

10 Things You Might Not Know About the Big House



Image: KP 1971

1. **When it was built in 1835, Kingston Penitentiary (KP) had some of the narrowest cells of any prison in the world:** only 74 cm (26 inches) wide, scarcely enough room to accommodate an adult human body. While cells have gotten bigger over the years, they occasionally hold two prisoners at the federal level. Double- and triple-bunking is pervasive in provincial and territorial jails.

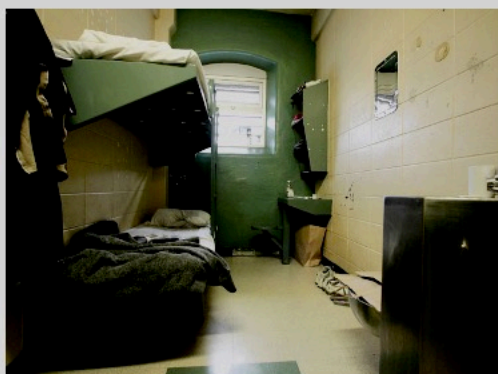


Image: Double-bunking in a Prison Cell

2. **Children as young as eight years old** were incarcerated at KP. They were subject to public lashing for breaking prison rules. In 1845, a 10-year-old boy was imprisoned for a 7-year term and publicly lashed 57 times in the space of eight and a half months. His offences were staring and laughing. An 11-year-old French-Canadian boy received 12 lashes on Christmas Eve 1844 for speaking his mother-tongue. Today, youth as young as 12 are still imprisoned in Canada.

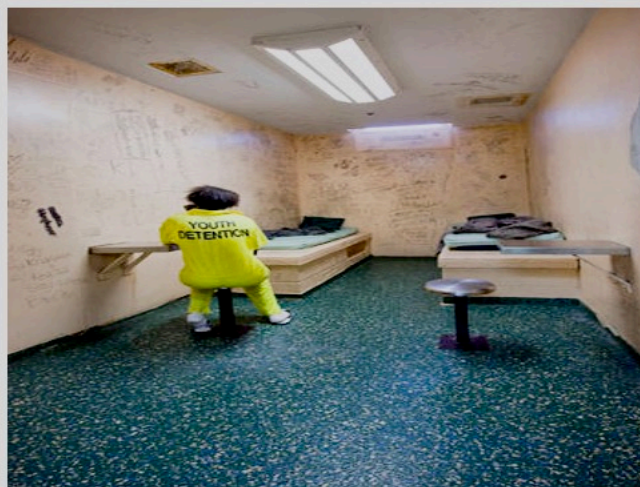


Image: Youth Detention

3. **Corporal punishment continued at KP until 1972.** Prisoner Roger Caron's book *Go-Boy!* (1978) covered in graphic detail how prisoners were subjected to corporal punishment in KP including by being whipped with leather straps designed to inflict physical pain. The strap had holes drilled through it to decrease wind resistance and increase the force of each stroke. Although corporal punishment was abolished in Canada in 1972, prisoners continue to be subject to violence at the hands of staff in Canadian penitentiaries and other sites of confinement justified on the grounds of necessary use of force.

4. **Solitary confinement was a common practice throughout KP's history,** isolating prisoners for days, weeks, months, and even years at a time. Solitary confinement is a harsh punishment which increases rates of self-harm and deaths by suicide among prisoners. It is widely accepted in the legal and academic community that solitary confinement constitutes "cruel and unusual punishment."

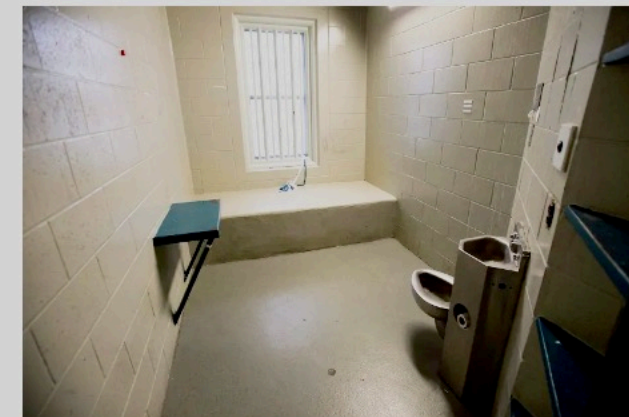


Image: The 'Hole' at KP

5. **Prisoners were subjects in unethical scientific experiments while imprisoned in the 1960s-1970s.** Experiments included sensory deprivation, behavioural modification, electroshock, and pharmacology. In one sensory deprivation study, 10 KP prisoners spent 7 days in dark isolation cells as researchers studied the effects on desire for audiovisual stimulation. Prisoners reported experiencing panic and hallucinations.



Image: James and Don Hogan seeking justice in Kingston

6. **KP was a site of mass-incarceration of Indigenous prisoners**, an ongoing issue in prisons discussed in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in 2015. Published in 2019, the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women* also spoke about this issue in the context of women. The incarceration rate for Indigenous people is over 900 per 100,000. That is approximately 7 times the overall rate of imprisonment in Canada.



Image: Rally Following Gerald Stanley's Acquittal

7. **KP was a "dumping ground for bad guards,"** with some staff terrorizing colleagues and prisoners according to a 1989 report commissioned by KP's warden. In 1999, at new warden Monty Bourke's request, the RCMP began an investigation code-named "Correct Zero" that would use prisoners as paid informants. As a result, 40 guards were disciplined and 8 guards were fired for selling/buying drugs, alcohol, protected information, and prisoner beatings.



Image: CBC News Coverage of "Correct Zero"

8. **Richardson Stadium on the grounds of Queen's University was built in a former limestone quarry on the Kingston Penitentiary farm reserve**, which once covered 100 acres of land between King Street and Bath Road. Jean Royce Hall, John Orr Tower, and Duncan MacArthur Hall are built on the former prison farm on grounds cleared by prisoners at KP. Queens' students live and study on this land.



Image: Collins Bay Quarry, 1936

9. **The last execution to occur in Kingston was in 1948.** KP prisoner Austin Craft was hung in the Frontenac County Jail, behind the Frontenac County Courthouse, which is close to Queen's campus. Capital punishment was practiced until 1962 and legal until 1976 in Canada. While executions are no longer legal, many prisoners still die while doing time.



Image: Frontenac County Jail

10. **Correctional Service Canada opened KP for public tours in 2013 as a deliberate PR strategy.** A recent analysis of federal government documents obtained through Access to Information requests by *Carceral Cultures Research Initiative* researchers reveals that the first public tours following KP's closure were initiated by CSC to deflect critiques of the decision to close the penitentiary from its staff and their union, journalists and politicians, and Kingstonians.



Image: 2013 photo of a hallway at KP.

To learn more about the history of imprisonment in Kingston and across Canada, see the following resources:

Carceral Cultures Research Initiative
<http://www.carceralcultures.ca>

Journal of Prisoners on Prison
<http://www.jpp.org/>

Justice Behind the Walls
<http://www.justicebehindthewalls.net>

P4W Memorial Collective
<https://p4wmemorialcollective.com/>