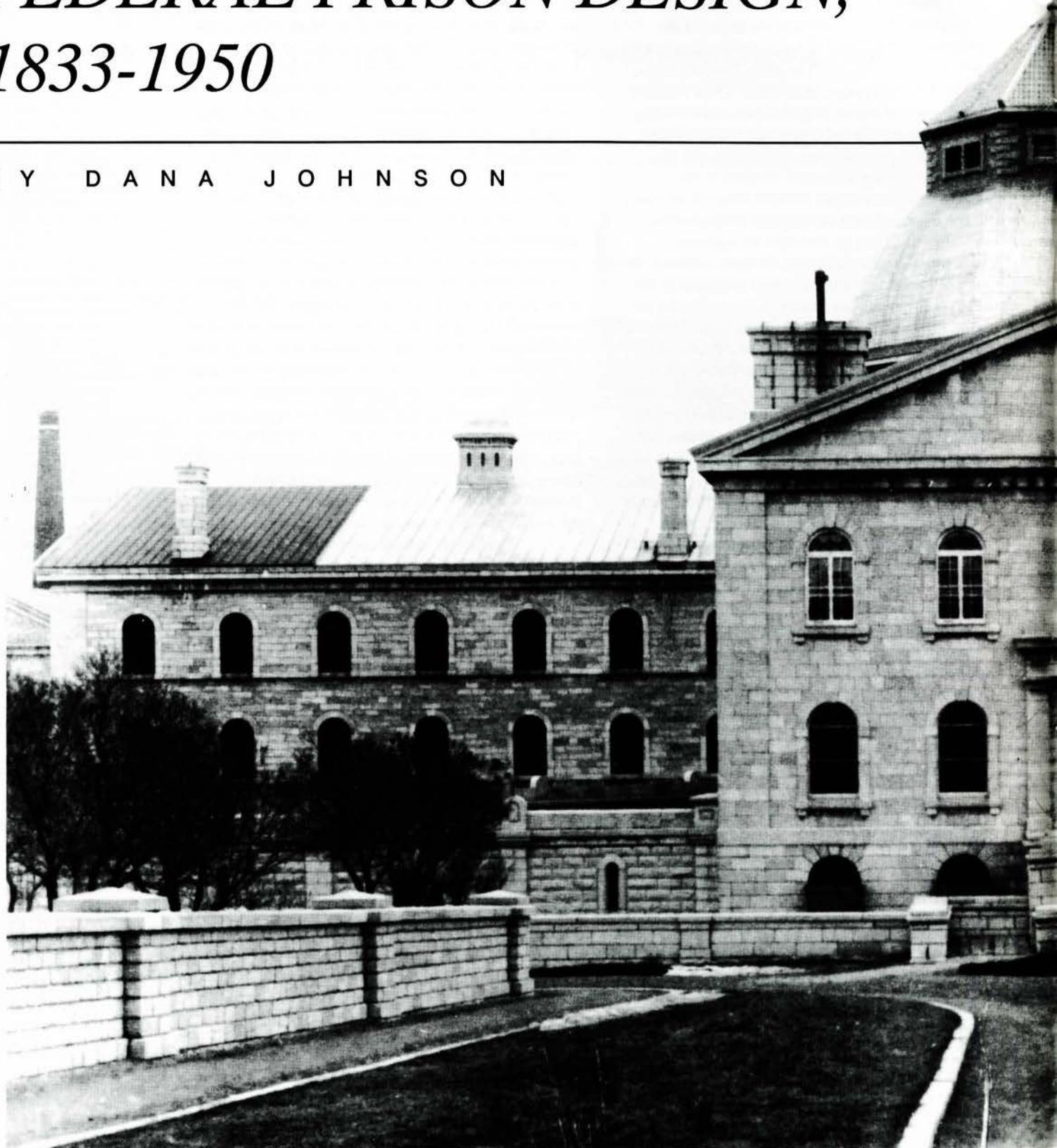
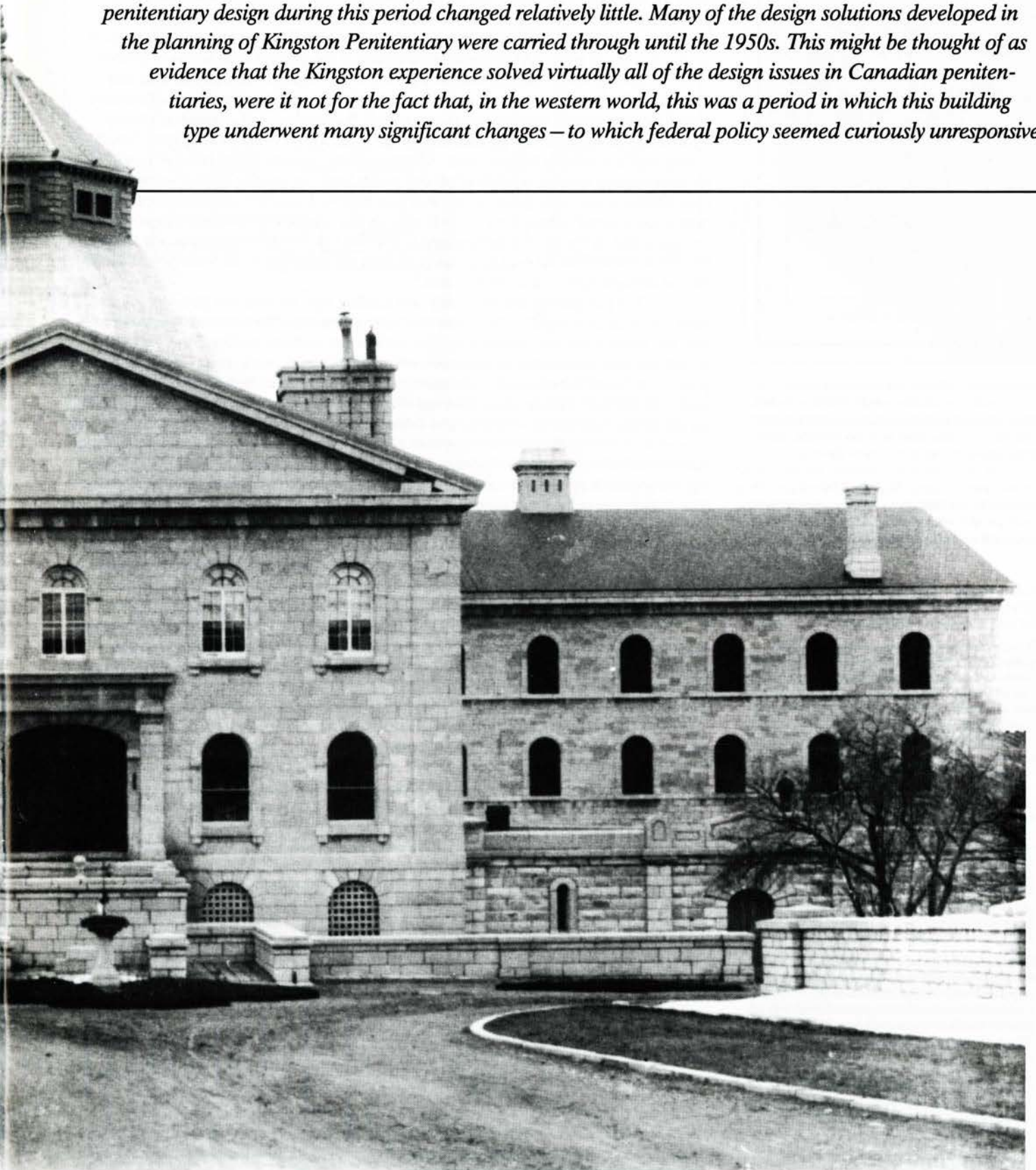

“THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...”
FEDERAL PRISON DESIGN,
1833-1950

B Y D A N A J O H N S O N



This paper examines the way in which the federal government planned its correctional facilities between the opening of Kingston Penitentiary in 1835 (when, of course, no federal government existed) and the establishment of a new generation of medium-security institutions at Joyceville in 1950. The principles guiding Canadian federal penitentiary design during this period changed relatively little. Many of the design solutions developed in the planning of Kingston Penitentiary were carried through until the 1950s. This might be thought of as evidence that the Kingston experience solved virtually all of the design issues in Canadian penitentiaries, were it not for the fact that, in the western world, this was a period in which this building type underwent many significant changes – to which federal policy seemed curiously unresponsive.



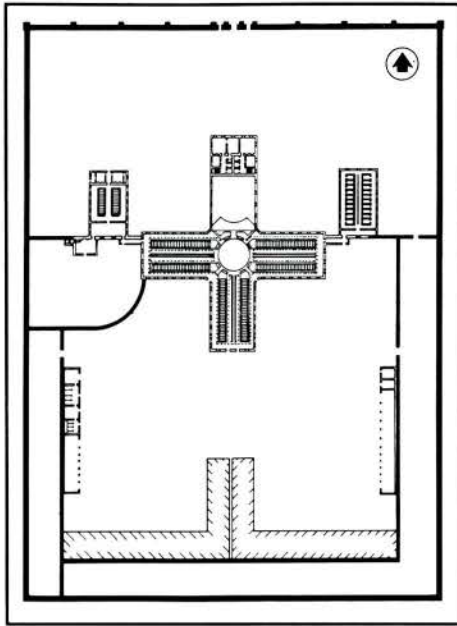


Figure 1 (above). Kingston Penitentiary, Kingston, Ontario, approved plan of the institution; William Powers, architect. (National Archives [NA], MG11, Colonial Office Papers, Vol. 156, "Blue Book for Upper Canada, 1838." Plan redrafted by Michel Benoît, Parks Canada)

Figure 2 (previous pages). Kingston Penitentiary, built between 1834 and 1860; William Powers with William Coverdale and Edward Horsey, architects. Front elevation of the main cellblock, c. 1895. (NA, PA-46255)

Kingston Penitentiary was established as a result of the redrafting of the criminal code of Upper Canada between 1831 and 1833, during which the number of capital offenses—those for which the punishment was the death penalty—was reduced from somewhere between 250 and 300 to 12.¹ As an alternative, the legislature substituted a sentence of commitment to a provincial rather than a local jail. The establishment of a central institution of incarceration at Kingston was the logical outcome of the criminal code review of 1831-33.

Though authorities agreed that Upper Canada required a central *jail*, what they decided to build was a *penitentiary*, which differs from other penal facilities in its reformatory intent. Jails and prisons were places of confinement, punishment, and deterrence. Penitentiaries served these three functions as well, but they also sought to perform a piece of social engineering in reforming the individual. Advocates of the Auburn system believed that, through religious training, a regiment of hard labour, and long periods of silent self-examination, inmates would come to see the error of their ways and, coupled with the unhappy nature of prison life, would commit themselves to a Godly life. The new institution at Kingston was the first in British North America designed to perform this reformatory role and was among the first institutions world-wide to be designed from the beginning to carry out personal reformation through architecture and regiment.²

The penitentiary was an entirely new building type, its form and philosophy derived from American prototypes.³ There were two leading contemporary systems of penal reformation, the Auburn and the Pennsylvania, each with its own evolving building form. Advocates of both systems believed that confinement, religious instruction, work, and silence would prove to be powerful reformatory influences in turning the criminal into a law-abiding citizen. Both believed that religious instruction was central to personal reformation and that a life of silence encouraged self-examination. The differences between the systems in philosophy, however, were fundamental: the Auburn system directed that inmates live in solitary confinement but work communally; the Pennsylvania system required solitary confinement in both working and non-working hours. These differences in philosophy had clear structural implications. The Auburn system involved the construction of small inmate living spaces, always located within a single cellblock in tiers which were structurally unrelated to the enclosing exterior shell. The Pennsylvania system housed inmates in low-rise buildings in which the cells were much larger and were placed in rows along the exterior walls. Though its buildings have undergone significant changes, Kingston Penitentiary is the world's oldest Auburn-styled penitentiary retaining both its original plan and its original cellblock.⁴

To design Kingston Penitentiary, the authorities had to look outside the colony for a suitable plan. The geographically closest model, at Auburn, New York, was the prototype of the Auburn system, and the institution possessed a group of administrators-cum-architects capable of offering suitable advice to the inexperienced. The master plan for Kingston Penitentiary (figure 1) and the plan of the main cellblock (its elevation is shown in figure 2) were both the work of William Powers, former deputy warden of Auburn and the first deputy warden of Kingston Penitentiary.⁵ Powers' master plan included five major elements:

- 1) A clear hierarchy of functional spaces leading from the front gate through the administration building, to inmate services and living spaces, to work areas, all within a walled enclosure with guard towers at the corners. (Powers' master plan did not articulate the guard towers, but his written descriptions make their existence clear.)
- 2) A hierarchy of spaces so organized that staff and inmate facilities—the latter originally included one of the province's finest hospitals, a dining room, a kitchen, a library, and a school—were, for reasons of security, all located within a single building.
- 3) A main cellblock, laid out in the shape of a Greek cross, to house these various functions effectively while maintaining a high degree of inmate supervision.
- 4) Cellular facilities of the Auburn type, in keeping with the philosophical direction of the institution. That is, inmates lived in small cells placed in tiers in the centre of the cellblock, structurally independent of (and some ten feet from) the outside walls. The original Auburn-type cells at Kingston Penitentiary measured 30 inches wide, 8.3 feet long, and 7.5 feet high. They were acclaimed by one authority, the chaplain at Auburn State Prison, to be "the best and most pleasant solitary cell ever constructed."⁶
- 5) An extremely simple decorative programme. In the judgement of advocates of the Auburn system, architectural embellishment was both expensive and counterproductive to the reformatory intentions of the institution. Later architects ignored these dictates at Kingston and added a measure of stylistic complexity to other wings, but generally a simplified treatment of a classical vocabulary was employed, decorative elements being used most effectively on the buildings visible to the public.

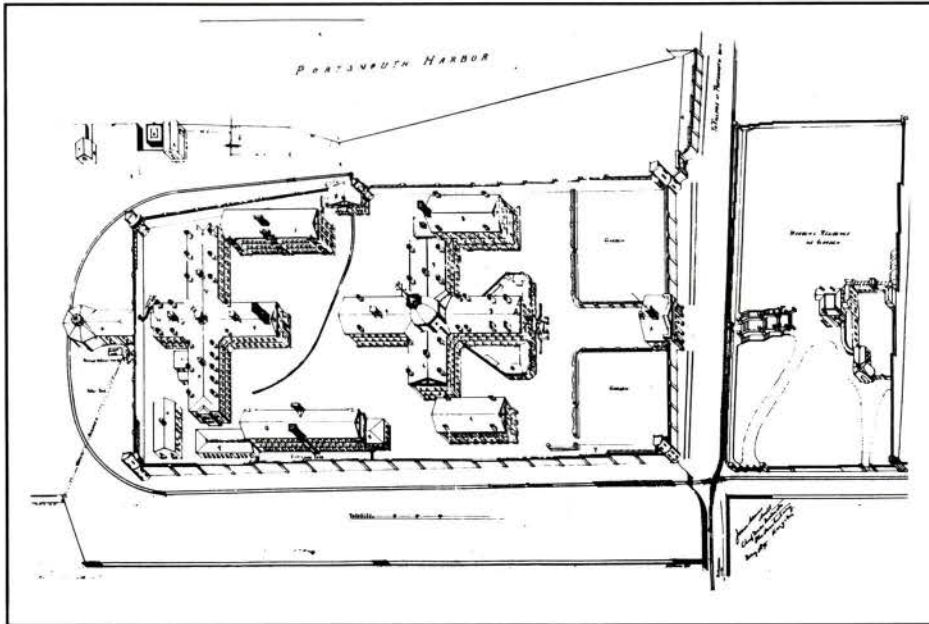
Powers' master plan for Kingston Penitentiary was not followed in all of its details (figure 3). His Greek-cross-shaped main cellblock, with its intricate cellular arrangement (figure 4), was constructed in stages between 1834 and 1860, all but the original south cellblock

1 Canada, National Archives, MG11, Colonial Office Records, C047, Vol. 148, Upper Canada Blue Books for 1833, microfilm reel B2907, p. 54.

2 Earlier Auburn-style penitentiaries were usually grafted onto existing institutions. Kingston offered a rare and important opportunity to design a penitentiary without reference to earlier programmes or structural resources. A previous Auburn-type experiment in design, at Sing Sing, had been judged a failure. See United Kingdom, "Report of William Crawford, Esq. to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department," in *Parliamentary Papers* (1834; reprint, Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), Appendix, for an account of early Auburn- and Pennsylvania-style penitentiaries in the United States.

3 The early development of systems of reformation and their structural implications are detailed in Norman Johnston, *The Human Cage: A Brief History of Prison Architecture* (New York: Walker and Walker, 1973), and Robin Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

4 The founding, design, and early years of Kingston Penitentiary are well documented and have been the subject of several studies: William George Christopher Norman, "A Chapter of Canadian Penal History: The Early Years of the Provincial Penitentiary at Kingston and the Commission of Enquiry into its Management," Master's thesis, Queen's University, 1977; Rainer Baehre, "The Origins of the Penitentiary System in Upper Canada," *Ontario History* 69 (October 1977): 185-207; Jennifer McKendry, "The Early History of the Provincial Penitentiary, Kingston, Ontario," *SSAC Bulletin* 14, no. 4 (December 1989): 93-105; and C.J. Taylor, "The Kingston, Ontario Penitentiary and Moral Architecture," *Social History/Histoire sociale* 12, no. 24 (November 1979): 385-408.



wing by the inmates themselves. Powers originally proposed a T-shaped workshop flanked by parallel service buildings, all connected by aisles of inspection so that guards could survey the inmates in the yards without themselves being seen. This proved too expensive and Powers himself altered the master plan to modify the form of the south workshops from a T- to a cross-shaped plan in imitation of his main cellblock. Later architects, William Coverdale and then Edward Horsey, changed the flanking service buildings into additional workshops to house programmes of contract labour which were initiated after Powers left.

For nearly forty years after it was opened, the plan and the method of management of Kingston Penitentiary had virtually no impact on the nature of penal programmes or on penal design elsewhere in British North America. Other colonies established jails and central or district prisons, but none borrowed any significant elements of the Kingston design and none included a true reformatory programme.⁷ This remained the case until the federal government established a second penitentiary at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Quebec, in 1873 (figure 5).

The institution at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul had first opened in the mid-1850s as a convent, and was later converted by the Province of Canada to serve as a reformatory for boys. After Confederation it was expanded by the addition of a single cellblock, and then sold back to Dominion authorities in 1872. Rather than demolish the existing facilities, federal architects played with several alternatives for expansion.⁸ One proposal forecast the construction of a Greek-cross-shaped cellblock behind the existing complex and attached to it by corridors. This distinctly odd design illustrates the federal government's complete acceptance of the Kingston structural model, whatever organizational and management problems such an arrangement might have caused. Fortunately for the administration at Saint Vincent-de-Paul, this proposal was not accepted. What was finally done was to make the existing cellblock the basis of a Greek-cross-shaped facility of four wings focused on a central domed hall (figure 6). This was constructed in stages by the inmates between 1874 and 1887.

Though its decorative programme was quite different from that at Kingston, the plan of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul followed all five of the structural principles adopted at Kingston (figures 1 and 6). There was the same clear hierarchy of functional spaces leading from the front entrance through the administration building, to inmate service and living spaces, to work areas to the rear, all within a walled enclosure with guard towers at the corners. This hierarchy of spaces was so organized that administrative and inmate facilities were all located within a single building. The main cellblock was laid out in the shape of a Greek cross, though here the institution's existing structures required that it be joined to a fronting administration building. Finally, the cellular facilities were of the inside, or Auburn, type, even though the extravagant hopes of reforming inmates by confining them for long periods of time in a cramped cell had generally been abandoned more than a generation before.

Though the form of the cellblock at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul clearly derived from the Kingston model, there were two important departures. Powers' system of tiers of inward-facing cells separated by an inspectors' corridor had never worked at Kingston, and federal architects of the 1870s abandoned this arrangement for a more traditional Auburn plan of two

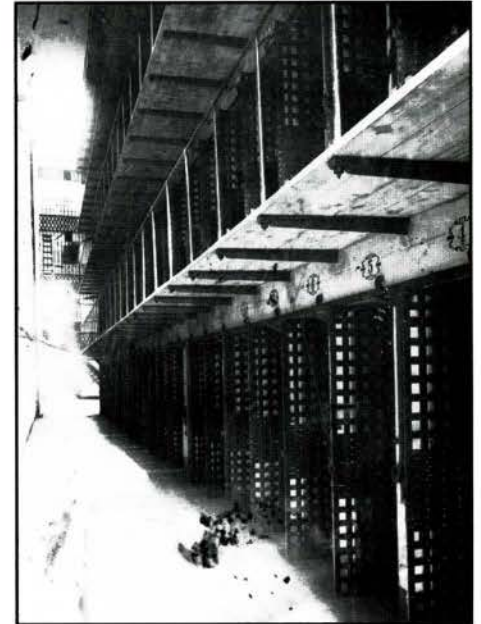


Figure 3 (left). Kingston Penitentiary, bird's-eye view of the institution in 1895; James Adams, del. (Queen's University Archives [QUA], Kingston Architectural Plans, no. 29)

Figure 4 (above). Kingston Penitentiary, east wing cellblock, view of interior looking towards the dome in 1892 with the tiers of cells on the right, the inmates' corridor beside it and, beyond the wall on the left, the inspection corridors. (Kingston Penitentiary Museum)

5 There has been considerable speculation about the architect of Kingston Penitentiary. Powers is identified as the architect in Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Toqueville, *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application to France* (1833; reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964). The various stages in the development of the master plan between 1832 and 1834 may be derived from Powers' correspondence with the commissioners appointed by the legislature of Upper Canada to superintend the planning and construction of the institution, preserved in the papers of John Macaulay, one of the commissioners. The originals are in the Archives of Ontario and microfilm copies are held by both the National Archives at Ottawa and Queen's University Archives at Kingston.

6 Archives of Ontario, Macaulay Papers, Chaplain B.C. Smith to John Macaulay, 19 October 1833.

7 A possible exception is the Central Prison for Ontario in Toronto, construction of which began in 1870 to the plans of the Toronto architect James Smith. See Donald G. Wetherell, "To Discipline and Train: Adult Rehabilitative Programmes in Ontario Prisons, 1874-1900," *Social History/Histoire sociale* 12, no. 23 (May 1979): 145-65.

8 For an examination of the development of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, see Dana Johnson, "Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Penitentiary, Laval, Quebec," Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office [FHBRO] Building Report 89-33, manuscript on file, Canadian Inventory of Historic Building [CIHB], 1990, pp. 8-16 and figs. 4 to 13.

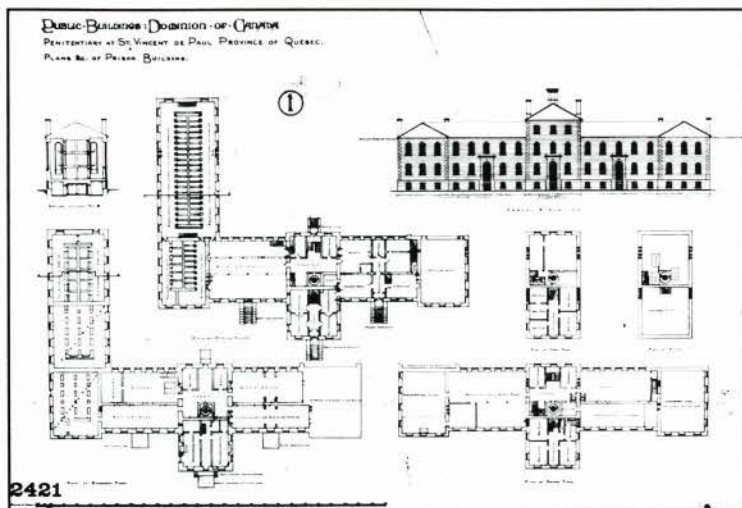


Figure 5 (above). Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Penitentiary, Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Quebec. Front elevation, plans, and section of the institution after its purchase by the federal government in 1873. (NA, Cartographical and Audio-Visual Archives Division [CAVAD], RG11M, 79003/6, Item 395, NMC-57370)

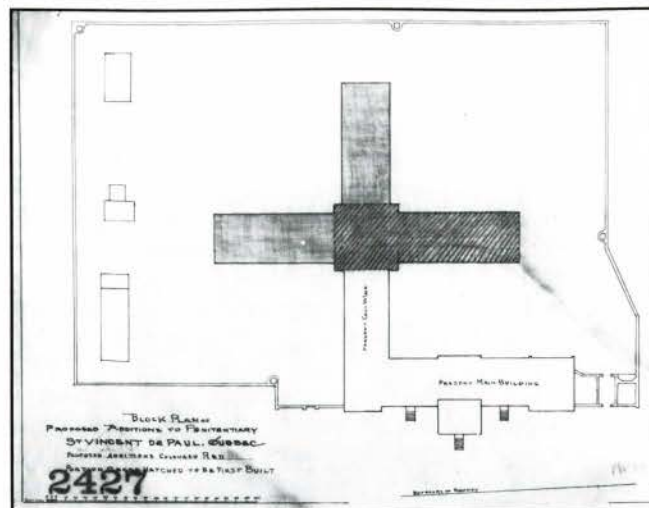


Figure 6 (right). Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Penitentiary, proposed expansion plan as executed. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/6, Item 3103, NMC-57378)

rows of inside cells placed back-to-back and facing (but structurally independent of) the outside walls. Saint-Vincent-de-Paul also introduced a new and enduring organizing principle: its fronting administration building was located outside the external wall, and this—rather than the Kingston arrangement of placing all but the gatehouse within the enclosure—became a feature of later federal institutions.

The expansion of the Dominion from the original four provinces of 1867 to include Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (1870), British Columbia (1871), and Prince Edward Island (1873) required a corresponding expansion of the correctional system. As a result, the federal government constructed three identical institutions, one at Stony Mountain for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (figure 7) and one at New Westminster for British Columbia, both begun in 1874, and one at Dorchester, New Brunswick, for the three Maritime provinces, begun in 1876 (figure 8).⁹

These three new institutions differed from Saint-Vincent-de-Paul insofar as their planning was unencumbered by existing buildings. The identical plans for the main cellblocks at Stony Mountain and New Westminster consisted of a T-shaped fronting administration building in the Second Empire style with an Auburn-styled cellblock behind (figure 9). Dorchester was similar in layout, though differed slightly in its scale and detailing (figure 10).

Though variations in size and external appearance might mean that parallels with Kingston seem somewhat strained, these three new facilities employed the planning principles adopted at Kingston. There was the same clear hierarchy of functional spaces from the front entrance to work areas at the rear, all within a walled and corner-guarded enclosure, so organized that administrative and inmate facilities were located within a single building. The cells were still of the inside, or Auburn, type, but followed the plan used at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, with tiers of a double row of outward-looking cells structurally separate from the exterior walls. Buildings housing the labour programmes also followed the linear plan of the flanking workshops employed at Kingston and those erected early in the 20th century at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, rather than the cross-shaped plan of the original workshop building at Kingston.

In planning expansion of the main cellblocks at these new institutions, government architects wrestled with the appropriateness of following the Kingston Greek-cross model or devising some different and innovative solutions. At Dorchester, the Kingston model was adopted when the first plans were prepared: they made provision for two additional wings of cells constructed off the dome (figure 11). At Stony Mountain and presumably at New Westminster (expansion plans for the latter appear not to have survived), enlargement was intended to take a slightly different form. Because of their isolation and the consequent need for a broader range of inmate services, expansion took the form of four wings arrayed off of a dome located at the end of the existing cellblock (figure 12).¹⁰

There were limited occasions for planning new federal correctional facilities for three decades after the completion of these federal penitentiaries. The Department of Justice did, however, have three opportunities between 1880 and 1910 to design institutions to a different format. One was the reconstruction of Kingston Penitentiary itself. The main cellblock, heralded as the most advanced Auburn-style institution in the world when it opened in 1838, was increasingly seen as unacceptable because of the size of its cells. The warden argued for an entirely new institution of five wings springing from a central dome, but central authorities

9 The early history of Stony Mountain is given in Dana Johnson, "Manitoba, or Stony Mountain, Penitentiary, Stony Mountain, Manitoba," FHBRO Building Report 89-35, manuscript on file, CIHB, 1992, pp. 3-11 and figs. 8 to 25. For Dorchester, see Dana Johnson, "Dorchester Penitentiary, Dorchester, New Brunswick," FHBRO Building Report 89-34, manuscript on file, CIHB, 1991, pp. 2-11 and figs. 5 to 20.

10 Only at Dorchester was the master plan followed to any degree. At both Stony Mountain and New Westminster these plans were ignored. The main buildings at Stony Mountain were demolished after World War I and the replacement institution also follows the Kingston model in its layout of elements.

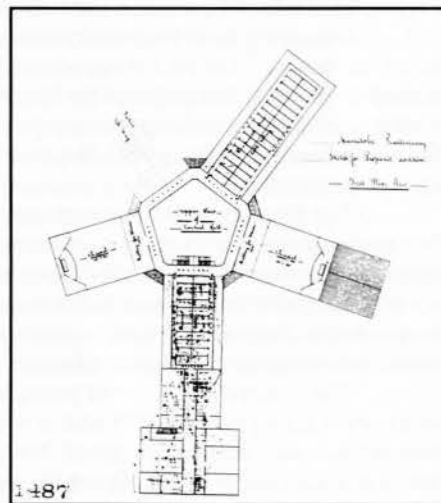
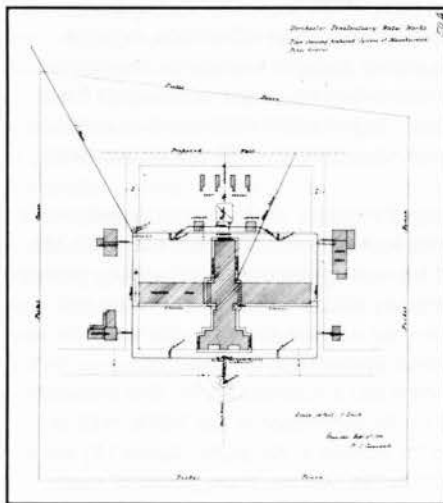
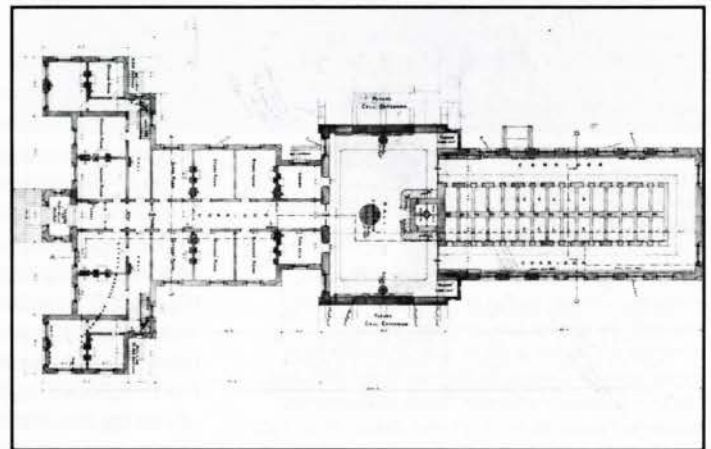
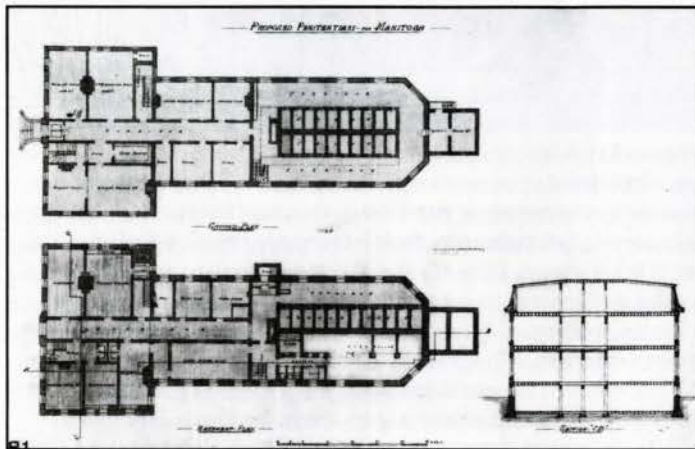
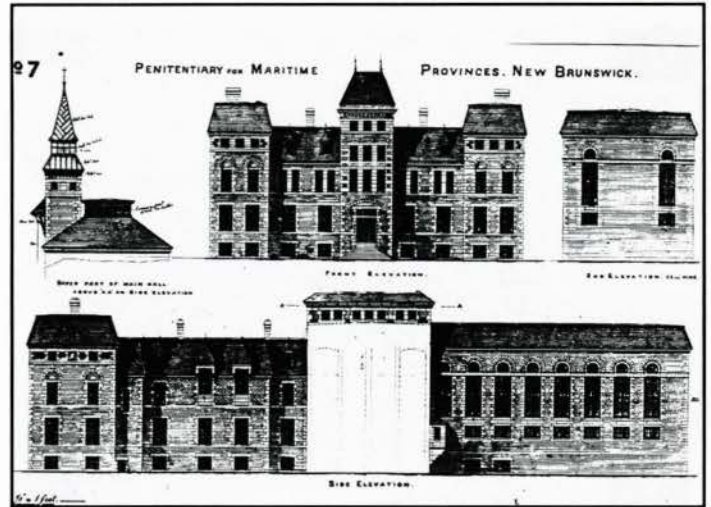
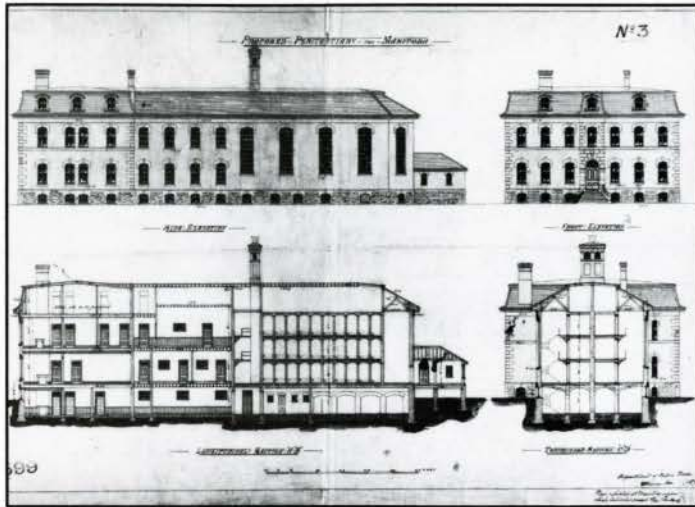


Figure 7 (top left). Manitoba Penitentiary, Stony Mountain, Manitoba, begun in 1874; Thomas Painter, architect. Elevations and sections. The penitentiary at New Westminster used the identical plans. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/36, Item 2137, NMC-47417)

Figure 8 (top right). Dorchester Penitentiary, Dorchester, New Brunswick, begun in 1876; John W. H. Watts of the Chief Architect's Office, Department of Public Works, architect. Elevations and details. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/15, Item 92, NMC-57901)

Figure 9 (middle left). Manitoba Penitentiary, plan of the basement and ground floor of the original cellblock/administration building. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/36, Item 2063, NMC-47407)

Figure 10 (middle right). Dorchester Penitentiary, plan of the ground floor of the main building. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/15, Item 88, NMC-57905)

Figure 11 (bottom left). Dorchester Penitentiary, plan of the institution after expansion, c. 1880. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/15, Item 111, NMC-57894)

Figure 12 (bottom right). Manitoba Penitentiary, plan of the first floor of the administration building/main cellblock after expansion. (NA, CAVAD, RG11M, 79003/36, Item 2069, NMC-47389)

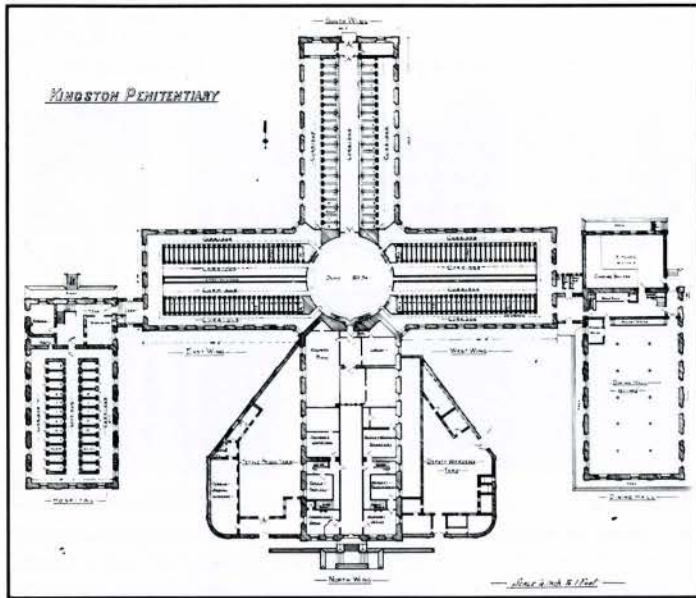


Figure 13 (above). Kingston Penitentiary, plan of the main cellblock in 1895; James Adams, del. The south wing (top of plan) had already been altered from its original configuration to a double row of outward-looking cells. (QUA, Kingston Architectural Plans, no. 29)

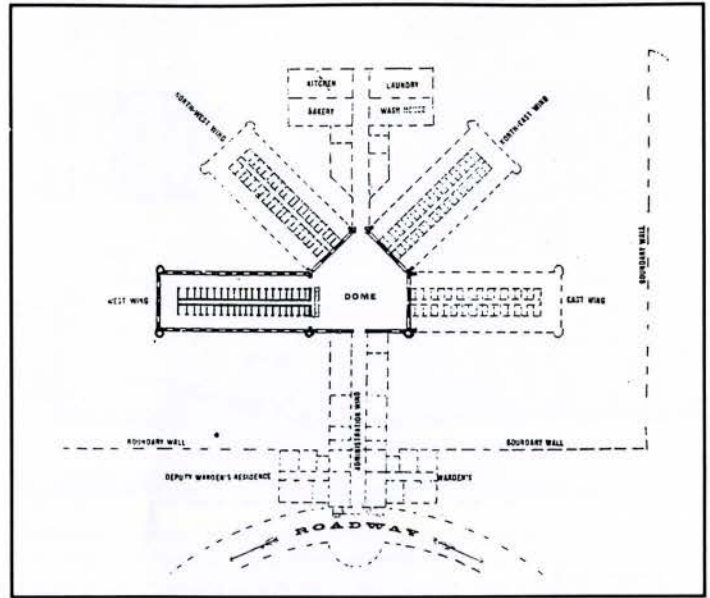


Figure 14 (right). Reformatory for Young Offenders, Alexandria, Ontario, begun in 1895; James Adams, architect. The project was cancelled before completion. ("Report of the Minister of Justice as to Penitentiaries in Canada for the Year Ended 30th June, 1895," in Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers 39, no. 11 [1896], Return 18, p. 105)

finally decided to reconstruct the cellblocks within the existing walls. The interior of each cellblock was removed in rotation and a new cellblock of four tiers of back-to-back Auburn cells was put in its place (figure 13).

Two planned projects offered opportunities for innovation: a prison for women at Kingston (1892) and a Dominion reformatory at Alexandria, Ontario (1896).¹¹ No plans for the women's prison seem to survive in federal records. It is therefore impossible to say what planning principles guided its organization. Plans for the Alexandria project were prepared (figure 14), contracts for construction were awarded, and construction was actually begun before the entire project was unceremoniously cancelled by the newly elected Liberal government. Though the reformatory was (wrongly) heralded as an innovative institution unique in North America, its plan largely followed the established design standards of the Department of Justice. It consisted of a fronting structure, combining an administration building with residences for the institution's senior staff,¹² which led to a dome off which were placed five wings housing cells and inmate services. Shops were located in a separate building to the rear.

One new federal penitentiary was designed and opened at Edmonton, Alberta, during this period.¹³ The plan of this new facility, it should come as no surprise, was almost an exact duplicate of that prepared for Dorchester some 40 years earlier, and its plan for expansion also followed the Kingston example of a cross-shaped cellblock focused on a central dome. Construction began in 1903, but the institution was closed in 1919 before expansion could be completed.

The Kingston model was seen once again in the second of the Justice department's 20th century penitentiaries for men, at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.¹⁴ Opened in 1911, this institution too adopted the well-established plan of a fronting administration building leading to a cross-shaped cellblock which included administrative offices and inmate services and living quarters. Shops were located in two buildings—one a linear structure, the second a T-shaped facility similar to that seen in Powers' approved master plan for Kingston.

The concepts of a separate prison for women and a reformatory for first offenders were revived during the late 1920s and, in contrast to the experience of the 1890s, both of these projects were actually completed. The prison for women at Kingston (figure 15) was a bizarre structure whose layout can only be explained by the overwhelming power of established norms within the Justice department. Its plan ruthlessly applied the same principles used in the design of the men's prison almost exactly a century before. A classically-detailed fronting administration building led to a cellblock of the Auburn type, with tiers of outward-facing cells unattached to the exterior of the cellblock. The whole was surrounded by 28-foot-high walls that were four feet thick. There was, however, one departure from long-established norms: because of the small number of inmates expected within the foreseeable future, the expense of building separate work areas was impossible to justify and shops were initially located in the basement of the cellblock.¹⁵

Reformatories for first offenders were planned in the 1920s for Collins Bay, near Kingston, and Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Quebec. These two new institutions were to utilize an identical plan, and for the first time the design standards and formats of the Kingston model

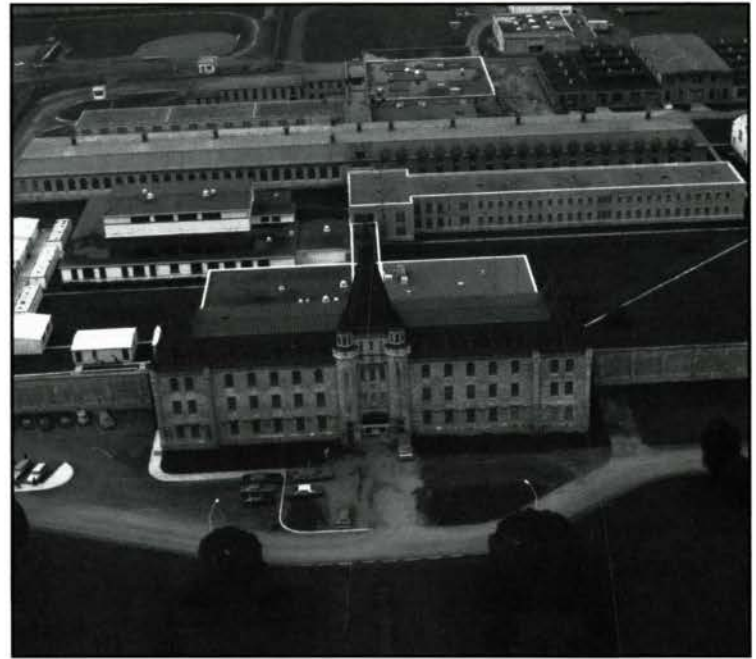
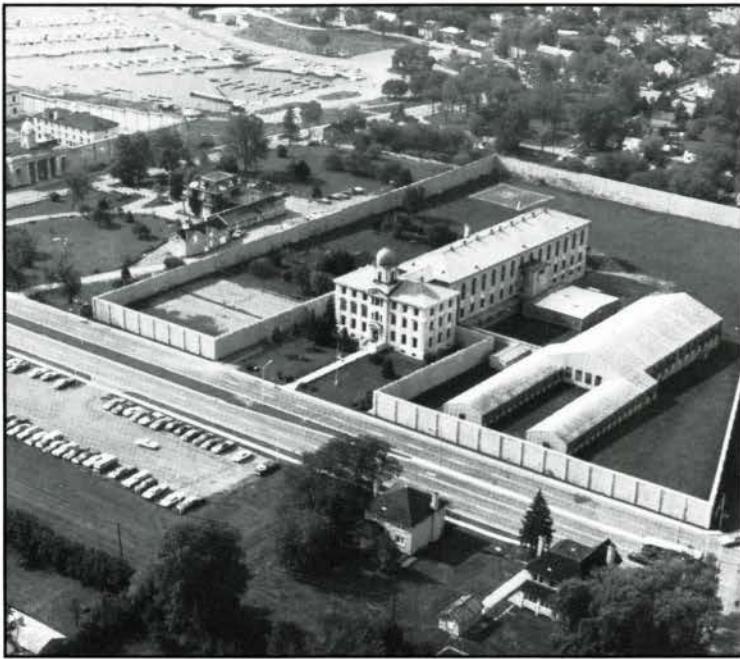
11 The first project is noted in Canada, *Report of the Minister of Justice as to Penitentiaries in Canada for the Year Ended 30th June 1892* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1893), xi, but no structural details are given. The latter project is discussed in *Report of the Minister of Public Works on the Works Under His Control for the Fiscal Year Ended 30th June, 1896* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1897), 38.

12 Further evidence of the theme of continuity of design elements bordering on a fixation may be seen in the fact that this element of the Alexandria Reformatory plan is suspiciously similar to the north administrative and residential wing in one of William Powers' preliminary plans for Kingston Penitentiary in 1833. This preliminary Kingston plan is illustrated in Taylor, 388.

13 The plan of the building is discussed in *Report of the Minister of Public Works on the Works Under His Control for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1903* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1904), part III, 22.

14 The early history of this institution is discussed in Dana Johnson, "Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan," FHBRO Building Report 89-36, manuscript on file, CIHB, 1993.

15 For a critique of the plan of this institution, see Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission to Investigate the Penal System of Canada* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1938), chap. 26.



were not followed. Instead of the cross-shaped cellblock seen at every maximum-security institution built between 1834 and 1934, these plans adopted a fundamentally different form, called the telephone pole. First employed in French prisons for wayward youths in the 1880s and popular for English prisons at the end of the 19th century, this organizational approach placed all institutional services in specially designed wings located to either side of a central corridor running from a fronting administrative building. The institution at Collins Bay was constructed, but the plan was modified midway through construction (figure 16). Though its walls and services were installed in the 1930s, the Quebec facility was not erected until the 1950s, and then to an entirely different plan.¹⁶

In spite of this use of a relatively innovative planning approach, these institutions still showed the Kingston influence. Collins Bay maintained the traditional sequence of spaces from the entry through the administration building to shops at the rear. In spite of its lower level of security and its dated (but in the federal context, innovative) plan, the institution also placed all facilities within a strongly fortified walled compound.

Depression, war, and reconstruction delayed plans to recast the federal correctional system until the mid-1950s, when the Department of Justice prepared proposals for a series of new medium- and minimum-security institutions, the first of which was a farm camp at Joyceville, Ontario. This signalled a programme of structural reform which greatly expanded the correctional system from the eight institutions of 1936 to the 40 which make up the service today. After more than a century of almost unthinking adherence to a structural and planning approach derived largely from the Kingston model, federal government design staff have, since the 1970s, leapt into the forefront of modern correctional design.¹⁷ In this sense we have come full circle: current work is widely regarded as embodying the most advanced of contemporary correctional design—just as Kingston Penitentiary was praised in its day for its modernity.

Figure 15 (above left). Prison for Women, Kingston, Ontario, built between 1924 and 1933; architectural staff of the Department of Justice, architects. Aerial view of the institution, c. 1980. (Correctional Service Canada)

Figure 16 (above). Collins Bay Institution, Collins Bay, Ontario, begun in 1930; architectural staff of the Department of Justice, architects. Aerial view of the institution, c. 1980. (Correctional Service Canada)

16 Ibid., chap. 23 (Quebec) and chap. 25 (Collins Bay), for a discussion of the plans for these buildings. The unexecuted plan for the Quebec building is located in the architectural plans collection, Technical Services, Public Works Canada/Correctional Services Dedicated Unit, Laval, Quebec.

17 The modernization of Canadian prison design in the 1960s and 1970s is clearly expressed in United Nations Social Defence Research Fund, *Prison Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1975), which illustrates four Canadian federal penitentiaries of this period and places them in a world context.