

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received JUL 30 1982
date entered

1. Name

County Jails of ~~the South Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission~~
historic Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks and Turner Counties *STR*

and/or common same

2. Location

street & number (See Attached Inventory Forms) N/A not for publication

city, town N/A vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state Georgia code 013 county See Attached Inventory Forms code N/A

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> "Thematic Group" <i>N/A</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership (see attached inventory forms)

street & number

city, town _____ vicinity of _____ state _____

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Superior Court

street & number Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks and Turner County Courthouses

city, town Fitzgerald, Nashville, Quitman and Ashburn state Georgia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Historic Structures Field Survey:
title Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks & Turner Counties has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1980-81 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

city, town Atlanta state Georgia

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☒ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☒ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearanceDESCRIPTION

The county jail in South Georgia, usually located in or on the corner facing the courthouse square, is often, after the courthouse, one of the community's most historically and architecturally significant buildings. Like the county courthouses, the county jails symbolize respect for the law and community pride. When the "new county fever" hit South Georgia around the turn of the century, the very first order of business was building courthouses and jails. Like the courthouses, jails were touted by proud citizenry and local papers as being the finest, most up-to-date buildings around.

Of the four remaining historic jails in the South Georgia area - the Brooks, Berrien, Ben Hill, and Turner county jails - all exhibit local versions of picturesque Romanesque style. Not only did they have the latest cells and escape-proof interior features, but their castle-like exteriors presented a dignified fortress-like facade, much more impressive than the simple log structures they usually replaced.

Built of brick, concrete, and iron, the four South Georgia jails display such features as elaborately corbelled cornices, pyramid-roofed corner towners (Berrien County and Turner County), Tudor arches, stepped gables, and battered walls (Ben Hill County).

All are substantial looking two-story buildings built on raised basements, with the exception of the earlier 1884 Brooks County Jail which sits on a solid foundation. Although this jail has two cell levels, it was constructed as a nearly square one story building with Italianate hood molds over long windows.

The interior of the jails displayed the latest advances in "fireproof" construction: the Turner, Berrien and Brooks county jails have arched corrugated metal and concrete ceilings; the Ben Hill Jail has flat corrugated metal ceilings, with concrete encased steel beams. All four jails have concrete floors and plaster over brick walls.

County records show that three jails were designed by architects: Ben Hill - J.R. MacEachron of Atlanta; Brooks - Simeon A. Remington; Turner - Wagner and Dobson of Montgomery, Ala. The Berrien County Jail was both designed and constructed by the Pauly Jail Building & Manufacturing Company of St. Louis, Missouri.

The Pauly Jail Company also supplied the steel cells and doors for at least two of the jails in Berrien and Brooks Counties. The cellblock for the Ben Hill County jail was provided by the Manly and Lamon Construction Company of Dalton, Georgia, noted jail cell manufacturer. The Turner County jail has plate steel cells, while the other county jails have riveted strap steel cells.

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In the Turner, Berrien, and Ben Hill county jails, the death cells, gallows and trap doors have been preserved, albeit welded shut.

Detailed specifications for the construction of all the jails are found in the minutes of the Superior Court of each county.

The jails today retain much of their original appearance. The only exterior change to the Turner County Jail is the addition of white paint in 1976; the Brooks County Jail was painted in 1980. A wooden kitchen and sheriff's living quarters were added to the Berrien County Jail in 1930 and removed in 1965; the wooden porch was replaced, roof repaired, and a fence added in 1976, as a local Future Farmers of America Bicentennial project. A tower was removed from the Ben Hill County Jail in the 1920's and a porch replaced in 1937.

The interiors of the South Georgia jails are relatively intact, with original ceilings, floors, cells, and walls of cell areas unchanged. The only areas renovated have been jailers' living quarters and dispatchers' offices, with some added paneling over plaster and lowered acoustical tile ceilings. The interior of the Ben Hill County Jail is currently under renovation.

The part of the metal floor that housed the trap door and gallows of the Brooks County Jail has been cut away, and an iron railing added; also fireplaces in each room have been bricked and plastered over.

PRESERVATION

The Berrien County Jail was in use as a jail until 1955; it was used as a dog pound and storage space until 200 Berrien Future Farmers of America members cleaned and rehabilitated the building in 1976. The students rebuilt rotted porches and window sashes, built steps, walkways and gardens, added some sheetrock, and equipped one room as a kitchen. In the last few years, the building has been vandalized and now stands vacant, although the Nashville Chamber of Commerce is interested in restoring the jail for an office.

The Turner County Jail still houses prisoners, although the county is operating in violation of standards of the State Fire Marshall and 1976 Life Safety Code for Penal Institutions. The Turner County Jail may undergo extensive rehabilitation or be closed within one year.

The Brooks County Jail housed prisoners until 1980; now it is vacant but for a small jailer's office. Because of code violations, Brooks County prisoners are being housed in the new Lowndes County Jail. The future of the old jail is uncertain, although the Brooks County Historical Society has requested use of the jail as a local museum.

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The Ben Hill County Jail is currently undergoing extensive interior rehabilitation in order to meet code requirements. Some doors will be sealed, a spiral staircase to the deathcell removed, and walls will be replastered or sheetrocked. After the work is completed, the jail will once more house prisoners.

METHODOLOGY

The study of county jails in the ten county area covered by the South Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission was conducted by Haley Blanchard, regional preservation planner for the Commission. This was part of the ongoing Historic Structures Field Survey sponsored by the Historic Preservation Section of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (the State Historic Preservation Office). The county seats for the ten county area have been surveyed and through this survey it was determined that only these four jails met the National Register criteria. The others were not eligible due to being non-historic, that is either being less than fifty years old or not having historic architectural integrity.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates See inventory forms **Builder/Architect** See inventory forms

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The County Jails of the South Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission are historically significant in architecture, law, and politics/government. In architecture these are significant as examples of buildings built for a specific purpose and thus embodying the necessary elements for that purpose. As jails, they by necessity had to include residential quarters for the county sheriff and his family, cooking facilities, and prison cells. The use of the Romanesque style (which is also found in many other jails in the state) recalls an earlier, castle-like historical fortress concept of a prison or jail facility. The fireproof, brick construction for these jails reflects the community needs for safety from fire, as well as growing prosperity and sophistication for those older counties that had earlier, wooden jails, in this case Brooks and Berrien Counties. In politics/government the jails are significant as county jails from their construction until the present in most cases. They would have been the only county jail, the place where most prisoners were kept for the duration of their terms. If incarcerated for a higher crime, prisoners would be kept locally until they could be transported to the State Prison in Milledgeville (later Reidsville) when the state prison system was operative. In law, the jails are significant for representing the enforcement of the state and local laws in the area. This included, briefly, serving as execution sites. During the period of time when there was no state prison system, all justice had to be carried out at the local level, including, if needed, any executions. These areas of significance support property eligibility under National Register criteria A and C.

Politics/Government- With the defeat of the Creek Indians in South Georgia by Andrew Jackson, Georgia acquired the area from the Chattahoochee River east to Wayne County. This land was surveyed and divided into three large counties: Early, Irwin, and Appling. Irwin County, established in 1818, encompassed most of the present ten county South Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission area, with the community of Irwinville chosen as the county seat. The land was made available for white settlement by the Land Lottery of 1820. Two log structures served as jails for the area from 1850 to 1890, when a two story brick jail (later demolished) was built.

Over the years, Irwin County diminished in area and population as new counties were created. For years, residents had complained about the two-day long trip to Irwinville and other county seats when attending court or having to transact business. Over the strenuous objections of Irwin and other "mother" counties - which would lose tax dollars, representation, and railroads - new counties were formed out of Irwin by the legislature: Lowndes (1825); Berrien (1856); Brooks (1858); Turner (1905); Ben Hill (1906); Tift (1905); and Cook (1918). As the counties flourished, public buildings became a necessity, so the first courthouses and jails (usually simple log structures) were built.

(CONTINUED)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See attached bibliography)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property (See Attached Inventory Forms)

(See attached

Quadrangle name ~~(See attached inventory forms)~~

Quadrangle scale inventory forms)

UMT References (See attached inventory forms)

A

Zone Easting Northing

B

Diagram B shows three empty coordinate axes. The first axis is labeled 'Zone' and has two tick marks. The second axis is labeled 'Easting' and has four tick marks. The third axis is labeled 'Northing' and has four tick marks. Each axis is represented by a horizontal line with vertical tick marks extending upwards.

C

D

E

F

G

H 

Verbal boundary description and justification

(See Attached Inventory Forms)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
-------	-----	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

	A) Haley Blanchard, Preservation Planner
name/title	B) Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian

organization	A) South Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission	date	July 13, 1982
	B) Historic Preservation Section, GA Dept		

street & number	A) P.O. Box 1223	of Natural Resources	A) 912 247-3494
	B) 270 Washington Street		B) 404 656-2840
		telephone	

city or town A) Valdosta
B) Atlanta state Georgia

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Elizabeth A. Lyon

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 7/26/82

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

See Contradiction Sheet for Testimony

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Brooks County's first jail, a two story hewn log structure built in 1866, burned to the ground in 1880. The Quitman Free Press urged "a new jail be built of brick and made fireproof;" on January 8, 1884, the county commissioners contracted to build such a jail. According to Folks Huxford, the jail was considered "one of the best in the state."

The brick two story Berrien County Jail replaced a log structure put together with steel rods which, according to local newspapers, had been the "laughing stock of South Georgia." The 1902 jail displayed the same "modern, fireproof" features as the 1898 courthouse - and restored the pride of Berrien Countians.

The immediate first order of business for the newly formed counties of Turner and Ben Hill, as reflected in county records, was the erection of a fine brick jail and courthouse.

County governments passed bond issues, hired architects, and spent considerable sums of money for their jails: Berrien - \$7,997; Ben Hill - \$12,426; Brooks - \$5,870; and Turner - \$10,855.

The jails are major landmarks in Nashville, Fitzgerald, Quitman, and Ashburn, and are significant as symbols of county government. Like the county courthouses, they reflect the county government system as it developed in Georgia.

Law- The county governments in Georgia are the local legislative and judicial authorities in the state. The county jail, which is an essential part of a county government's system, represents the enforcement of the law in each county, and is necessary in many cases to carry out the sentence of a criminal. The jails of Turner and Ben Hill counties have served in that capacity since their construction in 1906 and 1909. The Brooks County Jail housed prisoners for 96 years - from 1884 to 1980, and the Berrien County Jail was used for 53 years - from 1902 to 1955.

The county jails also represent the period in Georgia history when executions were the responsibility of local governments. All the jails were equipped with deathcells, nooses and trapdoors - and prisoners were executed in all jails except Ben Hill County. The last county execution in South Georgia may have been a hanging in Turner County in fall of 1914. Records show that subsequent executions were carried out at the state prison when it was reestablished after a several decade hiatus.

The jails, as execution sites, also reflect the prevailing custom of the time that hangings be public occasions in the interest of deterring crime. Newspapers, local histories, and stories of older residents abound with colorful accounts of local hangings. Mrs. Netta Shingler of Ashburn gives this eyewitness account of Turner County's last hanging in 1914:

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...."The last man to be hung in Turner County was a once-in-a-lifetime experience... Just before the trap was sprung a brief service was held. We were grouped facing the prisoner. Brother Thrasher read the Scriptures and closed with prayer. Then Miss Netta D. Jacobs, the Public School Music Teacher, and Mrs. J.J. Story, a former teacher, sang two numbers, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" and "Rock of Ages". If the prisoner heard us he made no sign, but those conducting the service were overcome. As we reached the bottom of the stairs we heard the trap spring open."

Jails represent a great change in South Georgia's criminal justice system - from lynchings and public outdoor hangings to a more standardized legal system under the aegis of local government. In summary, the jails represent the legitimacy and respectability of the county governments and county law.

Before the erection of the "modern" jails with their trap doors and gallows, executions often took place outdoors on hastily rigged wooden scaffolding, before all who cared to watch. Records, however, reflect an even greater number of unofficial lynchings than legal hangings. In most cases, there was no system for "justice." But according to local citizens, lynching became increasingly regarded as barbaric. The last famous lynching in the area was probably in 1915 in Brooks County. Legal executions by that time had become more "civilized," with fewer witnesses allowed (although large crowds eagerly waited to see the bodies brought forth in special baskets); hymns were sung and pieties uttered.

South Georgia, the state's last frontier of sorts and long regarded by many North Georgians as uninhabitable and uncivilized, was booming with prosperity and reaching for respectability in the late nineteenth century. An example of one town's change was that of Tifton, which in the 1880's "was as rough as the legendary frontier towns. Public drunkenness and Saturday night shoot-outs were common." Two opposite factions soon developed, the law abiding teetotalers and the gun toting drinkers. Battles between the groups included church burnings and shootings. (The law and order group finally won by incorporating the city and imposing a \$10,000 a year license for all liquor dealers.)

The county jails, in addition, represent the period of Georgia criminal justice history during which the "convict-lease" and "chain-gang" systems prevailed. The State Prison in Milledgeville was burned during the Civil War and not rebuilt. Legislative debate prohibited the reestablishment of a state prison facility, therefore prisoners had to be dealt with otherwise. Thus the convict lease system was created and used for the 1870's until a new State Prison opened in 1911.

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State Prison labor was used for private enterprise on farms and in mines under the convict-lease act. County prisoners were also "leased out" to private enterprise, significantly contributing to the burgeoning turn-of-the-century turpentine industry and the overall economy of South Georgia. One example of this system involves the Berrien County jail.

Berrien County Jail Book B, which shows prison records from 1897 to 1904, reveals that there was no county work farm. The majority of prisoners were sent to private work gangs, such as "the gang of E.G. Brown." According to local citizens, Mr. Brown operated a large turpentine operation north of Nashville and worked many prisoners. Such businessmen accepted, guarded, and fed prisoners, until they had served their time.

Berrien County Jail Book B, which starts with the jails first prisoner, also reveals that the average cost for board of a prisoner was \$.35 per day. The sheriff of Berrien County (who was on a fee system) received \$.60 to turn in a prisoner and \$.60 to release a prisoner.

After World War I, the "convict-lease system" became illegal. Prisoners were instead used to construct county roads, bridges, and other public works - the infamous "Georgia Chain Gangs" of the 1930's and 1940's. Prisoners often slept in boxcar-like pens in the South Georgia woods when out in the county for several days' work. This system - which provided free county labor and constituted a significant portion of the economic power of local counties - largely ended with post World War II criminal justice reforms and construction of county farms.

Architecture- The change from the simple log buildings to more elaborate structures resulted from: 1) increasing county prosperity and pride after the Civil War; 2) a general turning away from wood to brick, as part of public concern over fire, and 3) a growing civic pride and sophistication on the part of the citizenry and elected officials.

Thus, the four remaining historic South Georgia jails - Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, and Turner - are architecturally significant to their communities in several ways.

The jails were carefully designed - not only structurally but also with stylistic references to Romanesque style architecture.

The jails are the major examples of turn-of-the-century Romanesque style architecture in each town. Elements of the style that can be seen in the jails are the towers like those of ancient castles (Berrien and Turner county jails); stepped gables, Tudor arches, and battered walls (Ben Hill County); and hood moulded windows and doors (Brooks County).

In addition, the jails display "fireproof" construction - brick and concrete walls, corrugated metal ceilings, etc., part of the late 19th century movement toward that type of construction. They also reflect the jail works of two major jail cell manufacturers, the Pauly Company of St. Louis, MO and the Manly Company of Dalton, Georgia.

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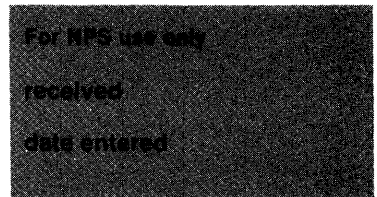
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Interviews with: Ruth Pryor, Beth Davis, Norman Dorminy of Fitzgerald; S.J. Morris of Nashville; Ray Wiley and Floyd Wardlow of Ashburn.

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Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name County Jails of Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, and Turner Counties Thematic Resources
State Georgia

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Ben Hill County Jail | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper <u>Delores Byers 8/26/82</u> |
| | | Attest _____ |
| 2. Berrien County Jail | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper <u>Delores Byers 8/26/82</u> |
| | | Attest _____ |
| 3. Brooks County Jail | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper <u>Delores Byers 8/26/82</u> |
| | | Attest _____ |
| 4. Turner County Jail | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper <u>Delores Byers 8/26/82</u> |
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