

Don't "Cell" This Sheriff Short; He Wants Big Jail



'If I Had Wings...'

Undersheriff Semon Bollenbacher inspects windows from inside the bullpen of Midland County's makeshift jail. (Saginaw News Photos.)

Midland – One thing Sheriff Ira Smith would like for Christmas – any Christmas – is a new jail. His makeshift jail is so small he has to send most of his prisoners to Bay City, 18 miles away.

The present two-cell model is located in the basement of Midland's Courthouse. The portable cells were set up in a large room, which Sheriff Smith calls "the bullpen". Since prisoners often have the run of the bullpen, special steel cages were built outside its windows. When prisoners are kept there overnight, an officer has to stand guard.

Midland County, like most other Michigan counties, once had a larger jail, complete with Sheriff's quarters. Built in 1868, it was torn down about the time the present Court House was constructed in 1922. Tentative plans at that time called for a new jail, separate from the Court House.

As recently as four years ago, Midland County supervisors were considering a new jail so seriously that they commissioned Architect Alden Dow to draw up plans for a 10-cell unit to cost

\$300,000. Site for the jail was to be on the lawn space between the present Court House and Annex. But the proposal didn't gel.

Now Midland County rents space in the Bay County Jail at the rate of \$1.40 per day per prisoner. Sometimes a court appearance by one prisoner means two round trips to Bay City, a total of 72 miles. An officer must go to fetch the prisoner before the court hearing and return him to jail afterward. Sheriff Smith says that if it weren't for the use of the Bay City Jail by Midland County, the Court House Jail would be used and crowded almost nightly.

A new jail won't be in the sheriff's Christmas stocking this year, but with Midland's rapid growth it is inevitable that he'll find it there some year.