

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY
NOMINATION FORM

Continuation Sheet

Item Number

Page

Name Historic: Oconee County Cage

Location: Property of ~~Oconee County Law~~
Enforcement Center

Common: Jail on Wheels

Classification: Object

Owner: Oconee County

West Main Street

Walhalla, S.C. 29691

Representation in Existing Surveys: Inventory of Historic Places in South Carolina, 1981

Description: The Oconee County Cage is a small, metal cage on a wheeled chassis constructed ca. 1900. The cage was pulled by draft animals who were hitched to a metal tongue which projects from the front axle of the chassis. The cage is approximately fourteen feet long, eight feet wide, and seven feet high. The front end, the floor, and the roof are of solid sheet metal on a riveted frame. The sides of the cage are enclosed by metal bars and strips in an open grid. The rear of the cage has a hinged metal door allowing egress.

The cage has twelve metal bunks inside, arranged in three tiers on each side. The bunks have metal frames carrying a mesh of metal strips, which supported the prisoners' pallets. A small metal barrel in the center of the floor allowed for a fire.

(continued on back)

Significance: The Oconee County Cage was one of several used in the early twentieth century as quarters for chain gang members at work sites. For example, on 29 October 1915 representatives of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of South Carolina reported that the Oconee County Chain Gang was located four miles from Seneca where the convicts were repairing the Oconee Station Road. The convicts slept in two steel cages; negro men slept in one and white men in the other. There were twelve convicts, four white men and eight black men. That day the convicts were fed fried bacon, biscuit, coffee, and syrup for breakfast; cabbage, bacon, and cornbread for dinner; and fried bacon, biscuit, and syrup for supper.¹³ On 23 October 1917 a visit (continued on back)

Acreage less than 1

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property is shown bounded by the red line on the accompanying Oconee County Tax Map #500-19, drawn at a scale of 1 inch = 100 feet. This boundary includes only the cage and its parking place.

UTM Reference Point 17/310542/3848460

Other Information

Description Continued:

Many parts of the cage, including the floor, are rusting out. Several of the metal bunks have been removed. The cage is now parked in the parking lot of the Oconee County Law Enforcement Center in Walhalla.

Significance Continued:

to the chain gang revealed that the cages had been screened since the last inspection.¹⁴ In July 1918 the State Board of Charities and Corrections reported that there were no white men on the gang; the county authorities had decided to discontinue working white men on the chain gang and to send them to the penitentiary or allow them to serve their sentences in jail.¹⁵

The Oconee County Cage, which has been preserved by the county to serve as a reminder of the advances that have been made in the confinement of prisoners, is the most intact object of its type that has been identified in the state.