

The Early History of The Provincial Penitentiary, Kingston, Ontario

From the late 18th century British prison designers had the unenviable task of trying to reconcile in physical structures the three, potentially conflicting, requirements (as formulated by the great philanthropist John Howard) of a modern reform penitentiary: security, salubrity, and reformation.² These were still significant ideals for the Canadian founders of the Provincial Penitentiary when, in 1832, it was decided to erect this institution on the shore of Lake Ontario, near the town of Kingston, Ontario. Alas, this experiment in a “Moral School” was declared a complete failure by 1848, after the depravity of the administration was publicly revealed in a government investigation.³ And yet architectural decisions were influenced by the three Howardian ideals. But as usually happens when large numbers of people are congregated and segregated from society, the humane aims of those in charge may unintentionally result in abnormal and repressive conditions for the very persons whose lives the planners are seeking to improve. Such perversions affected the managers and architects of the Provincial Penitentiary; for example, the dimensions of the convict cells were only 2.5 feet x 8.3 feet each. Even before they were constructed, critics scorned their restricted size as being like “pigeon-holes.” One of the planners defended the proposed size of the cells in the following manner: “The occupant has ample room to dress and undress, turn round, lie down, stand or sit, and a lengthened space for walking back and forth. And what more does he need? He would not occupy more space if he had it.”⁴ Specialized punishment cells, referred to as “dark cells,” were designed so that each had an opening, deliberately jogged, in one of its masonry walls to allow the entrance of air, but not light. Solitude, in this case without the distraction of external light and views, was thought to promote moral repentance, and yet such a physical environment, without sensory stimulation, can surely be judged as inhumane.

Despite the significance of its radial plan and use of classicism, this institution, perhaps as a reflection of its gloomy function, has barely been mentioned or seriously discussed in Canadian architectural histories.⁵ Yet it is as important a monument for Canada as John Haviland’s Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia is for the United States, or the Model Prison in Pentonville is for Britain.

The founding commissioners of the Provincial Penitentiary, Hugh Thomson and John Macaulay, were familiar not only with the theories of the British and American reform movements of John Howard and the Quakers, but also with the key monuments which had influenced their ideas or were built as a result of such influences. This knowledge was gained either by touring the sites — the prisons at Auburn and Mount Pleasant (Sing Sing), N.Y., for example — or by studying publications in which were discussed such examples as the Maison de Force in Ghent, the Bridewell in Glasgow or Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia.⁶ The last three examples are particularly interesting, because their plans are formulated on radial schemes (figure 1).

The commissioners had to come to grips with two fundamental problems — how to express in physical form the reform theories of prison management, and the long-term influence of the prison experience on the behaviour of the individual inmate. In his famous report on prisons, Howard had noted the corrupting effect of mixing, in the large communal daytime and sleeping rooms of the old prisons, hardened and novice criminals. Certain reformers (among them those at Eastern Penitentiary) felt that individual cells for labour and sleep were the solution, while others, in particular those concerned with Auburn, favoured individual cells for sleeping and communal rooms for eating, worshiping, and labouring.⁷ “Corruption” was avoided by enforcing — with great zeal — the rule of silence. Silence permitted prisoners the opportunity for self-examination of their short-comings and the opportunity for true repentance. That was the theory. In practice, silence was difficult to maintain, particularly in the case of children and, if effectual, promoted insanity.⁸ At any rate, this was the system proposed for Kingston. It was no doubt a significant factor in the selection of the two key officers for the new institution — William Powers and John Mills — from the staff of Auburn Prison.

by Jennifer McKendry

*Fear not, I mean not vengeance,
but your reformation.
Severe is my hand, but benevolent
my intention.*¹

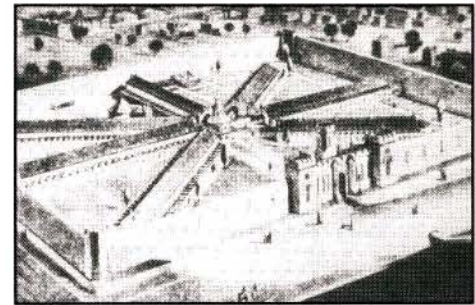


Figure 1. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia.
(Philadelphia Historical Commission)

Individual cells plus large communal rooms required a great deal of physical space and taxed the observation powers of the guards who had to impose silence on their charges. By the time of the planning of the Provincial Penitentiary, a system had been developed which featured a central observation area to which were attached long arms containing rows of cells. The number of arms varied according to the number of inmates housed and the number of storeys involved. Eastern Penitentiary had, for example, seven arms of one storey each, whereas Kingston, having a greater number of storeys, was to settle for fewer arms. The resulting designs, particularly when schematized as floor plans on paper, were agreeable to the love of repetitive geometry evident in architectural planning in the late 18th century.

THE MAIN BUILDING, 1832 - 1860

The Main Building of the Provincial Penitentiary was visualized from the beginning as a Greek cross centred by a rotunda, surmounted by a cupola. The first plans of 1832 were modified in the spring of 1833, and sent to the Boston Prison Discipline Society who published the site plan in 1836 (figure 2). Written descriptions help us to visualize these early schemes which have been revised over time.⁹ Correspondence between commissioner Macaulay and the chaplain of Auburn Prison (in the Macaulay Papers, Ontario Archives) describe William Powers, a deputy keeper at Auburn, as the originator of these plans. He came to Kingston in 1833 as superintendent of the building project, a post he gave up in July 1835 in order to become the deputy warden of the prison. He finally left the institution in June 1840. In 1834 his architectural qualifications were questioned in letters published in the local press, and he was portrayed as an American interloper, juggling his 'talents' as "Goaler, Builder, Artist and Buffoon" and misrepresenting himself as the creative power behind the new prison design. It was implied that the prison draughtsman William Kennedy was the real talent. Kennedy, who had copied the penitentiary plans for visiting dignitaries from France, denied, however, either originating or altering them. In June of 1834, John Mills, the master builder at the prison (he had accompanied Powers from Auburn), resigned his position and declared that it was he, not Powers, who had originated the plans.¹⁰

Perhaps one should think of the Provincial Penitentiary as having been designed by a committee who drew upon the ideas and talents of the penitentiary commissioners in Kingston and the various staff members in Auburn, rather than being the product of a single man. Commissioner Macaulay, on 31 July 1832, wrote to Levi Lewis, keeper of Auburn Prison:

I have this day written to your Deputy, Mr. Powers, requesting him to prepare me a plan and estimates of a Penitentiary to be submitted by Mr. Thomson and myself to our Legislature at its next sitting, and I have made some notes in my letter to him on certain points connected with Prison Architecture, management and discipline, which attracted our attention during our recent tour, or on reading the Reports since our return home. Mr. Powers will of course show you my letter and if on any subject herein adverted to, you should feel inclined to afford us any information, I beg to assure you that your communication will be esteemed a high favour.

Commissioner Thomson was a strong advocate of reform prisons and, as early as 1830, had been studying pertinent examples such as the Glasgow Bridewell, the new section of which was to be built with four radiating arms containing individual cells.¹¹ Powers may have been encouraged to turn to such prototypes for the Greek cross scheme he devised for Kingston. Auburn itself was not a model for such radial planning, because it was constructed on a three-sided courtyard plan.

As a result of Mills leaving in the summer of 1834, William Coverdale (1801-1865) was hired as his replacement.¹² This was the starting point of Coverdale's career as designer and supervisor of the building projects at the penitentiary until he resigned in 1846. Even after he left, some of his plans continued to be exploited by his successor, Edward Horsey (1806-1865), and the structures that Coverdale had erected on the site influenced the appearance of new ones. Coverdale had emigrated as a young boy with his family from York, England, and had settled in the area along the Richelieu River, Quebec, north of the American border. He may have worked in the 1820s on the rebuilding of Fort Lennox, and this experience may have influenced his decision in the early 1830s to move to Kingston, where the Rideau Canal was being completed, the rebuilding of Fort Henry had begun, and the Provincial Penitentiary was in the planning stages. Except for a short span from June 1835 to March 1837, when he was working in Hamilton and Brantford during a lull in the building activity at the prison, he worked in Kingston as an architect and supervisor of various projects until his death in 1865. His experience at the penitentiary prepared him for other institutional undertakings: he was City Architect from the middle of the 1840s, and architect in charge of the Rockwood Lunatic Asylum from the late 1850s.

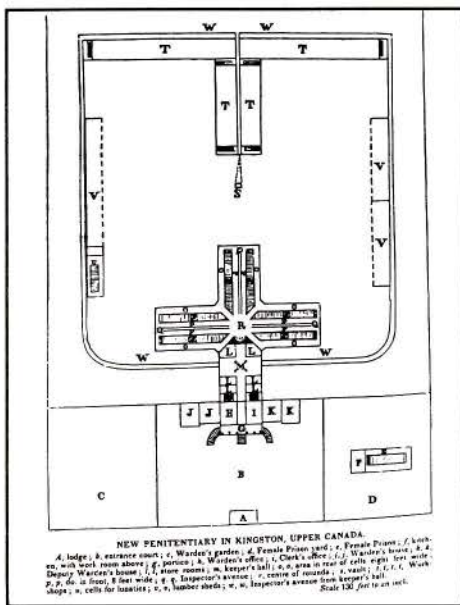


Figure 2. William Powers and John Mills, *Provincial Penitentiary, Kingston, 1832-34, proposed site plan*. (Reports of the Prison Discipline Society of Boston, 1836)



Figure 3. William Powers, John Mills, William Coverdale and Edward Horsey, Provincial Penitentiary, beg. 1833, south-east view of the Main Building before the rebuilding of the south wing in 1895. (NAC 46258)



Figure 4. William Coverdale and Edward Horsey, Provincial Penitentiary, beg. 1833, north-east view of Main Building before the alterations of the windows and doorway in the early 20th century. (Queen's University Archives)

Coverdale immediately set to work at the prison on creating plans which were regarded “as exhibiting no unfavourable evidence of the qualifications which he possesses for his present situation.”¹³ He was requested to deposit these plans, presumably including ones for the north wing of the Main Building, with the penitentiary officials when he left in 1835.¹⁴ Although they were useful as a guide for building activities during his absence, the prison officials realized that they needed him on the site and asked him to return in the spring of 1837.¹⁵

The south wing, next to the lake shore, had been begun in August of 1833 during the tenure of Powers and Mills, and was complete in September 1834, about two or three months after Coverdale replaced Mills as master builder.¹⁶ It must have appeared rather dowdy — a simple three-storey rectangular box, lit by rectangular windows and topped by a roof which was hipped on its southerly or rear portion (figure 3). There were no decorative touches.¹⁷ For about the first thirty years of the prison's existence there was a discrepancy between the plans (they appeared on paper for a united four-arm building) and the actual structure as built. As had been planned from the beginning, each wing was erected in isolation and at a different time from the others, in order to accommodate financial resources and the growing prison population. The connecting rotunda and dome were not constructed until later in the century. The north wing (figure 4) was designed by Coverdale by the summer of 1835, the foundations were laid a year later, and the stone walls began to rise in the autumn of 1836. Since Coverdale was absent at this time, Richard Logan supervised the work of the

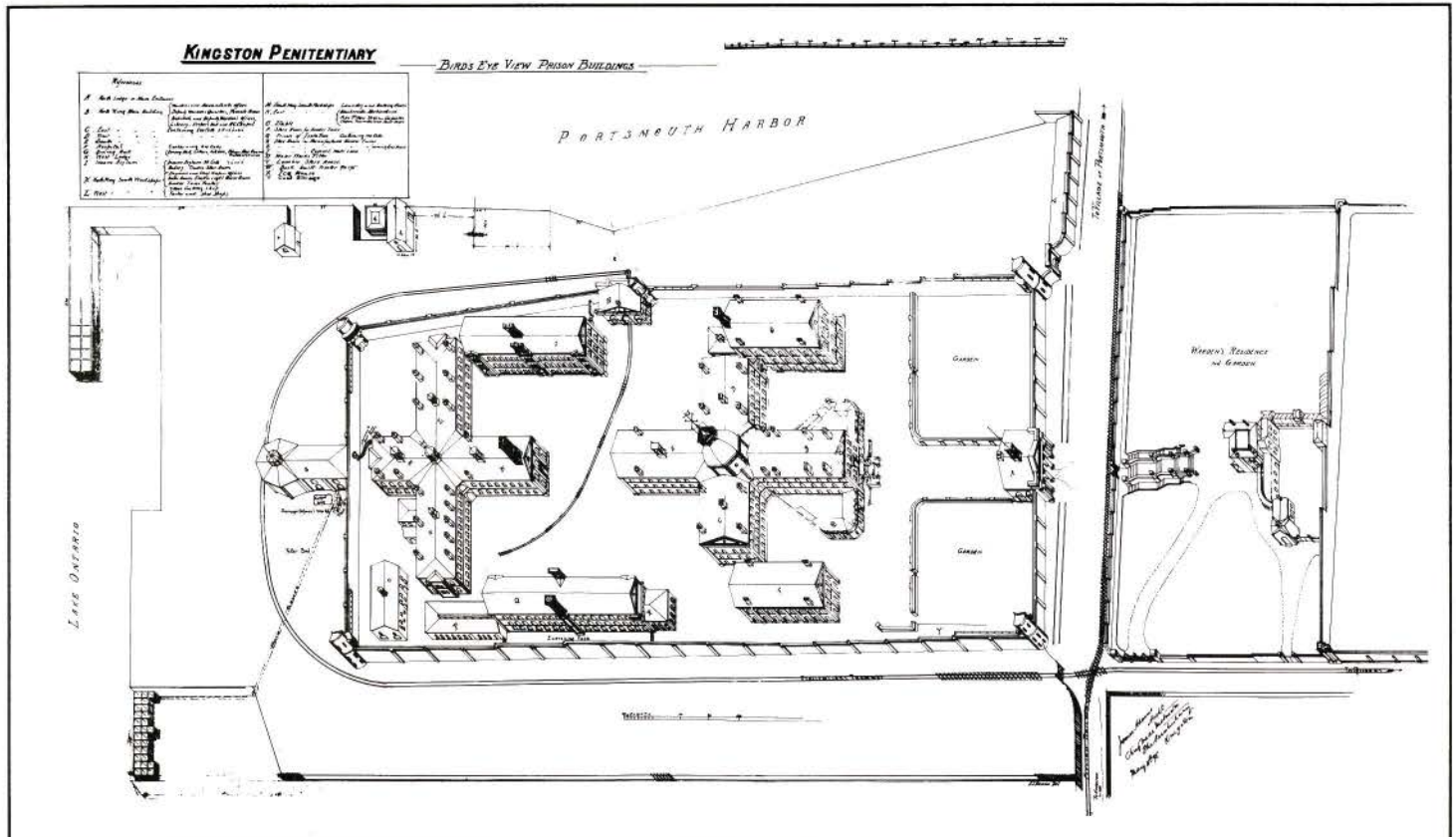


Figure 5. Provincial Penitentiary, beg. 1833, bird's eye view in 1895 of site by James Adams. (Queen's University Archives)

convict labourers but, due to their inexperience, progress was so slow that outside stonemasons had to be hired in 1837 in order to have the roof built before winter.¹⁸ The interior was being outfitted in 1838, but the function of the interior was subject to change for many years. Eventually it held the architect's office, along with other rooms for the bureaucracy.¹⁹

William Powers professed to be “no connoisseur of architectural ornaments” but, perhaps jealous over Coverdale's popularity, acridly criticized the latter's change in design (from that established in the south wing). He objected to the change from rectangular windows to ones topped by a round arch because the latter seemed more suited to a church than a prison.²⁰ This suggests that he was also no connoisseur of reform prison design, because the incorporation of round-arched windows or blind arcades was a pragmatic 19th century adaptation of John Howard's late 18th century design for an ideal prison which featured open ground-level arcades. These permitted the maximum circulation of air, thought to be essential for good health.²¹ But they also allowed the cold to penetrate the building in the winter, and used up potential floor space for cells and other rooms essential for the operation of a prison. Consequently, only token forms of the arch were incorporated into institutions built in the 19th century.

The open arcades favoured in late 18th century reform prison design are similar to those found on two of the stone buildings at Fort Lennox, Quebec. Because Coverdale as a young man lived near the fort, he was familiar with the design. There are, of course, links between military and prison architecture; for example, both types must provide accommodation and training facilities in a secure and austere manner for large numbers of persons. The military desired to prevent aggressors from entering their fortifications, and the prison officials desired to prevent their aggressive inmates from leaving their structures.

On the side walls of the north wing, plain round-arched windows (now altered) rested on string courses, while on the north or front wall the windows were more formally emphasized by the use of keystones and paired blocks under the sills. In fact, the whole mood and design of the north wing had changed to formal classicism from the relatively crude appearance of the south wing. The front wall of the north wing was capped by a pediment, and defined at the corners by stripped-down pilasters. The main doorway (now rebuilt) was arched and bordered by a severe Tuscan surround. Although the south wing was the first structure on the site, and thus might have been precedent-setting, it is Coverdale's north wing which sets the tone of the subsequent buildings on the prison grounds, including the buildings which flank the Main Building (figure 5), namely, the hospital (begun 1847) on the east and

the dining-hall/chapel (begun 1849) on the west. The key difference between the south and north wings is that the project was now controlled by a sensitive architect who could successfully combine aesthetic and functional considerations, while putting up with the frustrations of having to train convicts to be builders and having to deal with the bunglings of such poor administrators as William Powers and Henry Smith.

The remaining two wings of the Greek cross were built during the decade of the 1840s in response to the increasing number of convicts needing to be housed. This additive approach to building was an advantage of the radiating arm scheme, although the dome could not be erected until the four arms were in place. By the spring of 1841, the east wing was completed, and the foundations of the west wing rose three feet above ground.²² This wing was then put on hold until construction resumed a few years later — its cell system installed as late as 1847.²³

The wings were constructed with free-standing stone walls protected by a gable roof. The interior fittings were considered to be independent from the outer walls in their structural systems and, consequently, could be erected or altered at a later date. The number of storeys of cells was usually greater than the number of storeys indicated by string courses on the exterior walls — a functional consideration out-weighting the theoretical demands of classicism. Individual cells had their own interior windows unrelated to those in the outside stone walls. The cell doors swung out onto narrow galleries supported on iron brackets. If you were incarcerated in one of the upper tiers and walked out of your cell onto the gallery, only a railing separated you from a drop of about thirty feet to the main floor. You could proceed along the gallery to the central rotunda, in which iron staircases were located.

Although the rotunda was part of the original plan of the early 1830s, this essential connecting passageway for the arms of the Main Building was delayed until 1859, by which time Edward Horsey was the architect of the prison.²⁴ In 1853, the prison inspectors made an unsuccessful attempt to thwart the dream of a large dome, which they felt would lend too grand an air to the institution, as if conferring dignity upon crime.²⁵ But the distinctive classical style established in the north wing by Coverdale led inevitably to the need for a grand dome. This was the formula established in other civic buildings in Kingston and area. In 1844 a noble dome, elevated on a drum pierced by rectangular windows, was placed on the City Hall begun by architect George Browne and finished by William Coverdale. In 1855 construction was begun by Edward Horsey on the Frontenac County Court House, a classically-designed stone public building. Horsey's dome was rather disappointing — a simple, tinned hemisphere which John and Joseph Power rebuilt after a fire in 1875 in a more emphatic profile, elevated on a drum pierced by round-arched windows.²⁶ The Power design was probably influenced by Coverdale's design for the dome (now removed) on the Rockwood Lunatic Asylum, in the planning stages in 1857.

Horsey's dome on the Main Building of the penitentiary featured a multi-sided stone drum, modestly pierced on alternate faces by oculi. Above this rose the tinned curve of the dome, which spanned 56 feet and on which rested a large skylight surmounted by a weather vane. The skylight of German glass was 37 feet in diameter, and illuminated the unobstructed drop of 118 feet to the main floor of the rotunda.²⁷

In the late 18th century, Jeremy Bentham pointed out one of the advantages of his Panopticon, or centrally planned institution: there was "one station in the inspection part affording the most perfect view of every cell."²⁸ An echo of this was still evident as late as 1895 in this description of the rotunda of the Kingston prison: "The central dome contains three [*sic*] tiers of cells radiating from the centre like spokes of a wheel, so that all corridors are within view of a guard standing in that centre."²⁹ Because the rotunda did not have a floor for each tier of cells (other than at ground-level), the observation points were not as ideal as the quotation suggests. It seems unlikely that a guard could actually see from the perimeter walkways of the rotunda into all of the individual cells in the wings.

In the centre of the rotunda floor stood a bell which regulated the mind-numbing routine of the prison (and which was attacked during the riots in the 20th century). In 1955 the dome was removed, save for the stone base, and rebuilt, but its baroque character was lost. Its original profile against the sky was visible despite the perimeter wall, and was an important fulcrum for the radially planned Main Building.

Although it took decades for the Main Building to fulfill the architectural vision as conceptualized as early as 1832, the plan and method of prisoner control was known and influential. Immediately to the south, workshops (figure 5), "a most elegant and stately pile of buildings," were designed by William Coverdale in a cross plan with a dome.³⁰ They were planned about 1845, and were under construction when Edward Horsey took over from Coverdale. The arched masonry ceilings and free-standing stone steps which sweep in curves into the centre of the

workshop complex bring to mind the fearsome and romantic vision of Piranesi's prints of prisons. In 1871, H.H. Horsey, acting architect of the penitentiary and son of Edward Horsey (who died in 1869), submitted plans for a Solitary Prison for the penitentiary site. The new building was to be composed of five arms radiating from a central rotunda.³¹

The Auburnian type of cell arrangement used in Kingston was cited as an important model when alterations were contemplated in 1852 for the prison of Pied-du-Courant in Montreal. As part of these changes, Edward Horsey submitted an unaccepted scheme for the perimeter wall, influenced by the design in Kingston.³² The main building, in the form of a cross, and the outer wall of the 1872 penitentiary of St. Vincent de Paul, near Montreal, were based on the Kingston scheme. The late 19th century prison at Dorchester also has a cross-shaped building.

THE OUTER WALLS AND GATEWAYS

In the 19th century the Main Building was visible because of the height of the dome, which acted as a landmark when viewed from water or land. In addition, paying visitors frequented the site. But today the Main Building is less prominent due to the loss of the upper part of the dome and the protection given by the intimidating concrete walls which have replaced the old stone walls and west gateway. The result is that the public's main impression of the penitentiary is provided by the north, or front, gateway which is located tight against King Street West (the main access road between downtown Kingston and the suburban residential section to the west).

Convict work gangs were a common sight well into the 20th century as they went to or returned from the local quarries, but now, due to the penitentiary's classification as a special maximum-security institution, the main sign of activity is the arrival or departure of guards. In the past the site was part of the daily activity of Portsmouth Village, which abutted it. The links (no longer in existence) to the village were the west gate designed by Coverdale in the early 1840s, and a gateway on King Street West designed by James Adams in 1875 and located to the west of the corner watch-tower. The west gate (figure 9) faced the harbour, which in the 19th century was an active ship-building area for the village. Some of the supplies needed for the prison population and workshops were brought by ship, and finished products, such as worked building stone, were brought from the prison shops to the vessels for transportation to other communities (for example, to Cobourg and Chicago).³³

Security, as represented by a stout perimeter wall, is, of course, fundamental to a prison. Yet the Provincial Penitentiary was secured from the time of its opening only by a picket fence, which had deteriorated in many places by the 1840s. For a number of years this worried the prison officials, but it was not until 1840 that they had the funds available to request and approve plans for a stone wall designed by William Coverdale.³⁴ They were optimistic that it would be quickly constructed, but it was a complicated affair — the site had to be leveled, the gradient of the road in front of the prison reduced, and four circular corner towers constructed. The west and north gateways were to be elaborate structures, including two-storey buildings or lodges intruding into the grounds. The construction proceeded with fine workmanship, even though most of the convicts had had no previous training before Coverdale and others taught them on the site. They began on the southern part of the wall, and only one-third of the total wall was built by the spring of 1842.³⁵ Finally, in 1844, the Board of Inspectors was able to report that the north lodge and almost all of the walls were complete.³⁶ A datestone of 1845 is located in the pediment of the interior facade of the north lodge. Work was still being done on the last corner tower in 1846.³⁷ In 1852 Edward Horsey added a fifth tower, styled after those designed by Coverdale, immediately to the north of the west gate.³⁸

In my analysis of the Main Building, I noted that Coverdale improved upon and refined, but basically respected, the plans laid down by his predecessors. In the case of the perimeter walls, however, he was free to be creative, and indeed produced a solution which balanced originality with the conventions of reform prison design and established architectural theory.

Security, salubrity, and reformation — the three keystones of Howardian prisons — dominated the theoretical writings of the local Board of Inspectors and the Chaplain during the period in which Coverdale, who was linked to their group in his sympathies, was designing and building the outer walls.³⁹ Some entrances to British prisons bore inscriptions of this philosophy on their public faces; for example, on the Littledean Bridewell (1785, William Blackburn), there was simply the poignant word "Solitude," which was a recognized technique of bringing about moral reformation.⁴⁰ The main entrance to the Provincial Penitentiary at Kingston expressed this type of message, not by inscribed mottoes, but through architectural forms.



Figure 6. William Coverdale, Provincial Penitentiary, 1840-44, exterior of north gateway before the addition of a central tower about 1895. (Queen's University Archives)

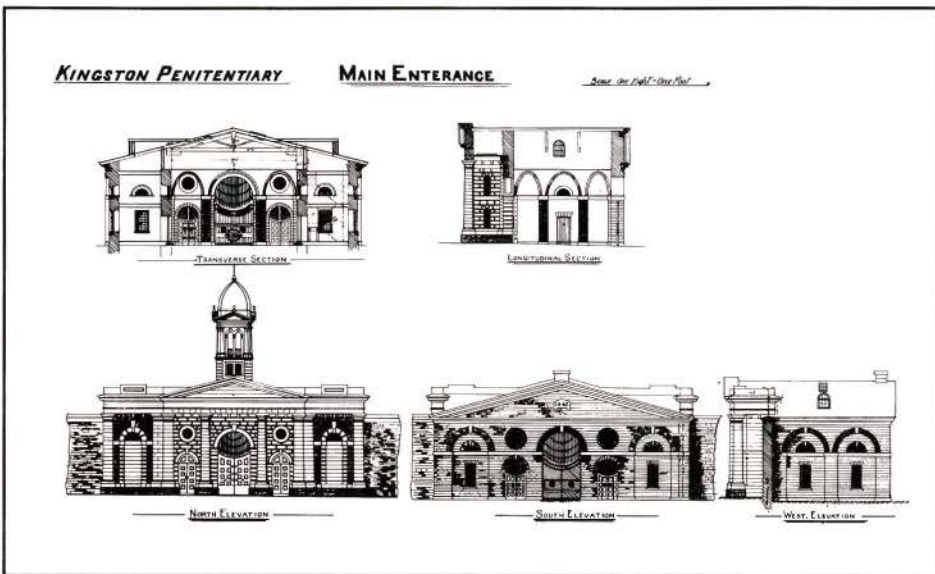


Figure 7. William Coverdale, Provincial Penitentiary, 1840-44: drawings by James Adams in 1895 of north gateway. (Queen's University Archives)

Coverdale's north lodge or gateway (figures 6, 7) incorporates a triumphal arch motif, the most famous of which was the Arch of Constantine in Rome. The prison gateway shares in common with such a triumphal arch the incorporation of a heavy attic, classical orders, rondels, and passageways composed of a large, central round-headed archway flanked by smaller passageways on each side. Roman triumphal arches survived in reasonable condition in a number of accessible sites and, hence, were well illustrated in guide and architectural pattern books, ranging from Andrea Palladio's *The Four Books* (1570) to Edward Cressy's *Encyclopaedia of Civil Engineering* (revised ed. 1857). In the latter, pedimented arches can be found. In addition, there were well-known illustrated British examples of the 18th and 19th centuries (for example, William Chambers's Arch at Wilton and Decimus Burton's Arch and Screen at Hyde Park Corner, London). But is the triumphal arch an entirely appropriate frontispiece for the usually sober nature of a penitentiary? Are they not characteristically rich and festive in appearance, due to the incorporation of a program of sculpture and the choice of the Composite or Corinthian Order? The latter was deemed "proper for all buildings, where elegance, gaiety and magnificence is required," according to Asher Benjamin, writing in 1814 but drawing upon a much older tradition.⁴¹ On the other hand, one could argue that they were suitable in these respects: they were located on important civic sites; and they were associated with and were celebrating in a public manner the military deeds of the Emperors. The Emperor symbolized the society he ruled — in a sense, his triumph over his enemies who were humbled as prisoners and marched under his arch was society's triumph over the evil of criminals who were being admitted to penal institutions. Coverdale wove this theme of the military and moral triumph into his composition.

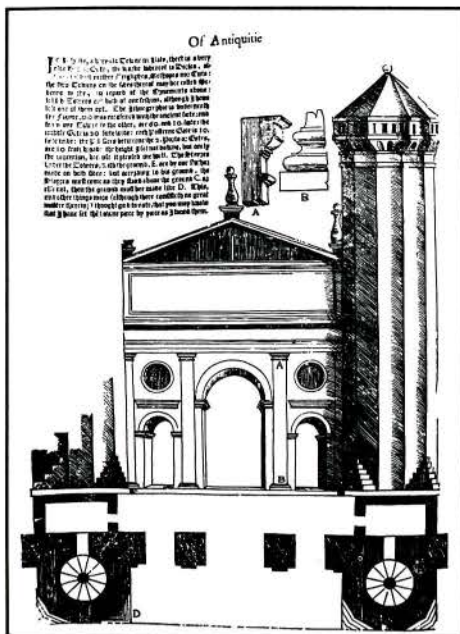


Figure 8. Spello Gateway from Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture*.

Another source for the north entrance to the prison may have been the Roman town gateway, which also featured round-arch openings, but in association with defensive walls, as one finds in a penitentiary perimeter wall. An example which bears a surprising resemblance to Coverdale's gate is the Augustan City Gate of Spello, Italy. It has the three arched openings, but only one rondel over each of the outer arches, as in the Kingston example (the Arch of Constantine has a pair of rondels over each of the outer arches). This gateway was illustrated (figure 8) in Sebastiano Serlio's *The Five Books of Architecture* (1537-1547) with a broad attic surmounted by a pediment.⁴² Since the upper part of the gateway had deteriorated, Serlio may have supplied certain details from his imagination. The gateway is flanked by tall faceted watch-towers of the type Coverdale placed at the corners of his walls. The order is a very simple Doric, without triglyphs and metopes (as Serlio points out), and is thus reminiscent of the Tuscan Order chosen by Coverdale. With this antique example we have a public structure with military overtones as part of a city's defense works, and associated with a more sober choice of Order than one characteristically finds on a triumphal arch. The Doric was of "a grave, robust, masculine aspect," suitable for military buildings.⁴³

In British architecture one finds from the middle of the 18th century the combination of arched openings and the choice of Doric or Tuscan Order; for example, Battey Langley illustrated in 1740 a Doric gateway and porter's lodge, and John Carter portrayed in 1775 a Tuscan gateway with side lodges, based on the 17th century church in Covent Garden, London by Inigo Jones. In many British gateway-lodges, the outer arches were filled by the fenestration necessary for the lodges.⁴⁴

There was an interesting use of the Roman triumphal arch for a penitentiary in George Dance the Elder's unsuccessful proposal in 1755 for the rebuilding of Newgate Prison, London.⁴⁵ His elevation showed two individual arches with three openings in each. The larger arch spanned a street which divided two blocks of the institution. The choice of the Doric Order is reminiscent of Roman gateways, but the embellishments with symbolic statuary is more in line with the richness of the triumphal arch. The smaller arch which permitted access into the Sessions House Yard was a plainer version, capped with a pediment. Even though this scheme did not materialize, it reached a wide audience due to being circulated as a print and reproduced in a magazine. Dance's simpler arch may have been the model for the gateway for a prison for 600 prisoners proposed by James Bevan in 1819.⁴⁶ In general, free-standing and engaged columns were avoided in the perimeter buildings of prisons because of economic restraints and a desire for an austere appearance.

Rustication became the conventional method of texturing the outer facades of prisons. Newgate, as built by George Dance the Younger from 1769 to 1784, set the stage with rustication boldly confronting the public thoroughfare — its effect made more ominous by the use of large-scale stones and limited fenestration. In contrast to the rather domestic appearance of many prisons built previous to about 1750, later prisons *looked* like prisons by incorporating a number of conventions on those facades or walls which were exposed to the public: rustication; large pieces of masonry placed in wide expanses of walls; spare use of windows, which were usually barred and often consisted only of a lunette; round arches for windows or flat arcades; moralistic inscriptions or symbols (fettters in the case of Newgate); and plans dominated by geometrical dispositions.

When Coverdale was contemplating his design for the outer walls in 1840, he had the following sources available through illustrations and written descriptions: antique triumphal arches and gateways; revival examples of these, free-standing or incorporated into British entrances to country estates; and the infrequent use of the triumphal arch motif in British penitentiary designs. But there was another source closer to home — entrances to military establishments, including gateways into the walled city of Quebec. Fort Lennox, Quebec has a single rounded arch in its stone 'triumphal arch' entrance. The fort was reconstructed in the 1820s under the general supervision of Colonel Durnford, who was also responsible in this same period for the expansion of the Citadel in Quebec City. The main single-arched entrance of the Citadel has become monumentalized, because of the flanking broad areas of masonry, ornamented by pairs of Tuscan columns which support an entablature. The exterior design of the west gateway (figure 9) of the prison at Kingston is similar, except that it lacks columns — they would have been inappropriate on a secondary entrance, and their bases and lower shafts might have been damaged by the rough work of transporting goods to and from the prison and harbour.

In terms of what had already been established as appropriate for prisons, can Coverdale's work be judged successful? The north gateway functions like that of a gateway into a Roman walled town — behind the walls sits a complex arrangement of civic, residential, and workshop buildings, all of which reflect the varied functions of a real town and yet

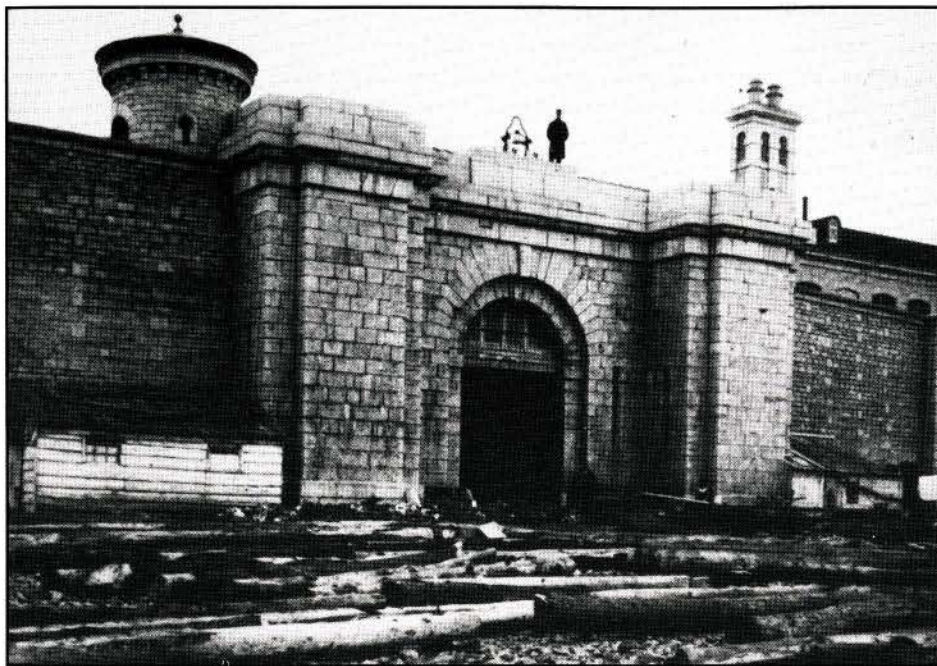


Figure 9. William Coverdale, Provincial Penitentiary, 1840-44, exterior of west gateway (now demolished). (Queen's University Archives)

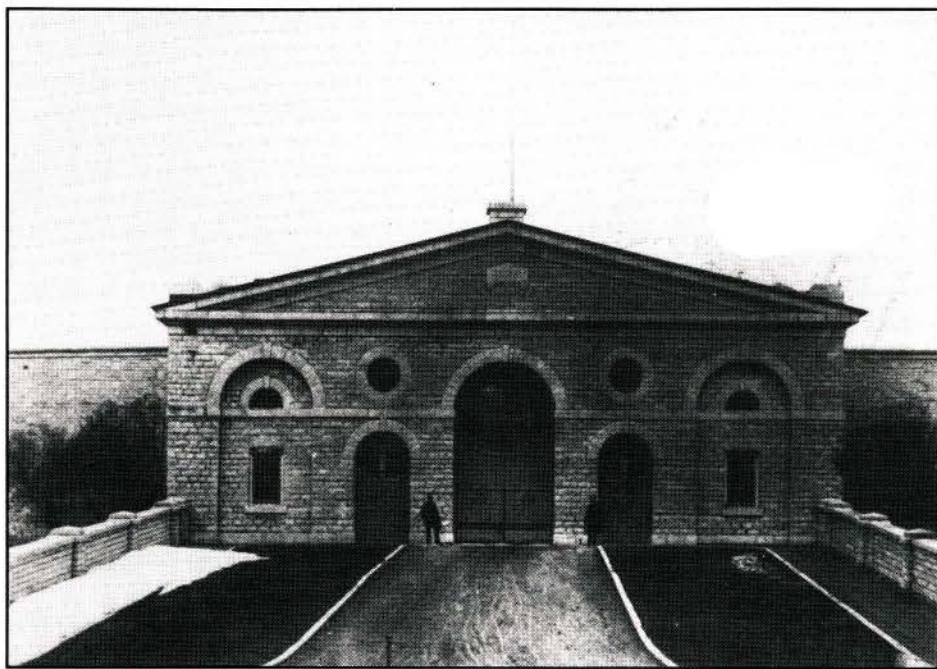


Figure 10. William Coverdale, Provincial Penitentiary, 1840-44, interior of north gateway and lodge. (Queen's University Archives)

are distinct from a town.⁴⁷ There are strong military overtones, though in this case, not to keep intruders out but to keep convicts in — to protect normal society from potentially dangerous deviants, while seeking to normalize them into accepting society's morals: a kind of moral triumph, symbolized by the triumphal arch motif. Security, salubrity and reformation, the three touchstones of the reform prison, are symbolized in the tripartite composition: first by the three arched-openings which are framed by pilasters on the recessed wall and by columns *in antis* aligned with the projecting walls; and second by the overall tripartite arrangement formed by the two projecting outer pavilions which flank the central recessed area. This emphasis on three continues on the facade (figure 10) which faces into the prison yard. There are three giant arches (AAA) linked by a string course across the flat facade, plus the central unit of the lower arches on each side of the tall, central arch (bAb). These rhythms are united by a common pediment.

The street facade of the north gateway is systematically textured. Serlio pointed out that, in rustication, a sculptural quality could be achieved through the interspersing of delicately worked stone blocks with roughly hewn stone and varied types of bonding.⁴⁸ Coverdale played off coarse against fine stonework. As one might expect from a classically organized

structure, the entrance rests on a 'firm' foundation of the largest and most grossly textured stonework. This foundation acts as a horizontal band across the composition, in counterplay to the finely tooled, 'light', uppermost band which includes the entablature, paneled parapets and pediment. The upper and lower bands are linked vertically by the smooth stonework of the piers and columns. The transition from the vertical face of the heavily worked walls to the smooth architraves of the outer pavilions and overhead area of the paneled ceiling of the portico is made by the smooth stonework of the curved corbels which mark off the mathematical divisions of the composition. The smooth keystone of the outer arch on each of the pavilions integrates the rough work of the flat wall surfaces with the smooth stone work of the inner arch which forms the lunette. The sill of the latter continues across the rusticated wall surface. Serlio illustrates four stages in the evolution of rustication; the first of which — simple, roughly worked blocks — is reminiscent of the pock-marked stone forming the walls of the outer pavilions.⁴⁹ As the system of rustication evolved, according to Serlio, workmen made flat surfaces with beveled edges, and this type of stone is found forming the wall of the central section of the prison gateway. Therefore, the more advanced rustication is centred in the composition, flanked and fortified by the cruder work on the outer areas. This has the effect of channeling the observer into the open arches of the gateway.

As James Ackerman has analyzed in his recent article on the "Tuscan/Rustic Order," Serlio associated the use of rustication and the Tuscan Order, "because the Tuscan manner is truly the roughest and least ornate of all ... the rustic is best suited to it and more in conformity ... than to any other [order]."⁵⁰ Tuscan was deemed appropriate for fortified places, such as city gates, fortresses, and prisons. Another 16th century authority, Andrea Palladio, referred to the writings of the Roman Vitruvius, who had described Tuscan as the plainest of the Orders. Palladio illustrated its form, even though the scarcity of surviving antique examples meant more guesswork about its elements than the other standard Orders. He stated that in villa construction, simple colonnades in the Tuscan Order could have architraves of wood which would permit wide intercolumniation, suitable for the passageway of carts.⁵¹ Although the prison portico has a stone architrave, it features in the centre a wide intercolumniation which was intended for the passage of carts and other vehicles. Coverdale seems to have followed the proportion set out by Palladio of four modules for the intercolumniation. Coverdale's selection of columns *in antis* is logical, as the integration into the wall of part of the piers on the extreme of the portico acts as a link to the wall relationship of the pilasters which mark the boundaries of the outer pavilions and divided the original perimeter walls.

Coverdale did not have to read Serlio or Palladio first-hand. There was an extensive body of literature on the theory of architecture published in the 18th and 19th centuries which drew upon ideas in circulation from the 16th century. For example, Palladio's description and plates illustrating the Tuscan Order were incorporated in 1747 in *The Modern Builder's Assistant ...* by Halfpenny, Morris and Lightoler.⁵² In 1759 William Chambers repeated Serlio's advice to use the Tuscan for prisons, fortified palaces, and so on.⁵³ Chambers' book was revised in a third edition in 1791, and reappeared with comments by Gwilt in 1825. On this side of the Atlantic, Asher Benjamin drew upon Chambers' work in his publications such as *Rudiments of Architecture* of 1814.

The majority of authorities advised that the proper proportion of a Tuscan column from its base to its capital should be seven modules, as opposed to the more slender and elegant effect created by the nine or ten modules employed for such Orders as Corinthian.⁵⁴ Chambers made distinctions within the formula for Tuscan — the shaft could be elongated for town buildings, but seven modules were correct for rural or military works, "where an appearance of extraordinary solidity is required."⁵⁵ The columns of the portico of the Provincial Penitentiary, being in a rural location at the time it was built, having military overtones, and needing to reassure the public with "an appearance of extraordinary solidity," were logically proportioned for the seven-module scheme.⁵⁶

In summary, Coverdale had assembled those motifs deemed by authorities as correct for rural, military and prison structures, and the Provincial Penitentiary had aspects of all of these. The north gateway announced to the passerby the function and ideals of the community constricted inside the perimeter walls. Coverdale's design was part of the generally accepted imagery of prisons of the early 19th century, and yet was original, due to the specific combination of concepts and motifs, namely, the triumphal arch (society's moral triumph over criminality), the Roman city gateway (a fortified entry to the community within), the system of texturing the stone by rustication (associated with military defensive works), and the selection of the Tuscan Order (strength and simplicity). This is no delicate 'Adamesque' classical design, but one exuding the 'terrible', a fearsome and stirring quality which Le Clerc had

Figure 11. William Coverdale, Provincial Penitentiary, 1840-44, north gate, perimeter wall and corner tower. (NAC 46244)



advised for prison entrances.⁵⁷ Casual entrance into this community was discouraged by Coverdale's combination of the low, squat proportions of the Tuscan, a minimal number of windows, oppressively barred, the coarse quality of rusticated stonework, and the sonorous rhythm of the architectural elements moving inexorably towards the central arch. One can imagine the sobering effect on a newly-arrived convict who had to pass from the din and chatter of the neighbouring village into the realm of the prison's deadly regime of silence and cruel punishment. The image of a fearsome medieval dungeon is hinted at through the use of narrow slits which pierce the sides of the portico and the tall watchtowers at the corners of the perimeter wall (figure 11).

In drawing upon published authorities, Coverdale was part of the flow of classical knowledge which can be traced to at least the 16th century. This suggests that it would be too glib to categorize this work as "classical revival," a term too favoured in Canadian architectural publications. Rather, the penitentiary is part of a continuing interest in the antique and, in the specific manner in which Coverdale organized the material from his sources, makes the north gateway a significant contribution to the history of Canadian architecture.

CONCLUSION

Even though the Provincial Penitentiary has not figured in Canadian architectural histories, it is a structure of national and international significance. It is a late manifestation of an intense fascination in late-18th century Europe with the grandiose geometric planning of buildings and sites. We can document the planners' awareness of the important landmarks in radial and reform penitentiary designs from the Maison de Force in Ghent to Howard's theories on British penal reform to Haviland's prisons in the United States. The Provincial Penitentiary in Kingston was influenced by the designs and systems of management of these European and American examples and, in turn, was in a position to influence the schemes for other penitentiaries, because its plan was copied for British, French and American penal officials. It was in the planning stages only nine years after the commencement of Haviland's Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, and eight years before the first stone was laid for the influential Model Prison in Pentonville.

The Kingston institution provided an opportunity for a number of planners, builders and architects to grapple with the problem of how to manifest, in appropriate physical form, social theories on morality. Despite being designed with noble aims on how to improve humanity, this complex can be judged a failure in this regard. Seeking to reform its inmate population in order to blend them into normal society by the end of their incarceration, the penitentiary ironically confined them in a living hell of isolation and deviancy. Seeking to prevent corruption among the different levels of crime and to provide opportunities for individual meditation, the penitentiary system sadly sentenced its population to a regime of silence, which proved conducive to madness. The various architects of the penitentiary were the technicians who built the walls and bars in conformity to the ideas held by penal theorists and managers. In the name of reform they designed and built horrendously small cells, by their very nature lacking in sensory stimulation with no windows onto the outside world and containing spy-holes for the guards patrolling the hidden "Avenues of Inspection." Floor

plans were not designed for the physical comfort of those forced to occupy them, but for the convenience of the staff and management. An overriding consideration in the design of the physical plant was the need for continuous surveillance of a maximum number of inmates by a minimum number of guards.

The triad of reform penitentiary values — security, salubrity and reformation — rested on a shaky foundation, built on the principles of congregation and segregation which too frequently lead to perversions of ideals. Coverdale, nonetheless, created a heroic front-piece to the complex in the design of the north gateway. This was a mature version of the classical details and organization of his earlier work on the Main Building. He carefully selected Tuscan as the logical Order for the gateway portico, and through texturing and scale merged aesthetics with respect for the need for security, the latter reinforced by medieval-inspired watch-towers.

The institution's buildings increased in number and were altered over time from the first notations on paper in 1832 to the renovations being planned for the 1990s. The basic concept of Powers and Mills has survived, and was refined in its detailing by the work of Coverdale who, in turn, influenced such later architects as Horsey and Adams.

Due to this institution's present function as a federal special maximum-security unit, it has gained national political and social importance. In addition, we should acknowledge its importance in our nation's architectural history.

NOTES

- 1 This motto was inscribed on an outer gate of a new work-house in Amsterdam, as recorded by John Howard, *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe* (Warrington, 1789), 73.
- 2 For further reading, see Robin Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1982), especially 142-194.
- 3 *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada* (Toronto, 1849), app. BBBBB, no page numbers. This report on the sordid affairs of the penitentiary contrasts with the optimism expressed during its planning stages: "... it will be a school of reform, where the idle will be usefully employed and the vicious reclaimed, to the good of themselves, and of society at large." *Chronicle & Gazette*, (hereafter, *C & G*) Kingston, 6 September 1834.
- 4 B. C. Smith, Chaplain of Auburn Prison to John Macaulay, Kingston, 19 October 1833; see also 1 May 1833; Macaulay Papers, Ontario Archives. I would like to thank Dana Johnson for kindly drawing my attention to this important source on the early years of the penitentiary.
- 5 The system of management of this prison has interested a number of social historians, for example, C.J. Taylor, "The Kingston, Ontario Penitentiary and Moral Architecture," *Social History* 12 (1979), 387-408, and William Norman, "A Chapter of Canadian Penal History: The Early Years of the Provincial Penitentiary at Kingston and the Commission Inquiry into its Management," M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1979.
- 6 *Journals of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1831), app. 211-12, and *Journals of the House* (Toronto, 1832-33), app. 26-39, 219.
- 7 Early American prisons are illustrated and described in William Crawford, *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States* (1835; reprint ed., Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969).
- 8 "Avenues of Inspection" for the guards were inserted into the narrow corridors between ranges of cells in the Provincial Penitentiary. An inmate could never be certain when he was being observed. The lack of opportunity to converse and thus form friendships drove a number of inmates mad, and they formed a ready-made clientele for the new Rockwood Asylum for the Criminally Insane, built in the early 1860s by William Coverdale. The situation was a sad reflection on how easily the theories of the reformers could produce results opposite to their humane goals.
- 9 Written descriptions are given in *Journals of the House* (Toronto, 1832-33), app. 39; *Journals of the House* (Toronto, 1833-34), app. 101-3; and the Macaulay Papers, especially 30 March 1833, Smith to Macaulay, and [1834] specifications by Mills. An overall plan (sent by the chaplain of Auburn to Boston, Macaulay Papers, 12 and 30 March 1833) from Reports of the Prison Discipline Society of Boston, (1836) v.6, 889 is reproduced in Taylor, fig. 1. A plan of the Main Building is reproduced in Evans, fig. 181. A plan of the south wing of this building is illustrated in *C & G*, 6 September 1834. Due to the number of alterations, rebuildings and demolitions of the various parts of the penitentiary, the architectural analysis in this paper relies upon historical visual material, rather than drawing upon the present appearance of the complex.
- 10 *C & G*, 22 February, 1 March, 6 June, and 10 June 1834. John Mills described himself as "Architect and Builder" in his specifications for the penitentiary.
- 11 Hugh Thomson (who died in April 1834 during the controversy about the creator of the penitentiary design) studied the Bridewell in Glasgow (*Journals of the House*, 1831, app. 211), and he recommended it and Auburn as models for Kingston. The Bridewell is illustrated in Thomas Markus, ed., *Order in Space and Society* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1982), fig. 1.38 - 1.41. Because the scheme for rebuilding the complex in 1822-24 with four arms radiating from the centre was not completed, it is likely that Thomson saw an ideal plan on paper. The proposal is described in Crawford, app. 180, and *The Topographical, Statistical, and Historical Gazetteer of Scotland*. 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1854), v. 1, 660-1.
- 12 His career is discussed in Mary Fraser, "William Coverdale, Kingston Architect, 1801?-1865," *Historic Kingston* 26 (1978), 71-80. Fraser has generously shared with me her research and private archival material on Coverdale, whose work plays a central role in my doctoral thesis (now in progress) on Kingston architecture, 1835-65, for the University of Toronto.
- 13 *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1849), app. BBBBB.
- 14 Commissioners Report, 6 June and 1 July 1835, in the Kingston Penitentiary Museum (hereafter, KP Mus).
- 15 *Ibid.*, 28 December 1836 and 2 March 1837.
- 16 *C & G*, 24 August 1833 and 6 September 1834. Convicts were not housed in the prison until the summer of 1835.
- 17 The south wing is illustrated in *Canadian Illustrated News*, 5 July 1873. Shown is an elaborate ventilator which was probably added in 1852 by Horsey, in response to complaints about the poor ventilation in this wing (Inspectors Report, 10 July 1853, KP Mus). In 1895 the south wing was extended and a new facade added by James Adams (Kingston Architectural Drawings 29 i-iv, Queen's University Archives).
- 18 Commissioners Reports, 16 June and 22 October 1836, KP Mus, and *Journals of the House* (Toronto, 1837-38), app. 188.
- 19 *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1849), app. BBBBB.
- 20 Commissioners Reports, 1 February 1836, KP Mus.
- 21 Evans, 167.
- 22 Warden's Letter Book, 24 April 1841, KP Mus. The walls of the east wing were built, and the foundation laid for the west wing in 1839: *Journals of the House* (Toronto, 1839-40), December 57. The west wing walls were raised and the roof installed in 1845: *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1846), app. G.
- 23 *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1848), app. S. Additional interior work, such as installing more cells and a brick Avenue of Inspection, was underway in 1853: Inspectors Report, 10 July 1853, KP Mus.
- 24 *Journal of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1860), app. 32. The rotunda was built in 1859, the dome in 1860: *Daily British Whig*, Kingston, 28 May 1860.
- 25 *Journal of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1854), app. DD.
- 26 Marion MacRae and Anthony Adamson in *Cornstones of Order* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1983), 183, incorrectly state that Horsey's dome was made of glass. It was constructed of wood covered in tin, and burnt in 1875, not 1874: *British Whig*, Kingston, 24 March 1875.
- 27 Horsey describes the rotunda and dome in *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1860), app. 32.
- 28 Quoted in Evans, 195.
- 29 *British Whig*, Kingston, Special Number, May 1895, 5.
- 30 "The design and plan of this superb structure [the workshops] were made by Mr. Coverdale, the former architect of the Institution, but they have been carried

- out and in some measure improved upon, under the direction of Mr Horsey, the present Architect." *British Whig*, 12 April 1848. In a report dated 14 November 1846, it was stated that the outer walls and roof would be complete in November (*Journals of the Legislative* 1847, app. M). Because the construction was so advanced by the time Coverdale left the employment of the penitentiary (probably in September 1846), credit must be given to him as the designer of the workshops. The dome of the workshop was burnt in 1852: *Daily British Whig*, Kingston, 26 February 1852. The building is illustrated in *Canadian Illustrated News*, 25 September 1875, 200-01, before the rebuilding of the main facade in 1881 by James Adams (1833-1906).
- 31 Directors Report, 27 January 1871, KP Mus.
- 32 Luc Noppen, in his article, "La Prison du Pied-du-Courant à Montréal", *RACAR* 3 (No. 1, 1976), 36-50, cites George Browne as the architect of the proposed corner towers, but in Nelson's report on the prisons of Lower Canada (Noppen's source), Edward Horsey is named (see 24, 71-2, app. F in Nelson).
- 33 Warden's Letter Book, 12 April 1843, KP Mus. The request for stone by R.H. Throop of Cobourg had to be refused, as this material was needed in the erection of the prison walls. Cut stone was shipped as far as Chicago: Thomas Flynn, *Directory of the City of Kingston for 1857-1858* (Kingston, 1857), ix.
- 34 Inspectors Minute Book, 7 and 26 October 1840, KP Mus.
- 35 Warden's Letter Book, 8 March 1842, KP Mus.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 15 October 1844.
- 37 *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1849), app. BBBBB.
- 38 Inspectors Letter Book, 10 July 1853, KP Mus. This tower is visible in figure 9.
- 39 The prison chaplain, Robert Rogers, discussed in 1840 reformation as the end result of punishment, "For it should ever be remembered, the safe keeping of the convict is not the end proposed, but his safe keeping, in order that certain means may be adapted for his moral transformation." *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1841), app. M. Eight years later, when the sadistic and scandalous mismanagement of the prison was under investigation, Coverdale aligned himself with the chaplain against the warden, who was supported by Horsey. The chaplain now sadly reported that the aims of reformation were a complete failure, due to officials, such as the warden, viewing the institution as merely a place of security. The warden, among his other misdeeds, engineered the plot to reduce Coverdale's salary by half. The Board of Inspectors resigned to protest this action. *Journals of the Legislative* (Toronto, 1849), app. BBBBB.
- 40 Illustrated in Evans, fig. 86.
- 41 Asher Benjamin, *Rudiments of Architecture* (Boston, 1814; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo, 1972), 49. Benjamin drew heavily upon the 18th century work of William Chambers.
- 42 Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture* (1537-47, 1611 ed.; reprint ed., New York: Dover, 1982), Book 3, Ch. 4, Fol. 33. An interest in the 19th century in the Spello gateway is suggested by its inclusion in Edward Cressy, *An Encyclopaedia of Civil Engineering* (new ed., London, 1856), 89.
- 43 Benjamin, 46.
- 44 For further reading and illustrations, see Tim Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *Trumpet at a Distant Gate* (London: Waterstone, 1985). The authors consider only triumphal arches, not antique city gateways, as prototypes for British gateways and lodges in the classical style.
- 45 Dance's proposal appeared in *Universal Magazine* 34 (1764), 169, and is reproduced in Harold Kalman, "Newgate Prison." *Architectural History, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* 12 (1969), 50-61.
- 46 Illustrated in Evans, fig. 149.
- 47 The Provincial Penitentiary was described in 1857 as being "a considerable City itself, or rather a citadel, being surrounded with high walls of the strongest masonry, and the area within being filled with workshops, dormitories, offices, etc., of the best and most substantial stone." Flynn, ix.
- 48 Discussed in James Ackerman, "The Tuscan/Rustic Order: A Study in the Metaphorical Language of Architecture." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42 (No. 1, 1983), 15-34.
- 49 Serlio, Book 4, Ch. 5, Fol. 15.
- 50 Ackerman, 15.
- 51 Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture* (1570, Ware ed. 1738; reprint ed., New York: Dover, 1965), Book 1, Ch. 14, pp. 14-15.
- 52 John & William Halfpenny, Robert Morris, and T. Lightoler, *The Modern Builder's Assistant ...* (London, 1747; reprint ed., Westmead: Gregg International, 1971), 6.
- 53 William Chambers, *A Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture*, rev. & enl. ed., Joseph Gwilt, 2 vols (London, 1825), v. 1, 183-84.
- 54 In order to compare variations in the Tuscan Order, a table of measurements and a diagram of elevations are given, respectively, in Ackerman, 16, and Robert Chitham, *The Classical Orders of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), fig. 4.
- 55 Chambers, v. 1, 183-84.
- 56 The deliberately low proportions of the north gateway were disturbed in the late 19th century by the unfortunate addition of a tall rectangular tower in the centre of the roof. This tower, which still exists, is visible in figure 7.
- 57 Chambers, v. 1, 183-84. The emotional quality evoked by such prisons is discussed in Kalman.
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Jennifer McKendry is a doctoral student at the University of Toronto. Her doctoral thesis is on Kingston architecture, 1835-65.