

Kingston, Ontario  
Kingston Penitentiary  
**Guard Towers (D-1 to D-5)**

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The northeast and northwest guard towers (D-1 and D-5) were erected between 1841 and 1846 to a design by William Coverdale, master builder of the Provincial Penitentiary. Those responsible for designing the southeast and southwest guard towers (D-2 and D-3), built 1912-17, and the west guard tower (D-4), built 1925-26, have not been identified. External modifications to D-1 and D-5 include replacement of the circular stone guard houses which capped each tower by timber framed, octagonal structures (1921-22 and 1920-21 respectively) and the blocking up of the narrow, segmental headed windows of the towers (date unknown). The single external modification to guard towers D-2, D-3 and D-4 noted is the blocking up of the narrow, semicircular headed windows of each tower (date unknown).

Internal modifications to the existing guard houses of all towers include the installation of toilet and lavatory facilities (1979) electrical wiring and lighting (1970s) and heating (1988). The guard towers are currently operated by Correctional Services Canada for surveillance of the security wall and yard.

See FHBRO Building Report 89-32.

## **Reason for Designation**

The guard towers were designated Recognized because of their historical associations, the quality of their design and construction, and their environmental significance.

The guard towers are associated with the establishment and evolution of the penitentiary. The towers, in combination with the security wall, constitute a key and visible element in the operation of the institution and serve as a reminder of why it is there.

From a functional standpoint, the guard towers, in their post-1920s configuration, provide effective surveillance of the security wall and yard area as well as providing secure and direct communication between the walkway on top of the security wall and the yard below. The very good quality craftsmanship and choice of materials is demonstrated in the stone masonry by the cut-stone trim of the doors and windows (segmental/semicircular arch, jamb quoins, lintel and sill) and moulded cornice supported on console brackets.

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**Guard Towers (D-1 to D-5) (Continued)**

While there has been some change in the landscape in association with the towers; e.g., demolition of the wall facing King Street and extending between the northwest tower and Portsmouth harbor (date unknown), construction of a sallyport at the southwest corner (1987) and establishment of an exercise yard in the southeast corner (date unknown), the essential character of the area has been retained.

The guard tower structures, reminiscent of Medieval castle architecture, constructed in masonry in a manner typical of the institution, reinforce the present character of the complex. The distinctive form, obvious function and public exposure of the towers, together account for their conspicuous identity within the region.

**Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the guard towers resides in their status as a good example of Baronial Gothic revival architecture. At the exterior, the characteristic features of the style are: the projecting round tower form, the slight taper of the wall towards the top, the long, narrow windows (in imitation of arrow slits), and the console bracketed cornice (reminiscent of machicolation).

The octagonal guard houses would appear to be modeled on the "lantern" of a common North American lighthouse type. The outside gallery protected by an iron railing, the large areas of glazing and the polygonal roof capped by an ornamental finial are all characteristic features of the maritime building prototype.

The amount of exterior fabric, dating from the mid-1920s configuration of the towers, means the Recognized designation applies to the whole exterior of each tower with the exception of materials and components of recent date.

A number of steps could be taken to improve the aesthetic qualities of the towers; e.g., replacing the current stock aluminum siding, thermal window units and soffit with custom fabricated elements based on the appearance of the wood originals, replacing the present blocking in the tower windows with cut stone to form window recesses at the exterior face, and better integrating the mechanical/electrical services visible at the exterior.