

TO: Professors Andrea Armstrong and Nishi Kumar
FROM: Christian Westholz
RE: “Better Know a Jail” Memo
DATE: November 28, 2023
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West Carroll Parish Jail

Introduction

West Carroll Parish is one of sixty-four (64) parishes in Louisiana, founded in 1877 with its parish seat located in Oak Grove. West Carroll Parish, named after the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, includes the town of Oak Grove and the villages of Epps, Forest, Kilbourne, and Pioneer.¹ It encompasses a total area of 361 square miles; and as of 2022, they estimated their population to be around 9,475.² The West Carroll Jail was built in 1964 and currently is under the supervision of Sheriff Scott Mathews and the Warden Danny Frasier.³

Jail Characteristics

The West Carroll Parish Jail is located on 305 E Main St., Oak Grove, LA 71263. The West Carroll Parish Jail was built in 1964 with a capacity for 26 inmates. As of recently, they have houses individuals in both federal and LDOC custody as well. More than half of Louisiana’s state inmates are housed in parish jails due to a lack of space in state prisons. In return, these parish jails are paid \$25 a day to house these incarcerated people. Currently, West Carroll Parish Jail has fifteen of them, with many of their sentences being for two to four years. The visitation hours are 2:00 p.m. to 3 p.m. every Tuesday, with no further directions on how to go about visiting inmates.⁴ Visitation is currently suspended due to COVID-19.⁵

The live jail database cannot be accessed through the Parish’s main website at www.westcarrollsheriffs.net There are no links on the main website to guide one to the live jail database.⁶ To find the relevant jailhouse roster, one must google “West Carroll Parish Jail,” to which one of the top choices is the website westcarroll.lavns.org/roster.aspx. The user simply needs to click this link, to which they will be transported to the list of inmates in the jail and some characteristics about them such as date of birth, race, and gender. The website makes it unclear how long these inmates have been in the jail’s custody.⁷

¹ [West Carroll Parish - The official website of Louisiana](#)

² [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: West Carroll Parish, Louisiana: Louisiana](#)

³ [Meet the Sheriff - West Carroll Sheriff's Department](#)

⁴ [Inmate Visitation - West Carroll Sheriff's Department](#)

⁵ Phone call with the Warden on 11/28/23

⁶ [West Carroll Sheriff's Department - Home](#)

⁷ westcarroll.lavns.org/roster.aspx

As of Tuesday, November 28, 2023, at 12 p.m. (CST), the West Carroll Parish Jail had twenty-six people in custody. Of those people in custody, none of them were female. Of twenty-six males, seventeen of them were white. Of those twenty-six males, nine were black.⁸

Public Records Request and Inmate Mortality

The West Carroll Parish Sheriff's department website has no ways or means to go about doing a Public Records Request. There is neither a template form to use on their website nor is there any means of a point of contact for this form. Users only means of obtaining a Public Records Request point of contact is history with which person to contact. Based on helpful tips from previous students in this course and no other alternative available, I submitted my Public Records request directly to the Sheriff who maintains the facility, Sheriff Scott Mathews. After submitting this Public Records Request to the Sheriff, my request was forwarded to the Chief Civil Deputy, Carole Deere, who simply answered my Public Records Request with a simple sentence stating that there were no deaths during the period I requested, to which I was continuously ignored when requesting this information on official letterhead.

Based on the documents and statements provided from the facility, from 2014 to 2023, the facility has reported no deaths for persons in custody, making them one of the few parishes in the state where no deaths have occurred to persons in custody in this time period.⁹

Jail Leadership

The West Carroll Parish Sheriff serves a four-year term as the chief executive officer of the law enforcement and ex-officio tax collector of the parish. The Sheriff also administers the parish jail system and exercises duties required by the parish court system, such as providing bailiffs, executing orders of the court, and serving subpoenas. Moreover, the West Carroll Parish Sheriff oversees the operation and management of correctional facilities within the parish. This includes maintaining secure and human conditions for inmates, ensuring their well-being, and providing necessary services and programs for their rehabilitation. The sheriff's office is responsible for the safe and efficient operation of the correctional system. The current sheriff and supervisor of the West Carroll Parish Jail is under the supervision of Scott Mathews.¹⁰

Sheriff Scott Mathews took office as Sheriff of West Carroll Parish on July 1, 2020 after beating fellow candidate Robert R. Patrick in a close runoff in the 2019 election. Patrick, who began his career in law enforcement with the West Carroll Parish Sheriff's Office before becoming a state trooper, lost in this run off election after vying for more funding to provide basic equipment to law enforcement officers in West Carroll Parish.^{11,12}

⁸ westcarroll.lavns.org/roster.aspx

⁹ [West Carroll – Incarceration Transparency](#)

¹⁰ [Sheriff - West Carroll Parish 2023 — The Local Election](#)

¹¹ [RESULTS: West Carroll | KTVE - myarklamiss.com](#)

¹² [Robert Patrick Memorial Fund will help underfunded law enforcement agencies in West Carroll Parish \(thenewsstar.com\)](#)

Sheriff Scott Mathews ran unopposed in the 2023 election, standing on the premise of being a family-friendly town. He stated that residents from West Carroll Parish pride themselves in living in a low crime, safe community, making it an ideal place to raise a family.

Jail News Coverage and Transparency

There has not been much in regards to transparency and news coverage of the jail. In terms of transparency, looking at the Louisiana Legislative Auditor of the West Carroll Sheriff's Department can give a user somewhat of a glimpse into the running of the parish and jail.

Financial highlights from the audit of the 2021-2022 state that the net position in the West Carroll Parish Sheriff's Department went up \$544,831. Revenues increased by \$224,967 (11%) with an increase in fees, fines, and charges for services. Expenses decreased \$53,038 (3%) mainly due to changes in post-employment benefits. These changes were the causes of many factors, some financial, some not. Non-financial factors affecting the West Carroll Sheriff's Department included the parish's property tax base, the continued housing of State prisoners in the parish jail, and the state and federal governments continued funding of grants.¹³

In terms of news coverage of the West Carroll Parish Jail, there is not much in regards to this subject. Robert R. Patrick, who unsuccessfully lost the sheriff's election versus Scott Mathews in late 2019, unexpectedly passed away in February of 2020. Following his death, a memorial fund was established by his daughter to aid West Carroll Parish Sheriff's Office. Notoriously considered one of the most underfunded sheriff's agencies in the state, sheriffs in West Carroll Parish must purchase basic equipment for use on the job with their own money. Such equipment such as bulletproof vests, boots, handcuffs, tasers, and other basic equipment, must be purchased with money from their own pocket. Patrick's goal, while he was still with us, was to make sure that these West Carroll Sheriffs had even the most basic of equipment, a sentiment he ran upon in the 2019 election. His memorial fund now memorializes him by raising only enough money to meet the basic equipment needs of West Carroll law enforcement.¹⁴

Due to Patrick's fund, the force was able to obtain a drug-sniffing dog for their parish's use. This new canine proved essential in the only recent news story relating to the West Carroll Parish Jail.¹⁵

On May 31, 2023, the West Carroll Parish Sheriff's Office was tipped off about a potential plan to deliver illegal narcotics to an inmate housed in the West Carroll Jail. Acting on aforementioned information, upon arrival of a woman and two minor children, police immediately searched her person and her possessions as they entered the jail complex. Finding nothing on her person, authorities then used their new drug-sniffing dog to perform an open-air sniff of the vehicle. A positive alert was noted on the front passenger door, which led to a search of the vehicle. Investigators uncovered a plastic baggie that contained a crystal-like substance

¹³ [West Carroll Parish Sheriff \(state.la.us\)](https://www.state.la.us/sheriff/)

¹⁴ [Robert Patrick Memorial Fund will help underfunded law enforcement agencies in West Carroll Parish \(thenevnewsstar.com\)](https://www.thenevnewsstar.com/news/2020/02/robert-patrick-memorial-fund-will-help-underfunded-law-enforcement-agencies-in-west-carroll-parish/)

¹⁵ [Robert Patrick Memorial Fund will help underfunded law enforcement agencies in West Carroll Parish \(thenevnewsstar.com\)](https://www.thenevnewsstar.com/news/2023/05/robert-patrick-memorial-fund-will-help-underfunded-law-enforcement-agencies-in-west-carroll-parish/)

believed to be meth, along with a glass pipe commonly associated with meth consumption. In addition to this pipe and meth, a yellow pill was found, which was later identified as Clonazepam. 34-year-old Jessica M. Vankeuren was taken into custody and charged with possession of a CDS in the presence of a minor, possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of Schedule II, possession of Schedule IV, and driving under suspension. She was booked into the West Carroll Parish Jail and transferred to the River Bend Detention Center.¹⁶

¹⁶ [Authorities conduct vehicle search for suspicions of illegal narcotics delivery to a West Carroll inmate | KTVE - myarklamiss.com](https://www.ktve.com/story/460844400/authorities-conduct-vehicle-search-for-suspicious-delivery-to-west-carroll-inmate)