

Kingston, Ontario

Main Cellblock (B-1 to B-8, B-14, C-22 and C-25)

Kingston Penitentiary

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The main cellblock consists of 11 administrative units housed in a single building which was begun in 1834 and completed (in its present exterior configuration) in 1959. In order of date of construction, these units are as follows:

1. The South Wing (B-4), 1834-35
2. The North Wing (B-2), 1836-40
3. The East Wing (B-3), 1836-45
4. The West Wing (B-5), 1838-57
5. The Kitchen and Dining Hall (B-8), 1839-41
6. The Hospital (B-7), 1847-49
7. The Rotunda (B-1), 1859-61
8. The Keepers' Hall (B-6), ca. 1911-12
9. The Disassociation Block (B-14), 1948-49
10. The Gymnasium/Schoolroom (C-22), 1951-56
11. The New Kitchen (C-25), 1956-59

The design for the 19th-century buildings (1-7, above), were furnished by William Powers, deputy warden of Auburn Penitentiary between 1832 and 1833. Building construction was superintended by William Powers, deputy warden of Auburn Penitentiary between 1832 and 1833. Building construction was superintended by William Powers (1834-40) and various employees of the institution including: John Mills (master builder, 1834), William Coverdale (master builder, 1834-46) and Edward Horsey (architect, 1846-69). The degree to which the original design was modified by those superintending the construction is the subject of much debate.

The architect of the keepers' hall is unknown. The plans for the disassociation block, gymnasium/schoolroom and new kitchen were prepared by the architectural branch of the Department of Justice.

The Main Cellblock is currently operated by Correctional Services Canada as cellular accommodation for prisoners with hospital, kitchen, dining hall, gymnasium and other services.

See FHBRO Building Report 89-32.

Reason for Designation

On May 18, 1990, the Main Cellblock was designated Classified by the evaluation committee. Above average scores were awarded in all criteria except site and landmark in the general area of Environment.

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The theme identified for the Main Cellblock is "the establishment and evolution of the penitentiary." The Main Cellblock is directly associated with the prison riots of 1932, 1954, and 1971 which led to major changes in penal practice, particularly on a regional level. Within the community of Kingston, the Main Cellblock serves as a very good example of the stimulation to population growth and economic expansion occasioned by the location and maintenance of a large public institution.

Architecturally the 1834-61 Main Cellblock is among the largest surviving examples of a Canadian public building in the Classic Revival style. Administrative units pre-dating the completion of the keepers' hall in 1912, taken together, have a very good aesthetic appearance. The same administrative units constitute the first Auburn-style prison in Canada, and while some evolution has taken place, the Main Cellblock retains its massing and is still used for its original function, the provision of accommodation for inmates. The excellence of the craftsmanship and choice of materials is demonstrated by the stone masonry which is uniformly of a very high order. The end elevation of the south wing (B-4) designed and superintended by James Adams is particularly fine with coursed limestone ashlar (bush hammered face) walling and cut limestone (finely-rubbed face) dressings. The cut-stone elements include: plain base and moulded string courses, a moulded horizontal and raking cornice, a slightly projecting circular window frame with carved date stone, semicircular and segmental arches with protruding console-pattern keystones, an entrance feature with moulded entablature and pilasters, and plain corner pilasters.

Most of the credit for the Main Cellblock design, and the innovative use of the Greek cross plan for an Auburn-type prison must go to William Powers. The contributions of John Mills, William Coverdale, Edward Horsey, James Adams and others involved in the execution must also be acknowledged.

In the area of environment, it is recognized that while substantial changes have been made to the site through the addition of elements such as B-6, B-14, C-22 and C-25, the Main Cellblock continues to dominate the institution.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Main Cellblock resides in its status as a very good example of Classic Revival "public" architecture. At the exterior the characteristic features of this style are: the symmetrical Greek cross plan; the medium-pitched gable roofs of the wings and appended blocks; the temple-like, pedimented treatment of end elevations; the massive central octagonal drum and dome crowned by a polygonal roofed lantern (now substantially altered); the pilastered wall treatment on B-7 and B-8

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(pilaster strips of slight projection from ground to main cornice defining each bay); the division of the walls into tiers, masked by base and belt courses and a great crowning cornice on B2-B5; the variation of window height at each tier on B2-B5 (now lost through the joining of the superimposed windows vertically); and the treatment of external angles with slightly projecting corner pilasters.

Internally the building is notable for the largely intact four tier cell arrangement in B-3 and B-5 (1896-1903); the surviving cantilevered iron galleries and straight flight stairs in B-1 (1895-1903); the original partitioning and "U" plan central wood staircase in B-7 (1847-49); and the original, ornamental cast iron posts and beams in the dining hall of B-8 (1839-41).

The discordant appearance of the post-1954 additions and alterations (choice of materials, shape and pattern of openings, architectural detailing, etc.) means the Classified designation applies to all pre-1954 exterior fabric with the exception of the porch at the east elevation of B-8 (1903-19); the enclosed basement stairwell at the north elevation of B-8 (1937-54) and the canopy at the north entrance of B-6 (1932-75).

Should the opportunity arise, the following alterations to the Main Cellblock would greatly enhance the aesthetic qualities of the building: restoration of the octagonal, helm (bulbous) roof and crowning lantern with its ornamental iron weathervane (B-1); opening of the three blind arches at the ground floor, north elevation and restoration of the windows (B-2); removal of the cladding at the gable end pediment (B-3); removal of the fire exit stair and restoration of the window at the south elevation (B-3); re-detailing of the main double door at the south elevation, now functioning as two single doors (B-4); removal of the single door and restoration of the window at ground floor, south elevation (B-4); removal of the cladding at the gable end pediment (B-5); re-detailing of the canopy at the north entrance (B-6); removal of the fire-escapes and restoration of the windows at the north elevation (B-7); unblocking of the recessed entryway at the south-west corner (B-8); re-detailing of the porch at the east elevation (B-8); removal of the enclosed basement stairwell at the north elevation (B-8); restoration of the areaway and basement windows at all elevations (B-8); removal of the fire escapes and restoration of the windows at the south and west elevations (B-8); removal of the concrete block buttresses at the north-west angle (B-8); and removal of the single door and canopy and restoration of the window at the north end of the east elevation (B-8).

Internally the heritage character resides in the rotunda, the cell ranges of the east and west wings, and the entire interior of the hospital. The removal of the temporary ceiling at the third floor level of the rotunda, restoration of vertical circulation to the rotunda, incorporating surviving elements of galleries and stairs, and sympathetic

adaptation of the interiors of B-3, B-5 and B-7 would greatly enhance these unique heritage resources.

The important role the Main Cellblock plays in physically defining the entry, cellblock, hospital, recreation and centre courtyards as well as establishing a consistency of scale, materials, architectural detail and decorative program for the inmate housing area of the institution has been noted. A consistent and long-term program of re-development which would include replacement of B-14, C-22 and C-25 with buildings of more compatible silhouette, form, fabric and detailing, while reducing the encroachment on the original courtyards, would ensure the heritage character of the property is protected.

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(Revised)