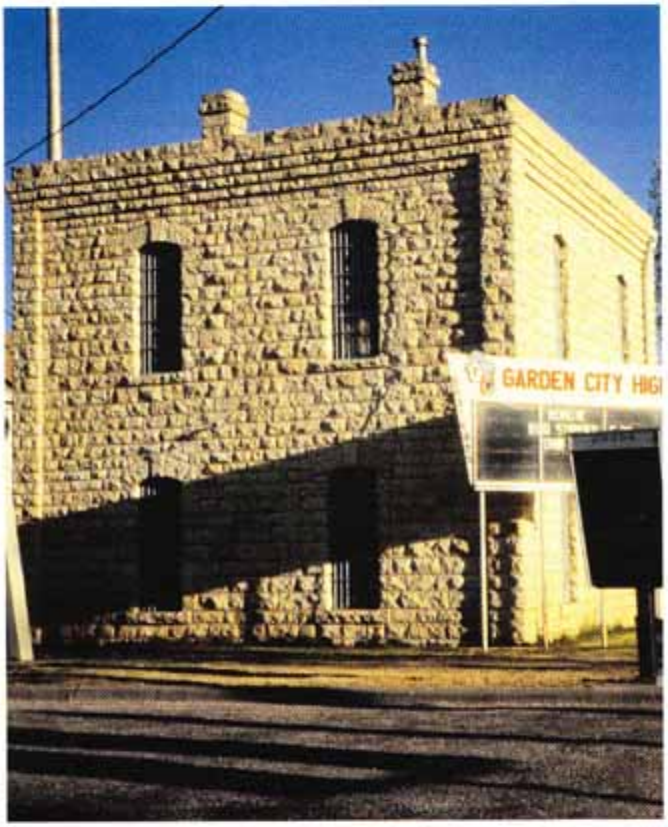
With the recent transfer of the business to the Vetter's next generation, there has been no reduction in the effort and concern given to making finished buildings. Equally appreciated by the architect is their ongoing introduction of new equipment, such as water-jet cutting systems and a five-axis routing machine, which adds to the sophistication of their fabrication methods. Because of the Vetters' high-quality work, my firm has used their stone in a number of subsequent projects.

Another search for regional stone took place in west Texas, where, in 1995, I had been selected to design a new downtown art museum for San Angelo, a small city spanning the banks of the Concho River. While defining the program and project cost, the museum director, Howard Taylor, mentioned a stone fabricator that was rumored to have started business about 60 miles northwest of the city. After a number of unsuccessful inquiries, my office was able to locate this operation by telephone, in the small town of Garden City. During the next design meeting in Texas, a half-day exploratory trip was organized for the design team to investigate this stone operation. The two-hour drive through the arid, under-populated landscape allowed us to speculate about what we might discover. Even so, it did not properly prepare us. Garden City, little more than an intersection, is on the road running west toward Midland. We had been instructed to turn at an historic jail building,—it was the only clue that stone had been used as a building product in this part of Texas—and to drive three miles north to the quarry. There, on the crest of a hill, was a large metal shed with enormous painted letters: TexaStone Quarries. A short distance up their dirt road was a pair of pink stone gateposts. The owners, Connie and Brenda Edwards, and their dog, Bud, gave us the full west Texas welcome: a tour of the fabrication shop (the metal building we had seen from the road) and the showroom, and a walk around the yard, piled high with various pieces of processed stone. During the visit, we saw a large quantity of discarded quarry block "skins," that were naturally deformed, discolored, and highly irregular. We also inspected all the open pits to see the color of the stone being extracted.



By the time we completed the tour and returned to the fabrication shop, it was almost dark. We liked a lot of the material and had numerous questions about its use. To us, the most interesting stones were the discarded quarry block skins. This highly irregular layer of material came from the upper boundary of the limestone deposit, which for millennia had recorded disturbances from erosion, meteors

Historic limestone jail, Garden City, Texas

and other acts of nature. At the end of our visit to Garden City, everyone agreed a west Texas stone for the museum had been identified.

A few months later, after developing the design, I returned to the quarry to examine the material more closely and to discuss an initial mock-up of a few stone blocks. Four four-

by-eight-foot skins were erected with a series of one-foot, sawn pieces between them. This demonstration was important, because the museum director could see for the first time how the blocks might come together, and it allowed the architect and fabricator to discuss the technical requirements of using blocks of this proportion. Since San Angelo was only two hours away, transportation of finished pieces this size posed little difficulty.

Proposing the large deformed stone skins for the museum's exterior generated considerable interest from the building committee and elicited requests from them to see the mock-up. When we next arrived in Garden City with this expanded group, instead of the mock-up we were anticipating, we found a full-scale installation cladding one whole side of the metal fabrication shed. The building committee was

unanimous in approving the material and its appearance. Doing business with Connie Edwards has proven to be full of surprises, but they are the kind that propel work forward.

Almost equidistant from Minneapolis and San Angelo, another type of encounter with regional stone awaited me. In 1996, I was selected to design a new dining facility for the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee. Better known simply as "Sewanee," this venerable 150-year-old