

BENZIE COUNTY JAIL

Between the years of 1908 and 1916 the Benzie county Jail was a small cement block building adjacent to the Sheriff's home in the Village of Honor. During that time the jail population varied between one to three prisoners.



In 1916 the Benzie county Sheriff's Department moved and a concrete jail which housed two to four inmates was built on Crystal Avenue in the Village of Beulah. A new Benzie County Jail was built next door in 1959 and had the capacity to house up to 12 inmates and usually held three to four prisoners at any time. The Benzie County Sheriff's Department then consisted of the Sheriff, his Undersheriff and three to four dispatchers. This rectangular building was constructed of block with brick facing. Within its walls were four jail cells, a small booking room, the dispatch/reception area, a

kitchen and a basement/garage below which also served as a property and laundry room.

In 1967 the Department added one additional deputy and was housing an average of eight inmates. Officers at this time were merely report writers, dispatchers and jailers.

As the 70's progressed, so did law enforcement. Advances in equipment and officer education levels as well as changes in laws improved crime solvability rates, and along with a growing Benzie County population there was a required need to increase staff as inmate population numbers in the jail grew. By 1977 the Benzie County Sheriff's Department had 16 employees (including a full-time and a part-time cook) and the jail held its capacity of 12 inmates at most times. As the workload increased, the Corrections/Dispatch Officers found themselves doing both jobs simultaneously.

In 1983 the Michigan Department of Corrections determined that the Benzie County Jail was not in compliance with Administrative Rules due to the jail's physical structure and staffing levels. The Department of Corrections granted Benzie County a five year variance to bring the facility into compliance. Despite renovations and additional staff being added, the facility often remained overcrowded and short-handed of staff. Part of the renovations included adding a new garage and moving the Investigative Division into the basement.

By 1988 the inmate population grew into the twenties and the County often had to pay other jails to board excess prisoners. In 1988 the County was forced to invoke the Jail Overcrowding Act of Michigan on three separate occasions. That same year the Michigan Department of Corrections granted the jail another two year operating extension to the variance.

A new jail was needed as the current one could no longer fulfill the county's needs, nor did its physical make-up meet the Michigan Department of Corrections Administrative Rule requirements. In August of 1989 the citizens of Benzie County passed a millage proposal to build and operate a new jail facility.

In the spring of 1990 with plans being developed for a new jail facility, the Investigative Division was moved out of the basement and into offices next door in the old County Courthouse. The basement was converted into a minimum security cell for the housing of trustees and work release prisoners. This move provided for an increased holding capacity to 18 prisoners. The job of Corrections Officer/Dispatcher was split into two separate positions and the number of employees was increased to 30 full-time and part-time positions.

Ground breaking for the current Jail and Law Enforcement Center occurred on December 9, 1990. It is located to the southwest of the Benzie County Government Center on US-31 in the Village of Beulah. Total cost of the facility came in

under the estimate of \$3,500,000.00, by about \$300,000.00. The brick and block structure covers approximately 19,000 square feet and houses the Jail and Sheriff's Office operations. The Benzie County Jail has a maximum inmate capacity of 47 inmates, which at the time of it's opening, made it the smallest Direct Supervision Jail in the United States.

