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Jailhouse Rocks

Built in **1869**, the historic **York County Jail** is for sale. Again.

FROM STAFF & WIRE REPORTS

THE *SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION* was shot in Ohio. But it could have been filmed right here at home in Maine.

The cells are here, iron doors clanging into eternity. There's even a quarters for the warden's family, just like in the Stephen King movie, with wallpaper and polished ash floors. Sure, it's not open-concept. But all roads lead to your purchasing the former **York County Jail** in the town of Alfred, York's county seat, at 8 Court Street on Route 111.

The asking price is \$250,000, or roughly ten times what the seller, Michael Kaplan of Kaplan 8 LLC, paid for it in 2001 as part of a bidding process conducted by the town.

"There were ladies' cells" as well as men's, "on the second floor at the end. That's why the doors are solid," Kaplan says. "There was a revolt in the prison" that signalled the end of its ser-



One of the unsuccessful bidders in 2001 was Tom Joyall of Kennebunk. "I bid \$56,000. I was going to renovate it to be a jail-house salvage. It was a terrible time. It would be great if someone were to put some money into it. It's a beautiful old building."

DETAILS, DETAILS

As for famous inmates, how about an axe murderer? In her story "Old Alfred Jail Saw Inmates Come and Go," Sharon Cummings writes, "The brick jail was just nearing completion in March 1873 when Louis H. F. Wagner was arrested for the famous double murder at Smuttynose Island," on the Isles of Shoals... [He was] the first inmate of the new jail."

When Wagner escaped from the jail roughly two months into his stay, the *New York Times* sent a reporter up to Maine to check us all out. Not exactly Sing Sing: "As I approached the building, prisoners could be heard laughing and singing inside... I entered, and a dozen prisoners flocked about me. They are all at perfect liberty to roam about the corridors. They have no handcuffs and, seemingly, no restraint."

Two other inmates had escaped with Wagner. "Wagner put on quite a performance for the guards, convincing them that he was feeling quite ill and planned to confine himself to bed all evening. By the time the guards took their posts at 9 p.m., Wagner was already gone. He had fashioned the likeness of a man huddled under the blankets on his cot with a short broom and a stool from his cell. It was hours before the guards noticed that the "man" wasn't moving and when they did, they were reluctant to call the warden for fear the murderer would make fools of them again.

"The prisoners had made their way through a scuttle in the jail, up through a ventilator and onto the roof with the intention of lowering themselves down a rope of blanket strips. Noticing a skylight into the warden's quarters, they decided instead to remove a pane of glass and reach in to unlock the large window. Once inside, they quietly made their way down

the stairs and walked right out the door.

"Wagner was recaptured by a farmer in Farmington, N.H., three days later. Unaware of the \$500 reward on his head, he had been driven by hunger to the farmer's kitchen door.

"The axe-murderer was transferred to the Maine State Prison in Thomaston, where he was later hanged for his crimes."

Cummings writes that inmates escaped from the York County jail a number of times.

"The last escape from the old brick jail took place in September of 1974. The familiar story appeared in the *Lewiston Journal*. "Four young inmates escaped from York County Jail Friday night. The men apparently forced a section of the ceiling and climbed out through an air duct to the roof and then used blankets to lower themselves to the ground."

Regarding the "riot" that closed the jail, Cummings reports: "The death of an epileptic inmate from untreated seizures on September 27, 1975, was the catalyst for a riot that closed the old brick jailhouse for good. The 15 inmates ripped out sinks, bunks and electrical wiring in every cell, causing significant damage. Forty law enforcement officers, including state police and firefighters with hoses, quelled the riot. All the inmates were transferred to the Cumberland County Jail and the cell block at the Alfred jail was closed by order of the court.

"The old jailhouse was deemed unfit for prisoner habitation but it was used for a number of years as York County's first homeless shelter before being auctioned..."

TOWN PERSPECTIVE

BY BLAIR BEST

Code Enforcement Officer Jim Allaire has the inside track on the jail's future potential. "I know [Kaplan] is anxious to sell it," Allaire says. "He's owned it for a long time, and he lives far away." [Now there's an Alfred perspective of the 'faraway' Portland metropolis!] "I think he's tired of running down to show someone the building who only wants to grow marijuana in it, which you can't do. It's a beautiful old building with a great lot and a full septic system. Although it is located in the center village, which is difficult for businesses. A lot of businesses can't legally run out of the center village because of town codes. However, that is changing soon. That's going to be defined as a 'mixed-use' area, so hopefully he'll have a better chance of selling it to a business that way."

The tax assessor's office values the property at "\$179,200." Kaplan's winning bid in 2001 was "\$2,501."

vice to the county.

Since then, it's slowly deteriorated, though its septic system is still capable of handling 2,100 gallons a day. Kaplan has made cosmetic, heating-system, and electrical improvements to the lower level facing Route 111 and had some tenants here over the years, but no one's here just now. He loves the building and has entertained countless dreams from possible purchasers, beyond his own, because many prospects just like to try the place on.

"Dunkin' Donuts looked at the land (over three acres), but the town wouldn't agree to its having a drive-through," he says. Other dreams, some of which have involved tenants, include "boatbuilders, a distressed sign company, Jailhouse Antiques, a photo studio, law offices, restaurants, a gift shop."

People have been offering Kaplan ideas "forever. Longer than that."

You could "remove the cells" if you like. "Above are beautiful arched windows. All the light, morning or afternoon, would flow in."

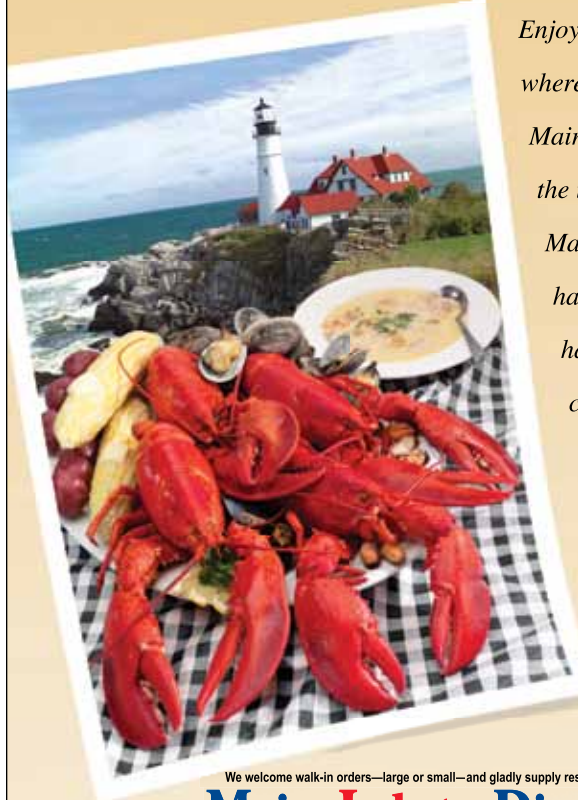
This jail has good bones. "All of these pieces of granite" are priceless.

During the summer, it's easy to imagine a craft brewery taking over the building. Slammer Glamour. Iron Clang. Shawshank Lager. Better still, what a film school this place would make, with a film festival. At night, the sound of crickets.

Asked if he's motivated, Kaplan replies, "Wicked."

Taxes are \$2,728.52 ■

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