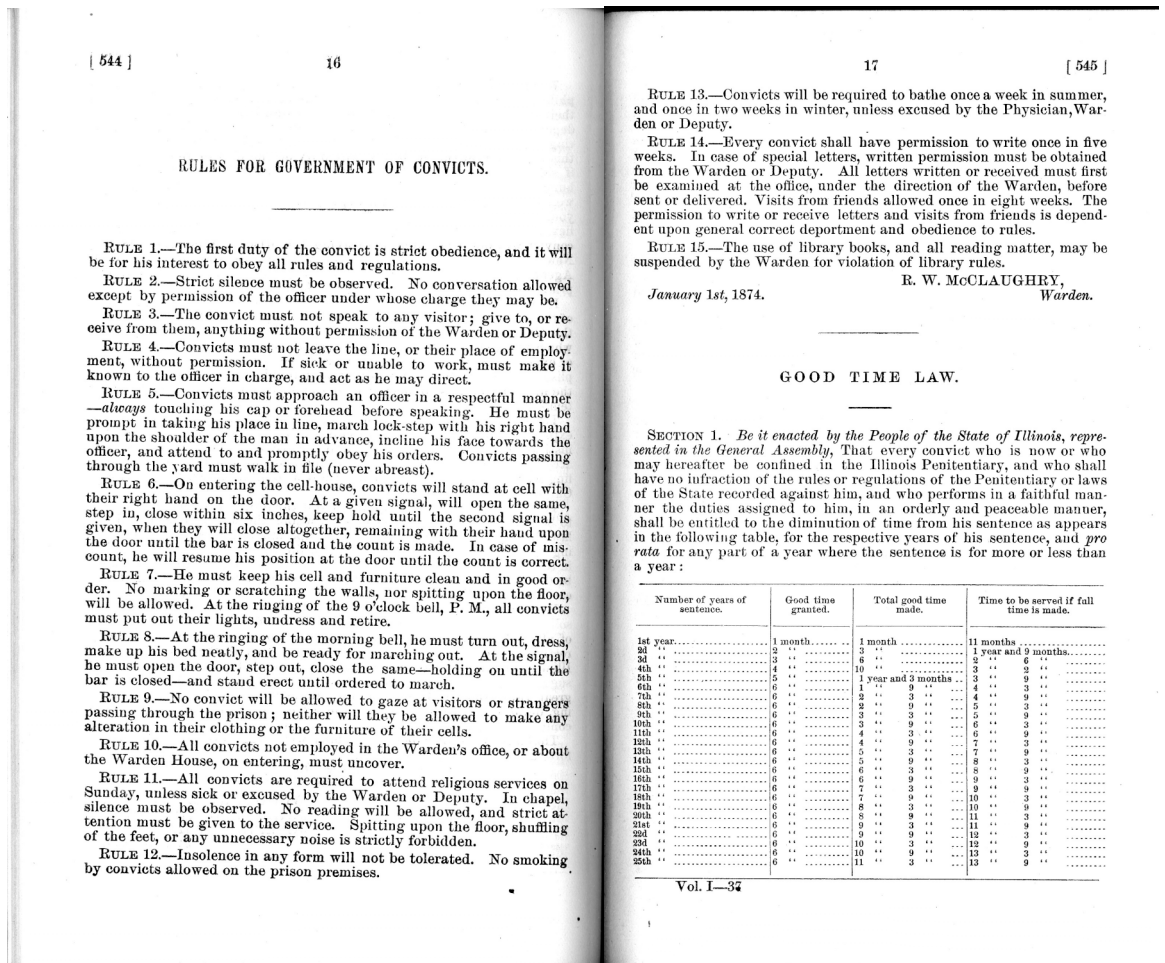


Lesson 4

This final segment of the lesson deals with how prisoners were treated in the early 1870's. There is clearly a desire on behalf of the state to create a self-sustaining prison system that would not draw upon public resources and financially burden the state. Work was not seen as redemptive as much as it was sound fiscal policy. Students will look at the [Rules for Government of Convicts](#), the [General Assembly Report of the Joint Committee Jan. 24, 1872](#), and the [Commissioners of the Penitentiary Minority Report to the Illinois General Assembly in 1871](#).

The first document students should study is the [Rules for Government of Convicts](#), published in the 1874 edition of Illinois Reports to the General Assembly. There are 15 rules for prisoners to obey. Assign a rule or two each to small groups and have each group of students read the rule verbatim, then paraphrase the rule for the class, then assess the fairness of the rule. Groups should articulate why they judge a rule to be unfair if they so maintain. The teacher should maintain a record of all rules deemed appropriate and all rules deemed inappropriate by the class.

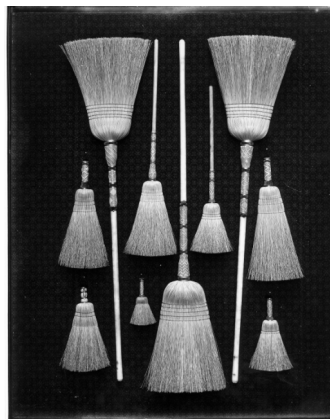


The following is an excerpt from Illinois Reports to the General Assembly Report of the Joint Committee Jan. 24, 1872 p 4:

*The employment of convicts at "hard labor" is provided for under our criminal statutes, and has been the policy adopted by this State ever since it had a Penitentiary. This is entirely proper, as a portion of at least of the expense attending the conviction and caring of criminals should be paid back by the convict in fulfilling his sentence. The acts of 1867 and 1871, providing for the management of the Penitentiary, evidently contemplated a system both punitive and reformatory in its character. Labor is necessary as a reformatory measure, as it is generally conceded that a reasonable amount is essential to reformation, as is a necessary condition of the right application of punishment. It should not be the paramount object to make it a source of income, but rather that it should serve partly to preserve and promote as well the bodily as the mental and spiritual condition of the convict, and also, in part, educate and prepare him to earn an honest living when he shall have obtained his liberty. It was a maxim with (John) Howard, "make men diligent, and they will be honest." These should be the considerations which should govern prison officers in making choices of occupation or trades for convicts, keeping in view the pecuniary consideration in making such selections, so that the public interest may be protected, and, as contemplated by the present law, make the Penitentiary self-sustaining.*

Students should consider the ramifications of convict labor, where convicts are expected to work, not to earn wages for themselves, but to provide the penitentiary with income to offset the cost to taxpayers. A class discussion should ensue as to whether this is a fair working environment that would truly "*and promote as well the bodily as the mental and spiritual condition of the convict.*"

Below is a photograph of prison-made brooms.



Next, students should carefully examine the photographs of the [prison shoe and boot shop](#) and [prison quarry](#). Although these photos were likely taken sometime after the 1870's, The [Illinois Commissioners of the Penitentiary 1871 Report to the General Assembly](#) describe these and other industries (machine and blacksmith shops and foundry, wagon and agricultural implements manufactory, cooper shop, paint shop, chair making and rustic work, broom shop, cigar shop, harness shop, tailor shop, and the making of army tents for the United States Government, under contract) within the prison to make it as self-sustaining as possible.



Discussion questions for whole group:

Consider the nature of this work and the fact that prisoners performed it wearing a striped uniform. What effect might have this had on the morale and attitudes of the men involved? What rights might these men have had regarding the length of the work day, the possible dangers of the work, and the fact that they were essentially working for free?