

Prologue

The original jail and courthouse of Cornwall Ontario burned down in 1826. About a year after the fire, the British crown approved the construction of a replacement building. The new structure, built on the downtown waterfront in 1833, kept a regency architectural style with its square shape and evenly spaced windows.

The left half of the new prison doubled-up as living quarters for the appointed governor and his family as well as an office. Over the years, the live-in governors' wives acted as a matron to the female inmates or became head nurse.

Although the two-story stone building looked beautiful from the outside, the living conditions on the inside were atrocious.

Within the cold and gloomy confinements, the general treatment of the jail's occupants was incredibly harsh. Not only was there a lot of violence between inmates, but guards often tortured the prisoners in their custody. Sometimes the beatings and lashings led to their unfortunate deaths.

Other deaths by illness, suicide, murder, and executions at the gallows occurred there. Many unclaimed cadavers were then buried on the premise.

During the 1985 expansion of the North part of the jail, several human remains were dug up from the grounds of the exercise yard. It is estimated that hundreds more are still buried under the current yard and what is now a parking lot.

The jail originally incarcerated all types of prisoners in its single cell block below the courthouse. Men, women, and even children accused of all types of crimes were mixed with mental patients, as the jail also served as an asylum. In addition, it became a refuge for the homeless and even housed the families of some inmates at times, so was often overcrowded.

There weren't enough individual cells with beds for everyone and absolutely no privacy.

Since violent and homicidal criminals on death row weren't separated from minor offenders like debtors and thieves, or those deemed insane, the jail wasn't a safe space for anyone. To stay alive at night, you practically had to sleep with one eye open.

Not even the different governors in office or their families felt completely at ease despite the cell blocks being locked, so the children were kept away from the prison as much as possible.

There had been many escapes from that prison, the first being in 1835 and the last in 1995, so you could never be too careful.

Due to the city of Cornwall's rising population and crimes, two new cell blocks with concrete walls and metal ceilings were added in 1869. This allowed the separation of prisoners by gender and severity of their criminal acts, but it was still a scary place.

The cell block used for keeping dangerous criminals became known for holding members of the Hell's Angels gang in the 1960's. The windows of the other cell block got covered up during the many restorations. Both cell blocks were nicknamed accordingly.

In 1936, dungeons accessible through hidden trap doors were discovered inside three of the cells from the windowless cell block. Those dark holes were not on any of the architectural plans which begged the question about what other secrets the jail held.

For instance, Governor Ralph Cook was found murdered in 1938. Upon further investigation, it was concluded that Governor Cook had taken his own life. There was no explanation as to why the political man chose to shoot himself inside the prison's garage that day.

The speculations about an escaped convict returning for revenge transformed into rumors about evil presences lurking in the shadows of the jail. Neither theory was reassuring.

In 1959, another extension to the jail was built which was used as a two-story apartment for another governor and his family. The proximity to the criminals and possible restless spirits continued to be disconcerting.

The governors' daughter was sent away to a boarding school due to concerns about her safety after being threatened by an inmate. This governor retired in 1971 and a superintendent was hired to look after the building. From that point on, nobody other than prison inmates lived in the building.

Another major change of the early 1970's included the modernisation of the jail. Humanitarian protests from appalled citizens led to the construction of a plumbing system and wiring of electrical circuits. Communal toilets and showers were put in each cell block for the prisoners, plus security cameras and electrical door locks were installed. The metal cots inside each cell were eventually replaced with cement beds. Around 1990, an infirmary as well as a kitchen were added.

Although the living conditions improved over time, remnants of the horrible past seemed to remain.

At night, the faint sound of metal chains or keys rattling, and even mysterious footsteps could be heard in the empty stairways and halls. The sound of children crying, insane laughter, screams for help, and whispered words echoed in the building. Strange shadows or figures were sometimes seen.

When the jail shut down in 2002, the remaining inmates were relocated to the Ottawa penitentiary.

The Cornwall jail became a historical site and opened its doors to the public. Guided tours were given five times per day, during which visitors and staff members often claimed to see or hear unusual things. Mysterious 9-1-1 calls came from there on occasion.

After several years of unexplained occurrences, professional paranormal investigators were called in.

With the high amount of paranormal activity recorded, it was concluded that the Cornwall historic jail was haunted.