock, and
Arkadelphia as three primary quartermaster posts for troops in Louisiana and Arkansas.36

34 Annual Report, 1854, 4, 9-13, 18-19, 21; Stout, “Origin and Early History of the Louisiana
Penitentiary,” 32; Louisiana Times Picayune, May 7, 1839; December 30, 1842; February, 6, 1848;
April 23, 1851; August 7, 1855; July 8, 1859. In most cases the cause of fires was unknown, but these
incidents tended to occur in cotton storage rooms, the pickery, and other locations where inmates
worked.
35 Appendix Report, 1854, 6; Annual Report, 1854, 7; Report, 1852, 5. The physician
reported deaths from heart attack, diarrhea, chronic syphilis, as well as one suicide.
36Lawrence E. Estaville Jr., Confederate Neckties: Louisiana Railroads in the Civil War (Ruston:
Two,” 6; http://www.lazyjacks.org.uk/transmiss.htm, accessed 1-5-2011. The principal depots were
established at Houston, Texas; Shreveport, Louisiana; and Little Rock, Arkansas.
Several factors frustrated the delivery of uniforms to the soldiers, including difficult geography, poor transportation, the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, the loss of textile manufacturing facilities, and the depreciation of Confederate currency. The delivery of supplies largely depended on an inadequate and somewhat chaotic system of southern railroads. In Louisiana, rivers and railroads were the most vital transportation systems, yet there was simply not enough investment in the railroads prior to the war to create an adequate wartime network. The failure to invest in more extensive railroad systems resulted in a major wartime deficiency for the Trans-Mississippi Department and Confederacy as a whole. By 1860 twelve companies in Louisiana had constructed a mere 395 miles of track. The Great Northern, the longest railroad, extended 206 miles northward from New Orleans to Canton, Mississippi. The Great Western ran westward eighty miles from Algiers (a Crescent City suburb) to Brashear City (present-day Morgan City), where numerous military depots were located. The Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas extended seventy-five miles westward from Desoto, across the Mississippi River from Vicksburg, to Monroe in north-central Louisiana. The geography of swamps, marshes, bayous, and rivers provided a challenging environment for construction companies that resulted in the highest cost per mile in the South. Louisiana invested $40,223 per mile, while Virginia spent $38,548, and Texas expended $31,186. Locomotives encountered dangers, including worn rails, poor ballasting, rickety bridges, and animal obstructions that resulted in horrific accidents.37

37 William Watson, *Life in the Confederate Army* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 248; Nichols, *Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi*, 19, 104. The Trans-Mississippi Quartermaster Department established the Clothing Bureau in 1862, but never completely eliminated need for donations. Estaville Jr., *Confederate Neckties*, 1, 3, 9-10, 19-21, 39-41, 60-61. At the onset of the war, only 8,800 miles of the nearly 31,200 miles nationwide were located in southern states. Louisiana rail companies owned approximately 80 locomotives and 900 freight cars.
During the Civil War the railroads were strained to accommodate the needs of both civilians and the military. The available trains were packed with soldiers, civilian passengers, baggage, mail, and a wide variety of wartime supplies. The frequency of crashes, wrecks, and derailments increased during the war, and often resulted from deteriorated lines, dilapidated equipment, and sabotage. A shortage of railroad locomotives, non-uniform gauge railing, and poor terminals on southern lines made supplying both soldiers and civilians almost impossible. Confederate quartermasters attempted to manage this chaotic and often clogged railway system from the depots. Inefficiency in the official distribution system was appalling, aggravating, and fatal to the support system for Confederate soldiers.38


38 Estaville Jr., Confederate Neckties, 4, 8, 13, 83. Several lines were essential to transporting supplies and soldiers across the Trans-Mississippi, including the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern, the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western, the Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas, the Baton Rouge, Grosse Tete, and Opelousas, and the Clinton and Port Hudson. Massey, Erstattr in the Confederacy, 15, 125-28; Nichols, Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi, 85, 90-92; Message of Robert C. Wickliffe, 1856, 5, 10, 14; For more information on Confederate railroads, see Black, Railroads of the Confederacy.
but failed in the Battle of Baton Rouge on August 5, 1862. Federal forces left Baton Rouge later in August, allowing Confederate state officials to return for several weeks.39

After the Federals left the city in August, the former lessees of the penitentiary made repeated attempts to relocate inmates and machinery to safe areas. In a communication on August 20, 1862, B. W. Clark, adjutant of the Fourth Louisiana Infantry, informed Captain Alexander Hooe that Provost Marshall Killborn offered the agents of the state penitentiary transports to remove inmates and machinery. The following day Major J. DeBaun, of the Ninth Louisiana Battalion of Partisan Rangers, reported, “The Federals have released all the convicts from the penitentiary. All the negroes that were in the penitentiary have been uniformed and armed. This information regarding the penitentiary I have received from a convict who is now in my camp.” Nearly a month later on September 17, Confederate Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles suggested to Brigadier General William Beall, “Protect the machinery in the penitentiary; recover any taken away, and place it all under charge of the police jury of the Parish East Feliciana.” Despite these precautions, a portion of the machinery was captured in Clinton where it was destroyed by the Union army. A small number of weaving looms were sold to private individuals in Baton Rouge and documented for future retrieval.40

The loss of the state penitentiary, the inmate labor, and the machinery was a considerable setback in the supply of goods within the Trans-Mississippi Department. In September 1862 Louisiana Governor Moore wrote President Jefferson Davis, “The State


Penitentiary and the manufactories at New Orleans have hitherto furnished clothing for the army and plantations. These sources of supply are cut off. We have nothing to depend on but hand looms, and the cards for them cannot be supplied at any cost, the few that are to be had selling at thirty times their old price." The Federal occupation of New Orleans in April 1862, coupled with the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863, made resupply from east of the Mississippi River difficult for the remainder of the war.\textsuperscript{41}

The penitentiary was ultimately reduced to a burned brick shell after three years of fighting. The Battle of Baton Rouge on August 15, 1862, and a devastating fire in November 1864 contributed to the destruction. The total investment by Louisiana and McHatton, Pike & Company in the penitentiary workshops totaled at least $151,867.95 from 1835 to 1865. The Committee of Examination on the Damage to Public Buildings at Baton Rouge estimated a financial loss of nearly $74,219.25 as a result of the war. Following the Civil War the burnt remains of the penitentiary were minimally repaired to hold a substantially reduced inmate population. All that remains of the original Louisiana State Penitentiary is a red brick warden house, built in 1839 and restored in 1967.\textsuperscript{42}

The decision by the state legislature to invest in a textile mill and workshops within the Louisiana State Penitentiary proved beneficial to the local economy before the Civil War. The institution became a self-sustaining enterprise that contributed to the local economy.

\textsuperscript{42}Kerby, \textit{Kirby Smith’s Confederacy}, 20, 28; Foster, “Slaves of the State,” 41, 47-48, 50. The old state penitentiary remained in use for several decades as a receiving station, hospital, clothing factory, shoe shop, and site for executions. In 1917 the remaining penitentiary buildings were cleared to provide space for a Community Club Hall, American Legion Hall, U.S. Post Office and Government Building, Public Library, public high school, Victory Park, and the East Baton Rouge Parish Recreation and Park Commission. The land where the prison was once located is currently occupied by a federal building and United States Court House. Hahn and Wurtzburg, \textit{Hard Labor}, 3, 6-8, 11, 14-16; Galveston \textit{Weekly News}, December 3, 1862; Kimberly S. Hanger, \textit{A Medley of Cultures: Louisiana History at the Cabildo} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Museum Foundation, 1996), 10; \textit{Inventory and Appraisement, 1862}, 14. For more information on the Battle of Baton Rouge, see Bearss, “Battle of Baton Rouge.”
economy, and it produced respectable profits for the lessees and state treasury. The penitentiary became a model facility for the Texas State Penitentiary and contributed to the spread of industry across the South. At the beginning of the Civil War, the penitentiary sold over 2.5 million yards of cloth annually. Inmate manufactures thus had the capacity to supply citizens, slaves, and the Confederate Army in the Trans-Mississippi Department.43

The penitentiary workshops produced a huge amount of finished cloth in 1861-1862 to supply Confederate soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi Department with uniforms. The Confederate quartermasters failed to develop an efficient distribution system, however. Transportation was inadequate and led to the waste of penitentiary goods. Confederate soldiers relied on textile production at the penitentiary, and the loss of the facility in April 1862, resulted in a noticeable decline in both the quantity and quality of clothing available to Confederate soldiers. Union control of the Mississippi River disrupted Confederate supply and was another major reason for the shortage of uniforms and other textiles in the second half of the war. The hardships experienced by soldiers during the harsh winter of 1863-1864 could have been ameliorated by continued production at the penitentiary workshops.

Table 1

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<th>1851</th>
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<th>1860</th>
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<td>Annual Profit</td>
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<td>$44,791.44</td>
<td>$65,374.75</td>
<td>$13,911.27</td>
<td>$36,401.89</td>
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Sources: Report, 1852; Appendix Report, 1854; Annual Report, 1854; Message of Robert C. Wickliffe, 1856; Report of the Committee on the Penitentiary; Annual Report, 1858; Report, 1859; Report, 1861; Report of the Special Committee of the Louisiana Penitentiary; Louisiana Times-Picayune, February 20, 1858; January 24, 1861; December 7, 1861.

43 Report, 1859.
Table 2

Number of Inmates, Louisiana State Penitentiary, 1835-1865

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Black Female</th>
<th>White Male</th>
<th>White Female</th>
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</tr>
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<td>1847</td>
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Sources: Report, 1852; Appendix Report, 1854; Annual Report, 1854; Message of Robert C. Wickliffe, 1856; Report of the Committee on the Penitentiary; Annual Report, 1858; Report, 1859; Report, 1861; Report of the Special Committee of the Louisiana Penitentiary; Burk Foster, Wilbert Rideau and Douglas Dennis, The Wall is Strong: Corrections in Louisiana (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995).
CHAPTER 3

PRODUCTION AT THE ARKANSAS STATE PENITENTIARY IN LITTLE ROCK

The Arkansas State Penitentiary was the second penal institution established in the
Confederate states west of the Mississippi River, and by 1860 it developed into one of the
most successful manufactories in Arkansas. The state penitentiary in Little Rock was
patterned on the successful penal systems of Pennsylvania and New York, which reformed
prisoners through solitary confinement and employment in workshops. An examination of
these workshops is essential to understanding the impact of the prison goods industry on
Arkansas and the Confederate Trans-Mississippi Department. These penitentiary
blacksmithing and carpentry shops became the largest manufacturer of wagons and
carriages for Confederate Arkansas. The workshops also produced a variety of clothing
and other wartime goods for Confederate soldiers from 1861 to 1863.

In 1860 Arkansas was a western frontier state with an expanding population and
economy. The penitentiary in Little Rock operated a significantly smaller textile mill than
the Louisiana State Penitentiary, but it still outfitted many Confederate Arkansas units
during the first half of the war. Phillip Dangerfield Stephenson of the 13th Arkansas
Infantry described the prison-made uniform he was issued in mid-September 1861:

Lieutenant Bartlett roared as I tried one thing after another. I finally emerged—and it
was a sight! I had on a long frock coat of coarse brown cloth, butternut color, very
tight, buttoned up to the chin on my long rail-like body. My pants, of the same stuff,
were a mile too big, baggy as sacks, legs rolled up at the bottom. Our uniforms were
mostly the same dirt color, the coats having brass buttons and black cuffs and
collars. My hat, a common light colored wool, was passable to fit by my shoes,
coarse brogans, were a No. 9, and a No. 8!44

44 Nathaniel C. Hughes Jr., ed., The Civil War Memoirs of Philip Dangerfield Stephenson (Baton Rouge:
Louisiana State University, 1995), 18; Ron Field, The Confederate Army, 1861-1865, Virginia and Arkansas
Despite his appearance, Stephenson laughed it off and was proud to be in uniform.

The initial step in the creation of the outfit worn by Stephenson occurred on December 13, 1838, when Governor James S. Conway signed a measure that authorized the establishment of the penitentiary. Three commissioners were instructed to select a plot of land within five miles of Little Rock. The state purchased 92.41 acres about a mile west of town at a price of twenty dollars an acre from P. T. Crutchfield. The location was an elevated site near the Arkansas River that remained the site of the state penitentiary for more than seventy years.45

The facility’s design was modeled after the Eastern Penitentiary of Philadelphia and included brick structures for ninety-six cells and four workshops. The commissioners preferred the Auburn system of prison management created in New York, which included solitary confinement for the prisoners and employment in workshops within the confines of the penitentiary.46

The first inmate was received on May 12, 1841. By December 15, 1841, the facility included a cell house, officer’s quarters, blacksmith shop, smokehouse, frame building for


the agent, and a log structure as a shoe shop. A hired mechanic instructed the inmates in the trades of carpenter, cooper, and blacksmith. The initial financial returns from the workshops were small until the inmates were trained and could work with efficiency. In early 1842 a crude brick wall was constructed to enclose the officers’ quarters, workshops, and cell house.\(^{47}\)

The penitentiary did not prosper. Its workshops suffered from a lack of capital, and a systematic boycott by the mechanics of Little Rock and the surrounding counties limited the success of the blacksmith shop. Local investors suggested the manufacture of hemp at the facility, but the penitentiary did not possess the necessary machinery. There were recurrent attempts to establish a cotton factory at the prison, but by 1846 only three looms produced twenty yards of cloth per day. On August 5, 1846, the prisoners revolted, attempted to escape, and burned the entire establishment. The fire destroyed nearly all of the supplies, tools, clothing, and bedding, with only $1,680.76 worth of property saved from the flames. On December 23, 1846, the legislature appropriated $10,000 to rebuild a cell house with at least eighty-four cells.\(^{48}\)


In the 1850s cotton mills offered a good opportunity for the penitentiary to raise revenue. Arkansas had many farmers and produced more than 26,000,000 pounds of cotton in the 1850s. An Arkansan correspondent noted that many southern factories were making profits of up to 25 percent, and he estimated that it took half as much capital to manufacture cotton as to grow it. Roswell Beebe, Chairman of the Arkansas Internal Improvement Board, declared he could get textile machinery from Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, or New Orleans. By 1858 there were only four manufactories of cotton thread and textiles across the entire state: a cotton-spinning factory in Van Buren, a similar facility in Arkadelphia, and a mill located in Benton County. The Arkansas Manufacturing Company, established by Henry Merril and John Matlock, produced “50 bunches of 250 pounds of spun yarn a day.” Despite this effort, the Arkansas textile industry remained so limited that the legislature donated its carpets to the Confederate military for use as blankets.49

From the start, Arkansans had called for government investment in cotton textiles. The Arkansas Gazette promoted the construction of a factory in Little Rock, listed the price of raw materials, and suggested an appropriation of $15,000 from the General Assembly. The machinery was estimated to produce at least 360 yards of cloth and one hundred pounds of yarn daily. An Arkansas planter named William Gregg wrote in May 1850, “I have looked forward with more than ordinary anxiety for the completion of your subscription list for a cotton factory at Little Rock . . . and if we can make insurance against fire, it would be well to convert our Penitentiary into a Cotton Factory.” On November 24,
1852, E. Steadman, a machinist from Tennessee, suggested that Arkansas legislators follow the example of the Tennessee government, which established a textile mill of 1400 spindles and 30 looms capable of producing 200 pounds of yarn, 200 yards of twilled jean, 225 yards of linsey, and 675 yards of osnaburg daily.⁵⁰

In 1852 an investigative committee noted that at least $124,589 had been expended since 1838 with less than $10,000 of inventory to show for that investment, and recommended that the Arkansas penitentiary be abolished. The investigators recommended that some inmates be leased to work on levees or roads, while others could be pardoned, exiled, or transferred to another state penitentiary. The committee concluded that Arkansas was simply too poor to maintain a penitentiary system. Instead, on February 17, 1853, Governor Elias Nelson Conway approved a two-year lease with Alexander George and John Robins for the sum of $26,248.00. A building contract with George and Robins called for construction of a 150-foot-long and 40-foot-wide workshop with two stories, and a new permanent wall of stone to surround the facility. Governor Conway defended this investment in the penitentiary, explaining that, “Without such improvements it will remain, as heretofore, a tax upon the Treasury.”⁵¹

In late 1859 A. J. Ward leased the penitentiary for a term of eight years. He selected his staff from among well managed penitentiaries in the Union, and took control of the prison on February 7, 1860. Governor Henry Massey Rector supported the introduction of

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a cotton and woolen mill within the penitentiary walls, and noted that Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee profited immensely from such mills. The number of inmates in the state penitentiary had increased from 17 in 1841, to 121 in 1860, enough to run a small textile mill efficiently (see Table 3).  

In 1860 the penitentiary consisted of a main cell house with sixty-four cells, two workshops, a hospital, dining room, and smokehouse. Ward and Superintendent A. H. Rutherford agreed that new workshops would be required to fully employ the prisoners. The governor noted, “It is gratifying to know that our state has the means to pay for enlarging the penitentiary, erecting workshops, buying machinery, and converting the institution into a manufacturing establishment, which would render it a source of revenue instead of a tax upon the treasury.”  

During his inaugural address, Governor Rector emphasized that the penitentiary was capable of defraying its own expenses, and he noted that many of the inmates were “skilful mechanics, and the products of their labor command high remunerative prices.” He believed the facility could become a self-sustaining institution through the successful implementation of the manufacture of woolen and cotton goods. He explained that cotton

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and wool were easily obtained at excellent prices, and referred to successful textile mills within the state penitentiaries of Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas. The governor also praised Ward as a well-qualified gentleman who deserved the confidence of the legislature.⁵⁴

Manufacturing facilities in Arkansas were largely unprepared to produce war materials following secession on May 6, 1861. Seventeen establishments produced boots and shoes, but their combined output was small. The entire state operated only 4 clothing factories, 1 for hats, 61 leather crafters, 22 saddle and harness makers, and 11 wool carding establishments. The people of Arkansas benefited from the Van Buren Steam Cotton mill, another one at Cane Hill, and a clothing factory at Nashville, but a majority of the clothing supplied to soldiers in early 1861 was homemade. Typically, one tailor in Little Rock named William H. Hart sewed uniforms for a militia company known as the “Capitol Guards” prior to secession. In November of 1860 Taylor & Company opened a store that sold kerseys, woolseys, home-made jeans, Kentucky jeans, satinettes, linseys, and Georgia plaids.⁵⁵

In a message to the legislature on November 5, 1861, Governor Rector reported that Arkansas had raised twenty-one regiments comprising at least 22,400 soldiers. These troops needed a variety of military supplies that could be produced at the penitentiary.

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⁵⁴ Inaugural Address of Henry M. Rector, Delivered Before the General Assembly of Arkansas, November 15, 1860 (Little Rock: Johnson and Yerkes, 1860), 4-5.
workshops, and Ward contracted to supply Arkansas’ Confederates. He had plenty of inmates because the penitentiary was utilized as a place of detention for deserters and war prisoners. On December 11, 1861, Confederate Colonel Solon Borland reported that “some 40 . . . prisoners had already been sent to Little Rock.” On March 23, 1862, Union Brigadier General Frederick Steele wrote Major General Henry W. Halleck, “I have been informed that all the prisoners of war taken by the rebels in Missouri and Arkansas are confined in the penitentiary at Little Rock.”

The workshops employed the inmates as blacksmiths, coopers, shoemakers, wagon makers, and chair makers. Several prisoners held more specialized occupations such as furniture maker, wheel maker, carpenter, tailor, carriage maker, trunk maker, harness maker, and grindstone turner. They produced wartime necessities to Confederate soldiers that included gun carriages, wagons, caissons, tents, harness, boots, shoes, clothing, cartridge boxes, belts, camp chests, stools, and cots. Additionally, nearly five hundred Confederate drummer boys were supplied with drumheads produced at the penitentiary.

These prison workshops were pivotal in supplying wagons and carriages used to transport goods to Confederate Arkansas soldiers. In fact, prior to the war wagon making was “the principal business heretofore carried on at the penitentiary.” A few private companies manufactured carriages, buggies, and wagons in the state, but they went out of business due to a lack of iron and other materials as the war progressed. During 1862 the workshops made gun carriages, caissons, and wagons used by Confederate soldiers.

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57 Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland, eds., *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 56; Ferguson, “History of the Arkansas Penitentiary,” 3; *Report of the Superintendents and Keepers, 1859 and 1860*, 6-9; Kerby, *Kirby Smith’s Confederacy*, 66, 74. Caissons are horse-drawn vehicles with two or four wheels used to carry artillery ammunition and coffins.
penitentiary manufactured 250 carriages and wagons, and in 1863 it continued to produce significant numbers of wagons for Arkansas Confederate soldiers.58

Early in the war the Confederate central government provided funds to the states for uniforms and equipment in what was known as the “commutation” system. These funds were used in part by the Military Board in Arkansas to support the clothing and equipment manufactory at the penitentiary in Little Rock. That facility offered established workshops and a reliable labor force that possessed the necessary skills to manufacture clothing and shoes for the military. A workshop at the penitentiary provided the necessary dimensions for a small textile mill, and the introduction of textile machinery allowed the facility to furnish quantities of clothing that smaller private factories could not. By the summer of 1861, the workshops reportedly produced “a large lot of army clothing” and “a great many shoes for soldiers.” The penitentiary superintendent reported to the state legislature on November 18, 1861, that the penitentiary workshops had completed 3,000 sets of uniforms, 8,000 pairs of shoes, 250 wagons, 100 sets of wagon and artillery harnesses, 500 drums, 200 tents, 600 knapsacks, and 500 cartridge boxes for Arkansas regiments.59

By the end of 1861 Arkansas units received commutation clothing produced at the state penitentiary. Commutation uniforms were initially issued to Arkansas units east of the Mississippi River. In the early fall of 1861 Major General James Fagan’s 1st Arkansas

59 http://history-sites.com/mb/cw/arcwmb/archive_index.cgi?noframes;read2758, accessed 1-5-2011; Huff, “Confederate Arkansas,” 242; Field, Confederate Army, 1861-1865, Virginia and Arkansas, 35; Huff, “Military Board in Confederate Arkansas,” 94. Commutation clothing refers to Confederate uniforms issued in early 1861 to early 1862 that were either privately purchased or provided by the state, but reimbursed by the Arkansas State Military Board until uniforms were issued by Confederate quartermasters beginning in late 1862.
Infantry reported receiving uniforms while camped near Fredericksburg, Virginia. On October 29 the 9th Arkansas Infantry received uniforms at Union City, Tennessee. Between October and December of 1861, several other Arkansas units in the Mississippi River Valley received new uniforms issued by the state.60

The Military Board patterned the issued uniform after the pre-war uniform of the U.S. Army that consisted of a frock coat, trousers, and forage cap made of gray woolen jean material. The uniforms produced at the penitentiary consisted of grey woolen jean material with either black or blue cuffs and collars. They included a frock coat, trousers, and either forage caps or slouch hats. The “Arkansas frock coat” was a single-breasted garment with either eight or nine buttons constructed from either “butternut” or “sheep’s grey” wool that was woven onto an unbleached or brown cotton warp. Uniforms supplied to the 18th and 23rd Arkansas Infantry consisted of either grey or brown frock coats, jean trousers, and matching grey forage caps.61

Concerning the prison’s productivity, the Arkansas True Democrat reported in late 1861:

The Arkansas penitentiary has been made a useful institution during the present war . . . Mr. Ward, the energetic contractor, tells us that by spring he will have turned out 10,000 pairs of boots and shoes for the soldiers . . . The most of our readers are aware that the penitentiary was leased for a term of years, with a view to the introduction of machinery to spin and weave cotton goods. For this purpose an appropriation was made for the erection of buildings for the factory and additional

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60 http://history-sites.com/mg/cw/arcwmb/archive_index.cgi?noframes;read2758, accessed 1-5-2011; Huff, “Military Board in Confederate Arkansas,” 94; Arkansas True Democrat, November 21, 1861; Field and Smith, Uniforms of the Civil War, 236; Field, Confederate Army, 1861-1865, Virginia and Arkansas, 36.

61 Field, American Civil War Confederate Army, 84; Field and Smith, Uniforms of the Civil War, 236; Field, Confederate Army, 1861-1865, Virginia and Arkansas, 35; http://history-sites.com/mg/cw/arcwmb/archive_index.cgi?noframes;read2758, accessed 1-5-2011; http://www.lazyjacks.org.uk/shirts.htm, accessed 1-5-2011. Butternut refers to a yellow or brown colored uniform worn by Confederate soldiers. Sheep's grey refers to light-gray colored wool uniform that retains some natural wool texture and color. Warp refers to yarn arranged lengthways on a loom that forms the threads through which yarns are woven.
cells for the prisoners. But the breaking out of war checked this enterprise and the contractor has wisely set the convicts to work making such things as were needed by the troops.\textsuperscript{62}

The citizens of Arkansas endured shortages of clothing and rapid inflation of the prices of available goods. One planter predicted the people would, “be reduced to a state of nudity.” By the fall of 1862, one Arkansas Confederate quartermaster believed, “clothing is the most serious question,” and continued, “The people, men, women, and children, go bareheaded, barefooted, and almost destitute of clothing.” But at the same time, Governor Rector reported, “I take pleasure in mentioning the efficiency of the officers connected with the state’s prison, and the material aid afforded by the institution in carrying on the war.”\textsuperscript{63}

General Sterling Price’s Missourians received uniforms in northwest Arkansas in early March 1862. These uniforms were made at the Little Rock penitentiary from wool, cotton jean, and osnaburg from Huntsville, Texas. In February 1862, Ephraim Anderson of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Missouri Infantry received clothing at Boston Mountain, Arkansas, and recalled,

Our regiment was uniformed here; the cloth was of rough and coarse texture, and the cutting and style would have produced a sensation in fashionable circles: the stuff was white, never having been colored, with a goodly supply of grease – the wool had not been purified by any application of water since it was taken from the back of the sheep. In pulling off and putting on the clothes, the olfactories were constantly exercised with a strong odor of that animal . . . Our brigade was the only body of troops that had these uniforms issued to them, and were often greeted with a chorus of ba-a-as . . . Our clothes, however, were strong and serviceable, if we did look and feel somewhat sheepish in them.\textsuperscript{64}

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\textsuperscript{62} Arkansas True Democrat, October 31, 1861.
\textsuperscript{63} Message of Governor Henry M. Rector to the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, Delivered November 1862 (Little Rock: Johnson and Yerkes, 1862), 29; Michael B. Dougan, Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 107.
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Major W. H. Haynes took charge of the Clothing Bureau of the Trans-Mississippi in June 1863 and was responsible for supplying soldiers in Arkansas and west Louisiana. He controlled the distribution of materials from the depots from January 1863 through June 1864. Inventory reports from the depots in Houston and Shreveport helped determine likely production at the state penitentiary. Reports from 1863 reveal the depot in Little Rock supplied upwards of 20,066 hats, 3,429 jackets, 16,879 shoes, 1,193 knapsacks, 149 tent flies, 251 axes, 107 picks, 81 spades, 329 camp kettles, 2,136 skillets, and 661 wagon sheets.65

Not everyone was impressed with the quality of penitentiary products. On June 22, 1863, Private William E. Bevens of the First Arkansas Infantry recorded, “We went there [Manchester, Tennessee] to relieve a Louisiana Regiment. When we arrived they were on dress parade, eleven hundred strong . . . They wore nice caps, fine uniforms, white gloves, fine shop-made laced high shoes. They carried fat haversacks and new canteens, fine new fat knapsacks with lots of underclothing and even two pairs of shoes. They laughed at us in our shabby dress, with our dirty haversacks and no knapsacks. We had one suit of underwear wrapped in our blankets. . . .”66

Penitentiary workshops provided much of the essential clothing for Confederate Arkansas soldiers, but prison cloth production facilitated sweeping changes to households across Arkansas as women contributed to the Confederate cause by producing clothes for the soldiers. In an address to the people of Arkansas Governor Rector asked,

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not that you, yourselves, should take up arms, and enter the service; but that you will contribute what you can easily and without inconvenience, spare from your supplies, means and appliances, in the way of clothing, to protect and defend your own volunteers--not against the arms of the enemy, but against the elements, are indispensable to enable us to make good your defence and protection against the elements...the soldiers are without clothing, or the means or opportunity for obtaining it -- they are in a climate several degrees farther north than they have been accustomed to: a large portion of them have been prostrated and are still feeble from the effects of fever, measles, and other debilitating diseases--and will perish if exposed, with the protection of clothing and blankets, to the bad weather of the fall and winter.67

Women responded by joining societies organized across the state, meeting in courthouses, schools, churches, and private homes to sew clothing, tents, haversacks and wagon-sheets.68

The widespread shortage of clothing caused the equipage of soldiers to be a difficult endeavor, but prison production helped. Ladies sewing groups across Arkansas were few in number and less organized than in other states. These groups supplied a limited number of uniforms to selective Arkansas units, but could not adequately provide for all Arkansas Confederate soldiers. The Weekly Arkansas Gazette reported that within six weeks ladies had “made nearly or quite three thousand military suits, upwards of fifteen hundred haversacks, and probably five thousand shirts, and have also covered over twelve hundred canteens.” In Camden, a ladies’ sewing circle was organized two weeks prior to secession. In Little Rock, Theatre Hall was converted into a workshop that turned out seventy-five pairs of pants and two hundred jackets made from penitentiary cloth for the 1st Arkansas Infantry. By September 12, 1861, the patriotic ladies of Little Rock provided entire

67 Arkansas True Democrat, September 19, 1861.
uniforms for Company A of the 6th Arkansas Infantry, known as the “Capitol Guards.” In early October, Company D of the 3rd Arkansas Cavalry also received clothing from the ladies of Little Rock. A group known as “The Daughters of the South” occupied the federal courtroom at the capital and converted it into a workshop for the manufacture of clothing. Mrs. A. J. Ward served as president of the Daughters of the South and more than likely acquired cloth from her husband at the penitentiary. The Daughters of the South produced complete uniforms for the “Crawford Artillery.”

The Arkansas True Democrat, reported on the production levels of textiles at the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville and lamented, “what a pity it is that we had not begun a year sooner to get machinery for the penitentiary here. Everything was being put in readiness for the reception of the machinery when the war commenced and prevented it.” During the second year of the war the penitentiary workshops and local societies remained the primary source of uniforms for Arkansas Confederate units. The 19th Arkansas Infantry, 20th Arkansas Infantry, and 1st Arkansas Cavalry were issued uniforms made from grey jean material most likely produced at the penitentiary workshops. In November 1862 the 34th Arkansas Infantry were also issued jackets and caps from the Military Board.

Life for the hard-working prisoners was Spartan but humane. When he entered the penitentiary, the inmate’s name, weight, height, age, color of eyes, color of hair, complexion, county in which convicted, nativity, and period of confinement were recorded. The

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70 Arkansas True Democrat, December 17, 1862; http://www.lazyjacks.org.uk/shirts.htm, accessed 1-5-2011; Field, American Civil War Confederate Army, 84.
Arkansas General Assembly insisted their employment in the workshops should be carried out with the least possible amount of communication among the prisoners. Male and female convicts were kept separate at all times. The prisoners were supplied clean shirts at least once a week, were required to shave once every week, and wear their hair very short. They were provided medical care when ill, furnished with comfortable clothes and bedding, and fed regularly, but the issue of salted provisions combined with confinement in damp quarters to cause outbreaks of scurvy among some of the prisoners. Dorothea Dix, the famous penologist from Massachusetts, visited the Arkansas penitentiary and contributed a small library to the institution to help improve the temperament of the prisoners.71

The penitentiary confined as many as ninety inmates within a cell house of only eighty-four cells (see Table 3). The average inmate in the penitentiary was twenty to thirty years old, convicted of stealing, served less than five years of confinement, and was employed as either a farmer or laborer prior to incarceration. These inmates were employed within the workshops as laborers, wagon makers, tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, and carpenters. The average inmate arrived in good health, and had either common or no education. The prisoners were noted for being exceptionally intemperate and suffered from “rheumatic pains, idiocy, lunacy spells, and laziness,” but the penitentiary physician, C. Peyton, noted that there were few mechanical injuries, and the inmates did not suffer from any regular epidemic diseases.72

72 Reports of the Superintendent and Keepers, 1856, 6, 8-10, 12-17, 23.
The lessees reported that the inmates were, “able bodied men, engaged in lucrative trades, and many of whom are the best of mechanics, whose work, labor and skill, of properly managed, would yield a vast amount of money to the contractor or lessee; consequently this institution, if properly managed would yield a revenue to the State of Arkansas.” Penitentiary Superintendent Rutherford announced new rules and regulations that established a thorough and strict system of discipline. This included complete silence during daytime employment, from workshop to cell, and during the night. The usual punishment for any offense was chained confinement in a dark solitary cell, where the diet consisted of only bread and water, and offenders were deprived of books, tobacco, and bedding.73

The prisoners were not allowed to leave their work-stations without permission, and were not allowed to speak or look at visitors. The regulations insisted on solitary confinement, and did not allow any tool, instrument, or weapon in any cell. At mealtimes prisoners were not allowed to commence eating until everyone was seated. They were allowed twenty-five minutes at dinner and fifteen minutes for other meals. Prisoners were not permitted to leave the table until a signal was given to rise and march silently in double file lines to their cells.74

Regulations provided for the commutation of as many as two days per month for positive conduct and behavior by inmates not serving life sentences. A chaplain preached at least once every Sunday to the inmates. By late 1860 each cell in the prison was supplied with a Bible donated by the American Bible Society. The prisoners were reportedly more

73 Report of the Committee on the Penitentiary, 1858, 4-5; Journal of the Arkansas House of Representatives, 1859, 6, 8.
74 Journal of the Arkansas House of Representatives, 1859, 5-6, 8.
content than under the previous regulations, and the Arkansas system of prison
management was reported to be one of the best in the Union.\textsuperscript{75}

The penitentiary held 121 prisoners on the eve of the war (see Table 3). The
average inmate was a single white male who had either no education or a limited common
education, and was between twenty to forty years old. Those prisoners were convicted
overwhelmingly for stealing, and violent crimes including murder. A majority of those
convicts served terms of either one, three, five, or seven years, with only one inmate
sentenced to life in the penitentiary. The prison doctor, C. Peyton, reported the prisoners
were in general good health, with only two cases of typhoid. The penitentiary chaplain, D.
L. G. McKenzie, praised the disciplinary changes, and recommended investment in
expanding the library to improve the mood, morals, and comfort of the inmates.\textsuperscript{76}

In September 1861 the penitentiary inspector, Thomas C. Peek, reported that an
expansion of the cell house and workshops was near completion. He reported the inmates
were treated humanely, and well fed, clothed, and disciplined. During a special session of
the Arkansas General Assembly in mid-November 1861, the office of penitentiary inspector
was abolished, and those duties were assigned to the penitentiary physician. In his
message, Governor Rector agreed with suggested improvements in sanitary conditions. He
added, “The fate of a convict is deplorable at best. All that can, ought to be done by the
government to comfort and soothe them in affliction.” Healthy inmates at the penitentiary


were vital to the production of supplies, and they endured these conditions until September 1863, when Union forces liberated the few remaining prisoners.\footnote{77 Acts Passed at the Thirteenth or Special Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, 1861 (Little Rock: Johnson and Yerkes, 1861), 29, 63.}

Confederate quartermasters were as pivotal in the transportation of goods as the prisoners were in the manufacture. From the outset of the war Confederate authorities in Richmond, Virginia, chronically understaffed the Trans-Mississippi Department. Arkansas was strategically critical to the Confederate war effort to control the Indian Territory to the west, or western Louisiana to the south. Arkansas was also an essential base of Confederate operations into Missouri. To fill this gap the Arkansas Secession Convention established the Military Board on May 15, 1861. The board served as a quasi war department for the state that consisted of Governor Rector, Benjamin C. Totten, and Christopher C. Danley. The Board could mobilize troops and oversee the defense of the state through management of forts, arms, and munitions. Yet, Confederate depots were not established in Little Rock and Arkadelphia until late the following year.\footnote{78 DeBlack, With Fire and Sword, 35; Nichols, Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi, 10; \url{http://history-sites.com/mb/cw/arcwmb/archive_index.cgi?noframes;read2758}, accessed 1-5-2011; Huff, “Military Board in Confederate Arkansas,” 76, 81.}

On August 20, 1861, the Office of the Military Board stated, “The enemy trusts to the depression of trade and the blockade of our ports to prevent sufficient supplies from reaching our army, and the Military Board deems it their duty to appeal to the patriotism of the country to aid them in their winter preparations. This committee again shall invite the ladies of each township in the county to form soldiers aid societies and shall assist in their organization.” The Board also appointed committees in each county, comprised of the county clerk and sheriff, to collect uniforms from local aid societies. Arkansas
quartermasters paid for clothing at state depots with either Arkansas or Confederate bonds.  

Confederate quartermasters later urged women to sell jeans to the government for one dollar and twenty-five cents a yard. In an appeal to the people of the Trans-Mississippi Department, Acting Chief Quartermaster Jonathan D. Adams instructed, “The clerk of each county . . . either to take charge of, or appoint some suitable person to receive and forward all goods manufactured for army purposes, in the county in which he resides, to the nearest Post Quartermaster of the Confederate States Army, who will be furnished with funds to pay for the same on delivery, with cost of transportation added.”

The penitentiary workshops produced some goods and the Confederate quartermasters eventually established a system to collect goods, but the delivery of supplies proved to be the greatest challenge. The geography of Arkansas posed serious limits to the potential for manufacturing. Prior to the war only rivers offered easily accessible and relatively inexpensive transportation within the state. The Arkansas River was easily navigated to Little Rock, the White River to Jackson Port, and the Red River to Shreveport, Louisiana. The Mississippi River supplied transportation along the entire eastern border of the state. Heavy transport relied on barges, keelboats, and the willingness of boat captains to maneuver almost anywhere where the water depth was adequate. The transportation of war materials was further complicated by inadequate roads that were impassable in bad weather. Stagecoach travel over the state’s primitive roads was described as a “bone-jarring test of endurance.” Confederate quartermasters

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79 Arkansas True Democrat, August 22, 1861; Field, Confederate Army, 1861-1865, Virginia and Arkansas, 37.
80 Eno, “Activities of the Women of Arkansas,” 6-7; Arkansas True Democrat, August 27, 1862.
relied on mule-drawn wagons that required doubled harnessed teams to manage the steep hills and river crossings.81

A lack of investment combined with geography to prevent a solution to the transportation problem prior to the war. Local planters tended to be conservative investors and overly provincial in their outlook. An Arkadelphia resident noted that, “planters do not want capital invested far from them, or where they can not superintend or watch it.” Arkansans looked elsewhere for railroad funding but found that northern investors had little interest in an alternative transportation system for the state. The result was that only sixty-six miles of railroad track was laid in Arkansas by 1861. As C. C. Danley, editor of the Arkansas State Gazette, reported, “Arkansas [was] without navigation, without railroads, deeply in debt and dependent upon her sister States for not only clothing her people, but for Bread, Bacon and Potatoes.”82

During his inaugural address, Governor Rector noted, “Nothing is more important to Arkansas than the construction of railroads. They would advance commerce, induce population, develop our mineral and agricultural resources, and awaken the latent energies of the people.” He lamented the lack of progress of the railroads, and called for an investigation of expenditures, as well as the causes of the non-completion.83

A lack of capital that resulted from financial panics combined with the onset of the Civil War to disrupt expansion of railroads in Arkansas. The Ouachita and Red River line reached nearly twenty miles of track prior to the war, but only operated handcarts. The

81 Moneyhon, Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas, 24-25; DeBlack, With Fire and Sword, 4; Nichols, Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi, 10.
82 Moneyhon, Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas, 32-33, 89-90.
83 Lewis, “Economic Conditions in Antebellum Arkansas,” 274; Inaugural Address of Henry M. Rector, 1860, 5; Dougan, Confederate Arkansas, 10.
Memphis and Little Rock railroad constructed twenty-six miles by April 1856. The eastern section of the line from Hopesfield to Madison was operational by 1858, and on May 30, 1861, the segment from Memphis to Little Rock was completed. The 45-mile middle section from the White to St. Francis Rivers remained unfinished despite Confederate efforts to complete the project.84

By September 1863, Brigadier General Frederick Steele’s Federal army threatened Little Rock. Valuable machinery at the penitentiary was relocated to places of safety to avoid possible destruction as the Union forces approached. On September 10, a portion of Steele’s army crossed a pontoon bridge near Commerce Street, and the penitentiary changed from Confederate to Union control. Federal troops found no convicts in the prison and no one in charge. Concerning the fall of Little Rock, the Confederate commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, General Edmund Kirby Smith, wrote to his wife, “Everything [officially] has gone wrong.”85

By late 1863 most textile mills in Arkansas had been destroyed by fire or enemy action, and almost all thread and clothing was homespun. On March 1-3 Confederate raiders burned the Bean and Pearson and Kidd mills at Cane Hill in west Fayetteville. Clothing and yarn was scarce and expensive at a cost of $8 to $10 per bunch, and homespun production was difficult due to a shortage of cotton cards. The scarcity of shoes drove the price to $10 to $25 a pair, and many poor families went barefoot. By the fall of 1864 there were no factories in Arkansas for the manufacture of thread and clothing for

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85 Bailey and Sutherland, eds., *Civil War Arkansas*, 30, 73; Barnard, “Old Arkansas State Penitentiary,” 321-22; Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas*, 106; Kirby Smith to Mrs. Smith, September 10, 1863, Kirby Smith Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.
Confederate soldiers. On May 3, 1864, Union Brigadier General J. R. West wrote Union Captain Byron O. Carr, “There is also some surplus (cotton) at the penitentiary, and still a few scattering bales at the works.”

The Arkansas General Assembly selected a prison management system that included workshops primarily for financial reasons, but also to expand manufacturing in a state that was not attractive to northern investment. The decision not to invest heavily in a textile mill at the penitentiary until the onset of the Civil War affected the size and output of the facility in Little Rock. The mill outfitted many Confederate Arkansas units from 1861 to 1863 but did not have the capacity to produce enough clothing to assist indigent families, citizens, aid societies, or slaves during the war. The antebellum institution did not become a self-sustaining enterprise, but successfully contributed to the local economy through the sale of goods from its carpentry and blacksmith shops. Those shops shifted to wartime production to supply barrels, casks, shovels, axes, tents, and wagons.

While the penitentiary workshops produced wartime materials for Confederate Arkansas soldiers, Confederate quartermasters, and the Arkansas Military Board were slow to distribute goods as a result of poor transportation within the state. The railroad system in Arkansas was not adequate to move troops or equipment and forced quartermasters to depend on wagons, oxen, and river transports. Ironically, the penitentiary workshops partly compensated by becoming a leading producer of wagons and carriages. Confederate Arkansas troops relied heavily on penitentiary goods until the Union occupation of Little

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Rock on September 10, 1863, resulted in the loss of a major manufacturing facility in Arkansas.

Union dominance of Arkansas after 1863 disrupted Confederate supply and was a major reason for scarcity. The hardships of Confederate soldiers in Arkansas increased after mid-1863, and as the scarcity of clothing worsened, so did disease. Confederate General Theophilus H. Holmes commented, “The troops are in a great measure destitute of clothing, with no prospect of supply from abroad, and dependent almost entirely upon local and domestic manufactures, which must be promptly paid for, as the people who furnish them are generally poor and cannot extend a credit.” The loss of the manufacturing facilities in Baton Rouge and Little Rock greatly affected the availability of wartime supplies in the Trans-Mississippi Department.87

Table 3
Arkansas State Penitentiary Inmate Statistics, 1841-1860

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87 Paul E. Steiner, Disease in the Civil War: Natural Biological Warfare in 1861-1865 (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 213; Nichols, Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi, 26.
Figure 2. Design sketch of the Arkansas State Penitentiary. Source: Arkansas State Penitentiary, Blueprint 1, Cass Gilbert Collection, PR021, 2NW, 2B, Case 6, Drawer 6, New-York Historical Society, New York, New York. Courtesy of Nicole Contaxis with permission of the New-York Historical Society.
Figure 3. Design sketch of the Arkansas State Penitentiary. Source: Arkansas State Penitentiary, Blueprint 1, Cass Gilbert Collection, PR021, 2NW, 2B, Case 6, Drawer 6, New-York Historical Society, New York, New York. Courtesy of Nicole Contaxis with permission of the New-York Historical Society.
CHAPTER 4

PRODUCTION AT THE TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY IN HUNTSVILLE

Texas was the third Confederate state west of the Mississippi River to construct a state penitentiary. In 1854 the state legislature recognized the potential profitability from inmate labor and passed legislation to create a textile mill modeled after the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Baton Rouge. After a drawn out approval process, Texas officials realized the benefits of the Auburn system of prison management for the state treasury and for the rehabilitation of inmates. Penitentiary workshops and a textile mill were built in the early 1850s at the Texas State Penitentiary to make the facility a self-sustaining enterprise.88

Prison goods were initially sold to merchants for local resale and to plantation owners for slave clothing. During the Civil War the penitentiary produced an enormous amount of cloth for Confederate soldiers, citizens, and slaves in Texas. The textile mill operated throughout the entire war, and was pivotal to the supply of cloth in the Trans-Mississippi Department following the destruction of the penitentiary in Baton Rouge in 1862, and the occupation of the state prison in Little Rock in 1863. The mill inside the Texas State Penitentiary was the largest source of revenue for the state during the war and demonstrated the profitability of inmate-operated manufactories. State and prison officials never anticipated how crucial the textile factory would become during the Civil War.89

The use of cloth from Huntsville state penitentiary during the war was widely reported in newspapers, letters, and county records across the Trans-Mississippi

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Department. The amount of cloth produced at the Huntsville textile mill is often misquoted as only 1,200,000 yards of cloth for the Confederate army, and the achievements of the largest textile mill west of Georgia during the war are often minimized. The facility in Huntsville was the only state penitentiary in the Trans-Mississippi to continuously produce supplies throughout the war and was not occupied or destroyed by any Union army.⁹₀

The birth of this important institution took place during the early statehood period. On April 6, 1846, five Walker County commissioners were appointed to establish a courthouse and jail. General John S. Besser, a Huntsville resident, was awarded the contract to construct the first jail at a cost of $350. This original facility was a double-dungeon design built from iron and wood. It operated as a county jail and provided temporary cells for prisoners sentenced to the state penitentiary.⁹₁

The construction of a state penitentiary resulted from nearly ten years of lobbying in the Republic of Texas. In May 1846 the First Legislature of the State of Texas passed “An Act to Establish a State Penitentiary.” The Mexican War delayed implementation of the act until March 13, 1848, however. A committee chose Huntsville and purchased 4.8 acres of land for $22. An additional $470 purchased 94 acres of nearby timberland, and donations of rock and timber from private citizens ensured construction could begin almost immediately. The location fulfilled the standards stipulated by the legislature, which insisted on a healthful climate near a navigable body of water. The Trinity River was close

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enough to import machinery, tools, and raw materials, and to export finished products to
distant markets.92

Governor George T. Wood appointed Abner H. Cook to supervise construction of the
penitentiary and serve as the first superintendent. Construction began in late 1848 and
was completed within a year despite numerous delays. The facility was modeled after the
Mississippi State Penitentiary in Jackson, where a large textile mill was already in
operation. State legislators insisted the new penitentiary be “constructed of substantial
materials and surrounded by a secure wall enclosing a yard of sufficient dimensions to
allow room for the construction of workshops.” The superintendent emulated the Auburn
system of prison management in which inmates were employed in occupations that state
officials deemed to be the, “most profitable and useful to the state.”93

On October 1, 1849, the first inmate entered the partially completed penitentiary
complex. The facility consisted of the east cell-house, west cell-house, south cell-house,
storehouse, kitchen, hospital, and guardhouse. A master blacksmith and a master carpenter
trained inmates at the workshops. Tools available included 1 set of blacksmith tools, 1 set
of carpentry tools, 2 hoes, 4 shovels, 2 spades, and 2 ladders. The penitentiary also
purchased twenty-nine sets of ball-and-chains. By 1851 wagon-making, small carpentry,
and blacksmith shops made products for use at the facility, as well as for sale to the

The Board of Directors first suggested in a report on November 10, 1851, that the penitentiary could be made self-supporting by establishing a textile mill. Governor Peter H. Bell requested a legislative appropriation of $35,000 to establish a mill within the prison walls. The mill was to be operated by inmates, and proceeds from the sale of finished fabric would help relieve the state of any financial burden. In 1853 Governor Bell instructed Besser, who had been appointed financial agent for the prison, to visit the textile mills at the Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi state penitentiaries. In Baton Rouge he noted the production of 25,000 yards of cotton and wool fabric that “produced handsome profits for the state.”

On February 11, 1854, the Texas legislature approved an “Act to Provide for the Establishment of a Cotton and Woolen Factory in the Penitentiary,” which appropriated $44,536 for the factory and an additional $104,526 of forthcoming proceeds for maintenance. Textile sales offered large profits to the penitentiary, but the work did not greatly contribute to the overall rehabilitation of the convicts. Profit, not rehabilitation, appears to have been the primary reason to operate the largest textile mill in Texas with inmate labor. Besser traveled twice to the northeast to purchase machinery and arrange shipment to the mill. In April 1854 he bought $40,548.72 worth of equipment, including an


eighty-horsepower steam engine from Boston, Massachusetts. He returned in December to oversee shipment of the machinery as well as to hire two northern workmen to install the equipment at the penitentiary.\textsuperscript{96}

The steam engine purchased by Besser consumed large amounts of water and wood to power the factory machinery. The Board of Directors asked Governor Bell for $500 to construct gutters for the collection of rainwater. The drainage system was eventually built along with additional cisterns, but a large amount of water was pumped by hand from wells onsite. The blacksmith shop contained only two complete sets of blacksmithing tools shared by four inmate workers. A hand lathe purchased in 1854 was vital for inmate machinists to fabricate replacement parts for factory equipment. Jacob T. Chandler served as the textile mill superintendent from 1858 to 1870, and W. H. Crawford was employed as an engineer. Their knowledge of the machinery enabled inmates to repair broken machinery with replacement parts fabricated onsite.\textsuperscript{97}

The textile mill in Huntsville became profitable within the first years of operation. A variety of finished cloth was sold to local merchants. Unbleached and un-dyed gray-goods were marketed to local planters as slave clothing. By 1856 the inmates at the Huntsville textile mill produced nearly a half million yards of wool cloth annually. The factory consisted of 40 looms, 896 spindles for cotton and 200 for wool, and produced high-quality finished cloth. Legislative appropriations for the mill from 1848 to 1861 totaled nearly

\textsuperscript{97} Penitentiary Records, July 11, 1850, Folder 12, Box 022-4; ibid., April 26, 1862, Folder 10, Box 022-178; Moore, “Texas Penitentiary and Textile Production,” 40-41, 43-44, 69.
$127,000, to which Besser boasted, “I doubt any similar institution, public or private, had
done better.”98

In 1858 Governor Hardin R. Runnels suggested the legislature appropriate $46,000
for additional equipment to increase profits from the Huntsville textile mill. The following
year factory machinery was expanded to 5,632 spindles and 200 looms that could produce
12,000 yards of cloth a day. This doubling of equipment enabled inmates to produce lighter
weight cotton, shirting, sheeting, kerseys, and cotton jeans, as well as yarn, thread, and
cotton batting. Within the first five years of operation the Huntsville factory produced
nearly 3,900,000 yards of cotton and wool cloth. For obvious reasons, Governor Sam
Houston praised the investment of $27,000 in new machinery at the penitentiary.99

Financial Agent M. C. Rogers reported that the Huntsville mill sold $284,695 in
products from 1859 to 1861, including 2,216,330 yards of cotton goods and 184,619 yards
of woolen goods (see Table 4). Following the onset of the Civil War, he remarked, “A very
active demand sprang up for penitentiary fabrics, and cotton is sent to us in sufficient
quantities to absorb all the fabrics made and no doubt rests on my mind that more goods
will be wanted at the factory than can be made.” The state penitentiary operated the largest


99 Moore, “Texas Penitentiary and Textile Production,” 45, 49; “Walker County: Before, During, and After the Civil War” Vertical File, Hill County College, Hillsboro, Texas; Marks, Hands to the Spindle, 73; Vera Lea Dugas, “A Social and Economic History of Texas in the Civil War and Reconstruction Periods,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1963), 159-60; Message of Governor Sam Houston to the Legislature of Texas, 1861 (Austin: S. N., 1861), 22-23; General Laws of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Texas (Houston: E. H. Cushing, 1862), 49.
textile mill statewide and presented a solution to the problem of clothing large numbers of Texan Confederate soldiers. 100

In August 1861 the penitentiary held 155 prisoners, and the average inmate was single, male, aged twenty to twenty-five, and served a term of two to five years for theft (see Table 5). Physician W. A. Raulings reported the prisoners suffered from an outbreak of scurvy from April through November 1860, that was remedied by the addition of more vegetables to their diet. The loss of ten to thirty inmates workers from sickness each day negatively affected productivity. The penitentiary incarcerated only Anglo and Mexican inmates for the first fifteen years of operation, but it also held fugitive slaves temporarily for up to six months. The inmates were generally well behaved, but were subjected to solitary confinement in a dark dungeon for one to two hours as punishment for any violation of prison regulations.101

At the onset of war Governor Lubbock was alerted to possible management problems at the penitentiary. An inmate had escaped in the spring, and a seven-year shortage of water remained unresolved. In August a fire occurred in the main cotton warehouse that resulted in the loss of $15,272 of raw material. In 1861 the Texas penitentiary sold at least 1,710,371 yards of cloth, but a discrepancy of 217,349 yards existed. M. C. Rogers also accumulated $42,114.93 of debt within a year as financial agent (see Table 4). He took the financial records upon his resignation in December, and did not return them until March of the following year. Governor Lubbock re-appointed Besser, who had little knowledge of who owed what to whom. In response, beginning in 1862 the

100 Penitentiary Report, August 31, 1861, Folder 1, Box 022-181.
101 Penitentiary Records, June 24, 1865, Folder 2, Box 022-181; ibid., January 1861, Folder 20, Box 022-9; Directors of the Penitentiary to Governor Francis R. Lubbock, September 16, 1863, Folder 15, Box, 022-4, ibid.; Physician Report to the Board of Directors, 1860, Folder 1, Box 022-9a, ibid.
legislature required quarterly financial reports from the financial agent to the state comptroller.102

The Huntsville factory reached peak production during the early years of the war. In 1861 more than two-thirds of the inmates were employed in the textile mill, which required 150 men for full operation. Superintendent Thomas Carothers reported the penitentiary required two to three inmates for sanitation, three to four to collect water, two for washing, and two for weighing supplies. He alerted the Board of Directors of the necessity to increase inmate population or supplement the workshops with slave labor. The penitentiary shoe shop, cabinet shop, gun shop, and tailor shop sold nearly $1,800 in goods, but could not increase productivity without the addition of more workshop employees. In 1861 Superintendent Carothers informed Governor Edward Clark that the textile mill could produce “4,000 yards of cotton and 800 to 1,000 yards of woolen cloth per day.” Governor Clark insisted all inmate labor should be committed to the production of fabric for Texas Confederate soldiers, as well as to any organized aid society.103

Penitentiary cloth became the main source of fabric west of the Mississippi River. Ragged civilians, ambitious military commanders, unscrupulous speculators, and confused government agents all demanded great amounts of cloth from the penitentiary. The Austin State Gazette reported, “Mr. Caruthers, Superintendent of the State Penitentiary says that institution can turn out 1,000 yards per day, of goods suited for winter clothing for our

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103 Moore, “Texas Penitentiary and Textile Production,” 83; Clayton E. Jewett, Texas in the Confederacy: An Experiment in Nation Building (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 176; Meiners, “Texas Governorship,” 72; Thomas Carothers to the Board of Directors, September 1861, Folder 18, Box 022-5, Penitentiary Records.
troops.” In fall 1861 Confederate quartermasters at Galveston and San Antonio each requisitioned 100,000 yards of cloth. On October 31, a six-month contract for half of all the fabric produced at the facility was agreed upon with Confederate Quartermaster Irby Morgan of the Army of West Tennessee. In 1862 the factory turned out 211,151 yards of woolens and 1,400,000 yards of cotton goods (see Table 4). The Dallas Herald reported, “The only factory in the Confederate States that is not charging from seven to ten prices for goods is the Star State Mills, at the Huntsville Penitentiary. We can but think the necessities of the State as well as good policy demand an increase of the rates of goods there.” In 1862 western Confederate quartermasters purchased 184,241 yards of wool and 765,791 yards of cotton goods that produced at least 40,000 uniforms, and 175,000 shirts and pants.104

As Union troops destroyed or occupied southern manufactories, the demand for penitentiary cloth increased across the Confederacy. The Huntsville textile mill became the primary source of clothing for soldiers, indigent families, aid societies, and war-torn citizens in the Trans-Mississippi after mid-1863. The loss of facilities in Baton Rouge and Little Rock drastically reduced sources for manufactured goods and added pressure to maintain production levels in Huntsville. Governor Lubbock praised the facility as, “an incalculable benefit to our army . . . the importance of this institution rises to supreme magnitude.” He warned that, “the risk of destruction to the sole manufactory of cloth west of the Mississippi River is of incalculable importance.” The Houston Tri-Weekly reported, “We learn from the Penitentiary that the applications for cloth are filled in the following

104 Dallas Herald, November 22, 1862; Austin State Gazette, September 14, 1861; Allan Coleman Ashcraft, “Texas: 1860-1866: The Lone Star State in the Civil War” (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1960), 73, 139-40; Meiners, “Texas Governorship,” 73; Harold S. Wilson, Confederate Industry: Manufactures and Quartermasters in the Civil War (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 29; Dallas Herald, October 16, 1861; James Lynn Nichols, The Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi (Austin: University of Texas Press), 34.
order: first, the army; second, families of soldiers; and third, the people. At present there are unfilled requisitions for the service to a larger extent, and for 500 families of soldiers; and besides these 30,000 applications of the third class are awaiting their turn.” Directors of the penitentiary praised the, “financially flourishing,” institution, and posted public and military prices for goods. Osnaburg that sold for $0.80 a yard was supplied to soldiers for $0.50 per yard. Twilled cottons that sold for $1.00 a yard were offered at $0.60. On March 6, 1863, the state legislature approved an act to regulate the distribution of penitentiary cloth, as well as an act to punish any person who obtained penitentiary cloth under false pretenses.105

Confederate uniforms made from Huntsville cloth were originally light blue and trimmed in yellow, but as commercial dyes became less available, various shades of sheep’s gray or brown appeared with black trimming. A shortage of dyes that included the extract of logwood and copperas limited the amount of fabric dyed at the penitentiary. Huntsville cloth was described as “white (bleached), brown (bleached and dyed) and sheep’s gray (natural fleece color; yellowish to brownish-gray).” As the war progressed machinery at the textile mill deteriorated and the quality of fabric decreased. By early 1863 the machinery at the Huntsville factory suffered from a lack of proper maintenance and began to wear down.106

Confederate soldiers complained about penitentiary cloth uniforms that seemed to lack any color whatsoever. In early 1863, Major W. H. Haynes, the chief quartermaster of

105 Message of Governor F. R. Lubbock to the Tenth Legislature of the State of Texas, November 5, 1863 (Austin: State Gazette, 1863), 9-10; Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, October 3, 1862; Ashcraft, “Texas,” 140; Directors of the Penitentiary to Governor Lubbock, September 16, 1863, Folder 15, Box 022-4, Penitentiary Records; General Laws of the Extra Session of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Texas (Austin: Texas Almanac, 1863), 20-21.

the Confederate Clothing Bureau, received 110,000 yards of white woolen cloth from the penitentiary. General Thomas N. Waul’s “Texas Legion” was issued uniforms of un-dyed white wool in late February 1863 at Fort Pemberton in Mississippi. In March, General John G. Walker’s “Texas Division” was reported to be well clad in penitentiary uniforms that were most likely un-dyed Huntsville woolens.107

Un-dyed uniforms from Huntsville were distributed throughout Louisiana and Mississippi in spring 1863. In mid-March, Private Willie H. Tunnard of the 3rd Louisiana Infantry received a new uniform while stationed at Snydor’s Mill, Mississippi. He noted, “The regiment received a new uniform, which they were ordered to take, much against their expressed wishes. The material was very coarse white jeans. The uniforms were issue to the men, few of whom would wear them, unless under compulsion, by some special order.” Soldiers from the 26th Louisiana Infantry Regiment expressed misgivings about the white uniforms that became known as the badge of a conscript.108

Governor Lubbock consistently emphasized the need to supply Texan Confederate soldiers with uniforms made from penitentiary cloth. A report titled “Goods furnished from the Penitentiary for Military purposes,” confirmed that Huntsville cloth was furnished to General Albert Pike, General Henry H. Sibley, Colonel Ebenezer B. Nichols, Colonel Benjamin F. Carter, Colonel Robert R. Garland, Colonel John H. Burnett, Colonel Edward Clark, Colonel Richard B. Hubbard, Colonel Oran M. Roberts, Colonel Horace Randal, Colonel William B. Ochiltree, and Colonel Thomas C. Bass in early 1863. Governor Lubbock forwarded a request for 6,000 yards of penitentiary cloth from Brigadier General John B. Hood in Virginia to Superintendent Carothers. Captain Hiram S. Morgan, of Company B of the 18th

Texas Cavalry, purchased Huntsville cloth to outfit his troops in gray double-breasted coats, and gray trousers with yellow cavalry stripes on the legs. General Sterling Price’s troops in northwest Arkansas received poorly colored uniforms that were sewn at the Little Rock Penitentiary, but were made from Huntsville cloth. The 16th Texas Cavalry was also described as being clad in, “faded penitentiary jackets in late 1863.”

Superintendent Carothers reported the penitentiary textile mill operated in, “fine fashion without any major problems.” However, he noted the decreased inmate population could eventually interfere with factory operations. An increase in pardons and discharges reduced the inmate population to one hundred and seventy-nine in 1863 (see Table 5). Carothers did not care whether additional labor was “slave, white, or men of questionable character,” as long as they “worked hard, and followed specific directions.” He petitioned General John B. Magruder, “if you can spare me as many as twenty prisoners (negroes would be preferred) to work in the factory, I will most gladly receive them, and after being placed in my charge I would relieve the military department of all expenses in relation to them.” Union officers from the U. S. S. Harriet Lane were sent to the penitentiary, but were segregated from other prisoners. They rarely worked in the mill and were frequent dinner guests at the home of the superintendent.

The Texas legislature realized the necessity to increase the inmate population, but insisted that an increase in the number of inmates from outside the state, “could potentially threaten the vital institution.” However, on November 14, 1864, demand for cloth forced

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the legislature to pass “An Act to Authorize the Use of the Texas Penitentiary for the
Confinement of Convicts from the States of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri.” The act
stipulated that open slots must exist for outside convicts, and the financial burden for
transport rested with the state from which they transferred. Local slave labor was also
increasingly used to meet the demands on the mill during the final year of the war.111

Proper maintenance of the machinery was the greatest problem at the Huntsville
textile mill. Shortages of supplies, tools, and parts as a result of the Union blockade limited
and even interrupted production at the penitentiary. Cast iron replacement parts
purchased from northern shops prior to the war were replaced by inadequate substitutes
manufactured onsite at the penitentiary blacksmith shop. Textile mill superintendent
Chandler oversaw inmate blacksmiths, machinists, carpenters, and tinsmiths in an attempt
to keep the factory functioning as efficiently as possible. In January 1863 the State Military
Board successfully imported machinery from Droege, Oetling & Company in Europe, as well
as $50,000 worth of castings and parts through Matamoros. These imports only minimally
improved the deteriorated equipment. On March 6, the state legislature authorized its
financial agent to purchase additional machinery. Superintendent Carothers reported the
penitentiary was well supplied with cotton, but a shortage of sperm oil idled half the

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111 General Laws of the Tenth Legislature (Second Extra Session) of the State of Texas (Austin: State
Gazette, 1865), 15; Jewett, Texas in the Confederacy, 159; Moore, “Texas Penitentiary and Textile Production,”
99; Meiners, “Texas Governorship,” 278-79; “Walker County: Before, During, and After the Civil War” Vertical
File, Hill County College, 2; General Laws of the Tenth Legislature of the State of Texas (Houston: Galveston
News, 1864), 6-7.
machinery. Even the successful import of additional machinery was insufficient to reach production goals during the final years of the war.\textsuperscript{112}

In 1865 Superintendent Carothers reported the inmates were in remarkable health and the penitentiary was in good condition. The inmate population had decreased from 218 to 118, and the workshops required slaves to be hired (see Table 5). The shortage of textile mill employees reduced production, forced machinery to sit idle, and caused the expectations of some to be disappointed. Carothers lamented that the textile mill could not meet the requirements of all Texans, and the Confederate military's continuous attempts to conscript employees of the penitentiary.\textsuperscript{113}

Wartime shortages required the citizens of Texas to renew home manufacturing where machinery was available. Knapsacks, haversacks, and cloth bags were made from penitentiary cloth by citizens, aid societies, and Confederate quartermaster workshops. Captain J. D. Adams pleaded, “Every family throughout this Department, possessed of a spinning wheel and loom, is requested to manufacture as large a quantity of cloth (both woolen and cotton) as the raw material at its command will permit. Those who have no facilities for spinning or weaving, may assist in the good work by making up shirts, drawers, pantaloons, coats and overcoats, and by knitting stockings, making hats or caps, and shoes; while those who have looms adapted to the purpose, can furnish blankets.” The Montgomery County Court purchased enough penitentiary cloth to make “two suits of


\textsuperscript{113} Thomas Carothers to Board of the Penitentiary, 1865, Folder 19, Box 022-5, Penitentiary Records; S. B. Hendricks to the Comptroller of Public Accounts, March 22, 1865, Folder 27, Box 022-9, ibid.
winter clothes for each of their one hundred and twenty-five men serving in Virginia.” Colonel J. M. Crockett reported in the Galveston Weekly News that ladies in Houston met in parties to sew uniforms, “made of very common strong woolen goods from the penitentiary.” The women met in the upper room of the telegraph office where several sewing machines were provided.\(^{114}\)

The activities of the societies in Ash Spring, Austin, Cherino, Dallas, Galveston, Gilmer, Hempstead, Jefferson, Lancaster, McKinney, Salado, and San Antonio were regularly noted in Texas newspapers. The ladies of Harrison County met every Tuesday morning at ten o’clock at the courthouse, while the women in Marshall met on Saturday morning at nine o’clock above either Dr. Lancaster’s Drug Store or the store of Ford & Horr. The ladies of Bastrop County submitted an application to the governor for penitentiary cloth to produce winter uniforms for destitute soldiers. J. H. Robinson of Travis County volunteered to collect and deliver four large wagons of uniforms to Texas Confederate soldiers in Virginia. The Confederate Adjutant General’s Office even established general depots at Austin, Beaumont, Dallas, Henderson, Houston, Jefferson, Palestine, Sherman, San Antonio, Victoria and Waco to collect donated supplies.\(^{115}\)

Texas Confederate soldiers thus initially procured their military clothing locally. Government officials urged soldiers to supply themselves with “one coat, two pairs of pantaloons, two shirts, two pair of drawers, two undershirts, three pairs of socks, two blankets, or one blanket and over-coat, two pair of shoes, one towel, and one hat.” The

\(^{114}\) Austin State Gazette, September 17, 1862; Moore, “Texas Penitentiary and Textile Production,” 145; Robert Pattison Felgar, “Texas in the War for Southern Independence, 1861-1865,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1935), 420; Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, July 14, 1862; (Austin) Tri-Weekly State Gazette, July 6, 1861; Austin State Gazette, July 6, 1861.

\(^{115}\) Austin State Gazette, June 8, 22, 1861, July 6, 1861, September 7, 1861, October 5, 19, 1861, June 10, 23, 1863; Marshall Texas Republican, May 18, 1861, August, 17, 1861, December 7, 1861, September, 6, 1862, February 19, 1863; Dallas Herald, September 18, 1861, November 6, 20, 1861.

The large Confederate depot at Houston operated throughout the war. From January 1863 to February 1864, the depot distributed 13,691 kepis and hats, 20,925 jackets, 40,293 pairs of trousers, 39,407 shirts, 34,507 pairs of drawers, 3,426 pairs of socks, 43,657 pairs of shoes, and 377 great coats. Captain E. C. Wharton of the Houston depot reported jackets and trousers were often made from penitentiary cloth. Throughout the summer and fall of 1863, the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Texas Volunteer Infantry was supplied with white woolen uniforms made of penitentiary cloth from the San Antonio depot. The 26\textsuperscript{th} Texas Cavalry Regiment was outfitted with white woolen kersey uniforms from James P. Spring. The Spring Company of Huntsville made shirts and drawers from penitentiary fabric and supplied them to Confederate quartermasters.\footnote{Frederick R. Adolphus, “Confederate Clothing of the Houston Quartermaster Depot,” *Military Collector and Historian* 48 (Winter, 1996): 173, 177; K.C. MacDonald, “Trans-Mississippi Confederate Uniforms,” 2-3, http://www.lazyjacks.org.uk/shirts.htm, accessed 5 January 2011; Frederick R. Adolphus, “The Uniforms, Equipage, Arms, and Accoutrements of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Texas Volunteer Infantry,” *Military Collector and Historian* 62 (Spring, 2010): 5; Frederick R. Adolphus, “The Uniforms, Equipage, Arms, and Accoutrements of Debray’s 26th Texas Cavalry.” *Journal of the Company of Military Historians* 61 (Summer 2009): 78.}

A tangled web of cotton agencies in Texas caused "bitter exchanges between
quartermasters, state officials, planters, and various other agents.” A circular issued by financial agent Hendricks announced the distribution of 300,000 yards of cloth to destitute citizens. However, in November 1864, the state legislature approved an “Act Concerning the Distribution of Cloth from the Penitentiary,” which appropriated 600,000 yards of cloth annually for the support of indigent soldiers’ families. County courts gathered lists of the dependents of Texas Confederate soldiers and forwarded them to the financial agent at the penitentiary for distribution. The state was divided into six districts, and cloth was distributed within ninety days after the applications were submitted. The financial agent reported in May 1865 that 126,212 yards of cloth were already distributed to several counties.118

The distribution of cloth from the penitentiary depended on the same railroads, inland waterways, and marginal roads used by civilians, state agents, and military officers. The prison was located twelve miles from the Trinity River; and poorly maintained dirt roads complicated the transportation of machinery, raw materials, and finished products. A stagecoach line connected Huntsville with the distant railroad line at Navasota, but a seven-year halt in railroad construction delayed the Phelps Line by the Houston & Great Northern Railway Company until well after the war.119

Fifty-eight railway companies were chartered in Texas, but only sixteen contributed to 468 miles of track across the state by the onset of the war. Ten railroad lines became operational, but the onset of war halted most statewide transportation projects. Early in


119 Kerby, *Kirby Smith’s Confederacy*, 64-67; Crews, *Huntsville and Walker County, Texas*, 16-17.
the war the First Confederate Congress authorized $1,500,000 to construct a railroad line between New Iberia, Louisiana, and Orange, Texas, but the fall of New Orleans officially ended the project. The Vicksburg and Shreveport Line was instrumental in transporting supplies across the Mississippi River until the fall of Vicksburg in 1863. The Texas and New Orleans line transported large numbers of soldiers and supplies to Louisiana during the early years of the war. The Galveston, Houston, & Henderson line was vital to coastal defense, assisted the recapture of Galveston by Confederate forces, and transported prisoners of war to the penitentiary. At the conclusion of the war the mileage of railroads in Texas declined to only 427 miles of track. The combination of a shortage of railroad engines, a lack of uniform gauge railing, and poor terminals made the resupply of soldiers and civilians a practical impossibility.120

A legislative appropriation before the war increased inland water systems to nearly 2,000 miles navigable by steamers, but most provided little help after the Union blockade. Unreliable railway and steamship transportation forced an increase in the overland movement of supplies and people on mediocre roads. In 1860 Texas was connected by at least thirty stagecoach lines owned by Sawyer, Risher & Hall. Huntsville was a stagecoach center in east Texas prior to the war. The principal lines from Huntsville ran east to Nacogdoches, Marshall, Alexandria, and Shreveport; the western lines connected to Austin, San Antonio, and El Paso. Planters without access to a navigable river hauled cotton overland to the penitentiary. By 1860 at least 10,000 teams of sixteen to twenty-four oxen

operated across the state.  

In regard to the transportation difficulties in Texas, New Orleans Picayune editor George Wilkins Kendall remarked that, “it mattered little how much goods the south made if it could not transport what it had from point of production to place of need.” The Houston Tri-Weekly editor wondered, “We cannot tell how this is to be accomplished, but are of the opinion that what is to be done, must be done by private enterprise . . . They will suffer before relief we shall prepare for them can possibly get to them.” Such inefficiency in the official distribution system was appalling and aggravating for those trying to distribute cloth and other goods from the Texas penitentiary, and it later proved fatal to the support of the soldiers.

Major Haynes, Quartermaster and Chief of the Clothing Bureau in the Trans-Mississippi Department wrote:

The department is prolific of raw material, but without means for its manufacture. There is only one manufacturing establishment of any magnitude in the department-that at Huntsville, Texas . . . the clothing of the troops depends upon the purchases of the cotton office of Major [Simeon] Hart, quartermaster, products of the Texas State Penitentiary, hand looms of the country . . . the failure of accredited purchasing officers; the fall of Brownsville, losing thereby large supplies which would have been secured in the summer of 1863; fall of Vicksburg and the interruption of intercourse, thereby preventing the passage of clothing to this department which had been secured by my agents; the depreciation of the currency and consequent interference in purchasing home fabrics, and many other causes have conduced to the paralyzation of the operations of this bureau.

The Texas State Penitentiary, unlike those in Louisiana and Arkansas, was never directly threatened by the Union Army. Ironically, it was attacked by Confederate forces on two occasions during the war. Major General John B. Magruder had warned Governor

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121 Crews, Huntsville and Walker County, Texas, 16-17; Ashcraft, “Texas,” 22.
Pendleton Murrah, "the enemy can have no stronger inducement for an advance upon Huntsville than that the penitentiary is used as a manufactory of clothing material for the use of the army," but he never expected the prison to be attacked by Texas Confederates. On December 5, 1863, soldiers under Colonel James W. White from Captain George A. Dickerman’s Company of the 2nd State Cavalry held financial agent Besser and his family captive while they demanded tents, clothing, and shelter in route to Houston. For nearly six weeks, from late May until June 1865, when Trans-Mississippi soldiers abandoned the war effort, two to five hundred Confederate soldiers from Galveston besieged the penitentiary at Huntsville for supplies on their way home. The textile mill sat idle for twenty-one days and sales were halted during the incident. The Director of the Penitentiary Board suggested the employment of a police force of fifty men, at a cost of $25 a month in addition to provisions, to guard the prison until, “the necessity passed.” On May 31 the soldiers broke into the penitentiary warehouse and stole at least 54,000 yards of cloth, which they handed out to a mob in Huntsville.124

Wartime challenges at the prison have been given little attention. Despite numerous obstacles, penitentiary workshops supplied essential equipment for Confederate soldiers fighting from Texas to Virginia. The requirements of Texan Confederate soldiers, their families, and citizens would not have been met without the thousands of miles of cloth produced at the Huntsville textile mill. Financial agents purchased nearly 4.25 million

pounds of cotton during the war, and their reports indicate at least 7,959,472 yards of cloth (4,522 miles of fabric) were produced at the factory between February 8, 1860, and May 31, 1865 (see Table 4). Confederate quartermasters purchased at least 451,588 yards of woolen cloth, 507,291 yards of cotton jeans, and 1,376,260 yards of osnaburgs. Demand for prison goods often outpaced production at the facility, but the penitentiary workshops were generally successful throughout the war.¹²⁵

The textile mill inside the Texas State Penitentiary was the largest Confederate mill west of the Mississippi River to operate for the duration of the war. From 1861 to 1862 Huntsville prisoners fabricated over 2,910,845 yards of cotton and wool cloth (see Table 4). During 1863, for example, the facility provided at least 1,387,081 yards of fabric to slaves, citizens, and Confederate soldiers (see Table 4). From February to August 1864, the inmates produced 790,553 yards of osnaburgs, 131,209 yards of jeans, 78,693 yards of kerseys, 184 yards of plains, and 946 yards of sheep's gray (see Table 4). In 1865 the penitentiary sold at least 793,097 yards of cloth in addition to the 126,212 yards donated to counties across the state (see Table 4). During the war the Huntsville mill consumed about 1,800 cotton bales annually, and 100 looms were operated for a minimum of 300 days per year. The penitentiary's purchase of at least 8,754 cotton bales was vital to the Texas economy and especially to nearby planters from May 1861 to August 1865.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Moore, "Texas Penitentiary and Textile Production," 109, 148; "Production of Cloth at Huntsville Penitentiary" Vertical File, Hill County College, 1; Financial Agent Report, March 5, 1863, Folder 21, Box 022-9, Penitentiary Records.

¹²⁶ Walker, Penology for Profit, 17; Report of the Financial Agent, March 1861, Folder 20, Box 022-9, Penitentiary Records; John S. Besser to Governor Lubbock, January 17, 1863, Folder 24, Box 022-9, ibid.; S. B. Hendricks to Governor Lubbock, April 1863, Folder 25, Box 022-9, ibid.; Financial Agent Report, March 5, 1863, Folder 21, Box 022-9, ibid.; Nichols, Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi, 34-35; Kerby, Kirby Smith's Confederacy, 261; Financial Agent Report, May 31, 1865, Folder 20, Box 022-15, Penitentiary Records; ibid., August 14, 1865; ibid., September 1865; ibid., November 30, 1865; ibid., May 1865; S. B. Hendricks to the Comptroller of Public Accounts, Folder 11, Box 022-12, ibid.
The Texas State Penitentiary became the largest income source for the state during the war and contributed more than 38 percent of state net receipts. By 1863 at least $800,000 was deposited in the State Treasury. The penitentiary grossed at least $2,388,541 during the war from the sale of prison goods, and the average annual profit was nearly $331,581.69 (see Table 4). The distribution of penitentiary cloth was complicated by inadequate transportation in Texas and the Trans-Mississippi Department as a whole. A lack of proper replacement parts hindered operations at the mill as the war progressed and lessened the quality of fabric produced. Temporary declines in prison population negatively affected production, left machinery idle, and required supplemental labor. Nevertheless, the workshops at the Texas State Penitentiary exceeded all realistic production expectations, and supplied Texans with cloth throughout the Civil War.127

Table 4

Textile Production at the Texas State Penitentiary, 1860-1865

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1862</th>
<th>1863</th>
<th>1864</th>
<th>1865</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spindles Active</td>
<td>5632</td>
<td>5632</td>
<td>5632</td>
<td>5632</td>
<td>2816</td>
<td>2816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yards Produced</td>
<td>1,200,474</td>
<td>1,710,371</td>
<td>1,611,151</td>
<td>1,387,081</td>
<td>1,001,582</td>
<td>1,048,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Profit</td>
<td>$142,347</td>
<td>$308,531</td>
<td>$366,777</td>
<td>$426,920</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: "Production of Cloth at Huntsville Penitentiary," Vertical File, Hill County College; Financial Agent Report, March 1861, Penitentiary Records, Folder 20, Box 022-4; Financial Agent Report, August 31, 1861, ibid., Folder 14, Box 022-4; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 29; Besser to Governor Lubbock, January 17, 1863, Penitentiary Records, Folder 24, Box 022-9; Besser to Governor Lubbock, March 5, 1863, ibid., Folder 21, Box 022-9; Financial Agent Report, February 20, 1865, May 31, 1865, August 14, 1865, September 1865, November 30, 1865, ibid., Folder 20, Box 022-15; Financial Agent Report, August 31, 1865, ibid., Folder 4, Box 022-16.

Table 5

Texas State Penitentiary Inmate Statistics, 1849-1865

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black Male</th>
<th>Mexican Male</th>
<th>White Male</th>
<th>White Female</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td></td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>211</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>179</td>
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<tr>
<td>1864</td>
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<td>1865</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Penitentiary Report, October 1, 1849, Folder 10, Box 022-4, Penitentiary Records; J. S. Besser to Governor Bell, July 11, 1850, Folder 12, Box 022-4, ibid.; Penitentiary Report, August 31, 1861, Folder 1, Box 022-181, ibid.; Thomas Carothers to the Penitentiary Board of Directors, Folder 18, Box 022-5, ibid.; Thomas Carothers to the Board of the Penitentiary, 1865, Folder 19, Box 022-5, ibid.; Financial Agent Report, January 17, 1860, Folder 20, Box 022-9, ibid.; June 24, 1865, Folder 2, Box 022-181, ibid.
Figure 4. Design sketch of the Texas State Penitentiary, 1849. Source: Penitentiary Records, Folder 10, Box 022-4, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin Texas. Courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The mass production of military goods at workshops inside the Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas state penitentiaries during the Civil War was part of the Confederacy’s effort to mobilize and fight a modern war. After limited investment in industry prior to the Civil War, states of the Trans-Mississippi Department were forced to convert their available manufactories to the production of war materials. Patriotic citizens contributed to the Confederate cause through the donation of supplies and participation in aid societies. Military depots across the region distributed penitentiary goods to soldiers and citizens. Some of those materials were transported in wagons constructed by inmate labor at penitentiary workshops in the Trans-Mississippi Department.

The penitentiaries became assets to their states as the sale of prison goods contributed to the local economies. The construction of penitentiary workshops expanded southern industry at a time when local industrial investment was scarce. State government decisions to invest in large textile mills, blacksmith shops, and carpentry shops in the 1830s and 1840s benefited the Confederacy during the Civil War. Shortages of all kinds required the Confederate states to produce goods domestically that were previously imported from northern states or overseas. The limited number of large manufactories in the Trans-Mississippi required Confederates to produce efficiently and at maximum capacity. The inability of those manufactories to meet all public demands revealed the need for the South to industrialize further and to produce more finished products locally.

The primarily rural society of the Trans-Mississippi faced a difficult task in mobilizing against a well-equipped Union army that spent roughly $1.8 billion dollars on
military supplies to conduct the war. Northern states benefited from a significantly higher concentration of manufacturing facilities capable of the mass-production of military supplies. Clothing contractors John E. Hanford, William C. Browning, and John T. Martin of New York filled over $20 million worth of Union military orders, while two descendant companies of Slade, Smith & Company of Philadelphia supplied $11.5 million worth of clothing, blankets, and tents to Union soldiers. The United States also maintained valuable overseas trade in military goods with Europe throughout the war. Union quartermasters relied most heavily on private industry to supply depots with military supplies, but also established temporary workshops to meet military demands.  

Similar to the South, several northern penitentiaries operated manufactories that contributed thousands of dollars worth of shoes and garments to the Union war effort. The Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin state penitentiaries operated small military goods manufactories with inmate labor. However, Union quartermasters were not as dependent upon penitentiary workshops for supplies as their Confederate counterparts. The United States government did not rely on a system of prison labor to contribute large amounts of clothing and materials to soldiers or citizens during the war.

In the Confederacy, the state penitentiaries of Louisiana and Texas contributed greatly to war supply efforts with fabric produced at their large textile mills. A smaller mill established at the penitentiary in Little Rock at the onset of the war could not produce at the same capacity as its counterparts, but made goods of comparable quality nonetheless. The penitentiaries marketed a variety of finished cotton and woolen fabric to local

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129 Ibid., 1, 14-15, 232-35.
merchants and apparel manufacturers as well. The abundance of raw materials (especially cotton and wool) allowed the facilities to operate at full capacity at times.

Inmates employed in Louisiana and Texas penitentiary textile mills operated 5,632 spindles with a maximum output of 12,000 yards of fabric per day. These facilities produced thousands of miles of cotton sheeting, shirting, twill, linsey, kersey, osnaburg, jean, and yarn from 1861 to 1865. Penitentiary goods were praised in local newspapers as high-quality fabrics, comparable to cloth purchased from northern merchants. The Union army occupied the mill at Baton Rouge in late 1862, and the machinery in the Texas mill gradually wore down. The Union naval blockade made the import of replacement machinery difficult despite continuous attempts by the Confederate government. As a result, the quality and quantity of penitentiary cloth decreased during the final years of the war.

The Trans-Mississippi penitentiaries also operated blacksmith and carpentry shops that supported the textile mills and made a variety of other goods for Confederate soldiers. The workshops in Baton Rouge supplied large numbers of wheelbarrows, barrels, and iron tools in addition to 1,700 miles of fabric. The blacksmith and carpentry shops at the Arkansas State Penitentiary supplied hundreds of carriages, wagons, and caissons for Confederate soldiers.

Prison goods were marketed in local newspapers and were exchanged for raw material from local farmers. As the country erupted in war, the market for penitentiary goods changed from strictly domestic to predominantly military. Confederate quartermasters, aid societies, and families of soldiers obtained penitentiary cloth to make uniforms. Quartermasters established depots and temporary workshops that paid
employees to cut and sew uniforms. Patriotic Confederate women across the Trans-Mississippi organized aid societies that outfitted entire regiments. Destitute families of soldiers also received fabric that was donated by penitentiary superintendents or distributed to the poor annually through county and parish courts.

The decision of antebellum state legislators to approve penitentiary designs that included additional room for large workshops and textile mills facilitated the mass production of supplies for citizens and soldiers during the war. The penitentiary textile mills were the largest cloth manufactories in each of their respective states and became pivotal to the supply of fabric in the Trans-Mississippi. The blacksmith and carpentry workshops in the prison industry benefited from low production costs and reliable employees. The penitentiaries contributed greatly to the local economies through the local purchase of raw materials consumed at the workshops. Shortages forced the Confederate state governments to operate the available manufactories efficiently and to consider the construction of additional factories. Most construction projects stalled, however, forcing Confederate states to work with the antebellum facilities.

Confederate military and state officials benefited from the location of large textile manufactories inside state institutions with long-established rules and regulations. The penitentiaries operated according to rigid schedules that mandated employment in the workshops from daylight to sundown. Well-qualified overseers maintained the equipment and trained inmates. State legislatures mandated either semiannual or quarterly reports that provided oversight in the workshops and ensured that they operated as efficiently as possible.
The advantage of inmate labor was occasionally neutralized by escapes, riots, fires, and the sabotage of equipment. The size of the inmate workforce available to the workshops fluctuated each year as a result of releases, pardons, escapes, and deaths. The prison population determined at what capacity the textile mill could operate and how many inmates were available to the other workshops. Late in the war penitentiary officials maintained the workforce with inmates transferred from other states and with local slave labor.

The prison industry in the Trans-Mississippi Department was a successful system while it lasted, and it contributed significantly to the supply of uniforms and a variety of other goods. These textile mills produced at least 10,992,087 yards or 6,245 miles of fabric from 1861 to 1865 (see tables 1 and 4). The blacksmith and carpentry shops produced hundreds of wagons, caissons, barrels, buckets, iron tools, and other supplies used by Confederate soldiers. The construction and expansion of penitentiary workshops prior to the war made domestic mass production a possibility in the Confederate southwest.

The success of the prison industry was tempered by a failure to meet the demand of citizens and soldiers for the duration of the war. The Union armies’ advances threatened Confederate state penitentiaries with occupation or destruction and disrupted business transactions as they approached the prisons. By the late summer of 1863, the Louisiana and Arkansas state penitentiaries were under Union control, and the Huntsville textile mill became the sole Confederate textile manufactory west of the Mississippi River. By 1864 the overworked Huntsville mill operated at half capacity as its machinery began to suffer from disrepair. While the demand for fabric from citizens and soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi steadily increased, the ability to supply it declined in the final years of the war.
A continuous reduction in the number of inmates at the Texas penitentiary also resulted in lower production of textiles. The distribution of prison goods was challenged by poor transportation systems and the disruption of Confederate commerce along the Mississippi River.

The historian Emory Thomas suggested that a lack of manufactories forced the Confederacy to accept revolutionary changes to industry and the traditions of a conservative South to mobilize for war. He noted that on the eve of hostilities nearly four-fifths of world cotton was grown in the South, but only one-tenth of United States cotton mills were located there. Demand for military supplies benefited private enterprise, but also invited the competition of products from inmate labor at state institutions. Ironically, the Confederacy depended on penitentiaries in the Trans-Mississippi Department to supply many goods that were imported prior to the war.130

Following the secession of the southern states in 1860-61, the Confederate central government constructed a nation, a government, and a military from the limited resources at hand. Once the war began, it was clear that the industrial base of the breakaway republic could not meet the demands of the conflict, and southern states were forced to improvise to keep the Confederate war machine operating. One of their answers to the supply problem was to tap into the potential of the industrial shops in state penitentiaries. Prison workshops in the Trans-Mississippi were not built for the mass production of goods or to ensure local autonomy in the event of an existential crisis, but the onset of a civil war forced state authorities to adapt and adjust. Those Confederate officials efficiently used the

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penitentiaries in an atmosphere of war, and the inmates, willing or not, greatly contributed to the war effort through their constant labor in the workshops and textile mills.
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