



# Historical Overview of KINGSTON PENITENTIARY

---

Kingston Penitentiary, British North America's first penitentiary, sits on 8.6 hectares of land located at 560 King Street West in the City of Kingston, the County of Frontenac. The institution fronts onto Lake Ontario on the south side, a residential area to the east, Canada's Penitentiary Museum and the now decommissioned Prison for Women site to the north, and the Portsmouth Olympic Harbour to the west.

Originally called the "*Provincial Penitentiary of the Province of Upper Canada*", or the "*Provincial Penitentiary*" for short, it was constructed through 1833 and 1834 under the reign of King William IV. Under the direction of William Powers, an American, its design was heavily influenced by the system in place in Auburn, New York at the time. The facility consisted of a single, large limestone cellblock containing 154 cells in 5 tiers and some other outbuildings used as industrial shops, sheds, stables and residences for the administration. It officially opened with the arrival of the first 6 inmates on June 1, 1835, Henry Smith being the first Warden and Mr. Powers appointed as the first Deputy Warden. When completed, it was the largest public building in Upper Canada.

The original cells measured 73.7 cm (29 inches) wide by 244 cm (8 feet) deep and 200.7 cm (6 feet, 7 inches) high. The entire compound was initially surrounded by a 12-foot high picket fence made of wood. The cells remained the same small size until the commencement of the first major renovations undertaken between 1895 and 1906. The other wings of the main building (B2, B3, B5) were commenced shortly after the opening and were completed in the 1840s & 1850s. The stone walls, towers and north gatehouse were completed in 1845. Between 1859 and 1861, the dome was added, connecting the four cellblocks. The north wing originally did not contain cells, but instead housed the dining hall, kitchen, hospital, keeper's hall, administration offices and residences for the senior administration officers and their families. The B8 building was commenced in the late 1830s as the dining hall and chapel and the B7 building was commenced in the late 1840s for use as the permanent hospital facility. Permanent limestone industrial shops were commenced in the southern part of the yard in 1845. They contained shops for blacksmithing, carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking and a rope walk for the manufacture of rope. The buildings that are now occupied by the Regional Treatment Centre were commenced in the 1850s and originally used as additional shop space.

With the union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841, the institution became known as the "*Provincial Penitentiary of the Province of Canada*" and, with the passing of the British North America Act and Confederation in 1867, the 32 year old institution became more commonly known as "*Kingston Penitentiary*" (and occasionally as the "*Portsmouth Penitentiary*" after the neighbourhood in which it is located). It was the principal facility of three such institutions placed under the control of the federal government, the others being the "*Provincial Penitentiary of New Brunswick*" Saint John, New Brunswick (1842) and the "*Provincial Penitentiary of Nova Scotia*" in Halifax (1845). For the first 99 years, women were incarcerated within its walls, although segregated from the male population. Children as young as 8 years old were also incarcerated here in the early days.

Kingston Penitentiary has experienced three major riots, with the first in October 1932. The

second in August 1954 resulted in extensive damage and the need to rebuild the Central Dome. The third and most serious, in April 1971, involved the taking of staff hostages, inmate deaths and extensive damage. The south wing was so badly damaged that it never reopened as a cellblock. In the aftermath of the 1971 riot, Kingston Penitentiary became the Regional Reception Centre, receiving and assessing all newly admitted inmates in the Ontario Region and classifying them for transfer to a parent institution. It held this role until 1981.

Today, Kingston Penitentiary provides accommodation to a static inmate population classified at the maximum-security level, many of whom cannot safely integrate into other institutional populations. Additionally, the Temporary Detention Unit was relocated from Millhaven Institution to Kingston Penitentiary in February 1998. This unit consists of a range of cells with the capacity for 37 offenders who have been readmitted under Temporary Detention status in the Ontario Region. More than 1000 offenders are re-assessed annually for placement at a parent institution by this unit. The Regional Hospital, providing twenty-four hour palliative nursing care, is also on site, as is the Regional Treatment Centre, an independently managed facility providing in-house mental health and treatment services to the Ontario regional population.

Within the general population, total convictions range across the broad spectrum of Canadian Criminal Code offences. The population represents a cross-section of the multi-cultural/religious mosaic of Canadian society. There are a number of foreign nationals incarcerated at Kingston Penitentiary with the majority of them being subject to a Deportation Order upon release. Most of Canada's more notorious inmates have been held at Kingston Penitentiary over the years. In addition to an active educational program, assisting inmates to upgrade their academic skills to secondary school completion level, the institution offers a wide selection of National Correctional Programs which include:

- *National Substance Abuse Program (NSAP)* - moderate and high intensity and maintenance\*
  - *Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP)* - moderate and high intensity delivered by a rotating team of facilitators based at Frontenac Institution.
  - *Violence Prevention Program - (VPP)* - moderate and high intensity and maintenance\*
  - *Alternatives, Associates and Attitudes Program (AAA)*
  - *Opioid Substitution Therapy* - treatment for opiate users using Methadone or Suboxone
- \* *Maintenance Programs* are designed to assist inmates to consolidate and maintain skills achieved through successful primary program completion.

A comprehensive Aboriginal Strategic Plan is also in place. Health care, psychiatric, psychological, religious and case management services are available to the existing population of approximately 400 inmates. A mental health unit is in the development stage.

In 1990, the Kingston Penitentiary complex was designated as a National Historic Site of Canada due to "the sophistication of its plan, its size, its age and the number of its physical facilities of special architectural merit that survive from the 19<sup>th</sup> century."

In April of 2012, the federal government announced that Kingston Penitentiary, the Regional Treatment Centre and a third institution in Quebec would be closed by the fall of 2013.