

# The Peterborough County Jail: A Quick History of the 160 Year Old Institution



## Architecture

The jail was constructed in 1842, to be an in-between of larger jails in Toronto and Lindsay. It was simplistic and aesthetically pleasing, positioned so it could not be seen from the street. It looked out East on the Otonabee river to inspire freedom, but at the courthouse to the West to reinforce discipline.

*\* The stones quarried from Jackson Park*



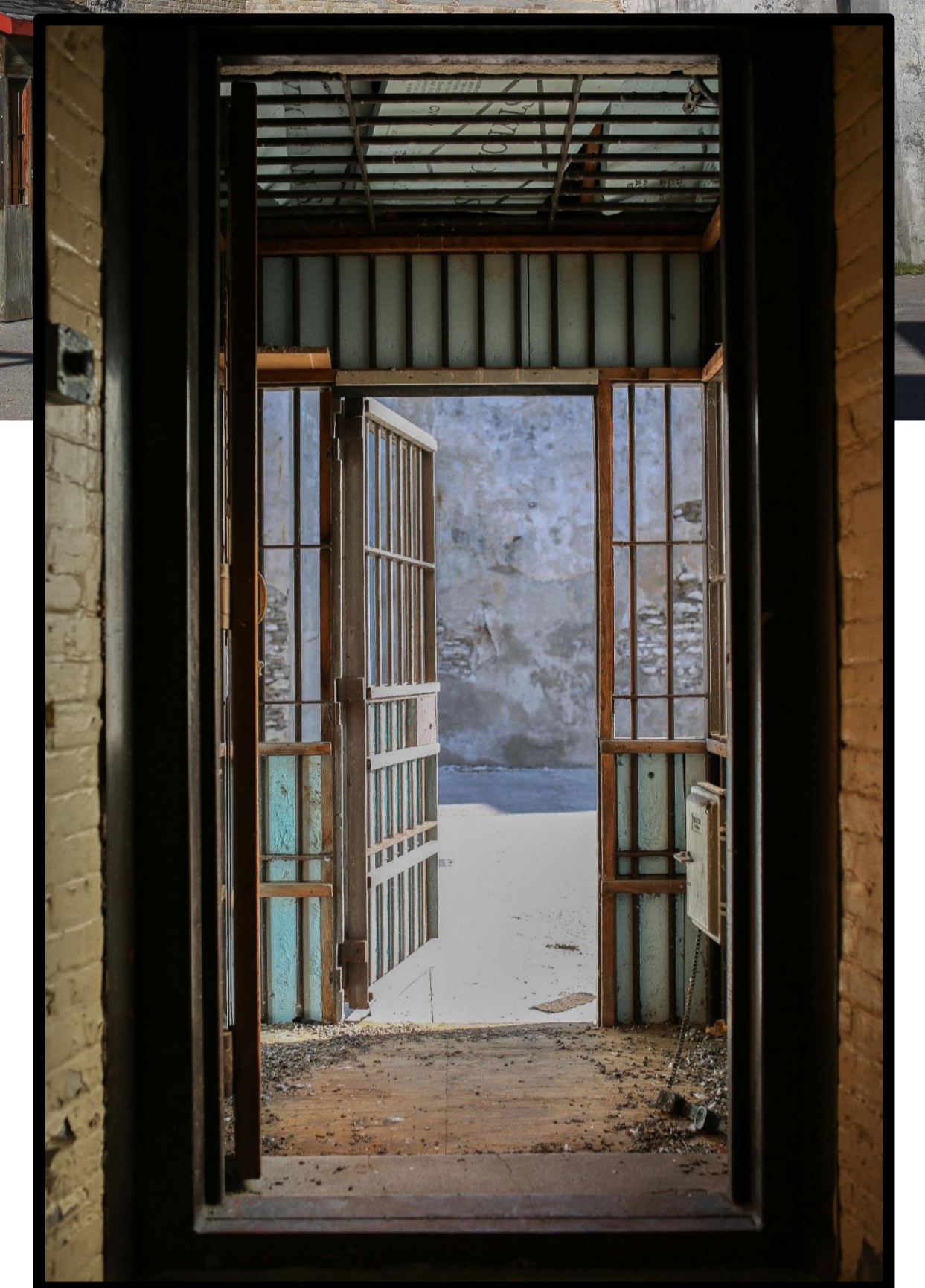
The purpose of this project was to research and write a history of the old county jail. Six themes of interest were chosen, including those detailed below. In 2016-17, the jail was transformed into a public park, which will feature informational plaques using the research and writing from this project.

## Capital Punishment

Hanging was not abolished in Canada until **1976**  
Capital punishment was not abolished until **1998**  
Executions were viewed as a public spectacle to induce fear  
Peterborough saw a total of 5 executions (hangings)

- 1873 William Brenton
- 1910 Robert Henderson\*
- 1920 Michael Barhi & Thomas Konek
- 1933 Edward Franklin

\* Robert Henderson was 17 when he was hanged. He was one of the two youngest people to be hanged in Canada.  
His trial took only 2 hours and 40 minutes.

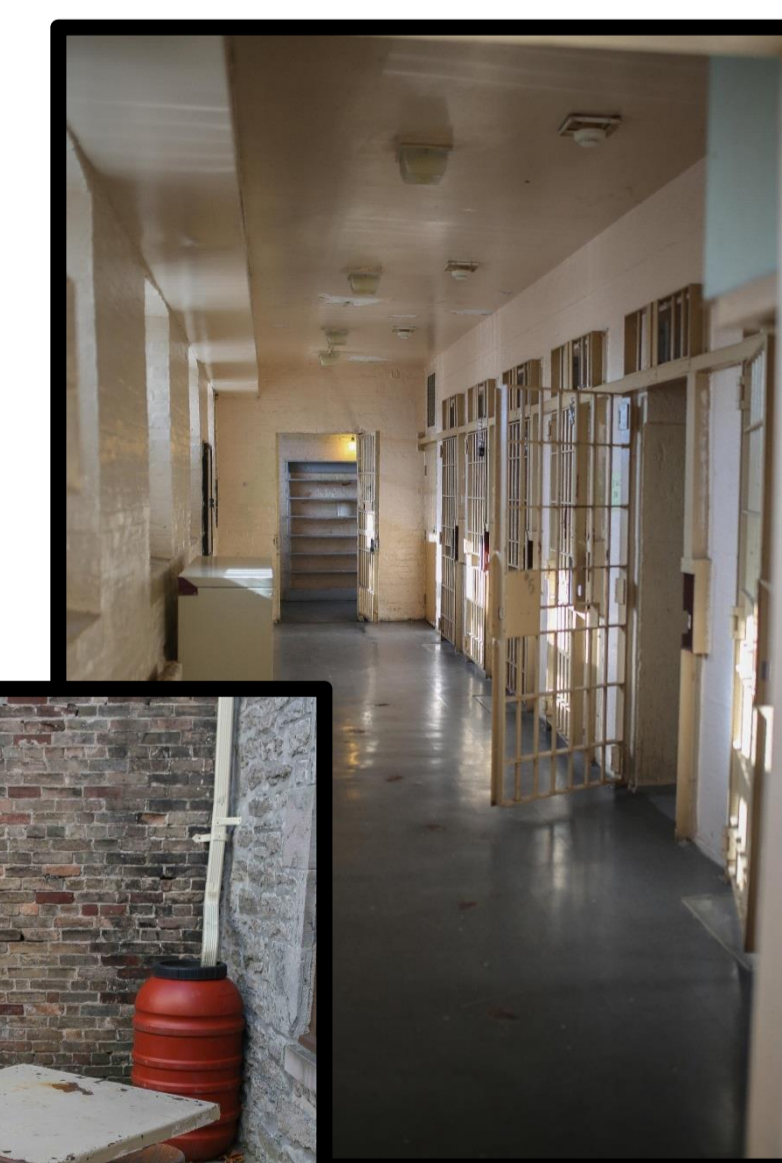
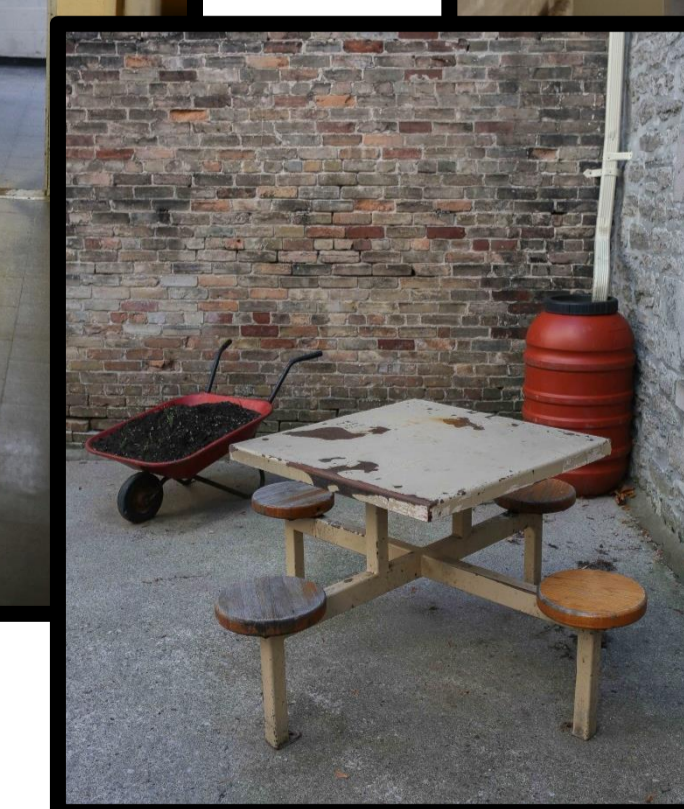
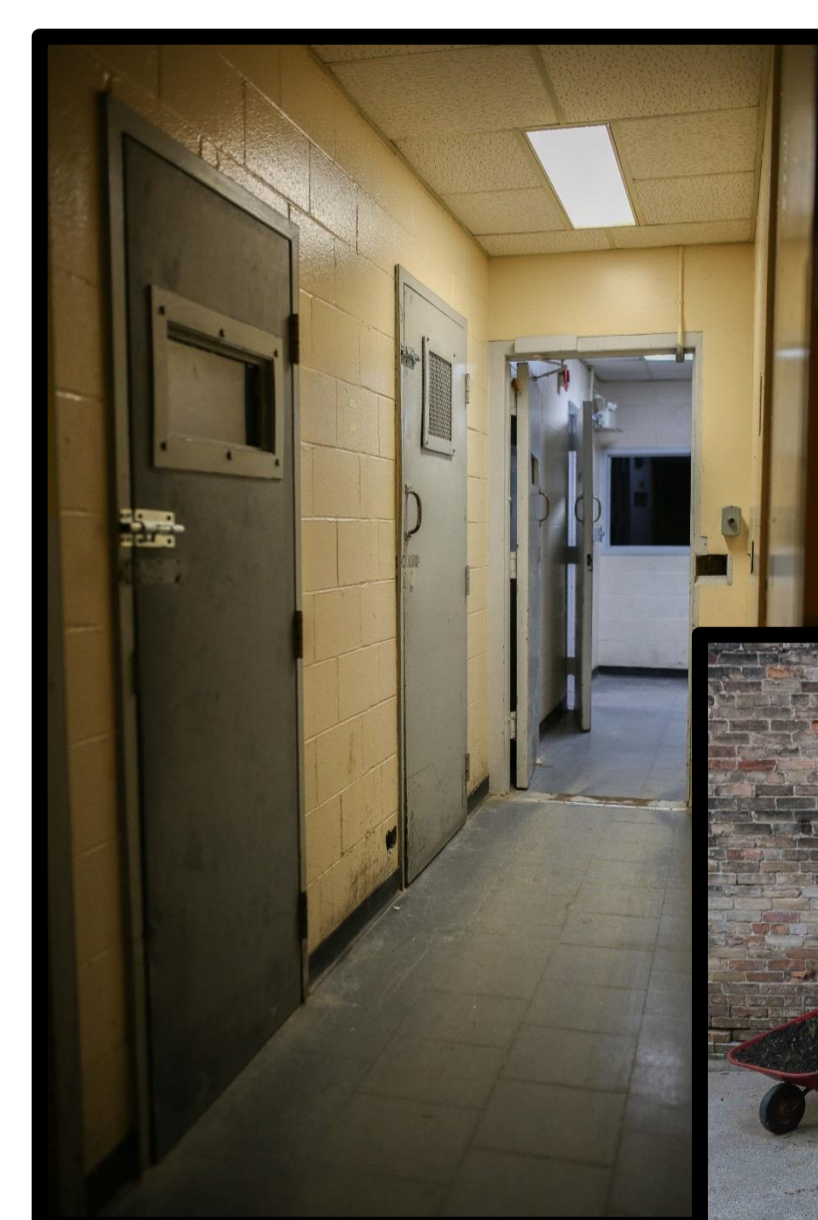


## 2001 Riot: "a minor disturbance"

On June 26th 2001, 12 inmates rioted when they learned of budget cuts that would affect their quality of life within the jail.

The inmates, using their bare hands and bars from broken beds, caused extensive damage, including breaking through a wall separating two cells.

Although police, fire, and negotiating services were called in, no one was hurt. Despite the fact that the public was told it was only a minor disturbance, one jail official called it the worst destruction he had ever seen.



## Inmate Experience

The jail's mandate emphasized custodial functions, rather than rehabilitation. Prisoners worked in groups during the day and were placed in solitary confinement at night.

The jail was a place of discipline and punishment. Many prisoners served multiple stints, as a result of alcoholism and vagrancy. As illustrated by the fact that all 5 inmates executed at the jail were tried for insanity, many inmates were dealing with addiction, poverty, or mental illness, rather than criminal offences.