

**Beyond the Attic Door: A Feminist Social History of Imprisonment
at the Portage Gaol From 1945 to 1970**

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

By documenting aspects of the history of the women's gaol in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, this project aims to contribute to our knowledge of women's imprisonment, an area which has been neglected in academic and popular literature. Particular attention is devoted to gaol history from the time it became a women's institution in 1945 until 1970. Gaol records, archived documents and interview data are combined to produce this account of the history of the Portage Gaol. The initial focus is on reconstructing who the women were and why they were imprisoned at the gaol. An administrative time line is then set out which provides some detail of the tenure of the three superintendents who oversaw the gaol throughout the period in question. Following these descriptions of who some of the main characters were and their roles, an analysis of what day-to-day life at the gaol was like is presented. Gaol regimes were implemented to ensure the close supervision and containment of inmates within the gaol. Work, education, recreation, discipline, classification and segregation all provided opportunities for gaol staff to scrutinize, correct and generally control female inmates. Regardless of the multitude of constraints placed on their daily lives within the gaol, inmates found ways to maintain some of their individuality and autonomy while incarcerated. Outright resistance to gaol regimes was rare, as most women complied with gaol routines. When conflict did occur between inmates or between inmates and staff, it was typically in response to the conditions of confinement at the Portage Gaol. By bringing this group of female inmates into focus, a small piece of history can be reclaimed from the attic and given the attention it deserves.

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Introduction

The history of imprisonment in Manitoba extends beyond a century, yet our knowledge of the institutions in which inmates were confined is in its infancy. It is unfortunate, but of no surprise, that we have very little historical awareness of women's incarceration. Generally speaking, women's penal history has received very little attention in the academic and popular literature. In particular, as Margaret Shaw (1991:2) notes, "no current history of women in provincial institutions would appear to exist." This is due, at least in part, to the androcentric bias in the disciplines of criminology and history. The purpose of this thesis is to begin the process of constructing a feminist social history of women's provincial incarceration in Manitoba. Specifically, the survival of a variety of sources of information have enabled the writing of a social history of the Portage Gaol.

The primary sources of data were literally found 'beyond the attic door' of the Portage Gaol. Scattered boxes of files, reports and logbooks were stored alongside Christmas decorations, cribs, handcuffs and work boots. The organization and assessment of these documents led to the selection of the time frame of 1945 to 1970¹ as the focus for this project. Although incomplete, gaol records have survived from the gaol's inception in 1896. Initially built to house men awaiting trial, the gaol had several uses before it became an institution that would house an exclusively female population. From 1945 to the present, the Portage Gaol has been designated

¹ Although I had access to gaol records that extended into the mid 1980s, the choice was made to limit this project to 1970. This decision was made, in part, to narrow the focus of the project to a manageable time period. Also, issues of confidentiality were managed by restricting the range of study to earlier historical documents.

a women's provincial institution. The change to a women's gaol in 1945 created a logical place to begin reconstructing this history of the Portage Gaol.

Women as 'Other'

This project has grown partially out of the lessons and critiques found in the works of feminist criminologists. Over the past two decades, a number of writers have critiqued the theories and methods of mainstream criminology (see, for example, Cain 1989; Daly & Chesney-Lind 1988; Gelsthorpe & Morris 1990; Heidensohn 1985; Leonard 1982; Naffine 1987; Smart 1976). This work has brought attention to the marginalization and exclusion of women in criminology. In addition to highlighting the omission of women, feminists have noted that on the rare occasion that women have been included in the criminological literature, they were likely to be represented in stereotypical or distorted characterizations. In fact, Marcia Rice (1994:59) has suggested that the bulk of this androcentric work has relied on middle-class notions of morality and biological explanations of the causes of women's involvement in crime. As observed by Mark Cousins, the theoretical literature concerning female criminality has been impaired by both "oblivion and error."

[C]riminology has left women out ... [I]t has responded to oppression with amnesia; that what has been hidden from history is not likely to be found by the mainstream historian ... [W]hat has not been ignored has been in error...[T]he limitation of the majority of these studies arises as a result of basic inadequacy in the perception of the nature of women and a reliance upon a determinant model of female behaviour. (Cousins 1980:111-112)

In the 1980s, attempts were made to fill the gaps left by the criminologists who had ignored women in their work. At the time, the strategy of adding women to the theoretical discussions of penalty was regarded by most as a logical starting point. To varying extents, Frances Heidensohn (1985), Nicole Hahn Rafter (1985) and R. Emerson Dobash and her colleagues (1986) all adopted this approach in their work. However, feminist analysts subsequently challenged these add-on tactics. Carol Smart (1990:79), for instance, asserted that adding women onto malestream theories only deepens the entrenchment of males as 'the' subject of criminology; positioning women as 'addendums' to masculinist thought effectively marginalizes women as subjects of inquiry in their own right. The consequences of these 'add-on' tactics are that "(m)ales are the yardstick against which both actions by and treatment of females are measured. Women and girls exist as Other; that is to say, they exist only in their difference from the male, the normal" (Cain 1990:2).

In recent years, feminists have become aware of the limitations of simply augmenting the historical and theoretical records with women's voices. The 'new' task of feminist historical work has become the problematization of the categories, methodologies and epistemologies that were developed and relied upon by mainstream writers. An integral part of these strategies has been the feminist critique of the assumptions and stereotypes about women that have traditionally been relied upon.

The literature is stocked with images of the criminal as 'abnormal,' 'sick' or 'other' in society. On the rare occasions that women were included in the

mainstream grand theoretical projects in criminology, they were likely to be portrayed as “either mad, masculine, menopausal, or maladjusted (to conventional female roles)” (O’Dwyer et al. 1987:178). Mainstream criminologists have been concerned primarily with locating the causes and motivations for criminal behaviour.

Given their preferences for explanations of crime that individualize and pathologize behaviour, the experiences of women in prison have been obscured. The “gargoyle-like stereotype” of the sick or dangerous criminal woman has loomed over the academic and popular literature (Worrall 1990:2). Carol Smart (1976:52) observed that most androcentric criminologists naively believed that “biologically based, causal factors can explain the motivation and reasoning of complex, culturally located and socially meaningful acts.” Stripped of contextual meaning, the offences of those who have been defined as criminal have often been used by theorists as evidence of a defect or pathology of the individual. In short, mainstream criminologists have drawn a bold line that separates the ‘normal’ from the ‘abnormal’ or criminal.

In addition to portraying the criminal as ‘other,’ mainstream theorists have been criticized for their reliance on gender stereotypes in discussions of women and crime. Pat Carlen and Ann Worrall (1987) have asserted that as gendered subjects in the criminal justice system, women have been represented and treated in terms of their allegedly innate qualities of ‘femininity, domesticity and pathology.’ These characteristics are held out as the ‘norm’ for all ‘good’ women to adhere to. In Britain, Clarice Feinman found that ideas about the character and behaviour of the ‘normal’ woman had a significant influence on criminal justice as it applies to

women. She found that women who came into conflict with the law were portrayed as having a number of inherent biological traits. "Women who went against their natural tendencies were considered to be 'monsters', 'the embodiment of the evil principle', and 'unable to distinguish right from wrong'" (Feinman 1979: 87-88). From the mainstream perspective, the woman who broke the law was also in violation of her 'natural' character as passive, maternal and weak.

In the present work, particular consideration has been given to making women visible, while avoiding the 'othering' of inmates that has characterized the work of mainstream criminologists. I have taken Maureen Cain's advice and committed myself to "studying women as women, and comparing different groups of women, rather than women and men." Cain suggests that this approach enables us to take "off the blinkers of the male-as-yardstick and male common sense, so that *new* thoughts can come into the social and criminological worlds" (1990:8). Careful attention has also been given to avoiding the sexist and stereotypical conceptions of women that have dominated the bulk of the male-centred literature to date. One of the ways of reaching a fuller understanding of the history of women's incarceration at the Portage Gaol was to write a 'social' history rather than a traditional history.

Social History

Social history stands in contrast to traditional accounts in several ways. A number of social histories from the criminological literature can be used as examples. One of the defining features of David Rothman's (1971), Michel Foucault's (1977) and Michael

Ignatieff's (1978) discussions of penal history is the study of prisons with an awareness that "power relations are rooted in the system of social networks." (Foucault 1982:793). This perspective is in contrast to the traditional or administrative accounts of penal histories that isolate the prison as 'the' site of power relations in their discussions. The social historian provides an analysis of the institution, its practices and the people who were confined behind its walls, with careful attention being given to the relation that the inner workings of the prison has to power relations in the wider society at that time.

This type of research focuses attention on the inherently political nature of history. For this reason, social context is extremely important in building an understanding of penal history. We can therefore give Rothman, Foucault and Ignatieff the label of 'social historian' because "they all provided a sense of the pivotal importance of social context, that is, of contextualizing prison regimes" (Howe 1994:63). The social historians have challenged the linear 'change-as-progress' assumptions of traditional history by making context an integral part of their analyses. In this sense, social history is an inherently critical endeavour. Problematizing history, challenging the 'truths' of the traditional historians and necessarily leaving the existence and meanings of the prison open to question are priorities of the social historian (Howe 1994:127).

Michel Foucault (cited in Gandal 1986:127) explains this approach simply as "an effort to make problematic and throw into question the practices, the rules, the institutions, the habits and the self-evidences that have piled up for decades and

decades.” This approach necessarily leads the social historian to question ‘what are prisons for?’ and ‘is the modern prison necessarily about crime and punishment at all?’ (Carlen 1983; Dobash et al. 1986; Howe 1994; Rafter 1985). Traditional historians are taken to task by social historians for treating penal policy as a “self-contained and self-explicable sphere” (Howe 1994:48). Grand narratives written by traditional historians are overturned by social historians who believe that “history is best told as a story of power relations and struggle, a story that is contradictory, heterogeneous, and fragmented” (Newton 1989:152).

To date, penal history has been written primarily from a male perspective. Although Rothman, Foucault and Ignatieff produced masculinist accounts of prison history (Howe 1994), they are not to be discarded. In the 1980s, feminists began a number of historical research projects and critically engaged social historians concerning their apparent neglect of women in prison. As a result of these efforts, criminologists have developed their own approaches to writing women’s penal history.

Women’s Imprisonment

A number of social histories of women’s imprisonment have been written over the past two decades. Most of this work has been done in Britain, Scotland and the United States (Carlen 1983; Dobash et al. 1986; Freedman 1981; Heidensohn 1985; Rafter 1985 etc.) In laying the foundation for analysis, all of these authors have started by asking two important questions:

1. Who were the women incarcerated in these institutions?
2. What events led to their confinement in these institutions?

Some striking similarities in the profiles of women prisoners are evident in the literature. Demographically, incarcerated women are likely to live on the margins of their society in terms of their race, class and marital status. They are typically young and not married. The offences for which women received custodial sentences were diverse and often reflected the moral, social or political concerns of their society at that particular point in history. For instance, societal concern with issues related to drugs, alcohol or prostitution has varied over time. The identification of issues or groups of people as 'problems' has led to increases or decreases in the emphasis placed on some behaviours as criminal. Therefore, we must be careful to note social concerns when commenting on crimes for which women have been incarcerated throughout history. It has been documented in the literature that while women were receiving formal sanctions for breaking the codified rules of their society, an impression is also left that these women were being punished for stepping out of the confines of the ideal of white, middle class femininity and domesticity. Recurring themes in the literature include the economic marginality of female offenders and the variety of offences for which they were incarcerated.

From Scotland to New York, it has been documented that the majority of women incarcerated had somehow breached the dominant cultural ideologies of 'proper' womanhood (Carlen 1983, Dobash et al. 1986, Rafter 1985). The 'proper' woman was to be married, with or without children; her priority was to be looking

after her 'domestic responsibilities' and not to be working at paid employment outside of the home. Many of the women who were incarcerated violated the prescriptions of 'proper' womanhood. Most were young and independent at the time of their incarceration. Most were unmarried, with or without children, and they worked outside of the home to provide for themselves and their families. It is in this sense that they were thought to have come to prison lacking "domestic discipline" (Carlen 1983:16).

If these women were employed prior to imprisonment, it is most likely that they would have been in low paying, unskilled and unstable positions (Dobash et al. 1986:207, Johnson & Rodgers 1993:98). With little or no formal education, incarcerated women had few opportunities to find stable, well paying jobs. Barriers abounded which supported the segregation of women in low paying, unstable positions. The dominant ideology upheld women's 'natural' or 'normal' place in society as the home, acting as wives and mothers.

Throughout history, women have been incarcerated for a wide range of law violations. According to Frances Heidensohn (cited in Carlen and Worrall 1987:17), one of the characteristics of women's involvement in crime is the heterogeneity of their offences. Women have been represented across the entire spectrum of crime categories, from petty property crimes to violent offences (Dobash et al. 1986:207). However, the majority of incarcerated women through history have served relatively short sentences for minor law violations. The nature of the majority of women's conflicts with the law suggests a relationship between their marginal economic

position and the types of offences they committed. The most commonly noted reasons for the incarceration of women were involvement in property crime and the failure to pay fines (Carlen 1983, Dobash et al. 1986, Heidensohn 1985). The poor material conditions of these women are reflected in the “economic rationality” of these types of offences (Heidensohn 1987:17). Some authors have connected economically-motivated offending with women’s responsibility to care for their families and themselves (Dobash et al. 1986:92). Also, the social and political climate of the society has played a role in which offences are considered sanctionable in any given historical period.

The Portage Gaol

Given the general inattention to women’s penal history in both popular and academic literature, the focus on the Portage Gaol seems appropriate. This project has been informed by the critiques of criminological literature and the relevance of social history in telling a story of women’s imprisonment. Chapter One concentrates on answering two main questions. The first is, ‘who were the women incarcerated at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970?’ This question is answered by presenting demographic information concerning the age, marital status, race, education and occupation of women at the time of their admission. These data are also compared to demographic information collected about male inmates at the Headingly Gaol during the same time frame and to more current demographics from the Portage Gaol. The second question addressed in Chapter One is ‘why were the women imprisoned?’ An

answer to this question is provided in a discussion of the types of offences for which women received gaol sentences.

The aim of Chapter Two is to provide an administrative time line of the Portage Gaol. The building was constructed in 1896 with the mandate of housing male inmates. By 1945, the institution held an exclusively female population. A number of changes in Manitoba's Department of Corrections precipitated the transitions at the Portage Gaol. The discussion in Chapter Two concentrates on the tenure of three superintendents who were present at the gaol during the period in question. Each superintendent approached his or her work differently, with a variety of consequences for the organization of the staff, inmates and day-to-day activities at the gaol.

While Chapters One and Two describe some of the key players at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970, Chapter Three is concerned with what the players did while they were at the gaol. Depending on the administrative priorities of the superintendent and staff, inmates were organized, classified and segregated according to a number of categories. These labels and the subsequent placement of women within the gaol had implications for how the women were expected to spend their time while incarcerated. As well, various forms of discipline and punishment were used to control and constrain women prisoners. Chapter Three also provides a description of the range of activity available to inmates at the gaol. Work, education and recreation were all key elements in the daily operations of the gaol from 1945 to 1970.

Chapter Four considers the women's responses to the conditions of their confinement. In an institution where control over inmates is a priority, these women found numerous ways to be autonomous. The daily routines were the site of many negotiations for control within the gaol. While the majority of women were mostly compliant with gaol routines, there were a number of strategies of resistance employed by inmates. Discussions of strategic, compliant and resistant women are central to this chapter.

The main objective of this project is to contribute to the development of a feminist social history of imprisonment. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the discussion begins with who the women were and why they were at the gaol and ends with an analysis of women's attempts to maintain some autonomy in such a restrictive environment. By bringing this group of females into focus, the hope is that a small piece of history can be reclaimed from the attic and given the attention it deserves.

Chapter One **Counting the Few**

In the past two decades, writers from Britain, Scotland and the United States have begun to draw women's penal histories out of the shadows (see Carlen 1983; Dobash et al. 1986; Freedman 1981; Heidensohn 1985; Rafter 1985). These authors concerned themselves with writing histories that challenged the traditional 'change as progress' narratives of penality which have been published in the past. Specifically, social historians of women's imprisonment have attempted to bring into focus how race, class and patriarchal assumptions have "shaped the imprisonment of women over time, the operation of regimes of punishment and discipline, the content of the authoritative official discourses on the criminality of the imprisoned women, and the way official conceptions and government policies have been translated into prison practices" (Dobash et al. 1986:10-11). A new set of research priorities was formed, focusing on locating women historically, socially and materially in the societies from which they came.

Demographics

The common starting point of these histories has been to question 'who were the women?' and 'why were they imprisoned?' The answers to these questions helped to frame subsequent analyses of the ways in which race, class and gender shaped the development of women's imprisonment. For instance, Nicole Hahn Rafter (1985) provided criticism of androcentric penal historians by bringing to light the shadowed existence of women's prisons in the United States. Rafter provided information

about inmates' age, employment, marital status, religion, racial or ethnic ancestry and law violations. This contextual work enabled an analysis that went beyond the usual problematic assumptions about the relations between crime and punishment. Detailed historical information about women imprisoned in New York State from 1894 to 1931 allowed Rafter to make connections between social changes in immigration, urbanization, capitalism and the development of penal institutions for women. Similarly, by building their analysis on a strong demographic foundation, Rebecca Dobash, Russell Dobash and Sue Gutteridge (1986) were able to discuss how assumptions about class and gender influenced the incarceration of women in Great Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the Canadian context, however, studies of women in prison have been limited. For example, the first book about "women in conflict with the law" was published in Canada in 1985 (Adelberg and Currie). Prior to the publication of this book, there was virtually no sociological or historical work written on women's imprisonment in Canada. Despite some recent concern with the conditions and reasons for women's federal imprisonment (Creating Choices, 1991), there remains a significant gap in our knowledge.

At this time, we do know that a relatively small number of women are incarcerated in Canada and that the majority have been remanded or serve their sentences in provincial gaols. For instance, in 1989-1990, 3 percent of the admissions to federal custody and 8 percent of the admissions to provincial custody were women (*Juristat*, December 1990). In 1991, 3,500 women were serving sentences and approximately 8,500 were on remand in provincial or territorial gaols

(Johnson & Rodgers 1993:106). More recently, “in 1996-1997, males represented 91% and females 9% of all admissions to provincial/territorial prisons” (Juristat vol.18 1998:7). While we know that more women are imprisoned provincially rather than federally in Canada, beyond these sparse figures we know relatively little about the women who have spent time behind the walls and bars of Canada’s gaols.

One study by Elizabeth Comack (1993) does provide a yardstick for historical change at the Portage Gaol. As part of the study, demographic information was collected on 727 women admitted to the Portage Correctional Institution between 1988 and 1993. From these data, it was concluded:

....[T]he women at Portage tend to be young, single, with low levels of education and high levels of unemployment While the women in general are disadvantaged in terms of their education and employment status, native women are especially so, as the vast majority have grade ten or less and were unemployed at the time of admission. . . . Overall, however, property and drug and alcohol offences account for a significant proportion of the offences for which women are admitted to the Portage Institution. (Comack 1993:16)

The purpose of this chapter is to address the questions of ‘who were the women?’ and ‘why were they imprisoned?’ as they apply to the history of the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970. More specifically, data pertaining to the age, marital status, race, occupations and offence(s) of the women prisoners will be presented. Where possible, these historical demographics will be compared to more current data, as well as to selected demographic information about the men admitted to the Headingly Provincial Gaol in Manitoba from 1945 to 1970.

Age

The population of women who were gaoled in Portage la Prairie between 1945 and 1970 was diverse in many ways. However, it is safe to say that over time, most of the women shared the characteristic of youth. In fact, throughout this twenty-five year history, the average age of inmates upon admittance to the gaol decreased. In 1950, approximately 11 percent (24) of the women who were gaoled at Portage were over fifty years of age. Over the next two decades, admitting women above fifty became relatively rare. This group represented just over 5 percent of the population in both 1960 and 1970. In the period under consideration, the majority of women at the Portage Gaol were under thirty years old. For example, in 1950, approximately 53 percent (119) of the women received at the gaol were thirty years or younger. By 1960, this figure had increased to 59 percent (236). The practice of admitting young women continued throughout the 1960s and, by 1970, 61 percent (171) of the population at the gaol was under thirty years of age.

A sample of records from a men's provincial institution in Manitoba show similar patterns of age upon admission. Annual reports from the Headingly Gaol reveal that like their female counterparts at the Portage Gaol, male inmates were also likely to be young. In 1945, the majority (56%) of the men admitted were under thirty years of age (Central Judicial District, Annual Reports 1945). The percentage of men under thirty serving time at Headingly remained near 50 percent between 1945 and 1964. By 1965, the number of men under age thirty had increased to 58 percent of the population (Central Judicial District, Annual Reports 1965-1966). While it became increasingly rare to find women over fifty at the Portage Gaol from

1945 to 1970, the average percentage of the population over fifty years of age at Headingly remained relatively constant; at around 10 percent.

More recent data indicate that the tendency to incarcerate younger women has continued. From 1988 to 1993, the majority (73%) of the women admitted to Portage were thirty-five years of age or younger; 53 percent were under thirty years (Comack 1993:11). Only 2 percent of the 727 women were fifty years or older (Comack 1993:11). In 1991, half of the women admitted to Canadian jails were between twenty and thirty years of age, and roughly 10 percent were under twenty (Johnson & Rodgers 1993:106).

Demographically, these figures are interesting. However, they can offer little insight into the ways in which age might have been a factor in how a woman experienced gaol life. Fortunately, there are some well-documented moments in the history of the gaol that help to bring the statistics to life. In one particular year, the admission of a number of younger women was given as an explanation for an increase in disciplinary charges at the Portage Gaol. From 1949 to 1950, the number of women under thirty at the gaol jumped from 43 percent (90) to 53 percent (119) of the total population. This year also saw the number of women admitted who were over the age of fifty decrease from 17 percent (36) to 10 percent (24). The impact of this decline in the average age of admission had on the administration of the gaol was significant, so much so that Miss Macpherson, the Superintendent at the time, noted in her annual report to the Attorney General:

The year was fairly uneventful, with the problem of discipline somewhat aggravated by the admission of a number of youthful psychopaths.

When it was necessary, the assistance of the R.C.M.P. officers was asked in subduing difficult inmates. (Annual Report 1949-1950)

Indeed, gaol staff called for R.C.M.P. assistance on six occasions throughout 1949 and 1950. The disturbances to which they were asked to respond were consistent with those of previous years. For example, on one night they were asked to attend to a woman they had brought in earlier. This account was taken from a gaol log book in which wardresses¹ were required to make entries at the end of every shift.

Admitted at 1:15 am Alice B.² [by R.C.M.P.] R.C.M.P. asked that Dr. be called right away as Alice had been badly beaten. Dr. Rennie came at 1:25 am Alice's only trouble was that she was intoxicated. She was unable to walk when she came in so we put her in #5. At 3am called in R.C.M.P. to help take Alice B. to basement cell, as she had aroused all the other girls and was getting worse. (Vol.8, 1949:132)

Another incident involved the RCMP forcibly moving an "insolent" and "uncooperative" woman to a punishment cell in the basement of the gaol (Vol.8, 1949:135). The women involved in these examples were both over forty years old at the time. It is likely that the "youthful psychopaths" the superintendent referred to did not arrive at the gaol until the spring of 1950. It was during March and April that two young women became the focus of much of the administration's disciplinary efforts.

At the end of February, an eighteen-year-old woman was admitted to the gaol to serve a two-year sentence for the charge of "incurability." Shortly after arriving at the gaol, Tricia found an ally in her nineteen-year-old friend, Jenny, who was

¹ "Wardresses" was the term used to refer to the women guards at the gaol.

² Pseudonyms have been substituted for the names of all inmates, friends and family members. All grammatical and spelling errors are retained from the original documents.

locked up just down the hall. These two women found a number of ways to express their dissatisfaction with the conditions and their treatment while in confinement.

What differentiated the actions of these women from others who had previously been there were a number of small, but important details.

Up to 1950, the majority of inmate protests and resistances at the Portage Gaol were individual, isolated events.³ In most of the instances when Tricia or Jenny was in trouble, they found some way to support one another. The wardress on duty described one such incident.

Tricia went haywire this afternoon about 4pm, pacing the corridor like a wild thing, cursing that she wasn't going to stay in this so and so place two years. When supper bell rang she seemed quieter and went down to supper. She had only been there a few minutes when she threw something at the table and rushed upstairs cursing as she came. Finally she took a chair and began banging the gate. I called R.C.M.P. who reasoned her to basement cells⁴ without much trouble ... When Tricia left the dining room, Jenny followed but was locked out. She refused all requests and orders threatened to punch me and throw me downstairs when R.C.M.P. came they locked her first. (Vol.9, 1950:3)

Other inmates (who were noted to be empathically motivated) also responded to the actions and consequent punishments that both Tricia and Jenny received. Such was the case one evening in March.

Tricia was being very ugly, using vile language and the usual threats. At 8pm with the assistance of the R.C.M.P. (3) we put her in the punishment cell where she has been continually screaming. She has been stripped of her clothing except pants ... Tricia shouting foul language and making threats at 10:30pm punch. I showered her with cold water thinking I might cool her down but she continued screaming ... Vicky, in sympathy with Tricia refused to go in her cell, tried to

³ For a further discussion of inmate protests and resistances see Chapter Three.

⁴ The "basement cells" referred to in this passage are also identified as "punishment" and "segregation" cells in gaol logbooks.

persuade her with help of girls to no avail. Called R.C.M.P. to put her in No.4 cell, quiet since. (Vol.9, 1950:7-8)

Stereotypes of the “proper” or “normal” woman who does not, by definition, question or defy authority seemed to have heavily influenced the expectations placed on these young women. When it was decided that they did not meet the standards of passivity and compliance, they were labeled as both “mad” and “bad” (Vol.9, 1950:9).

The assumption that young women who defied authority were exceptionally psychologically disturbed and violent seems to have been in operation at the Portage Gaol. One day, after being locked up, Tricia had a conversation with an older prisoner who was placed outside her cell to “guard” her. The wardress on duty had details of the conversation relayed to her and noted in the logbook that Tricia “admits that she has no respect for anyone, did not have any for her mother or father” (Vol.9, 1950:7). Later in the week, a psychiatrist who was brought into the gaol examined Tricia. In late August, she escaped from the Portage Gaol and was apprehended two days later by police in Winnipeg. Ultimately, Tricia was transferred to Kingston Penitentiary to serve an additional two-year sentence for the escape.

Marital Status

Demographically, from 1945 to 1970 there were significant changes in the marital statistics at the Portage Gaol (see: Table 1). In 1945, approximately 58 percent (99)⁵ of the women were married at the time of commitment. Thirty-six percent (63) of the

population was considered single, while the remaining women (6%) were either widowed or divorced. Between 1945 and 1950, dramatic changes in the marital status of gaol women at Portage were occurring. This was due in part to the addition of the 'separated' and 'common law' categories in the gaol records. Also, as the population of the gaol became younger, the number of single women increased. By 1950, the number of married women had dropped to 42 percent (94) of the population. The decline in the percentage of married women at the gaol continued through to 1970.

Table 1: Marital Status of Women Admitted to the Portage Gaol from 1945-1970

	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970
Married	99 57.5%	94 42.1%	48 17.5%	80 20.6%	70 23.6%	47 17.7%
Single	63 36.6%	72 32.3%	95 34.5%	178 45.8%	109 36.7%	115 43.2%
Separated	no cat.	25 11.2%	95 34.5%	97 24.9%	70 23.6%	55 20.7%
Widowed	8 4.7%	27 12.1%	26 9.5%	23 5.9%	16 5.4%	7 2.6%
Divorced	2 1.2%	3 1.4%	9 3.3%	4 1.0%	1 0.3%	0
Common Law	no cat.	2 0.9%	2 0.7%	7 1.8%	31 10.4%	42 15.8%
Total	172	223	275	389	297	266

A survey of some of the marital statistics at the Headingly Gaol from 1945 to 1965 showed that an even greater number of male inmates identified themselves as single at the time of their incarceration. For example, in 1945, 64 percent of the men admitted to Headingly were single; 33 percent were married and the remainder were

⁵ The total number of admissions per year may vary across demographic categories and years. This is due to missing cases in the available data.

separated, divorced or widowed (Central Judicial District, Annual Report 1945). By 1953, 55 percent of the inmates were single, while the number of married men had barely changed (35%) (Central Judicial District, Annual Report 1953). The most significant change from 1945 to 1965 was the number of men who reported being separated, divorced or widowed on admission to the gaol. In 1945, less than 3 percent of the men claimed to be separated, divorced or widowed; the percentages for 1953 and 1965 were just over 10 and 12 percent, respectively (Central Judicial District, Annual Reports 1945, 1953 and 1965-1966).

In the United States, Nicole Hahn Rafter observed that up to 70 percent of the women admitted to some prisons were unmarried (1985:126). More recently, at the Portage Gaol, Comack (1993:12) found that "(a)lmost half of the women were single; one third were either married or living common law; and the remainder were separated, divorced or widowed." While these statistics are the source of some useful information, they are limited. Details about a woman's marital status were obtained when she was admitted. Any change in marital status was not recorded in gaol logbooks. It would be especially interesting to learn if inmates' relationship status changed over the course of their imprisonment. Profiles compiled from the records at the Portage Gaol contain some examples of the life changes experienced by the women.

In 1947, Margaret arrived at the gaol to serve a six-month sentence for vagrancy. She was a thirty-nine year old Metis woman with a grade five education who was employed as a domestic worker. Margaret was single. From 1947 to 1962 she was in and out of gaol on a variety of charges (vagrancy, theft, willful property

damage, etc.) Margaret spent the greater part of 1953 to 1955 at Kingston Penitentiary. After serving this sentence, she returned to Manitoba. Within months of her arrival, Margaret was once again arrested, charged and sentenced to three months at the Portage Gaol. She had been married during her stay in Kingston. She was admitted and released three more times and, upon admission on charges of theft in October of 1957, Margaret identified her marital status as separated. This status remained unchanged for the remainder of Margaret's life. In December of 1962, at the age of fifty-five, Margaret was found dead in Winnipeg.

It is quite possible that many women at the gaol experienced transformations in their personal relationships while they were imprisoned. For example, while serving thirty days for being found 'intoxicated in a public place,' Isabel was informed by one of the wardresses that her husband had died. Arrangements were made and staff escorted Isabel to the funeral. More positive occasions were also recognized at the gaol. The first wedding in goal history took place behind the walls in the spring of 1953. The groom, mother of the bride, a pastor from a Baptist church in Winnipeg and several staff and inmates attended. A staff member provided music on the institution's piano and a woman who shared a cell with the bride sang throughout the service. A brief reception followed before the bride and groom were separated until her release. These examples illustrate the dynamic nature of life. Even when these women are seemingly removed from society, they continue to participate in and experience relationships with family and friends on the outside.⁶

⁶ For a further discussion of how women 'negotiated' relationships while incarcerated see Chapter Four.

Race

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Canadian prisons and jails has been well documented in recent years. Carol LaPrairie (1993:235) found that “(f)ar fewer women than men go to prison, but Aboriginal women are still disproportionately involved in conflict with the law compared both to non-Aboriginal women and to their representation in the general population.” Aboriginal women also comprise a greater percentage of provincial inmate populations than their male counterparts (Shaw 1994:16). The greatest overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in provincial jails occurs in the prairie provinces.

In 1991, Aboriginal women comprised 85.2 percent of the population of provincial jails in Saskatchewan; in Manitoba and Alberta, the figures were 66.2 percent and 47.9 percent respectively (Boritch 1997:25). Between 1988 and 1993, two-thirds of 727 women admitted to the Portage Correctional Institution were Aboriginal (Comack 1993:13). These figures are especially troublesome considering that Aboriginal people account for approximately 12 percent of Manitoba’s total population (Juristat Vol.18, 1998:7). Has this overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in Manitoba gaols always been the case? The simple answer is no. Intake records from 1945 to 1950 illustrate the dramatic rise in the admissions of Aboriginal women to the Portage Gaol. While Aboriginal women represented only 5.2 percent of the admissions in 1945, by 1950 they represented almost half (48.4%) of all admissions (see Table 2).

Table 2: Racial Origins of Women Admitted to the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970

	"White"	"Indian"	Total
1945	163 94.8%	9 5.2%	172
1946	160 90.4%	11 9.6%	177
1947	158 81.9%	35 18.1%	193
1948	148 55.2%	120 44.8%	268
1949	126 58.3%	90 41.7%	216
1950	115 51.6%	108 48.4%	223
1951	95 44%	121 56%	216
1952	100 43.9%	128 56.1%	228
1953	115 50.9%	111 49.1%	226
1954	102 33.4%	203 66.6%	305
1955	106 37.3%	178 62.7%	284
1956	106 35%	197 65%	303
1957	93 31%	207 69%	300
1958	85 23.7%	273 76.3%	358
1959	97 24.4%	300 75.6%	397
1960	81 20.5%	314 79.5%	395
1961	93 18.9%	398 81.1%	491
1962	71 18%	325 82%	396
1963	81 25.2%	240 74.8%	321
1964	73 25.3%	216 74.7%	289
1965	49 16.3%	251 83.7%	300
1966	51 15%	289 85%	340
1967	37 10.3%	322 89.7%	359
1968	47 13.1%	310 86.8%	357
1969	49 18.4%	217 81.6%	266
1970	30 14.2%	229 85.8%	267

Records from Headingly also indicate an increase in the number of Native inmates in gaol following World War II. In 1949, only 2.8 percent of the population at Headingly was Aboriginal (Central Judicial District, Annual Report 1949). The Native population at the institution grew and, by 1959, 13 percent of the inmates were Aboriginal (Central Judicial District, Annual Report 1959). Nevertheless, the proportion of Native men at Headingly from 1945 to 1965 did not come close to the level of overrepresentation of Native women that was apparent at the Portage Gaol. In fact, the largest Aboriginal representation at Headingly was 16 percent in 1965 (Central Judicial District, Annual Report 1965). In the same year, Aboriginal women accounted for almost 84 percent of the admissions to the Portage Gaol.

The number of Aboriginal women at Portage began to climb in 1946 and 1947. This increase can be explained, at least in part, by changing government priorities at the time. It has been observed that “(b)ecause of world and domestic events, the federal government ignored Native Canadians from the late 1930’s until the mid 1940’s” (Frideres 1983:30). James Frideres (1983:30-31) notes that following the Second World War, there was an increase in the use of provincial laws and the Indian Act to control Aboriginal people. The Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba also named some factors that influenced the apparent post-war change in the incarceration rates of Manitoba’s Aboriginal people:

We believe that policing agreements with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police play a part in this story because they introduced consistent enforcement of Canadian law to communities where, until that time, Aboriginal law still operated. We also recognize that construction of highways and the use of automobiles added an important new cause for police activity. The Bracken Report of 1955, which led to the wider availability of alcoholic beverages in the province, accelerated the trend

to greater Aboriginal involvement in the justice system. So too ... did closer supervision of, and amendments to, social and family legislation. (Hamilton & Sinclair 1991:77)

It was also after the Second World War that “Aboriginal peoples became much more visible because of increased mobility and, in particular, because of their massive migration to urban centres in search of jobs, an education or a better life” (Hamilton & Sinclair 1991:517).

One of the most profoundly demoralizing and destructive colonizing practices of the federal government was the creation of the residential school system. By the end of World War II, a great number of Aboriginal children had been socialized within the residential school system. The isolation and abuse in residential schools has left an indelible mark on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Hundreds of these students had suffered “emotional, physical and sexual abuse” as well as “social and spiritual deprivation and substandard education” (Hamilton & Sinclair 1991:514). As Justices Hamilton and Sinclair (1991:515) note in their report:

Residential schools denigrated Aboriginal cultures, customs and religions, and disrupted the traditional practices of Aboriginal child-rearing and education. They tore apart families and extended families, leaving the children straddling two worlds, the European one and that of their own Aboriginal societies, but belonging to neither. These policies have caused a wound to fester in Aboriginal communities that has left them diminished to this day.

By the late 1940s, scores of Aboriginal people had been removed from their families and forced to suffer through the residential school system. The “benign rule” of our provincial and federal governments has resulted in the “isolation, control and enforced poverty” of Native peoples (Frideres 1983:33). Having experienced racism and abuse in the schools, many Aboriginal men and women were left to cope with the

disillusionment and marginalization that followed. It can be argued that such a history of isolation and abuse would leave a person more vulnerable in society. As Comack (1993:36; emphasis in original) has argued “the presence of an abuse history, *in combination with* poor life chances, will exacerbate a woman’s social situation, thus making the potential for conflicts with the law more likely.” By accepting this logic, it is not terribly surprising that Aboriginal men -- and especially Aboriginal women-- have been incarcerated in great numbers in Canada’s prisons and jails.

The marginal social positions which Aboriginal women occupy in our society have had a marked impact on their interactions with the criminal justice system. “For Aboriginal women, the experience of poverty, the breakdown of families, the loss of children, substance abuse, and violence and racism is very damaging” (Shaw 1994:18). The ideological, economic and social conditions of the lives of Aboriginal women continued to deteriorate after 1950. The institutionalized racism and paternalistic practices of governments --including the many branches of the justice system-- facilitated the continued trend toward the rising rates of incarceration of Aboriginal people. Indeed, from 1945 to 1970 there was a steady increase in the population of Aboriginal women at the Portage Gaol (see: Table 2). Heavily influenced by the legacies of colonialism, paternalism, racism and sexism, Aboriginal women continue to occupy highly disadvantaged positions within our society and the justice system.

Education

When women were admitted to the Portage Gaol between 1950 and 1970, they were asked how many 'grades' they had completed. The yearly gaol calendars reveal that a number of women who arrived at the gaol had no formal education at all. A significant percentage of the population had received some schooling between grades one and six (see: Table 3). Over this twenty-year period, a smaller proportion of the women went beyond grade nine. Out of the group of women who did go on to grades ten to twelve, it is unclear how many graduated with high school diplomas. However, we can be certain that women who were admitted with any post-secondary education were extremely rare. From 1950 to 1970, a total of twelve women (out of approximately 6,500) had some university, college or trade school education. Knowing that women in prison are likely to be marginalized in society in a variety of ways, it is not surprising that on average, the educational attainment of the women at Portage was poor. It is worth mentioning that despite some yearly fluctuations in the 1950s and 1960s, the educational disadvantage of this group of women remained relatively unchanged.

Table 3: Education of Women Admitted to the Portage Gaol from 1950 to 1970

	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970
No Education	17 7.6%	12 4.3%	63 16.4%	16 5.9%	15 6%
Grades 1-6	82 36.4%	138 50%	176 45.8%	112 41.6%	101 40.1%
Grades 7-9	86 38.2%	91 32.9%	117 30.5%	118 43.9%	97 38.5%
Grades 10-12	38 16.9%	35 12.7%	28 7.3%	23 8.6%	38 15.1%
Post Secondary	2 0.9%	0	0	0	1 0.4%
Total	225	276	384	269	252

These statistics are consistent with the findings of several other authors.

Historically speaking, in the United States and Britain, both Nicole Hahn Rafter (1985) and Dobash et al. (1986) have commented on the marginal educational attainment of women prior to their imprisonment. More recently, Elizabeth Comack (1993:12) notes that a lack of education continues to be a predominant feature of gaoled women in Canada. Between 1988 and 1993, 69 percent of the women admitted to Portage had grade 10 or less education.

There are numerous ways of explaining why women in prison are typically undereducated. While the answers are not always simple or obvious, it would appear that for many of these women, educational attainment was connected to their race, class and gender positioning. In 1959, the Manitoba government published a report entitled "The People of Indian Ancestry in Manitoba" that provided some answers as to why Indian and Metis people left school when they did. Although some of the reasons for leaving school that were provided by participants are culturally specific, many of them can be generalized. For example, a number of participants cited the need to go to work as their main reason for leaving school (Department of

Agriculture and Immigration 1959:116). The researchers concluded that in some instances, "(t)here is a strong indication that the level of education of the child must be submerged for the immediate needs of the family group." If 'work' is defined as both paid and unpaid labour, then using this expanded definition, we can hypothesize that some women may have left school in order to fulfill a caregiving role within the family. Indeed, as the authors of the report noted:

The illness or death of the mother usually had the severest effect upon education. When this occurred, the oldest daughter normally was given the responsibility of maintaining the home and looking after siblings. By the time daughters are free to return to school they often are too old for the grade they would have to take. Hence, they decided to terminate their schooling. (Department of Agriculture and Immigration 1959:116)

The demands of caring for a child physically, emotionally and materially would certainly seem to make attending school less of a priority.

For children in isolated areas of the province, reaching a school was not always possible or desirable. In regions where fishing, farming or trapping was the main occupation, education in a classroom might seem to be irrelevant. In at least one documented instance, racism prevented children from attending school at all. "There are Metis settlements where none of the children have ever attended school and have little hope of ever obtaining an education unless the Provincial Government intervenes. They are not in a school district and neighboring White school districts are not interested in having them in their schools" (Department of Agriculture and Immigration 1959:117). While these are only a few of the possible reasons that women may not have attended school or left at an early age, the examples nonetheless illustrate some of the ways that race, class and gender may structure the

opportunity, need or desire for attending school. There is little debate that gaoled women who are under-educated (especially when combined with a criminal record) have limited chances of obtaining well paid, stable employment.

Occupation

Both historically and across borders, women have been typically unemployed or poorly employed prior to their imprisonment. In the late 1800s, the majority of women imprisoned in England were employed in “domestic service as maids, cooks, governesses and nursemaids” (Dobash et al. 1986:94). Over a century later, very little had changed. After surveying the records and interviewing inmates at a prison in Britain in the 1980s, Dobash and her colleagues (1986:170) concluded that if women were employed prior to being gaoled, they were likely to have been “doing low-paid, unskilled jobs.” The occupations they listed included: clerk, sales assistants, nursery attendant, machinists, waitresses, factory workers and barmaids. The remaining group of women was identified as students, housewives or unemployed. Similarly, Nicole Hahn Rafter (1985:127) found that in the five institutions she surveyed in the United States between 1800 and 1935, the majority of the women were unemployed or marginally employed, primarily in service-related jobs.

In Canada, women had very little representation in the labour force prior to World War II. During the war, the federal government went to great lengths to recruit specific populations of women for work. While the government was anxious to draw upon this large pool of reserve labour, they were extremely fearful of

disturbing the traditional, patriarchal family system. As Pierson (1984:125) notes:

“The recruitment would first catch young ‘girls’ and single women and then childless married women for full time employment, next women with home responsibilities for part-time employment, and finally women with children for full-time employment.”

The result was a flood of women into the Canadian work force. The steady increase in women’s labour force participation following World War II has been attributed to increasing numbers of married women going to work outside of the home (Information Canada 1970:54).

While women moved into the labour force in large numbers, the majority occupied marginal positions. In fact, women were segregated in a small number of occupations relative to their male counterparts. Most female employees were found in sales or service-related industries (Information Canada 1970: 56-59). From 1931 to 1981, patterns of women’s occupational segregation remained relatively consistent. According to John Fox and Bonnie Fox (1987:22), “(i)n both 1931 and 1981, for instance, nearly three-quarters of women were in occupations in which women were in a majority; in 1931, however, these occupations included less than 21 percent of the labour force as a whole, while in 1981 occupations in which women constituted a majority included 37 percent of the labour force.” Over time, women have been employed in positions that are typically low-skilled, unstable, low-paying and with little opportunity for advancement.

The picture becomes even more dismal if we compare men’s and women’s wages in similar occupations. In 1970, “men (were) paid more than women in 96 percent of all similarly described occupations” (Marchak 1977:148). On average,

even in traditionally "female" occupations, male workers earned more. For example, in 1965, the average yearly income of a male clerical worker in Canada was \$4,255, compared to \$2,617 for a woman in the same position (Information Canada 1970:63). Specific populations of women seem to be more at risk in terms of occupational and economic marginalization.

As a group, single mothers in Canada have been especially vulnerable to poverty. "In 1967, 23 percent of all families with female heads depended on government assistance as their major source of income, compared to 6 percent of all families headed by males" (Information Canada 1970:322). Single mothers and women in general were also more likely than men to be hired for part-time work. Part-time employment provides workers with little stability, few opportunities for advancement and little control in the workplace. In 1971, 24.8 percent of working women and 6.4 percent of working men were employed as part-time labourers (Labour Canada 1971:iii).

The segregation of women in low paid, low-skilled and unstable occupations was evident at the Portage Gaol throughout the period in question. Between 1952 and 1970, the majority of women who were brought to the gaol were unemployed at the time of admission (see: Table 4). Most of the other women identified themselves as housewives or workers in the sales or service industries. The remainder of the women (typically less than 5 percent of the population) was employed in clerical work, manual labour or in a technical/professional occupation. More recent research paints an even bleaker picture of the occupational status of gaoled women. From

1988 to 1993, 85 percent of the women at Portage were unemployed prior to their admission (Comack 1993:12).

Table 4: Occupation of Inmates at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970⁷

	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970
No Occupation	no cat.	92 41.4%	158 57.5%	250 65.0%	152 51.4%	126 46.8%
Housewife	66 38.8%	56 25.2%	49 17.8%	65 16.9%	63 21.3%	77 28.6%
Sales/Service	91 53.5%	52 23.4%	53 19.3%	51 13.2%	60 20.3%	52 19.3%
Clerical	6 3.5%	4 1.8%	0	2 0.5%	6 2.0%	0
Technical/Professional	0	2 0.9%	0	0	5 1.7%	1 0.4%
Manual Labour	7 4.1%	11 5.0%	8 2.9%	11 2.9%	7 2.4%	10 3.7%
Other	0	5 2.3%	7 2.5%	6 1.6%	3 1.0%	3 1.1%
Total	170	222	275	385	296	269

Employment seems to be the one area where male inmates have had a distinct advantage over their female counterparts. In 1949 at Headingly, 9 out of 1920 men admitted were identified as having 'no employment' -- less than 0.5 percent of the population (Central Judicial District, Annual Report 1949). At the Portage Gaol in 1950, 41.4 percent of the inmates had 'no occupation' when they were admitted.

This pattern continued at Headingly. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s

⁷ The following occupations are located in the "sales/service" category: domestic, waitress, cook, hairdresser, baby-sitter, sales clerk, seamstress, cashier, dishwasher, laundress, ward maid, usher, messenger etc. "Clerical workers" includes: typist, secretary, book keeper, office clerk etc. "Manual labourers" includes: factory worker, packer, farmer, power machine operator, painter, fish worker, garage attendant etc. The "Technical/Professional" category includes: nurse, welder, schoolteacher and accountant. Also, an "Other" category was created to accommodate those women who were identified as a student, pensioner, palmist and dancer.

(yearly), less than 2 percent of the total inmate population was unemployed when they entered the gaol.⁸

If we were searching for one characteristic that unites the largest percentage of incarcerated women in Canada, it would most likely be their lack of meaningful employment and subsequent poverty. Moreover, I would agree with Dobash and her colleagues that the “records, dismal as they are, probably give an over-optimistic picture since ... those having a job on admission had not necessarily had it more than a few days, and did not necessarily have any more stable employment record than those recorded as unemployed” (1986:171). In Canada, if not internationally, poverty is one of the greatest determining factors of who ends up behind bars. Women find that without the material resources to care for themselves and their families, their options for survival become severely limited (see, for example: York 1989:144). Elizabeth Comack (1996:31) has observed that; “(t)he class positioning of the women will obviously have a bearing on their ability to access economic resources to survive trouble and, more especially, trouble with the law. Economic marginalization, in and of itself, creates particular problems, conflicts and dilemmas and limits the choices or options available to manage them.”

In Canada, a lengthy history of colonialism, paternalism, racism and patriarchy has left Aboriginal women especially vulnerable to poverty. The Royal Commission

⁸ Inmates entering Headingly were likely asked to state their “occupation” during the initial interview at admittance and not if they were “employed” when they were apprehended. My suspicion is that the number of “unemployed” men who entered the gaol is much greater than it appears. I am hypothesizing that men who were

on the Status of Women in Canada (1970: 328) concluded that "large numbers of the poor in Canada are women, the poorest are the Indian, Metis and Eskimo women." For these populations of women, poverty has perpetuated itself. In her report to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Janet Fontaine (1991:481) remarked that "poverty is an unmistakable factor in the lives of Manitoba Native women and children. Poverty has been shown to be positively correlated with conflict with the law, low levels of education, decreased opportunity for employment, and a low level of health." It was also noted in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry that even if an Aboriginal woman is employed, her average annual income is likely to be less than 75 percent of that of non-Aboriginal women (Hamilton & Sinclair 1991:481). Economic marginalization, in turn, can have a profound influence on who ends up being gaoled in Canada.

One specific effect that poverty can have on a woman's ability to avoid jail is worth mentioning. "For a substantial proportion of women admitted to provincial jails in Canada each year, their greatest crime is poverty: three in ten were incarcerated for not paying fines (in 1991)" (Johnson & Rodgers 1993:107). This ratio comes as no surprise if we consider that 85 percent of the women admitted to Portage between 1988 and 1993 were unemployed at the time of their incarceration (Comack 1993:12). In 1950, 84 women had the option to pay a fine or serve a sentence at the Portage Gaol. Only 6 percent (5) of those women paid the fine. Similarly, in 1960, 197 women had the option to pay a fine and 11 percent (22) did. By 1970, 8 percent (11) of the women given the option to pay their fine did so. Most

trained in a trade were likely to offer that title as their "occupation" regardless of their employment status at the time of their incarceration.

of the women who had the option to pay a fine were incarcerated for 'public order' offences such as vagrancy or being intoxicated in a public place. Although crime categories are highly problematic constructs, they can be useful in building a profile of who the women at the Portage Gaol were.

Offences

Discussion of the offences for which the women at the Portage Gaol were incarcerated must begin with a cautionary note. Characterizing these women in terms of the offences that they were arrested, charged and sentenced with committing is potentially dangerous. Elizabeth Comack (1996:19) has argued that using crime categories to describe this group of women ultimately limits our understanding of their lives.

....(T)o categorize a woman on the basis of the current charges for which she is serving time neglects the history of her troubles with the law and thereby imposes a false unity to her behaviour. In addition, grouping women under different crime categories implies a continuity between their situations which may not exist in reality.

Some women who appeared in gaol records may have only been incarcerated once in their adult lives. For others, the Portage Gaol was their home on and off for several years. For example, Isabel (who I referred to earlier) had been admitted to the gaol numerous times for crimes ranging from vagrancy, theft, being intoxicated in a public place and offences related to the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act. Isabel had a lengthy history with the criminal justice system that is only partially documented within the gaol calendars and logbooks.

It is also important to note that the offences for which women are gaoled only represent one version of their actions, that is, the official version. As Comack (1996:19) notes, "(c)rime categories, in this sense, are *legal constructions*. They are the result of a lengthy process of detection, apprehension, accusation, judgment, and conviction. In the process of constructing these criminal definitions, Law imposes a particular understanding onto events." Recall that in Alice's case, she was arrested, charged and eventually sentenced to serve some time at the Portage Gaol for being intoxicated in a public place. When she was admitted, it was obvious -- at least to the RCMP-- that she had been badly beaten. The circumstances surrounding the beating were deemed irrelevant by the Law and were never investigated. The only thing that seemed to matter was that Alice had violated a section of the Criminal Code by being found intoxicated in a public place. The doctor who examined her wounds that night also felt that the events that led to Alice's beating were irrelevant.

As recounted in the log book:

R.C.M.P. asked that Dr. be called right away as Alice had been badly beaten. Dr. Rennie came at 1:25 am. Alice's only trouble was that she was intoxicated (Vol.8, 1949:132)

The Law renders all details outside of the offence for which Alice was gaoled irrelevant. Therefore, her experiences and interpretation of events on that night will remain forever unknown. Keeping the problematic nature of crime categories in mind, we can now begin to discuss the potential usefulness of these constructs.

From the spring of 1945 to New Year's Eve in 1970, approximately 6,500 women served sentences or were held on remand at the Portage Gaol. Up to this point, we have had few details about why this group of women was incarcerated.

Over this period of time, there were fluctuations in policing practices, judicial priorities and societal sentiments that all affected what was defined as crime and pursued to the point of imprisonment. Some of the changes can be observed in the breakdown of offences that women served sentences for at the Portage Gaol (see: Table 5).

Table 5: Recorded Offences at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970

	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970
Drug/Alcohol	46 27.7%	80 39.2%	99 36.3%	167 42.9%	232 62.7%	111 47.6%
Property	34 20.5%	39 19.1%	29 10.6%	48 12.3%	32 8.6%	43 18.5%
Person	6 3.6%	2 1.0%	18 6.6%	11 2.8%	18 4.9%	31 13.3% ⁹
Public Order	74 44.6%	68 33.3%	112 41%	120 30.8%	72 19.5%	15 6.4% ¹⁰
Indian Act	3 1.8%	11 5.4%	12 4.4%	37 9.5%	9 2.4%	0
Other	3 1.8%	4 2.0%	3 1.1%	6 1.5%	7 1.9%	33 14.2% ¹¹
Total	166	204	273	389	370	233

For the most part, women at the Portage Gaol have been imprisoned for alcohol-related, property-related or public order offences. If we removed the offences of ‘vagrancy’ and being found ‘intoxicated in a public place’ from the records at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970, the number of women imprisoned would have been approximately half of what it is. During the period in question, the percentage of women admitted for crimes against the person rarely exceeded 20

⁹ The dramatic increase in “person-related” offences in 1970 appears to be a statistical “blip.” The average in person-related offences from 1966-1970 was 6.2%.

¹⁰ By 1968 the offence of “vagrancy” was no longer appearing in gaol intake records. This seems to account for much of the decline in “public-order” offences.

¹¹ The increase in offences that fall into the “Other” category is the result of the increasing tendency to imprison women for violation of the Highway traffic Act and other driving-related offences.

percent of all yearly admissions. The one thing that remained relatively constant was that the vast majority of inmates were gaoled for public order and drug/alcohol offences. For example, in 1945, admissions for these types of offences accounted for 72 percent of all the sentences that women served at Portage. By 1965, this number had increased to 82 percent of the yearly admissions. Societal sentiments, policing and judicial priorities began to change by the late 1960s. One government report captures some of these changes.

In 1969, the Canadian Corrections Association published the "Brief on the Woman Offender," which contained a series of recommendations that addressed some of the biases against women in the criminal justice system. Many of the recommendations focused on public order and drug/alcohol related offences. It was suggested in the report that the Vagrancy "A"¹² provision of the Criminal Code be repealed as it was "inappropriate" and "harsh," especially for women surviving in poverty.

It is relatively easy for homeless men to find shelter in hostels practically anywhere in the country but such services for women are rare. Consequently, women and young girls are at a disadvantage. Since they cannot be referred to such shelters "for their own protection," they are arrested and charged as vagrants. In the process they acquire a criminal record. (Canadian Corrections Association 1969:4)

Another section of the Vagrancy provision of the Criminal Code which had direct and profound implications for women was also challenged in the report. The

¹² Section 164 of the Criminal Code or Vagrancy "A" was defined as: "Every one commits vagrancy who (a) not having any apparent means of support is found wandering abroad or trespassing and does not, when required, justify his presence in the place where he is found." (Canadian Corrections Association 1969:4)

authors concluded that the Vagrancy "C"¹³ section of the Code and its corresponding punishments¹⁴ were discriminatory. This section was most often invoked as a charge against street prostitutes. The law, as it was written, could only be applied to women. "It is assumed, wrongfully, that women are the only ones who solicit on the street or are unable to give a good account of themselves in these circumstances" (Canadian Corrections Association 1969:7). A recommendation was put forth to amend the Vagrancy "C" section to prohibit "a male or female from soliciting a male or female in a public place for the purposes of prostitution" (Canadian Corrections Association 1969:11). Clearly, the authors of this report were advocating a more 'equal' law that could be applied to both men and women.

Other important recommendations that appeared in the report concern drug and alcohol related offences. It was concluded that being under the influence of alcohol or a narcotic should not in itself be considered a criminal act. The authors of the report contended that rather than regarding intoxication and addiction as criminal matters, they should be treated as "medical" and "social problems." Following this reasoning, it was recommended that persons found intoxicated should be treated by health and welfare organizations and not punished in gaols. The authors also advised

¹³ Section 164 of the Criminal Code or Vagrancy "C" was defined as: "Every one commits vagrancy who...being a common prostitute or night walker is found in a public place and does not, when required, give a good account of herself." (Canadian Corrections Association 1969:7)

¹⁴ The authors of the report concluded that fines and imprisonment were inappropriate responses to prostitution. It was recommended that research be undertaken to find better ways to "rehabilitate" offenders (Canadian Corrections Association 1969:8-11).

that treatment programs be made available for women in prisons and gaols regardless of the reason for their incarceration.

Presumably, by the late 1960s, changing attitudes about what should and should not be considered “criminal” influenced the types of offences for which women were incarcerated. The number of women who were admitted to Portage for public order offences began to drop after 1960. The most dramatic decline took place between 1965 and 1970 (19.5 % and 6.4%, respectively). The observed decline can be at least partially explained by the disappearance of vagrancy offences from gaol records in 1968. Up to that point, the overwhelming majority of public order offences that were recorded at Portage were vagrancy.¹⁵ The offences for which women were incarcerated at Portage are quite similar to the more contemporary picture.

More than 25% of women admitted on sentence to a provincial prison are sentenced for property offences, such as shoplifting or fraud. Others are sentenced for “moral” and public-order offences, drinking offences, traffic offences or drug offences. Only 9% have committed violent offences, and these are primarily minor assaults. (Shaw 1994:15)

Specifically, at Portage from 1988 to 1993:

(W)omen admitted on remand were more likely to have charges involving crimes against the person and property (25.5% and 23.5% of all charges), whereas women admitted under sentence were more likely to have property and alcohol and drug related offences (28% and 24% of all charges). (Comack 1993:10)

Concluding Remarks

We now know more about who the women were that spent time behind the bars of the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970. In brief, this group of women was most likely to be young, unmarried and of Aboriginal ancestry. They tended to be poorly educated and either unemployed or employed in low paid, unskilled and unstable jobs. The offences for which they were incarcerated were mostly public order, property or alcohol-related. Women in prison were -- and are -- one of the most socially and economically marginalized groups in Canada. This seems like a large amount of information, however, we still know relatively little about the histories, lives and experiences of these women. In order to gain some insight into what these women might have experienced, it will help to sketch a picture of the three administrative histories of the Portage Gaol.

¹⁵ Other public order offenses which were cited in gaol records included: "causing a disturbance," "incurability," "public mischief," "solicit a woman to have unlawful carnal connection," "indecent act in a public place," etc.

Chapter Two The Portage Gaol – Three Administrative Eras

The Portage Gaol is located sixty miles west of Winnipeg. The building was originally constructed in 1896 and still stands within sight of one of the main streets that runs through Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Since the brick institution was built, it has undergone a number of changes to its structure, mandate and administration.

From 1939 to 1970, three superintendents shaped the administrative structure and routines at Portage. Their beliefs about the purposes of incarceration and the role of staff greatly influenced the daily operations at the gaol. Additionally, in their approaches to the treatment of inmates and the organization of the gaol, each superintendent gave different considerations to gender. Sheriff Ed Calder held his post as superintendent from 1939 to 1948. He oversaw the operation of the gaol throughout the transition to a women's institution. Miss Jessie Macpherson followed Ed Calder and held her position in excess of twenty years. From 1948 to 1969, Miss Macpherson encouraged consistency and predictability at the gaol. Following Miss Macpherson's retirement in 1969, Miss Noelle Des Lauriers was hired. Although Superintendent Des Lauriers appears only briefly at the end of the period in question, her influence over the workings of the gaol was evident. The tenure of each of these individuals will form the main framework for this discussion of the administrative history of the Portage Gaol.

The Early Years - 1896 to 1945

From the time the gaol opened its doors in 1896 until 1930, the vast majority of inmates admitted were male. In fact, the institution was built to accommodate a male population. On occasion, however, a woman would be detained at the gaol.

Typically arrested in Portage la Prairie by RCMP officers, these women rarely spent more than one night in a cell. Impromptu accommodations were made to hold women who were identified as transients, intoxicated or awaiting transfer to Winnipeg for trial. Institutional records show that from 1896 to 1930, there were never more than six women incarcerated at the Portage Gaol at one time.

A series of changes in Manitoba's penal operations led to a shift in mandate at Portage. The first was the 1930 closing of the Vaughan Street Gaol in Winnipeg. In the same year, the Headingly Provincial Gaol was being constructed just outside of Winnipeg. This new gaol began admitting inmates early in 1931, providing accommodation for the men who were displaced from the Vaughan Street Gaol. The provincial government was also searching for facilities to house female prisoners who had been affected by the closing of the Vaughan Street Gaol. By the autumn of 1930, speculation was mounting. Knowing that the female inmates were going to be displaced, journalists at the daily newspaper in Portage followed the story closely.

With the elimination of the old jail on Vaughan Street as a habitation for prisoners and the removal of all male prisoners to the new jail at Headingly, new accommodations will have to be made for female prisoners, Hon. W.J. Major, K.C., attorney-general stated Saturday. There seldom are more than 50 female prisoners at one time. [sic] Mr. Major pointed out, and for that reason it was considered unwise to go to the expense of building a separate wing at the Headingly institution, aside from the fact that it was felt in the best interests of all

concerned to keep prisoners of both sexes far apart. (*Portage Daily Graphic*, September 15, 1930)

Two days after the *Portage Daily Graphic* printed that the Attorney General wished to avoid establishing co-ed institutions, he announced that the Portage Gaol had been selected as the location where all female inmates in the province would be incarcerated. Although male inmates would also remain at Portage, the Attorney General took the steps to ensure that these populations would have little to no contact with one another. Approximately five thousand dollars was allocated to expand the existing facilities and install the barriers that would keep male and female inmates apart.

It was reported that the only potential contact that the male inmates could have with their female counterparts would be when meals were served. Even this interaction would be highly supervised.

One of the most interesting changes in the routine of the jail will be the matter of cooking the meals, which have always been prepared by the male prisoners, those who were known to be adapted to this class of work, but when the women prisoners are transferred here the cooking will be done by them and passed through a gate to the men's side of the jail and served by men waiters. The men and women prisoners will be kept absolutely separate, there being a brick wall between with locked connecting doors. (*Portage Daily Graphic* December 20, 1930)

In addition to the installation of brick barriers, the renovations included covering all windows where male and female inmates might see one another, updating security devices and expanding dormitory facilities to accommodate a larger population of women.

Changing the goal to a “mixed” institution garnered much attention within the community of Portage. A considerable amount of commentary was devoted to the fact that local men were employed to complete the upgrades to the building. The *Portage Daily Graphic* printed numerous articles that described the progress being made on the renovations at the gaol.

The work is being done by day labor to assist the un-employed. There is a supervisor of the Public Works Department from Winnipeg in attendance, but all the trades and labor will be by local men, and all the supplies will be purchased locally . . . [T]his work was necessitated by the transfer of the women prisoners and the need for more accommodation, but at the same time it is being done also to assist in the creation of employment for local men. (*Portage Daily Graphic*, December 8, 1930)

.... [I]ndications are that the building will be ready by the first of March, the date suggested by Hon. W.J. Major for the transfer of the women prisoners from the Winnipeg jail. The plumbing is ready for the reception of fixtures, and other preliminary works have also been attended to so that there will be no delay in any of the lines of trade. (*Portage Daily Graphic*, January 29, 1931)

The expansion of the gaol also included the addition of a “hospital room.”

A feature noticed today by a *Graphic* representative was a room which will be used as a hospital for women patients who become so ill that it is necessary to remove them to a separate room. There will be space for two or three beds, and the room will be fitted up with elementary hospital equipment. (*Portage Daily Graphic*, January 29, 1931)

It is not clear if the male inmates who became ill had access to a “hospital room” within the gaol, were kept in their own cells or were removed to the Portage Hospital for treatment.

Following the 1931 renovations at Portage, male and female inmates became

virtually invisible neighbours within the gaol. The institution was organized this way for approximately fourteen years. It is worthy of note that as the gaol changed from a co-ed to an all-female institution, there were few documented changes in its daily operation. While the Portage Gaol held both men and women, female inmates were the ones most active in the maintenance of the institution.¹ Daily logbook entries provide some idea of the work in which women were engaged.² For example,

Amy released from cell block and back to work in laundry.
(Vol. 2 Aug. 5, 1941)

Florence and Vicki to remain locked in cells at night. Out to work in kitchen and dining room, but no privileges in sewing room.
(Vol. 4 Oct. 30, 1942)

The only outdoor work available to inmates involved tending to the potato pit located on gaol property.

Until 1942, inmates and guards carried out their daily routines with very few visitors from outside of the gaol. A doctor conducted examinations on a weekly basis and, although the RCMP maintained offices within the building, their visits were sporadic. In the fall of 1942, the first volunteers started visiting the gaol. On September 10, 1942 (Vol. 4), two women from a church in Winnipeg arrived at the gaol to conduct a service for the female inmates at Portage. Shortly thereafter, pastors, priests and community members from a variety of churches and denominations led weekly church services at the gaol.

¹ See Chapter Three for more detailed discussions of work and recreation.

² Documentation of the men's routines while the gaol was a co-ed facility could not be located.

Other than these visits and some work, inmates had few distractions. Logbook entries provide evidence that women had the opportunity for one hour of daily exercise in a fenced-in yard behind the gaol. Reading, card games, needlework and radio entertainment were also options for inmates. Logbook entries provide no indication that the women's activities changed when male inmates were moved to the Headingly gaol in 1945. Under Superintendent Calder's rule, the Portage institution operated much like the provincial gaols that housed men at the time.

Some useful examples of how similar these institutions may have been can be found in Annual Reports from the men's gaol in Brandon, Manitoba. The work and spare time activities of the inmate populations at Portage and Brandon were almost identical. It was documented that

All able bodied inmates work at something daily, except Saturday afternoon and Sunday. They are employed in the vegetable garden and in routine operations such as kitchen work, building maintenance and the upkeep of the grounds. We have in the past experienced some idleness in the winter months, but I expect this will be eliminated when the proposed vocational training shop is put in operation ... We have no laundry equipment, the washing of clothes is done in the tubs by hand. It gives employment to a few men, but it is work they do not care to do and consequently the work is not done as well as it might be. Washing machines are now on order, which I expect to be delivered in the near future. (Brandon Gaol – Annual Report 1947:2)

Every Sunday afternoon, a representative from The Salvation Army conducted a church service at the Brandon Gaol. In addition, one Catholic service was held monthly. Inmates were also provided with some options for leisure.

The principal recreations consist of radio in each cell block and outdoor sports, such as handball, softball, volleyball and quoites. One hour daily is set aside for this, as well as Saturday afternoon

and holidays. These activities are under the direction of an Officer assigned to this field. Card playing, checkers and so on are allowed during non-working hours. (Brandon Gaol – Annual report 1947:2)

During Calder's administration at Portage, discipline and the maintenance of the institution shaped the routines in which women participated. Up until 1945, women (who represented a fraction of the provincial inmate population) served their time isolated from, but alongside, their male counterparts. Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that the women at Portage were engaged in very similar activities as men at other provincial gaols. The apparent inattention to gender may be explained by the fact that Portage had become the first and only Manitoba gaol to house an exclusively female population.

In the spring of 1945, all male inmates were permanently moved out of Portage to the Headingly Gaol. Confusion about the changes seemed to dominate both within the gaol and beyond its walls. The local news media was interested in the transition taking place at the gaol. However, it appears that they were provided with very little information. The *Portage Daily Graphic* printed a speculative article about the transition after the male inmates had been removed.

The Portage jail will become [sic] a jail for women only it is believed. Tuesday, May 22 all male inmate [sic] were removed to Headingly according to a report today. Formerly housing both male and female prisoners the jail was reported to have been over-crowded. Henceforth it will be used as one jail. (*Portage Daily Graphic* May 25, 1945)

Although the reasoning behind the decision to move the men out is difficult to ascertain, we do know that from 1945 to the present, the Portage institution has held

an exclusively female population.³

The Transition Period - 1945 to 1948

Arguably, 1945 marks the most significant year in the history of the Portage Gaol. It was certainly the pivotal year in the history of Ed Calder's employment at the institution. As superintendent, he oversaw the transition as Portage became a gaol for an exclusively female population. An inspection of the gaol and an inquiry into its administration was ordered by James McLenaghan, K.C., the Attorney General for the Province of Manitoba, in 1945. Mr. Royal Burritt, the Gaoler for the Eastern Judicial District of Manitoba, conducted the inspection over two days. The Superintendent of Provincial Buildings and the Chief Turnkey from the Headingly Gaol accompanied him. The recommendations that appeared in the report written following this inspection likely contributed to some of the changes that were implemented at the institution. This document provided the first indication that gender would become a relevant issue in the gaol's operation. Concerns about the organization and administration of the gaol were most prominent in Burritt's report.

One of the most troublesome issues singled out by Burritt was staffing. A small staff of wardresses guarded female inmates. Consistent with penal practices at the time, their role in the institution was primarily custodial. A total of six wardresses worked in shifts to attend to a gaol population of up to forty-four inmates. The staff

³ On occasion, a few men were held next door to the women. The RCMP had an office and a temporary holding cell within the building, but separate from the gaol.

of six was expected to respond to almost all of the daily needs of the inmate population. Wardresses were responsible for supervising the preparation of meals for the inmates and staff, administering medication to inmates, admitting and discharging inmates, escorting inmates to court and generally guarding the women as they participated in the daily routines. With human resources stretched as they were, wardresses attended primarily to issues of management and control of inmates.

After inspecting the gaol, Mr. Burritt believed that there was an insufficient number of staff at Portage. He also felt that wardresses were working long hours under potentially unsafe conditions. He explained:

The staff at the women's gaol is inadequate. It consists at present of six persons. A chief wardress, a wardress cook and four wardresses. During 10 1/2 hours each day only one wardress is on duty. During 8 hours two are on duty (including the chief wardress). During 5 1/2 hours three (including the chief wardress and cook) are on duty. (Annual Report 1945:3)

Mr. Burritt was concerned that under such conditions, inmates who were motivated to steal the gaol keys and escape could easily overpower the staff.

I have already pointed out that for 10 1/2 hours out of every 24 there is only one wardress on duty and she carries all the keys of the gaol. Such a state of affairs is pregnant with danger and serious injury to the wardress on duty. (Annual Report 1945:4)

Given these concerns, one set of recommendations directly addressed staffing. With so few wardresses working night and day to oversee a population that could reach forty-four women, it was virtually impossible to do anything except guard those who were in custody. Mr. Burritt envisioned a women's gaol where education,

These facilities were maintained until 1962.

recreation and occupational training would be made available to inmates. To address safety concerns and the lack of education and training opportunities at the gaol, Mr.

Burritt asked that three more women be hired.

The staff would then consist of:

- 1 matron⁴
- 1 chief wardress
- 1 wardress cook
- 6 wardresses

If a vocational, recreational and repatriation programme is to be established, at least one or two instructor wardresses will have to be employed in addition to the custodial staff of nine above referred to. (Annual Report 1945:4)

Mr. Burritt and his chief turnkey, Mr. Keen, also heard complaints about Superintendent Calder's conduct from a number of women, all of whom stated that they were prepared to give evidence under oath. A woman serving a one-year sentence for theft presented one of the most brutal cases. It was documented that

Sheriff Calder beat her up with his clenched fists for an infraction of gaol rules. In addition that she was locked up for 21 days with hard bed and put on a dry bread and water diet for five days, and further deprived of five days remission. (Annual Report 1945:11)

Mr. Burritt heard four other women state that they had either been beaten by Superintendent Calder or had witnessed him assaulting other inmates. All of the women who gave statements during this inspection noted that the chief wardress was also present to witness these assaults. Although these statements were documented, there is no evidence to suggest that justice officials took any further action.

During Mr. Burritt's visit, another group of inmates brought forward concerns about the work they were required to do and the uniforms they were

required to wear. Although the details of their complaints were not written in gaol records, it is clear that Mr. Burritt was less than sympathetic. He concluded that the women

.... quite overlooked the fact that they were in gaol and as a result had to put up with certain inconveniences. They misunderstood the regulations regarding the loss of remission through illness. I explained this to them and told them their sentences carried 'hard labour' which apparently they did not realize. I was able to satisfy them that they were not so badly treated after all. (Annual Report 1945:10)

It is interesting to note that none of the sentencing information contained in gaol calendars included "hard labour." Also, there is no indication that any definition of "hard labour" existed in gaol records. Given that Sheriff Calder was seemingly constructing and applying the rules in an arbitrary fashion, it is not at all surprising that the women who came forward at this time were confused and concerned.

Calder could be characterized as a frugal administrator who believed in providing few privileges for inmates. Mr. Burritt took exception to some of Mr. Calder's discretionary purchasing practices. For instance, after checking the supplies he found that

.... tooth brushes are not issued to inmates on admission to the gaol. A few are kept in stock and are given out only on rare occasions. A new tooth brush should be issued to an inmate on admission without having to ask for it. They are inexpensive, costing less than 10 cents each. (Annual Report 1945:10)

As well, recognizing that opportunities for recreation were lacking for women at Portage, Mr. Burritt took it upon himself to seek out such things as used reading material from the Headingly Gaol.

⁴ The title of "matron" is used interchangeably with "wardress" in gaol records.

There is no such thing as a library. True there is a cupboard with a few musty, dilapidated, uninteresting books that are never read. They should be destroyed on sanitary grounds. I have arranged to send them each week back numbers of *Colliers*, *MacLeans* and *Readers Digests* from Headingly Gaol. I am assured they will be very welcome. (Annual Report 1945:7-8)

By comparison, reading material was more plentiful at both the Headingly and Brandon Gaols. By 1947, the Headingly Gaol had over two thousand books in its library. The Brandon Gaol also made subscriptions to *Readers Digest*, *Colliers*, *Macleans*, *National Geographic* and *Popular Mechanics* available to inmates.

Another significant part of the transition to a women's gaol involved making the environment more "cheerful."

The appearance of the interior of the gaol is anything but pleasant. The color scheme within the gaol is depressing. The floors are cement colored, a spotty battleship grey. The lower portion of the walls are painted a bilious blue. The upper portion a dirty and scarred yellow. The bars of the cells are painted black and some bars in the corridors are painted red. The interior should be repainted in bright cheery colors. Windows in dormitories facing the court house and men's gaol are blacked but with hideous green paint, making them dull and oppressive. These windows should now be cleared so as to allow light and sunshine to enter. The necessity for the blackout does not now exist, as the men's gaol has been transferred to Headingly. (Annual Report 1945:5)

Following his inspection of Portage, then, Mr. Burrirt came to a number of conclusions and made a series of recommendations to improve the administration of the gaol. Perhaps the most significant conclusion reached by Burrirt was that Sheriff Calder was not to be left in charge of operations at the institution. Burrirt was quite emphatic when stating his observations:

I am definitely of the opinion that the administrative set up and policy of operating the institution are not good. The women's

gaol has no matron. That position is being filled by the gaoler, Mr. Ed Calder, Sheriff and Gaoler, C.J.D. He appears to be the chief administrative officer of the women's gaol assuming all responsibility for its operation and administrative policy. All female inmates charged with infractions of gaol rules are brought before him for trial, and punishment if found guilty. He keeps all gaol records and is the source through which food and other supplies for use in the gaol are obtained. He issues verbal orders from time to time with respect to the operation of the gaol. (Annual Report 1945:2)

Only three months after all of the male inmates had been transferred to Headingly, Mr. Burritt recommended that Sheriff Calder be replaced by a woman who, in his opinion, could more effectively maintain "the safe custody, welfare and reformation of the inmates and the proper administration of the gaol and its staff" (Annual Report 1945:2). Referring to Superintendent Calder, Burritt also stated:

Being a male person his contact with the female inmates and staff is necessarily limited, making it impossible for him to properly and efficiently administer the institution. (Annual Report 1945:2)

Dominance over his staff, limited interaction with wardresses and inmates and accusations of assaultive behaviour most likely combined to lead Mr. Burritt to critically evaluate Superintendent Calder's ability to administer the operations of the gaol. Following Burritt's review of the gaol in 1945, Sheriff Calder's role almost instantly became advisory. Mrs. Maud Mountain, the chief wardress, was called upon to take over many of the superintendent's duties. Even though Mr. Calder's role within the gaol was significantly diminished, he remained "on call" for crisis situations until the new superintendent took her place in 1948.

The Helping Years - 1948 to 1969

Miss Jessie Macpherson became the superintendent at the Portage Gaol in April of 1948. Like Sheriff Calder, she managed the gaol by personally seeing to the vast majority of administrative decisions. Unlike her predecessor, Superintendent Macpherson displayed a great deal of concern for the women who were housed under her authority. However, the benevolence shown toward staff and inmates was often overshadowed by the priority on obedience and discipline. It is also significant that Macpherson's regimes were tailored with the gender of inmates in mind.

One belief that seemed to inform most of Superintendent Macpherson's interactions at Portage was that women who were in gaol needed help. "Help" in this context took many forms. Before any assistance was offered to inmates, Miss Macpherson would attempt to get to know what their particular "needs" were. In order to accomplish this, Superintendent Macpherson made it a part of her duties to meet with and interview every woman who was admitted to the Portage Gaol. It did not matter if a woman was incarcerated for a day or a year, Miss Macpherson would ensure that she spoke with her shortly after arriving at the gaol. The superintendent also drew upon the knowledge of her staff in the effort to help inmates.

Under Superintendent Macpherson's guidance, the wardresses took charge of helping inmates to develop a variety of skills, from recreational to vocational. Most of the teaching was done informally. If a member of the staff had a specific skill and the materials were available, she was encouraged to teach those prisoners who showed an interest. In addition to sewing, knitting and other types of needlework,

inmates were given opportunities to learn weaving, leatherwork, clay modeling and quilting, with materials often donated by community groups such as local churches or the Elizabeth Fry Society. "Each girl is allowed to take with her on leaving the institution, some handwork of her own making to the value of two dollars" (Annual Report 1948:1).

As was mentioned in Chapter One, many of the women who were admitted to Portage had not completed any formal schooling beyond an elementary level. Perhaps recognizing the need for an academic education, staff members periodically helped inmates who were willing to participate. For example, in 1953:

A special project of supervising the grade nine correspondence course for two of our younger inmates was undertaken by a staff member who was formerly a teacher. (Annual Report 1953:2)

Unfortunately, this type of help was infrequently available and rarely lasted for any significant length of time. A combination of stretched staff resources, little interest from inmates and short sentences may account for the less than consistent offerings of teaching assistance.

In a number of cases, "help" meant assisting a woman to secure employment. Miss Macpherson seemed to have some insight into the potential connection between women's crimes and their economic situations. As was noted in Chapter One, over 40 percent of the women admitted to Portage in 1950 claimed to have no occupation. By 1960, this figure had grown to 65 percent of the population. Lacking an income, most of these women would be dependent upon male partners, extended family, the state or criminal activity to provide for themselves and their children. Women's

economic needs began to enter into logbook notations during Superintendent Macpherson's tenure.

Efforts to help women secure employment after release from the Portage Gaol were informal and infrequent. Gaol staff generally used their own resources to help women in their job searches. While women were typically escorted to the bus depot upon their release, on at least one occasion Superintendent Macpherson personally sought out employment for a woman in Portage la Prairie: "Discharged at 11 a.m. Doris Mitchell. Miss Macpherson arranged work for her at the Mayfair Coffee Shop so Doris remained in Portage" (Vol.11 June 10, 1953). Other staff members also made an effort to help some inmates find employment after release: "Kate Dixon taken to employment office - E.M. Frazer escort" (Vol.15 July 22, 1957). This inmate received additional help with her job search a month later: "Mrs. James escorted Kate Dixon to Winnipeg to be interviewed re - a job" (Vol.15 August 26, 1957).

There is evidence which suggests that male inmates in the province were offered much more support in their post-release plans. For instance, the Prisoners Aid Division of the Welfare Association of Manitoba took a very active role in assisting men at the Headingly Gaol.

During the past year, with the co-operation of the Prisoner's Aid, no inmate left the institution without being properly clothed, and in many instances, either employment was secured for them, or they were supplied with food and lodgings until suitable arrangements could be made for their welfare. (Headingly Annual Report - 1947:25)

There is some evidence that inmates at Portage were also provided with clothing when released. Both the Elizabeth Fry Society and some local churches collected and delivered these items to the gaol. However, there is no indication that employment or accommodations were arranged for these women.

Male inmates at the Brandon Gaol were also offered assistance in finding work. The Superintendent located his discussions of inmate employment under the category of "rehabilitation" in the Annual Reports.

We work closely with the Employment Service and assist any released prisoner to find employment if he so desires, but many who served any length of time prefer to keep their past a secret and look for employment through a private agency. Then we have the group who have no ambition to improve their way of living and who haven't the ability to do the simplest [sic] kind of work. It would be a lot to expect of any employer to pay this class the high wages expected today. (Brandon - Annual Report 1953:7)

It was the opinion of the Brandon Superintendent that if rehabilitation in this sense was to occur, considerable support would be required. He observed that:

....[T]he majority of the men were sentenced to short terms, in most cases from a few days to less than a month. It is next to impossible to do anything in the way of rehabilitating these men as they are mostly wanderers from one place to another. While they are not hardened criminals, it is quite evident that they require special guidance, as many of them do not have the ability or ambition to seek honourable employment. (Brandon - Annual Report 1957:6)

Although some attempts were made to secure employment for women after their release from the gaol, the focus of rehabilitation was generally elsewhere. Unlike their male counterparts, female inmates were encouraged to become more nurturing and domestically-oriented while they were incarcerated. Periodically, gaol

staff and volunteers from the community led informal training sessions. Instruction was provided in first aid, etiquette, table setting and nutrition. Superintendent Macpherson clearly supported these efforts and occasionally contributed by lecturing inmates on topics that included the "values of cleanliness" (Vol. 17 June 2, 1960).

Implied by the focus on the 'reformatory' aspects of domestic training is that women's 'natural' or 'normal' place in society is the home. Further to this, the implication is "that the failure of women prisoners is their failure as wives, mothers and housekeepers" (Dobash et al. 1986:182). The adoption of a domestic training focus for female inmates seems shortsighted, to say the least. Pat Carlen has emphasized this point:

The so-called training programmes are nearly always linked to traditional (and totally unrealistic) conceptions of women's roles, idealizations in fact which working-class women have seldom had opportunity (and, maybe, not even inclination!) to realize. Training for domesticity, far from helping a woman develop as a person, can often increase her dependency upon the 'male.' (Carlen 1983:19)

Inmate dependency and obedience were also emphasized in the way that Superintendent Macpherson organized the everyday workings of the gaol. One year when there were few disciplinary problems, Macpherson wrote in the Annual Report that "(t)he atmosphere of the institution could be compared to that of a school." (Annual Report 1948:2) Like a school, the day was organized around a series of bells. Each signaled different activities in the daily routine. For instance, a bell rang when inmates were to rise in the morning, proceed to the dining room to eat and return to their cells after work. While in the dining room, inmates were required to

sit in an assigned seating arrangement as dictated by the staff. For over twenty years, a "silent system" was strictly enforced during all meals. All talking ceased following the prayer which preceded every sitting.

Much like students, inmates were required to adhere to certain standards of appearance while at the gaol. For instance, throughout Superintendent Macpherson's career all staff and inmates were required to wear uniforms. Guards were attired in white nurses uniforms. Inmates were provided with a dress, a sweater and a pair of slacks. All inmates were required to wear their dresses unless they were engaged in particular work or recreational activities (i.e. digging in the potato pit or occasionally when playing sports in the gaol recreation yard). Many women rejected these attempts at stripping them of their individuality and refused to conform to the gaol standards of femininity.⁵

Macpherson also insisted that inmates adhere to a system of etiquette that emphasized a clear deference to those in positions of authority. For example, inmates were expected to rise when staff or other visitors entered. Women would risk losing some of their earned remission for disobedience of this order.

Miss Macpherson spoke to girls at second sitting re: rising when senior staff enter a room. Miss Macpherson warned the girls she would take five days off automatically if they forgot. (Vol. 13 Dec. 22, 1955)

Miss Macpherson spoke to first sitting reminding the girls to rise when guests appear and to tidy their rooms. A party of 25 students will tour the building tomorrow a.m. (Vol. 18 Jan. 17, 1962)

⁵ See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of inmate resistance.

In many ways, Miss Macpherson treated the women at Portage like a group of pupils that she and her staff were there to teach. For example, as an incentive for good behaviour, Miss Macpherson offered “field trips” of sorts for deserving inmates. On a summer afternoon in July of 1949, four inmates were escorted outside of Portage la Prairie to pick berries. They would later preserve the berries, which would then be shared with all inmates and staff over the course of the winter. Nevertheless, security was tight on the trip, with two matrons and Superintendent Macpherson supervising. On other occasions, Miss Macpherson or a matron would accompany a deserving inmate to the local movie theatre. Although it is difficult to assess what influence these excursions had on inmates, they were most likely a welcomed break from confinement and gaol routines.

The ideal of the nurturing, “reformatory” environment was often overshadowed by the more traditional penal goals of discipline and punishment. Superintendent Macpherson and her staff exercised a great deal of control over such things as the movement of inmates and the associations allowed within the gaol. As Karlene Faith (1993:131) explains, “attempts to soften or ‘feminize’ female institutions have been consistently subordinate to the issues of custody, order, management, discipline and punishment which are the fundamental functions of all prisons.”

Although Macpherson emphasized the value of creating a “school-like” environment for the reformation of inmates, a variety of disciplinary techniques were

also employed to induce conformity. Some frequently-used punishments included denying inmates access to sending or receiving letters, visitors, cigarettes or to outdoor exercise. Less common but more punitive strategies included placing inmates on bread and water diets and/or segregation in a darkened cell in the basement of the institution.⁶ The use of these punishments hardly seems to fit with the image of a school-like environment.

One of the most punitive disciplinary practices involved confining a woman in what inmates and staff referred to as the “black hole.” Consisting of a few darkened cells in the basement of the institution, the black hole was said to be reserved for the most “refractory” inmates. Also referred to in gaol records as “cages,” these cells were virtually empty. Inmates were provided with a pail in place of the toilet that was found in cells on the two main floors of the building. In addition to mousetraps, the cells were periodically furnished with a mattress placed directly onto the cement floor. The “black hole” was typically reserved for inmates who had violated gaol rules, although this was not always the case.

Superintendent Macpherson implemented a policy in the fall of 1958 that expanded the use of the basement cells. Presumably frustrated by the number of women who returned to the gaol after having served a sentence, Macpherson sought out a method that would deter inmates from returning. The policy required that a woman be admitted directly to the “black hole” if she received a new sentence within three months of her last release date.

⁶ See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the use of discipline at the gaol.

Rosemary will come under the new ruling. She is in basement cell and will remain locked at all times until further notice. Meals will be served in cell. (Vol. 16, 1958:93)

Frances placed in basement cell as it is less than a month since she was discharged. (Vol.16 1958:96)

If Macpherson believed that the goals of incarceration were to reform or deter inmates, then being re-admitted to the gaol could be interpreted as a failure of her techniques. This punitive strategy proved to be unsuccessful and was discontinued by 1962.

Miss Macpherson may have thought that her role at the Portage Gaol was akin to that of a school principal. Her emphasis on cleanliness, etiquette and obedience were consistent with this image. However, a reliance on more traditional techniques of prison discipline and punishment certainly undermine the idea that the Portage Gaol was school-like in its operation.

Bringing the Gaol Up to Date? - 1969 to 1970

Miss Macpherson retired in 1969, having served just over twenty years as the Superintendent of the Portage Gaol. In anticipation of her departure, the Director of Corrections for the province had offered Miss Noelle Des Lauriers the position. The initial offer was extended in 1967. Miss Des Lauriers declined at that time, as she was committed to two more years on a project for the Public Welfare Department in Saskatchewan. Possessing a Masters Degree in Social Work and no experience in corrections, Miss Des Lauriers took her place as superintendent at the Portage Gaol

in 1969. At that time, the Director of Corrections informed Superintendent Des Lauriers that her current mandate was to “bring the institution up to date.” Miss Des Lauriers recalled that what was meant by “bringing the institution up to date” was left to her own interpretation.⁷ What follows is a discussion of some of the initial steps that the new superintendent took to achieve her goals.

Possessing no experience in gaol administration or criminal justice in general, Miss Des Lauriers took some time to orient herself to the institution. For the first six months of her employment at the gaol, she depended on the knowledge and skills of her staff. Superintendent Des Lauriers took some time to observe and assess all aspects of the institution. She quickly discovered that Superintendent Macpherson had exercised a great deal of control over almost all of the daily operations at the gaol.

My predecessor, God knows, was a very concerned woman, but she ran the ship with her finger on everything, that nobody could have an aspirin without her permission. I don't know if they can have an aspirin or not. I'm not a doctor. The superintendent had to say 'yes.' So you could get awakened at 3 o'clock in the morning to see if so and so could have an aspirin. Give her the God damn bottle [laughter].

In addition to the dispensing of some medicines, Superintendent Macpherson had maintained control over a long list of other duties at the gaol, including determining the menus to be used, the visitors' schedule, the institutional accounting and the assignment of chores to inmates.

⁷ Miss Des Lauriers' observations were recorded in a personal interview conducted on July 29, 2000.

Superintendent Des Lauriers discovered that both the staff and inmates had become very comfortable with the way things were run by Miss Macpherson.

For the staff, many of these things were frightening. I studied the staff, and I found where their strengths were. I didn't have a deputy, but I picked a woman who was basically the superintendent for the first six months, because I had never worked in an institution, and [she] was very capable ... [a woman] who I to this day still highly respect. But the changes I brought scared her ... and there were the residents and change was very frightening for them. Even **easing** up on certain things was frightening because they didn't know where it would lead.

Des Lauriers found that even the smallest changes she proposed were often met with fear and resistance. As a result, the changes that did occur needed to be implemented much more gradually than she had anticipated. For example, when Superintendent Des Lauriers arrived, she suggested that the women should be provided with fresh fruit and juice along with their meals. The staff initially resisted, offering the argument that the expense would be too great. She recalled that their frugality was likely misplaced in this case.

.... because it had always been a very economical institution by comparison to the men's. Very much so. The girls were well fed ... there was no deprivation, **but** the menus, in my opinion, were not adequate. We were spending, I called it tons of money, ah, on cold medicine when giving them some orange juice and fresh fruit could have made all the difference.

Des Lauriers felt that gradual change would be the best way of achieving her goals with the least amount of resistance. First, oranges were made available at breakfast on Sunday mornings. Eventually, the staff agreed to have fruit juice served with breakfast seven days a week. After months of incremental change to the menu,

Superintendent Des Lauriers' initial suggestion of fruit and juice being served daily was put into practice.

Like her predecessor, Superintendent Des Lauriers believed that "helping" or reforming women was the goal of incarceration. In the first report that she wrote, Miss Des Lauriers commented "[I]t is so easy sometimes to set up rules and regulations which make our work much easier, but the question we must ask is, 'does it serve the needs of the people whom we are trying to help?'" (Annual Report 1970:2) After a year in her position at the gaol, Superintendent Des Lauriers summarized her expectations:

The theme and focus has not changed. It is the re-education of the inmate in order that she may live within the demands of society. We do not expect our girls to go out wearing halos. If they did, they would stick out like sore thumbs, as no one in this day and age wears one. However, if a girl should have learned how to function in society and not gotten herself into trouble, then we have achieved our aim. (Annual Report 1970:1)

While Superintendent Des Lauriers perpetuated some of the same practices as her predecessor, she began a slow process of dismantling some of the pieces of the old regime.

Prior to 1970, the "silent system" was strictly adhered to in the dining room. This meant that all women had to refrain from speaking unless they were participating in the prayer that was said before meals. Superintendent Des Lauriers eliminated this rule after decades of silence during meals. She observed some of the changes that resulted.

[S]ince the girls are now allowed to speak while eating their meal, they are learning to socialize. One of the interesting

factors of being allowed to speak at the table, was that the first few days were a general bedlam. It was almost reaching a point of hysteria. However, like everything else, people get used to it and now it is usually just a murmur that can be heard. There is still 'kibitzing' going back and forth, but it is the usual thing that one would expect in a relaxed atmosphere. (Annual Report 1970:3)

It is likely that Superintendent Des Lauriers may have overestimated the benefits of allowing inmates to speak to one another in the dining room. It is doubtful, for instance, that these women did not know how to "socialize" before coming to the gaol. Nevertheless, having the freedom to speak with the other women at the table did allow inmates to retain some of their adult status while incarcerated.

Superintendent Des Lauriers also began to give inmates more control over their recreational time. The results of giving women more discretion with their time surprised her.

One of the things which was done this year was give more leeway in evening lock-up. Lock-up had been 8:30 p.m. for quite some time, but at the beginning of the year, the odd night was allowed to watch a certain T.V. program. Hence, it became that even if the program was not very good, because a late lock-up was allowed, the girls would want to see this program. When lock-up became "hit and miss", then the girls no longer needed excuses to stay up and it is interesting how the interest in the T.V. diminished depending on the programs, and the girls themselves became far more choosy. Also, because they are allowed to stay up, it is interesting how many go to their room earlier than what we would expect. Lock-up also is no longer a problem; everyone seems to be quite contented to go to their room. (Annual Report 1970:7)

It is worthy of note that some of the male inmates in the province had been extended a similar privilege over a decade earlier. The superintendent at the Brandon

Gaol seemed equally as surprised as Des Lauriers by the results.

[E]arly last year I requisitioned for a Television set, which was kindly granted by the Honourable Attorney General, M.N. Hryhorczuk. This has proved to be a great success. At 6.00P.M., all inmates go to the Assembly Hall, known as the Chapel, and watch television until 10. P.M. Up until the time television was installed, all inmates were locked up in their cells at 6.30 P.M. Now they are not locked up individually till 10.00 P.M. We have had only one case of misbehaviour and the penalty for this is no television for one week. It would appear that extra supervision would be necessary for this late-hour lock-up, but that is not so. It is plain to see that the prisoners appreciate this privilege, and the regular staff on the evening shift handle this quite nicely.
(Brandon – Annual Report 1957:4-5)

Superintendent Des Lauriers also initiated some changes in the gaol that were intended to create a more “homey” atmosphere. In the 1970 Annual Report, Des Lauriers stated that she

.... intend[ed] to keep on working towards creating a more relaxed, home-like atmosphere. We would like to see the girls use their rooms as rooms only, and the rumpus room more as the family room. (Annual Report 1970:15)

Also, more interaction between inmates and staff was thought to have been facilitated by a change in wardresses’ uniforms. Up until the early 1970s, the staff wore white nurses’ uniforms.

In both the administration and operation of the centre, the staff this year has learned to mingle more freely with the girls. This has been done through introduction of programs and even through changes in the uniform. Many of the staff have taken on a “mod” look and gone into the pant-dress uniform. These look sharp and are also very serviceable when taking recreation.
(Annual report 1970:1)

Aesthetic changes in the dining room were also thought to have improved inmate-

staff relations.

As far as the dining room equipment is concerned, the smart tables, and a variety of colors in the chairs have made much to create a very homey atmosphere there. Placemats were obtained which, fortunately, matched the chairs, and here, we find that as a result, the staff now automatically eat with the girls and table manners have improved 100%. (Annual Report 1970:2)

Superintendent Des Lauriers arrived at the institution with the goal of “bringing the institution up to date.” Perhaps as a result of her inexperience and the entrenchment of the staff and inmates in their routines, change of any kind was slow to come. Des Lauriers began by loosening some of the restraints of the old regime, such as the longstanding practices of the “silent system” and early evening lock-up. Superintendent Des Lauriers would go on to implement more substantive changes throughout a career that stretched to almost twenty years at the Portage Gaol.

Discussion

These three superintendents and the staff who worked for them determined the daily routines at Portage. They had the power to control almost every aspect of inmates' lives: when they would rise in the morning, how they would spend their day, who they would be allowed to interact with, what they would wear and when they were permitted to speak. Their beliefs about the purposes of incarceration, the role of staff and the relevance of gender in gaol routines had far reaching consequences within the gaol.

Under Superintendent Calder's reign, the inmate was kept in custody for the purpose of punishment. This was consistent with federal and provincial correctional

policy at the time (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones 1989:360). There is evidence that Calder physically assaulted at least four women who were in his custody. He seemingly used these physical punishments at his own discretion, as female inmates were exempt from corporal punishment in the province of Manitoba.

Male inmates in the province were subjected to corporal punishment as directed by judges in their sentencing instructions. Cases in which corporal punishment was used at the Headingly Gaol were infrequent and carefully documented in Annual Reports. In 1949, two inmates received corporal punishment at the Headingly Gaol. In the first case, the inmate was found guilty on a charge of attempted rape. He was sentenced to serve two years less a day and was to receive "sixteen strokes of the lash" (Headingly - Annual Report 1949:4). The punishment was carried out, with the inmate receiving eight stokes in April of 1949 and another eight, six months later, in October. The second case that year involved an inmate who was sentenced to serve twenty months at Headingly. It was explained:

He has a long criminal record and previously served terms in the Manitoba and Prince Albert Penitentiaries where he was considered incorrigible. On November 9, 1949 this inmate struck one of the Officers of this Institution. He was subsequently charged with this offence and was sentenced to five strokes of the Paddle. The sentence was carried out on November 24th, 1949. Since that time [he] has been a model prisoner. (Headingly - Annual Report 1949:4)

The existing documentation indicates that corporal punishment was inflicted on male inmates only as ordered. In contrast, Superintendent Calder's use of force appears to have been independent, without the instruction or knowledge of Provincial Justice

officials.

In 1945, the role of female staff at the Portage Gaol was primarily custodial. This is at least partly explained by the fact that very few people were employed at the gaol. The staff consisted of six women: one chief wardress, one wardress cook and four wardresses. For ten and a half hours every day, only one wardress was employed to guard a maximum of forty-four inmates (Annual Report 1945:3). The greatest number of staff on duty at any given time was three. Their work focused on the management of inmates and the maintenance of the institution.

Superintendent Calder's authoritarian style of administration contributed to keeping the staff in custodial positions. He possessed the bulk of the decision-making powers, allowing the wardresses very little authority within the institution. Calder assumed responsibility for issuing the majority of the rules and responding to any reports of violations. With no systematic set of rules in place, Superintendent Calder governed the institution with sweeping discretion. Mr. Burritt observed that

[t]he gaol has no rules except verbal orders issued by Mr. Calder and a few issued by the chief wardress. Remission of sentences is handled in a haphazard manner. Remission lost through infractions of gaol rules is frequently restored thus destroying its value. Wardresses should be given authority to deprive an inmate of one days remission for unsatisfactory work or conduct subject however to appeal to the matron within 24 hours. Such authority would greatly strengthen the power of the wardress to control the inmates under her supervision. (Annual Report 1945:10)

Mr. Burritt's impression of Calder's approach to decision-making and staff autonomy was less than favorable. During his inspection of the gaol, Mr. Burritt

noted that even the chief wardress was relatively powerless under Mr. Calder's authority.

The chief wardress, Mrs. Mountain, exercises little or no initiative. She is more or less subjugated by the strong personality of Mr. Calder. She, in fact, is a mere cog in the wheel of the institutional machinery. (Annual Report 1945:2)

Mr. Burritt recommended that Superintendent Calder be replaced by a matron who would be given "the responsibility for the safe custody, welfare and reformation of the inmates and the proper administration of the gaol and its staff" (Annual Report 1945:2). Mr. Burritt included a caution that Mrs. Mountain, the chief wardress, should not be considered for the position of "matron." He advised:

The matron should be a woman of intelligence with a background in public service. A person possessing administrative ability, able and willing to assume all the responsibilities, such an appointment involves. It is my opinion that the present chief wardress, Mrs. Mountain, owing to being deprived of initiative for so long a time would hardly be suitable for the position. (Annual Report 1945:2)

Calder extended his authority to almost every aspect of the gaol's administration. In addition to maintaining gaol records and purchasing institutional supplies, he issued the majority of the rules and applied punishments when he judged them to be fit. Under Calder's administration, the Portage Gaol could be described as a "custody-oriented" institution. Generally speaking,

Inmates have low status and there is restriction of communication among inmates. Correctional employees do not participate in organizational decision making, and authority is premised on rank. Communication flow is downward from the administration to the staff, who are often unaware of the overall objectives and goals of the administration. (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones 1989:400)

Throughout Calder's administration, the custody of inmates and the good order of the institution were the dominant themes.

A number of significant changes in goal operations took place after Superintendent Macpherson replaced Mr. Calder. Management of inmates and the maintenance of the institution continued to be priorities throughout Superintendent Macpherson's career at the Portage Gaol. In addition, both the superintendent and her staff spent a great deal of their time interacting with inmates. Under Macpherson's guidance, the explicit goal of imprisoning women at Portage became the reformation rather than punishment of inmates. It can be argued that implicit in this regime was a gendered vision of reform or rehabilitation.

Changes in the role of staff at the gaol were vital in the attempt to reform inmates. Miss Macpherson's emphasis on "helping" incarcerated women was evident almost as soon as she began her career at Portage. In the first Annual Report she wrote, Macpherson applauded the wardresses: "Especially worthy of mention is the attitude of the staff to their work. Each officer is not merely a 'guard,' but is a teacher and counsellor to the inmates" (Annual Report 1948:2). Unlike Calder, Superintendent Macpherson expected the role of the wardresses to be much more than custodial. Comparing the atmosphere of the institution to that of a school (Annual Report 1948:2), she encouraged her staff to listen to inmates and pass on their knowledge to them. In these terms, Macpherson encouraged her staff to assume maternal or nurturing roles in their interactions with inmates.

Superintendent Macpherson's expectations of her staff are quite consistent

with what has been documented in women's institutions in the United States. Estelle Freedman (1981:89-90) has studied the histories of several women's prisons and concluded that they "rejected traditional penal goals of punishment and deterrence. ... Women's prisons were intended to retrain women through sympathetic female staff, prayer, education and domesticity." The presence of staff members who would act as role models for inmates was an integral part of "retraining." In these institutions, staff members "assumed the roles of loving but demanding mothers who forgave past errors but insisted on obedience" (Freedman 1981:95). Nicole Hahn Rafter (1985:169) documented a similar approach to women at a reformatory in the United States:

The reformatory worked through kindness as well as coercion, and therein lie the key to its success. Had it merely punished, it would have antagonized; but Albion also performed extensive nurturing functions, alleviating some of the harsher aspects of poverty. It served as a hospital where the diseased could receive treatment, the malnourished food, the pregnant decent care at delivery.

Maintaining an orderly and well-disciplined population of inmates and staff was certainly a priority while Superintendent Macpherson oversaw gaol operations.

Unlike Superintendent Calder, whose primary focus was on custody issues, Miss Macpherson lauded the ideal of reforming or rehabilitating inmates. The practices that Superintendent Macpherson employed were quite consistent with Karlene Faith's analysis of "rehabilitation":

The idea of rehabilitation is most consistent with the belief that criminal behaviours stem from flaws or weaknesses of the individual ... In this paradigm such individuals can be 'saved,' 'cured' or otherwise reformed through combinations of religious and moral instruction, psychological treatment and/or vocational

training in combination with the behaviour-modifying effects of losing one's freedoms. (1993:125)

It was this individualized approach to dealing with inmates that set Superintendent Macpherson apart from her predecessor.

When Superintendent Des Lauriers took up her position at the Portage Gaol, she discovered that Miss Macpherson had operated a well-ordered institution. In fact, many of the same rules and routines had been in place at the gaol for the entirety of Miss Macpherson's career as superintendent. As was previously discussed, Des Lauriers was initially instructed to "bring the institution up to date." An analysis of the initial modifications that were made reveals how Superintendent Des Lauriers interpreted this mandate.

Many of the changes that Superintendent Des Lauriers proposed relaxed some of the rigid aspects of the gaol regime. When Miss Des Lauriers arrived at the gaol, she found that the women were told when they would rise in the morning and retire in the evening. She stated, "they were roused at six o'clock or seven o'clock or something to that effect. To which I said 'What for?' They don't eat 'til eight." Des Lauriers also questioned the routine practice of locking inmates in their cells at 8:30 p.m. on weeknights. Surprised by this practice she exclaimed, "Even the chickens weren't thinking of going to bed, as a matter of fact!" By 1970, the longstanding policies of early rising and early evening lock-up had been overturned.

Unlike her predecessors, Des Lauriers encouraged guards to adopt a less authoritarian style when dealing with inmates. For instance, Superintendent Des

Lauriers welcomed the change in staff uniforms to less formal attire, citing the effect it had on staff-inmate relations.

Because one of the things that was discovered is that the uniform does something to people, you know, and lets it go to their head as a matter of fact. This way the lines were in many ways blurred and the, uh, residents started calling the staff by their first name.

Superintendent Des Lauriers directed much of her initial efforts at reducing the hierarchical nature of the interactions at the gaol.

Miss Des Lauriers also put into place some changes that would reduce her workload and provide inmates with a little bit more freedom in their communication with others outside of the gaol. It had been Superintendent Macpherson's policy to read and censor all mail sent or received by inmates. Miss Des Lauriers continued this practice with one significant change. While Superintendent Macpherson had made it her policy to cover over any profanities which were written in the incoming or outgoing mail, Des Lauriers refused to carry on this practice. She recalled explaining to her staff:

It's the language of the street and I don't think that we should take offence if it is used. I don't like it and you don't like it and I don't have to like it. But, it is the language of the street and what we have here are people from the street who are going back to the street.

Des Lauriers commented that the process of concealing profanities in these letters was often a very cumbersome task. She remarked that some pages would have had to be "completely blackened."

Superintendent Des Lauriers also implemented a change to the policy

concerning visitors. Previously, Miss Macpherson had permitted inmates to have visits with family members on Sundays and one designated evening during the week. Superintendent Des Lauriers found this arrangement to be quite unsatisfactory. She explained why visits had been so infrequent for many women.

Well, you see, they didn't have many because of distances precluded it and I can remember many were illiterate, and so, uh, somebody came from the reserve somewhere or other when the visiting was on, I think, Thursday and would appear on Tuesday, and they traveled all that distance and basically not allowed to see them and, but the staff were concerned enough that they would come to me and say 'What will we do because this man has come from to see his wife?' and I'd say 'Does it make any difference? He's here to see her. Why not?'

Superintendent Des Lauriers also recalled an instance when she helped a mother at the institution stay in regular contact with her children.

A woman who was sent to us for thirty days, I think, it was. She had two kids in school supposedly. The kids would come and see her and I said 'This is okay.' They can come everyday. Then, um, I mean they were dirty. They were the dirtiest little buggers. So I said to my deputy, I said, 'You know, get her a towel, a face cloth and a bar of soap and have her take them into the washroom and give them a good scrub.' So that's exactly what Mrs. Stewart did. Oh God, she grabbed the towels and she grabbed the kids and the kids came out squeaky clean! (laughter) Then I sorta said 'I wonder if they've eaten?' So we got it so that we would have a couple of sandwiches and a glass of milk. The thing is that with the food, I mean those kids were hungry and they started coming earlier and earlier. So I went and talked with Mrs. Stewart and the cook and said 'What would happen if we made a spot at the table for her and the two children?' She said 'It wouldn't kill us.' So when she finished her sentence the kids were coming in everyday to eat (chuckling). I just made my own rules.

Although Superintendent Des Lauriers implemented changes that gave the women some new privileges in their environment, she perpetuated narrow options for

education and vocational training at Portage. In this sense, she continued to emphasize femininity and domesticity in gaol routines. For instance, Miss Des Lauriers seemed to be quite proud of the expansion of the "personal care" program.

This program continued to develop this year. Two hair dryers were obtained, and the room which used to be the classroom is in the process of being converted into a "beauty-nook." While it stands pretty bare at this time, we are hopeful that next year proper tables and mirrors will be obtained. Hair tinting is also allowed as this is something which is done in the community. The girls are learning to apply this to each other and are also helping each other doing their hair. Facials were also introduced, discussions on skin care, also two speakers were brought in to discuss the application of make-up. (Annual Report 1970:6).

In at least this instance, "bringing the institution up to date" meant equipping women with the skills and props of femininity.

Superintendent Des Lauriers also planned on extending the use of the craft room. Women who already knew how to sew worked there during the day. Miss Des Lauriers hoped that structured classes would be organized so that other inmates could learn during their free time.

Hopefully, as time goes on, we are hoping to set up basic sewing classes where our girls would learn how to at least sew a straight seam and learn how to hem a dress and even make over some of the dresses which they might have. We feel that we have at this point in time enough old clothes on hand, that whatever they make, they would be able to take home with them. (Annual Report 1970 6-7)

These examples illustrate how Superintendent Des Lauriers' initial work at the gaol was geared toward relaxing some of the aspects of Miss Macpherson's regime. Nevertheless, order and discipline were still integral to the daily operations at

Portage, as was the focus on domesticity and femininity. Des Lauriers' initial changes at the gaol did not substantively alter the focus of the policies and practices that had been in place for over twenty years.

Concluding Remarks

In 1945, the primary purpose of imprisonment at the Portage Gaol was the discipline and punishment of inmates. The staff had very little autonomy under Superintendent Calder's rule. During the second administrative era, Miss Macpherson set out to "help" or reform the women. The staff at the gaol was instructed to enforce the rules and routines as well as nurture inmates. Superintendent Macpherson constructed a gaol regime that emphasized domesticity and femininity. Initially, Superintendent Des Lauriers' administrative task was to update institutional policies and practices. While Des Lauriers changed some of the rigid aspects of the routines at the gaol without substantially altering the regime, notably, she retained the gendered focus of gaol routines.

The administrative history of the Portage Gaol is best characterized as a gradual shifting of control. Under Superintendent Calder's authority, inmates and staff had little to no power within the institution. They were to respond to the orders as he alone appointed them. Superintendent Macpherson encouraged her staff to take a more interactive approach in their interactions with inmates. However, she maintained the bulk of the decision-making powers within the institution. When Superintendent Des Lauriers arrived at the gaol, she was confronted by a group of

staff and inmates who were accustomed to having almost all of the institutional decision-making done for them. Des Lauriers put a great deal of her initial effort into transferring some of the discretionary powers to both staff and inmates. The rules and daily routines that each of the three superintendents put into place are best understood with these administrative histories in mind.

Chapter Three Institutional Control

When women were incarcerated at the Portage Gaol, they were confronted with a regime that subjected inmates to close supervision and control. The ways in which inmates spent their days were often carefully choreographed to meet these objectives. The organization of work, education, recreation and discipline all provided opportunities for scrutinizing and regulating inmates. In addition, women were confronted with forms of discipline and punishment that, in many ways, stripped them of their adulthood. Classifying and segregating inmates within the institution were also key strategies implemented to achieve these goals. The process of labelling and segregating different types of inmates began before the transition to a women's gaol. Nevertheless, the system of classification in place at Portage in 1945 did not remain static. In fact, between 1945 and 1970, significant changes were recommended and some were implemented.

Classification and Segregation

A central part of the transition of Portage from a co-ed institution to a women's institution was the re-organization of inmates within the gaol. Extensive administrative and structural changes were recommended almost as soon as the men were removed from the building. In the 1945 Annual Report, Mr. Royal Burritt argued that changes were necessary at Portage "if a proper plan of segregation and classification is to be adopted" (Annual Report 1945:4). At the time, "the only segregation in force [was in terms of] venereal inmates, segregated until they are

cured or become non-contagious, and drug addicts until they get over the effects of drugs taken before admittance to the gaol” (Annual Report 1945:4).

Mr. Burritt’s suggestions for classification and segregation reflected his belief that some inmates were more likely to be “cured” or “reformed” when kept apart from other types of inmates. He recommended that the women at Portage be organized in a way that would facilitate the control and subsequent correction of inmates. He envisioned the population divided into:

1. Inmates requiring maximum security.
2. Inmates requiring medium security.
3. Inmates requiring minimum security.

These are again subdivided into:

1. Drug addicts.
2. V.D. inmates.
3. Reformable inmates.
4. Non-reformable inmates.
5. Remand inmates.

(Annual Report 1945:5)

Mr. Burritt did not define what “maximum,” “medium” and “minimum” security would entail. However, this particular system of classification was never actually implemented at Portage.

Although Burritt’s recommendations for the gaol were never fully realized, an incident which occurred only months after his report was written did lead to some changes. On April 15, 1946, over half of the forty-two inmates at the Portage Gaol staged a “riot” which drew both public and political attention to institutional conditions. A local newspaper described the event:

Getting out of control last night the women in the provincial jail here rioted throughout the day. Tear gas bombs thrown by the R.C.M.P. failed to quell the shouting, singing women. Windows stood paneless as beds, chairs or any object at hand came raining down through the bars. The glass in the greenhouse on the east

side was shattered. Shouts of "We want the Attorney General" was mixed with the singing of "Don't Fence Me In," and calls for "we want Sheriff Calder back"¹ filled the air and drew large crowds to watch the scene. (Portage Daily Graphic, April 16, 1946)

Guards at the gaol had been documenting an increase in inmate dissatisfaction and defiant behaviour for at least a week prior to the riot. Acts of resistance (as found in gaol log books) included refusals of medication, yelling at wardresses, stalling at lock up time and one suicide attempt. It was reported that the primary sources of discontent for the prisoners were a lack of medical treatment for drug addicts and the quality of the food at the gaol. Presumably, inmates engaged in this protest in an attempt to bring attention to and seek improvement of the gaol conditions. While they did succeed in drawing attention to themselves, the desired outcomes eluded them.

Following the April riot, Mr. Burritt investigated conditions at the institution and interviewed a number of women who were involved. He concluded that

.... [P]risoners, both male and female, at times fail to recognize they are in jail and forget that of necessity they must put up with certain inconveniences. The family tree and social standing of the inmates cannot be given the consideration it appears that some think they deserve. (Portage Daily Graphic, April 22, 1946)

Nevertheless, following Mr. Burritt's investigation of the riot, conditions at the gaol did change. Classification and segregation became priorities at the Portage institution.

¹ At this time Sheriff Calder had very little involvement with gaol operations. He was "on-call" in crisis situations.

By May of 1947, the interior of the building had been remodeled and a “program of segregation” was in place. Prisoners were now separated and received “treatment” according to the label they were given when admitted to the institution. The Portage Gaol had two floors, plus a few cells in the basement that were reserved for “refractory” inmates. As noted previously, staff and inmates referred to the cells in the basement as the “black hole.” In addition, a room where inmates gathered to sew, play cards and attend church services was located on the second floor. The main floor of the building became the home of the “first timers.” This group of women was strictly segregated from the “repeaters” who were regarded as less reformable and a negative influence on other inmates. The repeaters were housed on the second floor, isolated from other inmates. The administration went to great lengths to keep these groups of inmates apart. If first time inmates and repeat inmates wanted to communicate with each other, it would have been difficult. They were assigned work in different parts of the building, had their meals served at different times in the dining room and were given different recreational options.

Many inmates spent some of or their entire sentence in limited contact with others at the gaol. Inmates who were found to have some form of venereal disease upon admission were regarded as contagious. To avoid infecting other inmates, these women were either confined to the “hospital” dormitory or kept isolated from other prisoners in separate cells on the two main floors.² These women remained isolated and were treated until the doctor and chief wardress were satisfied that they

² It is helpful to note the use of the words “isolation” and “segregation” in gaol logbooks. The term “isolation” refers to confinement of inmates for some form of medical treatment. “Segregation” was the term used to describe confinement for the purpose of punishment.

were cured of the symptoms of the venereal disease. Drug addicts would also be kept in isolation at least until they had completed a period of withdrawal.³ There is some evidence which suggests that drug addicts were often, but not always, segregated from other inmates. If a woman had recovered from the symptoms associated with withdrawal and was not judged to be a threat to the management of the institution, she was integrated with the rest of the population (either as a first time or repeat inmate).

Isolating drug-addicted inmates from the rest of the gaol population was not a practice that was unique to the Portage institution. Concern with the behaviour and treatment of drug addicts also thrived at the men's gaol in Headingly. Annual Reports from the gaol consistently included some account of the status of drug addicts within the institution. For example:

The number of this type of prisoner has increased considerably during the past year, although not one was found addicted to the extent that he required any special treatment. The increase can be attributed to more active enforcement on the part of both Winnipeg City Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police ... This type of prisoner has, in the past, been a source of trouble in Penal Institutions. I must say that during the past year, they have set an excellent example to other inmates. Not one, during the year, was charged with a breach of gaol discipline. They are segregated at all time from other inmates of this Institution.
(Headingly – Annual Report 1949:2-3)

The practice of segregating drug addicts from other inmates persisted until at least 1965 at the Headingly Gaol.

³ Up until 1949, the usual course of treatment for drug addicts included some form of medication (i.e. 217's, 222's, 292's, or Nembutal). By October of that year, "a policy went into effect that no sedatives would be given, but that plenty of food and hot drinks would be available to addicts during the withdrawal period" (Annual Report 1949-1950:1).

At the Portage Gaol, suspicion toward drug addicts thrived. Superintendent Macpherson encouraged her staff to closely monitor this group of inmates. The suspicions, as expressed by the wardresses, were that drug addicts were influencing others to be non-compliant and/or become drug addicts themselves. Warnings were periodically written in the logbooks to alert wardresses to a drug addict who may have been attempting to influence or recruit others. Some examples included:

Anne asking to see Dr. Rennie and for something for pains in her legs however she refused a hot bath, which is supposed to help, it looks to me like she is acting on advice from other drug addicts. (Vol.8, 1949:134)

Margaret trying to get Bernice to be a drug addict. (Vol.8, 1948:125)

Drug addicts remained a highly monitored population during Superintendent Macpherson's tenure at the Portage Gaol.

Superintendent Macpherson retained the system of classification that was implemented in 1947 when she took her position in 1949. The practice of keeping repeat inmates and first-time inmates apart (which began during the transition from a co-ed gaol to a women's institution) continued throughout Macpherson's career. In addition, the policies of housing these groups of women on separate floors of the gaol, maintaining two separate sittings for all meals and separate work assignments were all perpetuated.

The only potential contact that the two groups of inmates could have with one another was during some highly-monitored church services and recreational activities. Church services were a consistent exception to the practice of keeping first time inmates and repeat inmates apart. Although these women occupied the

same room for church, they were not permitted to socialize. The wardresses often documented the number of each group of women who attended the services, along with any behaviour they considered to be noteworthy. Typical log book entries included:

Mr. Robson Salvation Army here for service 2-3 p.m. 6 first and 16 repeaters attending. (Vol.8, 1949:131)

Margaret wore her dress today but was very very untidy, a jersey under it and a belt tied around her waist. Ilene disgusting in her appearance at church. Pentecostal service at 2 p.m. 10 repeaters, 5 first timers present.⁴ (Vol.8, 1949:133)

On occasion, first time inmates and repeat inmates participated in some form of recreation while sharing the same space. This did not mean, however, that they were allowed to mingle with one another. For example, card games in the “rumpus room” were organized with first time inmates and repeat inmates seated at separate tables: “Six tables of whist tonight. Mary and Linda winners for repeaters. Jane and Leona winners for 1st offenders” (Vol.9, 1950:22). In spite of warnings from wardresses to stay separated from one another, there were times when differently classified inmates would communicate with each another: “Girls all out to the yard together tonight. Some of them will not stay segregated in the yard” (Vol.8, 1949:135; emphasis in original).

The way that inmates were organized within the Portage institution remained consistent for over twenty years. As noted in Chapter Two, upon taking up her position at the Portage Gaol, Superintendent Des Lauriers implemented changes that she believed would bring the institution up to date. Unlike her predecessors, Des

⁴ Margaret and Ilene were both “repeaters.”

Lauriers thought that segregating first-time inmates from repeat inmates was unnecessary. She explained the rationale for integrating the inmates:

“21” [a set of cells on the second floor] ceased to be used as a reception area for repeaters. First we found that there is no difference between the first offender and the repeater. They usually have known each other on the outside before and greet each other like long lost friends. The other thing too which we established was that it might have been the first time that they were caught, but it was not the first time that they had committed an offence. I don't think that either group are teaching anything bad to each other that they don't already know. As a result of the above, we are endeavoring to see if it is possible to do without this reception area, make other arrangements, and hence, plan for taking the cages out of this room which is adjoining the rumpus room and set it up as a games room. (Annual Report 1970:10)

From this time onward, repeat inmates were housed with first-time inmates on both floors. Superintendent Des Lauriers also began integrating drug addicts and inmates with venereal diseases with the other inmates. Women who were too ill to participate in the gaol routines were kept segregated in the hospital dormitory.

One outcome of integrating inmates was that the staff were released from policing interactions between these groups of women. Superintendent Des Lauriers recalled that keeping first time inmates and repeat inmates on separate floors was especially taxing on staff when there were very few residents at the gaol. Under the system of segregation put in place by Ed Calder and perpetuated by Miss Macpherson, inmates would have to be separated according to their classification regardless of how many women were incarcerated. In order to tend to the needs of both groups of women, staff would have to be present on both floors of the gaol. After this system was abolished, up to twenty women could be housed on one floor. The result was that gaol staff could be more efficiently employed when the number

of women at the gaol was low. According to Superintendent Des Lauriers, the staff seemed to appreciate having the women integrated. She commented that they “kind of liked it because it was less work.”

Discussion

Central to the classification of individuals at the Portage Gaol were the processes of ‘examination’ and ‘documentation.’ Michel Foucault (1977:170) includes these practices in his discussion of the “simple instruments of disciplinary power.” He contends that a specific type of ‘disciplinary power’ emerged in prisons at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Foucault (1977:189) explains:

The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. The procedures of examination were accompanied at the same time by a system of intense registration and of documentary accumulation. A ‘power of writing’ was constituted as an essential part in the mechanics of discipline.

At Portage, gaol calendars, medical records, visitor logs and daily logbooks were all essential parts of the “network of writing.” Gaol calendars contained the most detailed information about individual inmates. Foucault would argue that this is a form of disciplinary power that

.... is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able to always be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (Foucault 1977:187)

The initial examination and documentation process at the Portage Gaol was very thorough. Every woman who was admitted to the gaol was identified by a list of data that included her name, assigned serial number, birth date, birth place, offence(s), sentence, race or ethnicity and marital status. Gaol officials also took note of inmates' physical characteristics such as their height, weight, hair and eye colour. Women's bodies were subjected to particularly intense scrutiny at the time of their admittance. Guards took note of any "descriptive marks" on women's bodies. Some examples included "scar inner right arm," "birthmark left foot," "appendectomy scar," "tattoo 'Jim' left arm," "needle scars on arms" and "burn scars both hands."

Through the processes of examination and documentation, each inmate was rendered a "case." As defined by Foucault (1977:191) a "case" is the "individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc." The construction of cases was an integral part of the classification and segregation schemes at the Portage Gaol. Beginning in 1946, the Portage gaol employed a very simple system with only four categories used to identify inmates ("first-time inmates," "repeaters," "drug addicts" and "VD inmates"). In spite of its simplicity, this form of organizing staff and inmates at the gaol persisted for over twenty years.

Classification and segregation of inmates at the Portage Gaol was based on the "principle of partitioning" in which "each individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (Foucault 1977:143). Following the riot of 1946, "partitioning"

inmates became a consistent practice at the Portage Gaol. The timing of the implementation of this strategy suggests an attempt on the part of the gaol's administration to prevent the "dangerous coagulation" of inmates (Foucault 1977:143). Foucault explains the goals of "partitioning":

To know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using. Discipline organizes as analytical space. (Foucault 1977:143)

In short, "partitioning" or classifying and segregating inmates increased the powers of gaol staff to monitor and control inmates.

Separating and categorizing inmates was also a strategy employed to prevent some women from influencing or "infecting" others. For example, repeat offenders were isolated from less institutionally-experienced, first-time inmates. Similarly, drug addicts and women being treated for venereal diseases were placed in the hospital room or isolated in their cells. The processes of labelling and organizing inmates to influence their reform are not new in terms of the history of prisons. David Rothman has observed similar practices in the first penitentiaries designed for male inmates. He noted that "(t)he duty of the penitentiary was to separate the offender from all contact with corruption, both within and without its walls"(Rothman 1971:83). The underlying belief was that the environment which encouraged criminal behaviour in inmates on the outside was replaced by the reformative influences of the prison. Beginning in the 1830s,

the promise of institutionalization depended upon the isolation of the prisoner and the establishment of a disciplined routine. Convinced that deviancy was primarily the result of the

corruptions pervading the community, and that organizations like the family and the church were not counter balancing them, they believed that a setting which removed the offender from all temptations and substituted a steady and regular regimen would reform him. (Rothman 1971:82)

With inmate movements and associations so highly choreographed, even daily routines such as cooking and cleaning could be closely scrutinized.

Daily Routines: Work, Education and Recreation, 1945 to 1970

In terms of work, education and recreation, very little changed at the gaol over the twenty-five years in question. The work was domestically oriented, and generally contributed to the maintenance of the institution. Over the years, attempts were made to offer women some basic academic skills, although a number of barriers prevented consistency in this type of education. Prisoners also had opportunities to engage in some highly structured and monitored recreation with other inmates and staff. Daily life for inmates and staff at the gaol was mostly organized around eating, cleaning, craftwork and some recreation. When inmates were not confined to their cells, they may have been working in the laundry, craftroom or kitchen.

The gaol laundry was typically a busy area of the institution. Under the supervision of staff, inmates worked up to six hours a day, six days a week washing, drying and ironing all of the institution's laundry. A schedule organized the work to be completed on each day. Unless an inmate was too ill or confined to a punishment cell, she was responsible for laundering her own uniforms, towels, sheets and pillowcases. Periodically, the inmates in the laundry were given additional work that was initiated in the community. For example, the nearby

Manitoba School for Boys regularly sent in excess of two hundred uniforms to be washed and ironed. Inmates would complete this work in the evenings, after the institutional laundry was done.

Another busy area within the institution was the kitchen. From early morning to early evening, seven days a week, there was some kind of activity taking place in the kitchen and dining room. Under the close supervision of the matron in charge of the kitchen, inmates were responsible for preparing, serving and cleaning up after every meal. While the separation of first-time inmates and repeat inmates was being enforced, every meal was served twice in the dining room. Inmates who prepared breakfast were required to get out of bed earlier than the others to accommodate the first sitting at 8 a.m. In addition, special meals were prepared and served to inmates who were confined to their cells for medical or punitive reasons. For a few weeks out of every year, the kitchen staff worked well into the evenings preparing large quantities of preserves that were consumed at the gaol over the winter. Although working in the kitchen meant rising early in the morning and cooking and cleaning throughout most of the day (including weekends and holidays), there is some indication that it was considered to be desirable work by some inmates. Superintendent Des Lauriers remarked that there was a general belief among the inmate population that assignment to the kitchen was a "choice job" that often improved a resident's "status" within the gaol.

Women who knew how to sew and do other types of needlework spent much of their day completing projects in the craft room. The inmates who did this work generally possessed needlework skills before coming to the gaol. Women who did

not know how to sew, knit or crochet were encouraged to learn from others in their free time. Employing inmates in the craftroom successfully minimized some of the institution's expenses.

Most of the activity in the craftroom involved sewing and mending inmate and staff uniforms. Inmates were provided with the supplies to make everything from dresses and sweaters to hospital gowns worn by inmates when the doctor was visiting. Almost all of this work was done by hand as sewing equipment was either lacking or unreliable. In addition to clothing, inmates also produced many other items that were used at the gaol. These included shower curtains, pillowcases and quilts. At some point during Miss Macpherson's tenure, a loom was acquired and set up in the craftroom. Up until the early 1970s, all of the institution's towels were crafted on the loom. Superintendent Des Lauriers abandoned this practice shortly after arriving at Portage. She found that buying the materials required to make the towels was more expensive than purchasing towels at a local department store.

Projects were also occasionally brought in from the community. Some additional revenue came into the gaol budget as a result of these efforts. The hospital in Portage la Prairie, some local hockey teams and the Vaughan Street Gaol in Winnipeg all benefited from the labour of inmates. Hospital sheets, pillowcases and towels were hemmed or mended in the craftroom. Hockey teams from Portage commissioned inmate workers to sew crests on their sweaters and repair their socks. The inmates were also called upon to sew the dresses that the inmates and staff wore at the Vaughan Street Gaol. These projects came to the gaol sporadically and were usually undertaken in the evening.

Evening recreational activity was also available in the craft room. Women were encouraged to do a variety of needlecrafts and to teach other inmates as well. If extra materials were available, inmates were allowed to make items to take with them when they left the gaol. In 1969, Superintendent Macpherson was permitting inmates to take their work with them as long as it did not exceed two dollars in value. To encourage women to engage in such "healthy amusement," Superintendent Des Lauriers canvassed community groups such as the Elizabeth Fry Society to donate old clothing to the institution. Having amassed a large quantity of discarded material, the two-dollar limit was eliminated.

.... [W]hen some of the girls went in to learn to sew, from old material that we had, we allowed them to make quilts which they could take home. It should be pointed out that this was discarded material, usually old coats that no one would want to be seen dead in, and hence, after the coats are ripped and washed, they are cut up and make exceedingly warm quilts which they can use in their home. (Annual Report 1970:6)

Inmates who were skilled at various types of needlework when admitted to the gaol were encouraged to continue the craft while they were incarcerated. Beginning under Miss Macpherson's supervision, wardresses occasionally entered some of the inmate's work at local fairs. Over the years, some exceptional pieces won ribbons that were dispatched to the inmates at Portage. Craftwork contests were also initiated within the institution. Matrons would judge the work and offer small prizes such as candy or tobacco for the best pieces.

Throughout the year, women also contributed many hours of craftwork to charitable organizations. This voluntary work was initiated under Superintendent Macpherson's administration and was continued by Superintendent Des Lauriers.

Inmates regularly knit socks and mittens that were donated to church groups in Portage. Also, the Children's Aid Society received a number of quilts which the women had made. Every Christmas, a group of inmates gathered in the craftroom to knit doll clothing for a local church group. The Dorcas Society gave these dolls to "families who were not able to buy toys for their children" (Annual Report 1970:6). Ironically, many of the women who helped to dress these dolls were likely mothers who could not afford gifts for their own children. As we saw in Chapter One, most of the inmates at Portage were either unemployed or employed in positions with relatively little stability and low wages before being gaoled.

Almost weekly, inmates were given assignments other than the usual domestic labour within the institution. A group of three to six women were regularly escorted by guards to the RCMP quarters and courthouse adjoining the gaol. While there, these women completed a variety of cleaning tasks. When inspections or tours of the courthouse were scheduled, much more was expected of this group of workers. A logbook entry in January of 1954 stated: "Mrs. Newman has had a gang of girls in the R.C.M.P. quarters for the past two days cleaning. Washing walls, and ceiling, scraping floors and waxing etc. Getting ready for inspection" (Log Book Vol. 12:54). There was also a variety of seasonal work that inmates did at the gaol. Cleaning the leaves from the recreation yard was a typical fall activity. In the years when a garden was planted, inmates would be gathered to plant, weed and harvest the vegetables.

All of the women at the gaol were expected to do the work that was assigned to them. According to early institutional records, jobs were given out on a rotating

system “with due consideration for suitability and aptitude” (Annual Report 1947:2).

Superintendent Des Lauriers continued the practice of assigning work to inmates

based on their abilities:

Many of them thought it was sort of a privilege to work with the staff, so they, uh, they liked it. If they had any, they had to have the aptitude. It wasn't a case of teaching them how to sew a seam, it was a case of you had to have the aptitude to do a good job.

Many of the administrative decisions to place women in particular work environments were also influenced by the perceived relationships between inmates.

From 1945 to 1970, first time inmates and repeaters were strictly segregated from one another for most gaol activities, including work.

Generally, unless an inmate was withdrawing from drugs, was otherwise deemed too ill to work or was locked up on disciplinary charges, she was expected to take her place in the gaol labour force. Ultimately, it was up to the doctor to decide who was too ill to work. He visited the institution on a weekly basis, unless there was an emergency. If an inmate was unable to work for a prolonged period of time, she was referred to in gaol records as a “chronic.” The term itself implies that a woman had some sort of illness, although this was not always the case. Under Superintendent Macpherson's rule, a “chronic” was a woman who was “mentally and/or physically incapable of accepting prison routines” (Annual Report 1956:3). In 1956, this definition was expanded to include women who were pregnant. In spite of receiving the label of “chronic,” most women at the gaol worked throughout their pregnancies. It was only on a few occasions that the doctor determined that

gaol labour would threaten the health of an inmate or her baby. Outside of work, few opportunities for education and training existed at the gaol.

Shortly after the transition to a women's gaol began at Portage, people recognized and responded to the lack of education that was available for inmates. On May 19, 1945 a local judge was expected to arrive for an inspection of the building. Other commitments on that day prevented him from keeping his appointment. Rather than re-scheduling the visit, Judge Adamson arranged for his wife to visit the gaol. Following her tour of the building, Mrs. Adamson had tea with the staff and remarked that one of the most pressing problems at the gaol was the "lack of constructive occupation for young girls" (Log Book May 10, 1945). Later in the same year, Mr. Royal Burrirt echoed Mrs. Adamson's concern and stated that "(n)o vocational or instructional training worthy of the name is being given" (Annual Report 1945:6). He proposed that the lack of training was a direct result of insufficient staff and sewing equipment. To address this problem, Mr. Burrirt requested that an "instructor wardress" be added to the custodial staff that was already on the payroll. He believed that with additional help:

... inmates could be given useful, productive training in:

1. Knitting socks

The penal, mental and other provincial institutions are heavy users of men's socks; at Headingly Gaol alone we purchased 1580 pairs last year. Our requirements will increase as the population of the gaol goes up. I recommend the purchase of at least two knitting machines with which the tops of the socks would be knitted, the feet being knitted by hand. I am informed that one pair of socks requires only 7ozs. of yarn.

2. Knitting mitts and scarves.

3. Making dresses and other wearing apparel for inmates.

4. Embroidery work etc.

Vocational training could be extended to gardening outside the gaol building. At present no inmates are employed outside on

the gaol grounds or vegetable garden, not because they might run away, but because there is no wardress available to place in charge of them while on outside work. (Annual Report 1945:6-7)

The institution would have certainly benefited from the implementation of such a training program. The costs of confinement could be somewhat defrayed with the help of inmate labour. However, this type of "education" was not likely to improve women's opportunities once they were released from gaol.

Periodically, informal sewing, weaving, home nursing, nutrition and etiquette classes were available to those inmates who were interested. Many of these classes were provided by women from the community who volunteered to come in and teach the inmates. In some instances, prisoners were recruited to teach their peers to read and write or learn basic mathematical skills.

When Superintendent Des Lauriers arrived at the institution, there was no academic education being offered to inmates. By the early 1970s, a consistent program of education was in place at the gaol. At the time, Superintendent Des Lauriers did not have the resources in her budget that would have allowed her to hire a teacher. Recognizing the need for some sort of ongoing effort to provide education to inmates, one of the guards was asked to organize an educational program at the institution. The Department of Education was contacted as a potential resource and, much to Superintendent Des Lauriers' surprise, her request was greeted with great enthusiasm.

When I contacted him, he was so excited! Absolutely so excited. He said 'You know this is a part of our mandate, that we are supposed to supply education in the jails.' So he came out and he sent a pile of books to Mrs. Duncan. They were just coming out of our ears, and a schedule and what was required for upgrading and we had a qualified upgrading school going on.

Didn't have an awful lot of students because, you have to remember that at that time also we had many residents that, ah... couldn't sign their names when they came in, but the staff themselves undertook to teach them how to sign their names while they were in.

Superintendent Des Lauriers recalled that the Portage Gaol was the first provincial institution in Manitoba that offered a consistent upgrading program for inmates.

It can be demonstrated that prior to Superintendent Des Lauriers' arrival, much of the "education" at the Portage Gaol had a moral or religious tone.

Individuals and groups representing a variety of Christian denominations had an ongoing influence on the routines at the gaol. In any given month, representatives from the United Church, Church of Christ, Salvation Army or Methodist, Presbyterian, Mormon, Pentecostal, Baptist and Roman Catholic churches were sure to be on the visitor's list at the gaol. From 1945 to 1970 not one Sunday, Easter or Christmas went by that was not attended by at least one of the churches that regularly visited the Portage Gaol.

Options for recreation were also dominated by Christian influences. Local clergymen or those who had traveled from Winnipeg came to teach, counsel and preach to inmates according to their own doctrine. There were also occasions when a group of parishioners would come in to "entertain" the women. This typically involved reading from the Bible or leading inmates in singing hymns. Beginning in 1948, a local church group began showing films at the gaol. This became a weekly diversion for staff and inmates. The films covered a wide variety of topics, from

missionary work and musicals to the effects of alcohol use.⁵ Various churches were scheduled to visit the institution on different days of the week. If there was a cancellation or a night when no activity was planned, a matron would often lead inmates in hymn singing or scripture reading.

According to institutional documents, inmates were encouraged to attend church services, however, attendance was "not compulsory" (Annual Report 1947:3). Although it was stated that attendance was not required, the staff at the gaol regularly kept track of who was present at the services. In addition, any behaviour that was considered noteworthy was documented. For example:

Father Minvielle here from 7 to 9:15 pm to hear "confessions" of 15 girls. All were very quiet and orderly during service. (Vol. 7 March 28, 1948)

Iris disgusting in her appearance at church. Pentecostal service at 2pm. 10 repeaters, 5 first timers present (Vol. 8 June 12, 1949)

As well as noting who attended church services and their dress and demeanour, matrons also took note of the inmates who were absent.

Inmates did not receive formal sanctions for not attending church services. However, there were often consequences for making that choice. A brief note in the gaol logbook was often used to alert staff to be especially watchful of inmates who opted out of church-led activities. A simple observation such as, "Frances and Eleanor have not attended church for some time" might lead matrons to increase their monitoring of these women (Vol. 8 May 8, 1949).

⁵ Some titles included "Ice Carnival," "Songs From the South," "Andy Pandys Pop," "The Story of Menstruation," "Alcohol: What it Does Outside and Inside the Body" and "Drunk Driving: A Crime Does Not Pay Series."

Christianity also pervaded the daily routines at Portage. Even if inmates chose to abstain from church services, they could not avoid participating in the daily prayers which were said before every meal. The matrons kept watch for inmates who did not comply with the routine. For example, "Mrs. Newman reports girls not standing properly during Grace" (Vol.11 Dec. 12, 1952). Shortly after this note appeared in the logbook, Superintendent Macpherson warned the inmates that they would lose privileges if they did not meet the expectations of the staff while the prayers were being said.

In addition to these daily occurrences, Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas were observed. These days were likely welcomed by most of the women, even if Christianity itself was not relevant to their lives. At Portage, many privileges accompanied these holidays. On these days, most inmates were excused from work, family visits were often allowed and extended, larger meals were served and small gifts such as candy or hairbrushes were given out.

Superintendent Des Lauriers was much more sceptical than her predecessor when it came to allowing religious influences into the gaol.

Everyone wanted to convert the inmates according to what they were, their beliefs. They'd literally knock the doors down and some were charlatans among others. So, uh, we had, I had a reputation also that I didn't want church in there. But what I had soon observed is that the church service in the traditional manner didn't work, but if you had a minister or priest who was willing to sit around the table and talk religion to them, with them and have discussions, then it worked very well.

Over the years, Superintendent Des Lauriers welcomed a number of ministers and priests who were willing to give up formal ceremony for less-structured meetings with inmates.

Church groups from Portage and surrounding communities, including Winnipeg, were the most regularly scheduled visitors to the gaol. Although religious services were provided at some of the men's institutions in the province, their presence seemed to be less consistent. For many years, the Salvation Army was one of the only Christian-based groups visiting inmates at Brandon. Although appreciative of the work done by the Salvation Army, the gaol administration also made attempts to solicit the services of other groups. For example:

Religious Services in the Gaol, during the past year have been conducted solely by the Members of the Salvation Army, under the leadership of Major Cartmell. There has been a service every Sunday afternoon in the Gaol Chapel. Major Cartmell, made all the arrangements and held special services to celebrate Xmas and Easter, for these two special services he arranged for the Salvation Arm Band and Choir to assist him. The prisoners look forward to these Sunday services, the majority of the population attend and take part in the services each Sunday they are here. If it were not for the hard work and conscientious efforts of Major Cartmell, this Gaol would be without any religious services. This wonderful organization is deserving of the highest praise for the interest that it takes in the men in this institution. Clergy, of other denominations in this City apparently have no interest in Gaol Work, and efforts on my part to gain their interest in this work have been fruitless. (Brandon – Annual Report 1953: 9)

While the administration made numerous attempts to encourage other churches to get involved with inmates at the Brandon Gaol, their efforts were mostly unrewarded.⁶ For example:

⁶ We can only speculate as to why there was such a longstanding difference in the participation of church-based volunteers at the Portage and Brandon Gaols. There are several reasonable explanations. In Brandon, gaol work may have been a lower priority than other church commitments or, as the Superintendent believed, local church groups were simply uninterested. Another possibility may have been the belief that male inmates were not suitable candidates for their efforts.

To date the clergy of other denominations have shown very little interest on institutional work. I hope this situation can be rectified in the near future. Ministers of other denominations do visit individuals when asked and often give valuable assistance. (Brandon – Annual Report 1960:2)

In 1960, the Salvation Army was still visiting the gaol every Sunday. A representative from a local Roman Catholic Church was also attending the gaol twice per week with one additional service provided every month.

Discussion

A continued emphasis on domesticity and femininity in education and training programs at Portage can be observed right up to 1970. As identified by Superintendent Macpherson, “(t)he main program emphasis is related to training in housekeeping tasks, such as food preparation, sewing, weaving and related activities” (Annual Report 1967:5). Carlen has observed similar systems in more modern institutions for women. She summarized the daily activities at a prison in Scotland as “a constant round of routine domestic and machine work interspersed with contrasting periods of isolation and enforced and monitored sociability” (1983:112). These types of regimes have been cited as employing techniques of social control that are unique to carceral systems designed for women. Carlen (1983:59) agrees that the penal control of women should be seen as “a very specific form of social control especially tailored for the disciplining of women. For the majority of these imprisoned women have not merely broken the law. As women, mothers and wives they have also somehow stepped out of place.”

It is important to remember that many of the women who were incarcerated at Portage were living on the margins of society in terms of their race, class and marital status. These women were not unlike other female inmates (past and present) who had somehow breached the dominant cultural ideologies of 'proper' femininity (Carlen 1983; Dobash et al. 1986; Rafter 1985). The 'proper' woman was to be married. With or without children, her priority was to be looking after her 'domestic responsibilities' and not to be working at paid employment outside of the home. Ultimately, the further a woman strays from the stereotype of the 'normal' woman, as reinforced by the 'ideological discourses of femininity,' the more diligently she will be controlled in both public and private institutions (Worrall 1990:35). Historically, it has been white, middle class ideologies of domesticity and femininity that have saturated penal philosophies (Carlen 1983; Dobash et al. 1986; Freedman 1981; Rafter 1985). Perhaps as a result of the reliance on these ideologies, the majority of the institutional employment or educational opportunities for female inmates at Portage have focused on domestic skills.

It can be argued that the majority of the routines at the Portage Gaol were directed at imparting a type of "domestic discipline" onto inmates (Carlen 1983:16).

Carol Smart noted that in Britain,

.... most regimes employed in penal institutions are typically those which reinforce the stereotypical traditional sex role of women in our culture. Inmates are usually given the opportunity to learn to cook, sew and do other domestic tasks, and in more liberal regimes, they may be able to learn to type or take education courses. (1977:140)

Prison administrators have claimed that regimes which emphasize domesticity and femininity encourage the development of "self-respect, diligence, orderliness, sobriety, punctuality and ambition" (Dobash et al. 1986:65-67).

At Portage, domestically-oriented institutional labour was thought to have positive social effects on inmates. In one annual report, written by Superintendent Des Lauriers, the laundry was singled out as a place where

.... many problems besides clothes were ironed out. A hostile girl, after a bath, clean clothes, joined in to wash her personal clothes, and maybe find a solution to her particular problem. Often one would observe a conversation that started out with fighting words, gradually simmer down to an all-round discussion, generally the opinion of the group being accepted. (Annual Report 1970 - addition by R. Wilman - Matron).

The belief that inmate labour was potentially reformatory was not unique to the Portage Gaol. Dobash et al. (1986:68) observed that beginning in the mid-1800s, "useful employment" of women in British and Scottish prisons was thought to be central to the "reformation and good order" of inmates.

By comparison, some commentary on inmate employment appeared in every Annual Report at the men's gaols in Manitoba. The authors of these documents often cited the reformatory qualities resulting from the "productive" employment of inmates. One year, the superintendent at Brandon stated:

For all men convicted and sentenced to prison who show a desire to turn over a new leaf, I would like to offer the following suggestions ... If some system could be devised whereby: First Offenders and men given short sentences could serve their term on a Colony Farm put to some productive work where they would be taught some responsibility and placed more or less on their honour, they would respond much quicker to rehabilitative counselling. It had been my experience that men handled in this manner appear much more settled and satisfied. Men, on entering institutions of this kind, usually do so in a depressed

state of mind, and as a general rule are resentful toward authority. To place such men under strictly enforced rules and caging them up in cells for long periods of time only aggravates this state of mind. I have found with the majority of them that, if we instill the feeling that they have enough intelligence to respect the privileges granted them, and in addition having some productive work to occupy their time, they will respond much quicker to a rehabilitative plan. (Brandon – Annual Report 1957:6-7)

When Superintendent Des Lauriers took her position at the Portage Gaol, she found that the same type of routines had been in place for approximately twenty years. When asked to comment about the consistency of the routines, she stated that

.... there are things that happen that a certain situation arises and you have to make changes and adapt a routine because of that. The situation vanishes somewhere in history, but whatever was devised then keeps on going and when you ask somebody why you do it that way. 'I don't know we've always done it that way.'

According to Des Lauriers, the rationale for the routines at the Portage Gaol had been lost over time. The gaol had functioned smoothly for all of those years, so there had been no reason to question the entrenchment of routines.

At the very least, a regime that is driven by the domestic labour of prisoners benefits gaol staff and administrators. Quite simply, if inmates were kept occupied maintaining the institution, then fewer staff would need to be employed. At the Portage Gaol, as well as prisons and gaols in Britain and the United States, the training and education that was available to imprisoned women would only provide them with skills that would qualify them for low-paying, unstable positions in domestic or service-related industries. Despite the institutional rhetoric of good intentions, penal regimes seem to have only reinforced stereotypical and marginal positions for gaoled women.

Discipline and Punishment

Women who were incarcerated at the Portage Gaol were subjected to a wide variety of disciplinary techniques. Inmates were routinely subjected to different types of deprivation, degradation and/or physical discomfort. Some forms of discipline were overtly punitive, while others were more paternalistic. These strategies were used to punish, deter and generally control inmates. Over the years, most of the techniques persisted while only a few were abandoned.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Sheriff Calder dictated all of the rules and administered punishments while he was the superintendent at the Portage Gaol. A review of gaol logbooks reveals that he relied on four types of techniques to invoke conformity among inmates: deprivation, isolation, physical restraint and medical restraint. Most often, combinations of two or more types of punishments were used, although, on occasion a single strategy was employed.

The most common forms of punishment that Superintendent Calder ordered involved imposing some type of isolation and deprivation on women. Typically, a disobedient or disruptive inmate would be locked in her cell with some restriction of privileges put into place. The following examples illustrate some of the variations that Calder used.

Emily had a fainting (feinting) spell at the office door at 11:35 a.m. Emily was locked up at 5:30 p.m. No mattress tonight. (Vol.1 May 7, 1940)

Bradley and Graham cell block for 3 days on bread and water – no smokes. (Vol.3 Dec. 29, 1941)

Eva locked in cell No. 1. Hard bed⁷ – bread and water for 5 days. (Vol. 3 June 4, 1942)

Sophie locked in cell. Bread and water for 5 days and 5 days remission for insolence. (Vol. 3 July 31, 1942)

Violet 5 days bread and water, hard bed for ten days. No smokes, no reading or sewing. (Vol. 4 March 11, 1944)

The addition of a number of cells in the basement of the building gave gaolers the option of completely segregating a woman from other inmates. The “black hole” was used for the first time in 1946.

Beatrice, Lillian and Pearl refused to go into cells for Mrs. James. Noisy, defiant, insolent and filthy singing during church service. Called the Governor, Mr. Sutherland who, with the guards took them to the “Black Hole.” The three fought like demons all the way. Lillian destructive in cell before taken down. ... Visited the three girls in the “Black Hole” at 6:30 p.m. Taking bread and water, blankets and prescribed medicine – all three accepted everything quietly ... Mrs. James and I visited the “Black Hole” at 8:15 p.m. to leave sliding door up for air. (Vol. Aug. 11, 1946)

The black hole was used regularly from this point and throughout Macpherson’s and Des Lauriers’ careers.

Calder also employed a number of physical restraints when attempting to subdue an unruly inmate. The following example includes some of the tools that were at Calder’s disposal.

Theresa tearing bedding and threatening suicide. Sheriff Calder and Mr. Bradley put on the straightjacket and then the muffs 10:30 a.m. (Vol. 2 Jan. 24, 1941)

In this case, Theresa remained in the straightjacket and muffs until the following morning when Calder returned and removed them. These techniques were certainly

⁷ An inmate would not be provided with a mattress if her punishment included the order of a “hard bed.”

punitive as inmates were often kept in restraints for hours after they had been subdued. For example:

Connie asked for 292 just after her usual medicine, had to refuse, then she started to break the furniture in cell block. Sheriff Calder came over and put the cuffs on her. Sheriff came in at 5 p.m. took handcuffs off Connie so she could eat her supper. Allowed her blankets and pillow. Put hand cuffs back on her at 8 p.m. (Vol. 3 Dec. 7, 1941)

Sheriff came in at 7:45 a.m. and took the cuffs off Connie. (Vol. 3 Dec. 8, 1941)

Restraining inmates generally required considerable physical force. Sheriff Calder would move inmates himself or with the assistance of RCMP officers. Gaol matrons were generally exempt from these duties unless the support of these men was unavailable.

A disciplinary technique that often required less physical force but was nevertheless punitive involved medicating or sedating inmates. If an inmate was destructive or defiant, either the superintendent or the gaol doctor could order that she be medicated. This practice persisted throughout all three administrative eras. Most of the medications which were used came in the form of pills and were given to inmates by the gaol staff or superintendent. On the occasions that the sedative was prescribed in the form of an injection, the doctor would attend the gaol and administer it himself. For example:

Apparently Pauline (clinic girl) broke into the clinic cupboard and took out a jug of alcohol passing it to several girls. All became incapacitated, ugly and abusive. General girls fighting. Sheriff Calder came and called the Dr. who gave the girls hypos. All sleeping at 6 o'clock. (Vol. 3 Aug. 11, 1942)

Quite a disturbance in cell block and No. 4 – gave Margaret, Sophie and Mary Nembutols on Mrs. Mountain's order. Mary seemed to be delirious all night. (Vol.5 April 6, 1946)

... Miss Macpherson called RCMP who handcuffed Kay to the bars in the cell block in the basement. This took a bit of doing finally we used two sets of handcuffs. The RCMP were here about one hour. I managed to get two luminols down her throat. She complained of one handcuff being too tight. We called the RCMP again and had it loosened. (Vol. 13 Dec. 9, 1955)

If an inmate was particularly resistant or destructive, the gaol doctor occasionally recommended that she be placed in a psychiatric facility. Both the Brandon and Selkirk mental hospitals accommodated female inmates who were referred by the gaol doctor. These referrals were quite rare, with no more than ten women ever sent to the hospitals in one year.

Given that Superintendent Macpherson held the belief that the gaol had a "school-like" atmosphere, it might be expected that inmates would have been subjected to "school-like" forms of discipline and punishment. Some of the disciplinary techniques that Macpherson and her staff employed would certainly leave an observer with that impression. Such was the case with some of the disciplinary strategies that were paternalistic in nature. However, other techniques were used that were far more punitive than those found in almost any school. Macpherson also employed a wider variety of punishments than her predecessor. In fact, she maintained all of Superintendent Calder's techniques except the use of muffs as restraints.

Isolation and deprivation continued to be some of the most commonly used types of punishment at the gaol. Miss Macpherson used many of the same restrictions to punish inmates as Sheriff Calder had. For example, she revoked

earned remission, imposed restricted diets and denied women access to cigarettes. In addition, Macpherson routinely denied inmates the privileges of sending and receiving mail, spending time in the exercise yard and having visitors. Macpherson and her staff also combined new strategies with those that had been in use during Calder's reign. For example:

Leona was being very ugly using vile language and the usual threats. At 8 pm with the assistance of the RCMP (3) we put her in the punishment cell where she has been continually screaming. She has been stripped of her clothing except pants. Leona shouting foul language and making threats at 10:30 pm punch. I showered her with cold water thinking I might cool her down but she continued screaming. (Vol. 9 March 14, 1950)

Norma was cursing and banging things around and as I walked down past the door she picked up the garbage can and threw it at window, breaking 2 top panes. Miss Macpherson and RCMP Police notified, Miss Macpherson came to building, then 2 officers. Norma walked peacefully down the stairs in front of the 2 officers and myself. While undressing used much profanity and threats. (Vol 19 Dec. 11, 1962)

Stripping inmates of their clothing when they were moved to the basement cells became a standard procedure under Superintendent Macpherson's authority. As the previous example illustrates, this practice was carried out regardless of whether or not male officers were present. While stripping women of their clothing and spraying them with water may have successfully subdued inmates, these practices likely added further discomfort to what were already humiliating and degrading forms of punishment.

Physically restraining women was not intended to be a form of corporal punishment, although there is evidence that inmates were periodically injured when attempts were made to move them to the basement cells. A combination of force

used by officers and resistance on the part of the women likely contributed to some of the injuries.

Grace insolent and not co-operative this morning. RCMP called in and moved Grace to basement cell by force. Grace using vile language. (Vol. 8 Sept. 17, 1949)

Grace was still feeling the physical effects of being forcibly moved to the basement cell two days later.

Grace asleep until 12:30am asked for aspirin for pain in her shoulder which she claims the RCMP dislocated. (Vol. 8 Sept. 19, 1949)

Brenda's complaint about the use of excessive force by the RCMP in the following example relates to an incident that had occurred on the previous night.

Brenda has been fairly good today but was crying and quite hysterical over what she says was abuse from RCMP. She has a tooth broken off and a black eye and she demands to have a Lawyer. (Vol. 16 Aug. 3, 1959)

Brenda had struggled with the doctor and at least two RCMP officers as they had moved her to the basement cell and handcuffed her to the bars.

In addition to these traditional forms of punishment and control, Superintendent Macpherson and her staff employed some new techniques of discipline. These strategies were paternalistic in nature and might have been quite similar to the type of discipline that was employed in schools. What made these types of control unique is that they all contributed to the childlike treatment of women at the Portage Gaol.

At suppertime Sharon walked out of the dining room without eating supper. She was brought back a little later and ate a few mouthfuls. She seemed to be near tears when I questioned her as to her reasons. (Vol. 7 Aug. 10, 1948)

Mrs James. Went to No. 3 at 9:00 a.m. to see Kathleen, Mary and Ann. Made them get out of bed and talked to them in a stern, decided manner. They were to do what they were told and when – and were not to resent being locked at any time. Kathleen showed more cooperation than either Mary or Ann. But they all finally cleaned up their dormitory – washed all the clothes and bedding which was wet and soiled from last night and ended up washing the laundry floor. (Vol. 9 April 12, 1950)

First floor girls brought in from yard for not keeping their coats on. Cheryl worst offender. Later Cheryl apologized to Mrs. James. (Vol. 18 Dec. 10, 1960)

In addition to some form of formal sanction, or as a punishment on its own, some inmates were required to give public apologies for their behaviour. This technique was initially put into use in 1952 and continued throughout Superintendent Macpherson's career. For example:

At Miss Macpherson's request Ruth apologized in front of the girls in #3 for the filthy, abusive language she had used to and about the members of the staff. (Vol. 11 June 5, 1952)

Mrs. Cook gave Lillian a warning during the noon meal for vile language and disobedience. Miss Macpherson took five days remission and another 10 days unless she apologized to Mrs. Cook before the girls in the Dining Room. Lillian refused and at her own request went to punishment cell. Later she decided to apologize and went back to her dorm. She will continue in kitchen as cook. (Vol. 13 April 7, 1955)

These strategies were less overtly punitive than other types of gaol discipline. Nevertheless, it was likely a degrading experience for adult inmates to be treated as children.

Although Superintendent Des Lauriers arrived at the gaol with the intention of bringing the institution up to date, there is little evidence that she altered any of the longstanding disciplinary practices. Throughout her first year at the gaol,

women were medicated into submission, lectured about their appearance and locked in the punishment cells.

Concluding Remarks

From 1945 to 1970, the vast majority of the techniques of discipline and punishment remained relatively constant at the Portage Gaol. Over these years, women were subjected to various forms of deprivation and isolation as well as physical and medical restraints. All of these techniques of discipline overlapped with other aspects of the gaol regime in attempts to deter, punish and generally control women. Beginning under Superintendent Macpherson's authority, the classification, work, education and punishment of inmates took on gendered forms. In overt and less visible ways, these regimes contained the message that female inmates at the Portage Gaol were essentially childlike. Pat Carlen observes that even in more modern women's prisons, the routines and security measures tend to "induce feelings of infantile dependency in the prisoners" (1983:109). There is a general agreement that prison administrators have been heavily influenced by "the stereotypes held about women in prison, particularly their presumed lack of intelligence, by the narrow and conventional interpretation of what constitutes education and their mistaken notion of the future needs of women" (Dobash et al. 1986:179). Women at the Portage Gaol were placed in an environment that operated to strip them of their independence and adulthood. Rather than accept the conditions of their confinement, many inmates found ways to challenge these regimes.

Chapter Four

Shifting Control: Compliant and Strategic Women

Inmate conflict usually occurred in response to some aspect of the conditions of confinement at the Portage Gaol. The gaol was organized so that matrons controlled most, if not all, of the legitimate pathways to power and resources. As a result, most of the conflicts between inmates and staff concerned the deprivation or inadequacy of resources, the delivery of services and issues of restricted communication within and outside of the institution. Conflict between inmates most often stemmed from arguments over material goods, different preferences, nuisances and race-based struggles. Inmate acts of non-compliance reflect the everyday aspects of daily life at the Portage Gaol.

Food Fights

Mealtime, one of the most routinized activities at the gaol, was often the site of inmate-staff conflict. The quality and quantity of food were often the focus of inmate dissatisfaction. For example:

Irene in a disagreeable mood, complaining the food wasn't good enough. At the supper table she and Bonnie created a scene over the salad, saying it was just garbage. Bonnie's behaviour was especially bad. Irene still complaining of being hungry after supper. The supper menu was - tomato soup, cheese, salad (lettuce, fresh green peas, grated fresh carrots and green onions) with salad dressing in bowls on the table, fresh raspberries with cream, bread and margarine, muffins and tea. In the future, any inmate heard criticizing the food will be punished by losing days [earned remission]. Please leave a report of any offenders on the Superintendent's desk. By order of Miss Macpherson. (Vol.9, 1950:19)

The initial complaint about food in the next example was noted in the logbook as evidence of an increasing number of bold comments being made by one inmate in particular.

Kathleen protested loudly over her meal - she disliked honey etc. etc. She'd see Mrs. Stewart [kitchen supervisor] was fired etc. This type of thing from Kathleen is becoming much more frequent - she'll even tell staff to clean her floor - it is what they're here for. So far other girls seem to ignore her remarks. (Vol.19, 1963:58)

Struggles concerning food at the gaol illustrate that some inmates may have been frustrated with a lack of control over what they ate and when they were permitted to eat. Women risked being punished for taking food from the kitchen or dining room and hiding it in their cells. Matrons often discovered these items during cell "raids."

Dormitories #18, #19, #11 yielded a number of things taken from pantry - tea, coffee, salmon, sardines, butter, etc. (Vol.11, 1953:47)

Butter taken from Sharon's cell - "she had it there because she likes butter and it isn't served at noon meal." (Vol.28, 1970:58)

In spite of being threatened with various forms of punishment, one inmate repeatedly took food from the dining room and hid it in her cell. As discussed in Chapter One, Margaret served more than twenty sentences at Portage from 1946 to 1962. Over the years, there were numerous log book entries referring to Margaret's resistance to certain rules at the gaol. One of Margaret's most common institutional infractions was taking food to her cell.

Miss Macpherson talked to her (Margaret) today and warned if there was any more food taken upstairs it would mean bread and water for Margaret. (Vol.15, 1957:86)

Margaret's cell was raided at supper and all the food confiscated.
(Vol.16, 1958:92)

Following this particular cell search, Margaret was openly displeased. She was particularly concerned that a matron had removed some of her belongings from her cell.

She (Margaret) came down later objecting to Mrs. Cook going into her cell and taking out her things she was using - jars, sugar etc. (Vol. 16, 1958:92)

This example suggests that, as an inmate, Margaret does not retain the right to privacy in "her cell" or the ownership of "her things." As McDermott and King have observed, "(i)n many cases the act of searching may be no more than a reassertion by the staff that the cell is not private territory" (1988:366). Not easily deterred, Margaret continued to collect food in her cell. Her cell was once again searched while she was serving another sentence for vagrancy.

Mrs. Fletcher raided Margaret's room. It took a pail to hold the loot. Seven slices of bread and toast, a biscuit, ripe tomato and two cobs of corn. (Vol. 19, 1962:2)

Although Margaret was threatened with a bread and water diet and restricted recreation privileges for these incidents, there is no indication that she was ever punished.

This type of institutional control over food did not exist at the men's gaol in Brandon. One annual report details the practice that eliminated the concern with the theft of food at that gaol. The superintendent and staff did "not consider it an offence if an inmate gets a hand-out from the kitchen between meals if he is hungry. In this way, no food is stolen or wasted" (Brandon - Annual Report - 1957:3). Inmates, in

this case, had somewhat more control over the food they had access to. It is quite likely that male inmates at Brandon had less need or desire to steal and conceal food than their female counterparts at the Portage Gaol.

Theft of non-food items by inmates was also an occasional occurrence at the Portage Gaol. Guards suspected that the following items were selected and consumed for their alcohol content:

Lock on pantry cupboard had been forced and lemon extract missing.
(Vol.6, 1946:98)

It was reported today that some of our main floor girls have opened the locks on cupboard in Clinic with bobby pins and removed the Alcohol bottle. Also opened the file box and read the records.
(Vol.14, 1956:67)

Today we hear all (or most) cologne sticks were "swiped" melted down and drank up!!! So it became evident that Carole was not putting on an act yesterday. (Vol.17, 1961:125)¹

Access to Resources

Another common source of inmate dissatisfaction with staff concerned the delivery of goods and services. Due to the organization of the gaol regime, inmates were almost completely dependent upon matrons for the delivery of many of their needs and wants. Once incarcerated at Portage, inmates discovered that the staff controlled access to everything from matches and cigarettes to medical attention. Inmate discontent with staff often arose from the refusal of a request. The following are examples of how matrons interpreted these interactions.

¹ On the previous day Carole was described as being "loud" and "un-cooperative."

Irene screaming with temper and pounding when I would not produce matches. (Vol.5, 1946:95)

Ann had her powder² at 1:40 a.m. Has been calling for cigarettes all nite and got them. Wanted her lites on and threatened to hang and raise Cain if she didn't get them. Turned them on rather than have all girls awake. Started banging at 6:30 a.m. on glass with her cup and banged continuously until 6:45 am. (Vol.7, 1947:118)

Inmates at the gaol were also dependent on the staff for less tangible but meaningful things-like information.

Nancy very curious about her release date, replied to with non committal answers much to Nancy's disgust and despair, she muttered something about "sadistic type staff." (Vol.19, 1963:10)

One of the most frequently noted inmate grievances concerned the delivery of medical attention. The staff at the gaol were responsible for dispensing most of the medicine prescribed to inmates as well as administering basic first aid when required.

Mary has been in an ugly mood today because she didn't get her foot dressed when she asked. Has been pretty abusive in her language to several of the staff, calling them Portage trash. (Vol.10, 1952:38)

At medicine time Faith insisted she did not get her powder, she said it was aspirin ground up. Her name was on the powder. She shouted and carried on, demanding to see Miss Macpherson. She finished up by cutting her wrist. Miss Macpherson brought her to the front office. She managed to spread her gore all down the hall and office. I bandaged her up and all is quiet once more. (Vol.17, 1960:122)

One of the few occasions when inmates protested collectively was inspired by their perception that two of their peers were receiving inadequate medical treatment. Open conflict began after one of the doctor's regular weekly visits to the gaol.

² Medications at the gaol were often provided to inmates in the form of a "powder." The existing evidence suggests that these were primarily sedatives and pain medications. The word "powder" appears as a general descriptor for a variety of these medicines.

Beatrice and Jean not satisfied over treatment from doctor. Riot in numbers 4 and 6 [dormitories]. Miss Mountain over and called the Dr. Satisfied Beatrice and Jean and others promised to settle down. (Vol. 5, 1946:95)

On the following day, it became apparent that the issue had not been dealt with to the satisfaction of many of the inmates. One of the matrons on duty documented the incident that resulted.

Prisoners very upset thinking that drug addicts and Beatrice were not getting enough from doctor. Colonel Burritt and Mr. Kean here from Headingly at noon - interviewed girls then went to lunch, after lunch returned with seven M.P.'s [RCMP officers]. Used tear gas. Girls very noisy and destructful from noon until 2:30 p.m. Police Commissioners here at 6:30 p.m. to take over. Moved girls into cells about 10 p.m. Gave girls bread and coffee and all medicine. (Vol. 5, 1946: 95-96).

Twenty-one out of forty-two inmates were punished for participating in the "riot." They spent forty-eight hours locked in their cells on a bread and water diet. This group of inmates also had their cigarettes and mattresses removed from their cells. It is important to note that there were no documented changes to the medical services at Portage following this incident.

The practice of tightening institutional controls following inmate protest was the typical administrative response at gaols throughout the province. On one occasion, a number of men at the Headingly Gaol staged a "sit-down strike" that received a considerable amount of attention from the administration. The institutional response was detailed in the 1947 Annual Report.

[A] sit-down strike was called by a few incorrigible agitators who were employed on outside gangs at the gaol. Approximately 90 inmates were involved and they refused to either work or return to the gaol until their complaints had been heard. The inmates involved in the strike were interviewed by D.C.M. Kyle, Inspector

of Gaols for the Province of Manitoba, and submitted to him five complaints, not one of which had any basis in fact. Mr. Kyle promised to investigate these alleged grievances in the following week. The inmates then returned to the gaol. ... The stike on December 31, 1947 was believed to be due to certain agitators trying to avoid working outside in temperatures of over twenty-five degrees below zero. The idea of striking was no doubt fostered by daily news broadcasts which the inmates were permitted to hear twice a day over the gaol radio. At that time the news broadcasts consisted of almost entirely of strikes in progress both in Canada and the United States. It is needless to say that the broadcasting of the news over the gaol radio was discontinued as the result of this strike. (Headingley - Annual Report 1947:23)

The superintendent believed that the complaints lodged by inmates were not legitimate. As a result, no changes were made to address inmate concerns. The changes that were implemented (such as the restriction on news broadcasts and additional punishment for the “agitators”³) reflect a typical tightening of control over inmates following such a disturbance.

Historically, as Geller and Harris (1994:xvii) have noted, women in prisons and asylums most often found that “(s)pirited protest or disobedience of any kind would only result in more grievous punishment.” Margaret Shaw arrived at a similar conclusion in a more contemporary analysis of institutional responses to inmate violence. In her examination of incidents that occurred within Canada’s federal prisons for women, she found that

... staff resorted to traditional punitive ways of handling events, increasing controls in all institutions, and segregating and labeling women as difficult and risky, a process which has had a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal women. (Shaw 2000:69)

³ Following this incident, fifty-five inmates were charged with “breaching gaol discipline.” Three of these men received additional gaol terms for their participation in the strike.

Regardless of the gender of inmates, the institutional practices of increasing control and punishment following acts of disobedience are certainly widespread and longstanding.

Restricted Communication

Many of the rules and routines at the Portage Gaol served to restrict who inmates could communicate with while they were incarcerated. Nicole Hahn Rafter (1985) has concluded that limiting or severing all outside supports encourages inmate dependency on the institution and increases the likelihood that women will adopt the same attitudes and behaviours as their keepers. It was thought that with little outside influence, inmates would be surrounded by only positive role models in gaol. Inmate struggles with staff to negotiate the boundaries of these restrictions were very common. Communication with other inmates in the gaol as well as families and friends on the outside was often prohibited, usually monitored and contested almost daily through inmate acts of non-compliance. Inmates employed both overt and covert strategies to circumvent the institutionally constructed barriers to communication with others.

The staff at the Portage Gaol put a great deal of effort into keeping particular groups of women apart. As noted in Chapter Three, from 1945 to 1970 the movement of women within the gaol was orchestrated to keep first-time inmates and “repeaters” apart. The belief that “repeaters” would negatively influence their less criminally-experienced counterparts was long-standing at Portage. This policy

remained in effect until 1970. Some inmates, even under the watchful eye of the matrons, risked punishment in order to communicate with one another. For example:

Mrs. Iwa had trouble with Linda in the laundry this morning over talking with repeaters. Linda defiant and insolent with bad language. (Vol.11, 1952:42)

Many women took steps to reduce their risk of being detected and punished by employing more covert means of communicating with one another. A commonly employed strategy involved exchanging information in the form of notes, referred to as "kites" or "bombers."

Men working on the roof today. Reports of girls dropping "kites." (Vol.9, 1950:22)

Inmates either exchanged notes directly with one another or hid them for later retrieval. The recreation yard was often a site where inmates hid notes. The staff were wise to some of the hiding places and, as a result, the recreation yard was frequently targeted for searching by staff.

There is talk of "bombers" being left in the yard for main floor girls - so staff checking yard take note. This of course is not to be mentioned to any of the girls. "Bombers" are supposed to have been pushed thro' the hole in the back fence. (Vol. 17, 1960:118)

While incarcerated at Portage, many avenues of communication with family and friends were either prohibited or highly restricted. Only members of an inmate's immediate family were allowed to visit the gaol. Visits with mothers, fathers, husbands, children or siblings were at the discretion of the superintendent. If a family member was able to find a way to the gaol and was allowed in, they were given a fifteen to twenty minute visit under close supervision by a matron. The numerous

restrictions placed on inmates concerning family and friends on the outside often made communication with them impossible or undesirable. Despite these restrictions, many women did not give up the desire to maintain some kind of relationship with family members and friends while they were incarcerated. Inmates found other means to send messages beyond the walls and fences of the gaol.

A "kite" was picked up in upstairs hall which stated Jean was sending "kites" out with Jennifer. Jennifer claimed she destroyed kites given to her to take out. (Vol. 12, 1952:48)

Vera lost two days remission for sending out a letter with a discharged girl. (Vol. 13, 1955:59)

Separation from family members seemed to cause a great deal of anxiety and frustration for some women. Examples of the experience of isolation and powerlessness that being separated from family members caused can be found throughout gaol logbooks. On numerous occasions, staff members came into conflict with inmates over institutionally-imposed restrictions on communication with family on the outside.

Marnie is feeling very much abused. She resents not getting a special letter some time ago, to write to her aunt, who has since passed away. (Vol. 14, 1956:70)

Tracey upset over her affairs at home - angry because I didn't allow her to phone long distance about it. (Vol.9, 1950:20)

Numerous women who were incarcerated at the Portage Gaol were mothers. Many of these women expressed profound frustration that gaol staff and outside agencies possessed so much control over information about or access to their children.

Betty ate a half slice of toast with two bowls of tea for breakfast. Just tea at noon. Claims she threw out the food given her. She says she is not going to eat until her Welfare worker visits her again with news of her baby. (Vol.11, 1952:45)

Julie crying, begging a cigarette and wanting to come upstairs. Julie given extra toast rations. Crying loud and long wanting to phone her husband and see her baby. Dr. Lowther was here twice to see Julie. He gave her a needle about 1 p.m. and since then she has been quiet and has slept for some time. (Vol. 18, 1961:130)

Marilyn in a very bad mood this afternoon. She slammed her door hard enough to knock the plaster off around the door and threw something through her window because she decided the Children's Aid weren't making arrangements for her to see Carla [her daughter] fast enough to suit her. (Vol. 28, 1970:87)

These are important examples of how the contradictions of femininity can be exaggerated in gaol. Ann Worrall observes that;

... femininity is characterized by self-control and independence. Being a normal woman means coping, caring, nurturing and sacrificing self-interest to the needs of others. On the other hand, it is characterized by lack of control and dependence. Being a normal woman means needing protection. It means being childlike, incapable, fragile and capricious. (1990:33)

Mothers who were incarcerated at Portage often wanted to maintain some control over their relationships with their children. In some circumstances, these attempts were defined as threatening displays of independence and a lack of control over one's emotions. The institutional message being communicated to the women in the previous examples is that the "good" inmate quietly accepts her separation from family as an inevitable and justifiable consequence of incarceration.

The previous examples from gaol logbooks also illustrate that inmate access to phone calls, letters and other modes of accessing family members were likely

controlled by a combination of institutional rules and staff discretion. Another impediment to staying in touch with significant others during a period of incarceration was the location of the gaol. The women who were incarcerated at the Portage institution were brought from all over the province. Finding transportation or the money required to pay for a ride was simply impossible for many relatives of inmates. Superintendent Des Lauriers recalled how the RCMP brought one willing group of women to the gaol.

We had a group that came from the north-west and ... of course it was drinking, and somewhere around January the RCMP would make the rounds. Non-payment of fine. Would gather them all and very often it was because they (the RCMP) wanted a trip to Winnipeg. So, not only very often, it was a trip to Winnipeg. So they would bring them in four and five at a time. They would come in dressed in their Sunday best, no matter what it was...clean as clean can be, and well you know some people go to Florida and some people got to Mexico, they came and visited us and they were, they knew the ropes, you didn't have to tell them anything. They visited with the staff, they visited with their relatives, they visited with me, they uh...then they went home. Served their sentence ... and we liked them!

Superintendent Des Lauriers was quite certain that these women were traveling to Portage with the help of some self-interested RCMP officers. Des Lauriers recalled that

.... [I]t was the RCMP who initiated it, because they wanted a trip to Winnipeg. . . . there was something specific going on in Winnipeg they wanted to get to, so this way they got their trip paid ... Even at that time we even used to get them from Churchill. Three days for being drunk!

This way of visiting the gaol was certainly not the norm, however, it ensured a woman a free ride and guaranteed accommodations in Portage.

Other types of communication by inmates to the outside were strictly forbidden. Opportunistic conversations with people passing by the gaol on the street and pre-arranged meetings with others through the fence or out the windows were prohibited at all times. Many women disregarded this rule.

No. 6 [dormitory] girls shouting at people on street. (Vol.5, 1946:76)

Mrs. Newman called to say a car was near the east entrance and Beth was talking to the occupants. The language exchanged was anything but ladylike. (Vol.18, 1961:132)

Vicki and Pat climbed the basketball posts and called to someone on the street. Would not come down when told to do so. Mrs. Davis brought the girls in as soon as possible. RCMP brought in a "kite" which had been passed out, also showed one which was found on one of two men RCMP had just picked up and who are now next door. (Vol. 10, 1951:29)

Vicki and Pat were not allowed in the recreation yard for one week following this incident. On numerous occasions, the staff at the gaol also discovered that former inmates were attempting to communicate with women confined at the gaol.

Joanne called at the door about eight p.m. rather insistent on paying Evelyn's fine. She was a little inebriated, called Miss Macpherson who came in and talked to her. Joanne left \$20.00 for Evelyn. There is evidence through a note that Cindy was sending to Evelyn that Joanne had been talking to the girls while they were in the yard. (Vol.17, 1960:112)

Sharon, Lydia and a third girl at the west fence calling up to girls in the second floor at 4:15 p.m. Once they knew they were being watched made a quick getaway. They ran across the Smith Motor lot. (Vol. 18, 1961:133)

Inmate Conflicts

While incarcerated at Portage, women worked, ate, slept and spent their leisure time in close contact with one another. However, women who shared the same space in gaol were not always so eager to associate with one another. Inmates were expected to share limited resources with individuals with whom they may not have gotten along. In this environment, conflict between inmates seemed almost inevitable.

Struggles over objects did occur periodically at the gaol. For instance,

Janice and Clara had a fist fight this morning over library books I believe, each received minor scratches and cuts. Mrs. James talked to the girls in #3 and warned them about their behaviour. (Vol. 14, 1956:71)

In the next example, the matron believes that an inmate's disregard of her advice led to the theft of some of her belongings.

Anita complains a bra - 2 pr. panties and a lipstick were taken while she was in the hospital. I explained to Anita she had taken them upstairs after I had warned her she was responsible herself, and very much against my advice. Later the lipstick was found in Sandra's room very well hidden and the pink panties behind Glenda's rad. (Vol. 28, 1970:2)

Interestingly, the onus for the theft was placed on Anita, rather on than the women who stole the items. In this case, the inmate was faulted for disobeying the advice of the matron and doing what she decided was best with her possessions.

Accounts of inmates being concerned with the behaviour of others frequently appeared in gaol logbooks. In the following examples, inmates take exception to the language used by some of their peers.

According to reports from Jenny and Ruth, Sheila is very unladylike in the yard and was calling Jenny a vile name. (Vol. 8, 1949:137)

Girls again accusing Linda of filthy talk - especially about staff. Rita in office crying and complaining of Linda's dirty talk. (Vol.9, 1950:15)

On other occasions, inmates attempted to censor their peers on their own.

Girls in #19 scolding the girls in #10 for being so noisy and unladylike. (Vol.10, 1951:34)

The girls in #3 - Christine, Louise, Emily and Melanie piled on Betty and shoved soap in her mouth because she had been using filthy language. (Vol. 9, 1950:20)

The most common incidents of inmate conflict involved verbal battles over individual preferences and disturbances. Margaret was often at the center of these disputes, which reflect the close quarters that inmates occupied at the gaol.

At 4:45 a.m. Margaret started to run the water in her sink and Annie yelled at the top of her voice for Margaret to "stop running that water." Not another sound afterwards. (Vol. 8, 1949:136)

Suddenly the quiet night was broken by #10, Gail and Yvonne going to clean up on Margaret for waking them up with her banging around, flushing the toilet and rattling her cup. We had fifteen minutes of tongue lashing. (Vol.15, 1958:88)

Everyone was quiet until 6:30 a.m. when Marilyn and Alice gave one another a tongue lashing. Marilyn accused Alice of getting up early every morning and disturbing everyone in #21. (Vol.13, 1955:61)

Racial tensions between inmates were also documented by gaol staff. Most of the log book examples of overt racial conflict involve white women expressing their disdain for Aboriginal inmates. Race-based tensions between inmates were not documented in gaol log books until 1949. This could be indicative of the growing numbers of Aboriginal inmates at Portage after 1947 and/or an increased attentiveness to racial conflicts by gaol staff.

Rose refused to go for breakfast, "she couldn't eat at the same table as Indians." (Vol. 8, 1949: 139)

Mary and Deanne have just spoiled an otherwise perfect evening by a violent verbal battle. Language and threats flying thick and fast. Mary accuses Deanne of sleeping all day and running water all night. Deanne called Mary a "drunken squaw" etc. Each threatening to make pulp out of the other but neither got out of bed. (Vol. 12, 1954:55)

On one occasion, the staff expressed concern that Aboriginal inmates were beginning to segregate themselves from other women in the gaol.

The Indian girls are making the barrier between themselves and the white girls wider and wider. Yesterday they placed themselves at one end and the whites at the other end of the table. (Vol.28, 1970, 36)

Negotiating Control

It is important to provide some context for inmates' challenges and resistance to the gaol regime. By seeing these actions as logical responses to an oppressive regime, we reduce the risk of necessarily defining these women as out of control or pathological. Margaret Shaw (2000:61) contends that "violence and disorder in prisons must be seen not as the result of individual pathology but as social and situational events." The staff at the Portage Gaol must be considered central figures in this type of "social" analysis. The matrons were expected to monitor, scrutinize and control what inmates wore, when and what they ate, with whom they spoke, as well as their emotional and physical health. As a result, most inmate conflict with staff originated because of these institutionally-produced relations of power and control. Disputes between inmates reflect their relationships to one another. Conflict

between inmates was less likely to stem from the rules at the gaol than the close quarters, individual preferences and racial tensions. Although the matrons possessed a great deal of power within the gaol, inmates found ways to contest the legitimacy and meaning of the regime on a daily basis.

Women employed a wide variety of strategies to negotiate control while they were incarcerated. Acts of resistance that were documented at Portage were typically non-violent and carried out by individuals. When women did act violently, it was usually directed at themselves or objects in their environment. Individual and collective assaults on inmates or staff were extremely rare. For a number of reasons, the vast majority of women at Portage complied with gaol routines.

Compliant Women

From 1945 to 1970, hundreds of women were incarcerated at the Portage Gaol. Daily accounts of inmate behaviour appeared in the logbooks. These documents reveal that the vast majority of women obeyed the rules and generally had good relationships with staff and inmates. Outward compliance with gaol regimes may be explained by a number of factors. For one, Estelle Freedman (1981) credits the all-encompassing nature of prison regimes with encouraging compliance among inmate populations. Freedman (1981:101) concluded that "(i)solation stripped inmates of their normal identities, while keepers held absolute power to impose their ideals on them."

Another possible explanation for inmate compliance is that many women found their stay at the Portage Gaol to be quite acceptable. Chapter One revealed that many of the women who came to Portage were young, unemployed, poorly educated and incarcerated for public order and property crimes such as vagrancy and theft. Women who left impoverished and perhaps abusive situations outside of the gaol might have welcomed the food, shelter and relative safety of the institution. Also, women at Portage received sentences that were under two years in length. In Britain, Dobash, Dobash and Gutteridge (1986:78) observed that “many women received short sentences which meant that the deprivations and rigours of confinement had to be endured for a brief period and might be more readily tolerated.”

It is also important to note that women who appeared compliant to matrons were not participating in overt struggles against gaol regimes. It is quite possible that some inmates gave the impression that they were in acceptance of their confinement while they engaged in more covert, less detectable acts of resistance. Another possible explanation for inmate compliance is that the threat of punishment may have been a sufficient deterrent. For whatever reason, very few women actually engaged in overt struggles with other inmates and staff at the gaol.

Strategic Women

Struggles for autonomy occurred every day at the Portage Gaol. The dominant forms of resistance were individual rather than collective. Prison historians have

commented that populations of female inmates who served short sentences were not likely to develop close, trusting relationships which are required to unite in protest of gaol regimes (Bosworth 1996; Daley 1993; Dobash, Dobash and Gutteridge 1986). Individual acts of resistance usually involved some form of self-expression or display of independence by the inmate. Techniques employed by inmates to redefine meaning within the gaol will be discussed in three categories: negotiating control over personal appearance; annoyance and inconveniencing tactics; and destructive behaviour.

When women entered the gaol, they were stripped of most of their personal belongings. Inmates were provided with uniforms in an attempt to standardize their personal appearance. Uniforms included a dress, a sweater and a pair of pants. Dresses were to be worn the majority of the time, although inmates were permitted to wear pants for some types of outdoor work and recreation. It was a strictly observed institutional rule that on Sundays all women were required to wear dresses. Nevertheless, institutional efforts to standardize inmate attire were not always successful. Women challenged these attempts to force the appearance of femininity on them and found many ways to express their individuality. Risking punishment, inmates altered or refused to wear their uniforms as they were instructed.

Margaret wore her dress today but very very untidy, a jersey under it and a belt tied around her waist. (Vol.8, 1949:133)

Irene roaming the halls in slacks and coat sweater. Please leave girls in Dorm. on Sundays unless they wear dresses. (Vol.8, 1949:136)

Judy went to dinner in her slacks - the only one who did so. Judy stayed in this afternoon rather than put on her dress, but put it on for supper rather to please Muriel than because she should. (Vol.9, 1950:20)

At noon Julie and Frances went to dining room in their slippers. They were sent back for their shoes. As they went upstairs for shoes "grace" was being said and they both joined in at the top of their voices. (Vol.15, 1958:87)

Some girls coming for medicine in slacks, were sent back to put on a dress (Sunday ruling) too much trouble for one or two who didn't return for medicine at 4 p.m. (Vol.18, 1961:132)

While incarcerated, some women chose to alter their appearance in a more permanent way.

Sharon and Lily have "tatoo" marks on their arms. How long?
(Vol.11, 1952:45)

Irene has tattoed her leg and took time to show the girls the marks before leaving the dining room. (Vol.12, 1954:54)

Miss Macpherson spoke to Darlene and Lois re - tattooing. Both lost 5 days. (Vol. 14, 1956:69)

Inmates also made numerous attempts to take control over issues of personal hygiene. Baths were only allowed on certain days and were supervised by members of the staff. Many inmates challenged the lack of privacy and control over when or how often a bath would be permitted. Some women threatened to disregard orders unless they were granted a bath. For instance:

Tricia being a little difficult to-nite, refused to be locked in because she did not have time for a bath, however after sitting on the floor for about 10 minutes she went in for Mrs. Kemsley but said she wasn't going to work tomorrow. She seemed o.k. all evening. (Vol.9, 1950:2)

Tricia stayed in bed all day, cross and stubborn. Refusing to have any meals sent up in the regular way. She has promised if she has a hot bath after supper she will take her place as usual tomorrow. (Vol.9, 1950:3)

Tricia was allowed to have a bath that night and, as she had promised, she went back to work in the laundry the following day. Other inmates chose to avoid making requests to staff and created their own opportunities.

Angela asked to be excused from supper table and slipped into bath. When spoken to about it Angela was quite superior - she wasn't going to wait in line for a bath. (Vol.11, 1952:42)

Perhaps because inmate attire and general appearance were closely monitored, often criticized and controlled, women in gaol chose the "presentation of self as a primary mode of resistance" (Bosworth 1996:7). Another reasonable explanation is that inmates were challenging some of the institutional rules and practices that placed them in a state of childlike dependency.

In addition to taking control over self-presentation, inmates also used a wide range of strategies which served to annoy or inconvenience the staff at the gaol. These were some of the key ways in which inmates tipped the balance of power in their favour. The most common annoyance tactics involved the creation of some type of disturbance. For example, after being placed in one of the basement punishment cells on a bread and water diet, "Cheryl pounded steadily for over an hour after lights out" (Vol.5, 1946:91). Other examples include:

Gina moved her bed to the barrier just after 6 a.m. and sat knitting and singing out loud, annoying the girls when told to be quiet said she never heard of a place where you had to be speechless. (Vol.13, 1955:64)

Katherine gave us plenty of trouble all evening screaming for nothing until the place sounded more like a mental institution. (Vol.14, 1956:66)

Another common way of showing dissatisfaction and inconveniencing staff involved stalling or refusing to be locked up. Inmates were able to use the routinized nature of gaol life to their advantage. Waking up in the morning, meals and lock up time in the evening were all scheduled opportunities for inmates to be non-compliant.

For example:

Edie has done a lot of stalling at lock up time today and has not been very good generally. (Vol.5, 1945:84)

The girls are getting very slack about getting up in the morning when called. A number of them have to be pried out of bed at the last minute. (Vol. 12, 1954:53)

Helen munching away at her breakfast long after everyone else has gone. "She is not in any hurry, not going any place." (Vol. 14, 1956:67)

In the previous examples, inmates risked punishment to do things at their own pace.

While they managed to frustrate members of the staff, it is not clear that they actually intended to do this. In the following incidents, inmates openly express their intent to inconvenience the matrons.

At lock up time Carole, Verna, Doris, Shannon congregated in #7 dorm and refused to move, singing obscene songs at the top of their voices. We locked everyone else and then tried to reason with them again, but Gail and Faith doing their best to help them along. Miss Macpherson came down and they came out. Shannon was giving her an argument, but finally had to give in. Gail is at present singing at the top of her lungs evidently trying to influence the upper floor. (Vol.17, 1960:121)

Refusing to be locked up Connie taunted staff that they "would not be getting home at nine o'clock tonight." (Vol. 16, 1959:100)

Kathleen refused to be locked. Trying to get a cigarette from another inmate. Said to Mrs. Griffin "oh, you're just paid to wait around anyway." (Vol. 17, 1960:124)

On occasions when inmates persisted in refusing to be locked up, they were physically moved into a cell by RCMP officers or gaol matrons. However, stand-offs between inmates and staff rarely progressed to that point.

In addition to refusing to be locked up, inmates also protested by refusing to do the work that had been assigned to them.

Mildred refused to do dishes at noon claims she is sick, Kay on dishes for present. (Vol. 7, 1947:122)

Jenny refused to get up for breakfast. Claims she is too tired to do dishes today. Leave her locked, meals up until further order. Margaret still to "weak" to take a steady job. Refused dishes this morning. (Vol.8, 1949:129)

Mary refusing to clean steps on a "Sunday." (Vol.8, 1949:129)

Many of these women continued to disobey staff requests even when they were threatened with various punishments.

Mary refused to go to iron for Mrs. Cook this morning and used some pretty bad language. Miss Macpherson went up to her dorm and told Mary if she didn't go she would lose 10 days remission. Mary still refused to go. (Vol.10, 1951:30)

Joyce begged off laundry work today. Mrs. James talked to her but she was very decided that she would rather lose 5 days than go back. (Vol.11, 1952:42)

Annette refused to work and told Miss Macpherson she had no intention of doing as she was told - so Annette is in the basement and will be on bread and water till further order. (Vol.18, 1961:136)

Refusing to work, stalling and creating a disturbance were overt tactics that were almost always acknowledged by the staff.

Other, more subtle techniques could easily go without detection. For example, many women successfully concealed, stockpiled or disposed of medication

that the matrons dispensed to them. However, on occasion, they were caught in the act.

Bonnie faking taking her pills. She had several pieces in her hand tonight. Said she was saving them to cure her headache. (Vol.14, 1956:69)

Yvonne was given her powder after supper. Mrs. Cook followed her to the washroom and observed Yvonne spit it into a small jar there. Miss Macpherson saw the contents of the jar and Yvonne is to be taken off the medicine list. (Vol.17, 1960:121)

Some women took control over situations by refusing to engage with staff at all. Even though this strategy was not directly confrontational, it was a display of independence that usually led to inmates being punished.

Lisa returned to "Black Hole." She preferred Black Hole to co-operation - refused to answer Mrs. Mountain. (Vol.6, 1946:108)

Amber not eating very well and crying some this morning, will not talk to me. Refusing to speak, threw milk on floor. Amber not to go to exercise yard without permission from Miss Macpherson. (Vol.8, 1949:126)

Inmates who spoke a language other than English could effectively alienate some inmates and staff members. As a result, inmates were strongly discouraged from speaking any language other than English. Speaking another language also guaranteed some privacy in conversations that were often overtly monitored or easily overheard by staff or other inmates. Gaol logbooks reveal that a number of Aboriginal women were cautioned for using their own languages.

Tricia crying to herself some when I switched off hall lights. Barb and Tricia talked in Indian. Very pleased about something. (Vol.9, 1950:17)

First offenders still not in too co-operative a mood. Persisted in talking French in the yard, thereby isolating Vicki who does not understand it. (Vol.9, 1950:18)

Georgina crying, begging to move from No.3. Says the girls are picking on her. Talking Indian language and laughing at her. Moved her to No.4. (Vol.10, 1952:38)

Rose was insolent to Mrs. Cook when checked about speaking Indian in her presence. (Vol.16, 1958:94)

Mona and Lyn quarrelled. Lyn slapped Mona for swearing at her and Mona's nose bled. Very difficult to get a full explanation as Mona would not talk English - rather think she swore at us also. (Vol.19, 1963:8)

In effect, these inmates were employing a strategy of control that was quite similar to many used by their gaolers. Isolation and restricted communication were standard features of the regime at the Portage Gaol.

Inmates were also known to negotiate control in more threatening or destructive ways. The most common types of aggressive behaviour displayed by women at Portage were self-harm and destruction of institutional property. The staff at the gaol responded to dozens of threats and incidents of women cutting themselves, swallowing objects and attempting to hang themselves. Lighting fires, jamming locks, destroying clothes and breaking windows were also common displays of aggressive behaviour by inmates. While women did get into physical fights with their peers and staff members, these incidents were very rare.

It was very common for inmates to direct their frustrations, grief and anger at themselves. Threats of self-injury and actual harm were very common among the inmate population at Portage. Women likely cut themselves, swallowed objects and

attempted to hang themselves for a variety of reasons.⁴ Margaret attempted to harm herself on a number of occasions.

Margaret good until about 12:15 a.m. then set fire to her dress and refused to put it out threw water in but couldn't reach fire as it was in the corner under her bed, finally called guard and had her put in empty cell. Fought as she was being put in cell then fell against toilet and cut her head. Her head was bleeding quite a bit - phoned Mrs. Lisson about 1:30 a.m. and she arrived about 2 a.m. and phoned Dr. Rennie. Margaret very noisy and tried to hang herself. (Vol. 6, 1946:102)

Margaret made several attempts to hang herself for three days following this incident.

Margaret slept not at all. Demanding the Dr. attempted to fix the blanket up at 11:45 p.m. Tried to strangle herself with cloth round the tap. Called Mr. Campbell over but we had her free and she didn't even see him. Threatens she will do it during the day when she isn't watched so closely. Margaret needed to be watched every minute as she was determined to hang herself. Very abusive and filthy language to wardresses. Demanding more drug to sleep on. (Vol.6, 1946:103)

Inmates injured themselves with a wide variety of objects that could be found in their environment.

Jeanette cut her wrist this a.m. about 9:15 with a piece of glass from x-mas tree decoration. Dr. Rennie dressed it for her at 2:15 p.m. . . . Jeanette moved to cell in #4 cell block to remain locked.

Jackie claims she swallowed a needle (record player) which she picked up this morning while she was cleaning up. Dr. Rennie was called. He said it was unlikely to do her any harm. (Vol.10, 1951:29)

The staff often treated inmate self harm as a punishable or pathological behaviour.

⁴ The topic of self-harm among populations of imprisoned women has only recently become of topic of concern. (See for example: Cathy Fillmore, Colleen Dell and The Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba. April, 2001. *Prairie Women, Violence and Self Harm*. Shaw, M. 2000. "Women, Violence and Disorder in Prisons." In Kelly Hannah-Moffat and Margaret Shaw (Eds.), *An Ideal Prison? Critical Essays on Women's Imprisonment in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing).

The girls from number three dormitory called at 9:15 to tell us Rita was cutting her wrist. She had the razor that Edith had borrowed. Miss Macpherson was still here so we opened up and examined her wrists. One had quite a slash but the other not so much. Everytime we bandaged them up she would tear them off. Miss Macpherson called RCMP who handcuffed Rita to the bars in the cell block in the basement. This took a bit of doing finally we used two sets of handcuffs. The RCMP were here about one hour. I managed to get two luminols [sedatives] down her throat. She complained of one handcuff being too tight. We called the RCMP again and had it loosened. (Vol.13, 1955:64)

Vera reopened and cut deeper the cuts she made yesterday. Vera claims she broke a salt shaker to do so. I feel she'd kept a bit of glass from yesterday. Vera sat amidst blood and water and Edna was screaming, banging and tearing sheets. Threatening to hang herself. Mrs. Newman called Mrs. James who was able to calm Edna enough that she moved into the next cell and was given Sodium Amytol. Vera was given Sodium Amytol and we hoped they'd settle. However, Vera would not even try. When I went down at 4 p.m. she's again torn off the bandages and reopened the cuts, digging them open with her nails. She'd also flooded her cell and the end of the cell block. This time her complaint was her smokes had been taken away and she was being punished for nothing. Again she was moved - this time to the punishment cell and her wrist rebandaged. On the 10 o'clock punch Mrs. Wilson reported Vera had the bandages off and bleeding. I called Miss Macpherson she came in and called the Dr. and RCMP. They moved Vera to clean cell and handcuffed her to the bars. They had hardly gone when I went down and she had the bandages off again and minus a tooth doing so, we called the RCMP again to put the cuffs on in such a way she can't harm herself. The Dr. said Vera could keep the cuffs on all night. He would see her tomorrow. (Vol. 16, 1959:101-102)

Vera has been fairly good today but was crying and quite hysterical over what she says was abuse from RCMP. She has a tooth broken off and a black eye and she demands to have a lawyer. (Vol.16, 1959:102)

Vera was not allowed to contact a lawyer while she was at Portage. In the days following this incident, the institutional doctor and a psychiatrist examined her.

Roughly forty-eight hours after the first time Vera opened the wounds on her arms, she was being transferred to the mental hospital in Selkirk, Manitoba.

In the following examples, women utilized threats of self-harm when they did not get what they wanted from the staff.

Leslie was very restless and annoying most of the night. She complained of a headache and couldn't sleep, so she asked for a cold drink so I suggested hot-cocoa and she got the hot water bottle then too. She kept scolding and asking for aspirins and when she was refused these she really talked back to us then and said "alright I can do the same as I did in Vaughn" and at the same time reached over to her table and let me see a piece of glass that was broken and said that she would use that on her wrists for sure and even said "hanging herself would be quicker." I then got the hot water bottle and got her to lay her head on it and for the rest of the night she didn't say a word. She didn't get the aspirins, I got her to give me most of the glass - one little piece is missing yet. (Vol. 13, 1955:57)

Grace went out to see Dr. Rennie about her rash but wasn't very pleased with his treatment. Later she slashed her wrist and would not let Miss Frazer or myself dress the wound. She is threatening to kill herself if something isn't done for the terrible itch. (Vol.15, 1957:83)

Self-harm may have satisfied a range of needs for these women. They may have been coping techniques, attempts to manipulate staff or attempts to end their lives.

Another frequently used outlet for anger, boredom and frustration was the destruction of institutional property. Incidents of property damage were usually preceded by some sort of conflict with inmates or staff. In the following example, the staff deny Margaret something to help relieve her pain. She responds by tearing up a number of objects in her cell.

Margaret started demanding something for her pains about 11:15 p.m. Woke up the other girls. Refused to stop so I phoned Mrs. Mountain. She came over and we moved her up to No.1 where she started

tearing up her blankets and night gown. Called Mounted Police to come and put handcuffs on her. Gave her a blanket which she started to tear up and then with the assistance of RCMP removed her to lower punishment cells where she had to be watched constantly. She started to tear her mattress to stuff in her mouth. About 3:30 a.m. we had RCMP to come down and loosen the handcuffs. She raved and cursed until 4:30 a.m. (Vol. 7, 1947:119-120)

On other occasions, inmates smashed toilets, tampered with locks, lit fires, tore apart pillows, broke windows and destroyed clothing. It is quite likely that some instances of property damage were inmate attempts at entertaining themselves.

Jennifer had pictures drawn on the wall of her dorm. This morning took pencil away from her until she can promise not to destroy the walls etc. (Vol.8, 1949:130)

Two girls report that others from main floor have cut up pillow cases, sweater and hose to make play toys, animals and dolls. (Vol.11, 1958:47)

When inmate aggression was turned outward on staff, it was usually expressed in the form of intimidation or threats.

Tricia blew up shortly after nine o'clock. Cursing and swearing stamping about in her room. So mad she felt like "breaking everything." She had a tennis ball and started bouncing it on the floor and it came out in the hall and I clipped it. When the lights went out at 9:30 p.m. she got all dolled up, because she said she was going to see a "Mountie." When I went back to see if she was going to undress and go to bed she demanded her ball. Said she would break everything if she didn't get it. I asked her if she was going to sit up in the dark all night as she couldn't go to bed with her clothes on. She told me to "hang around for a couple of hours." (Vol. 9, 1950:16)

Janine did not put the linen on the bed as told or put out her soiled clothing to go to laundry. She is still talking about what she will do when she comes upstairs, and will a girl get the "Pen" for striking a wardress? (Vol.15, 1957:83)

There is also evidence contained in the logbooks which would suggest that some matrons did feel threatened by particular inmates at times.

Alison is definitely getting more "ornary" everyday. She simply ignores you if you tell her she is doing wrong or tells you at length you've no right to tell her what to do etc. etc. There are times when Alison has been denied something when one wonders if it is safe to turn and leave. (Vol. 17, 1960:109)

Actual assaults on staff were very rare and were almost always carried out by individual inmates. There is evidence which suggests that when women did become violent with staff, they were most likely in a position where they had very little left to lose. In the following example, an inmate in a punishment cell in the basement has armed herself with water to throw on matrons when they come by to check on her.

Marlene asleep until 12:30 a.m. asked for aspirin for pain in her shoulder which she claims the RCMP dislocated. She was very pleasant and polite to me. On the next round when Mrs. Cook went in, she blasted her with a few of her choicest names, then the next round she was waiting for her with a supply of toilet water, and I don't mean cologne. I thought it best to look after #8 gate myself to save further trouble which turned out to be a good idea as she had another array of paper cups filled with the aforesaid toilet water waiting for Mrs. Cook. (Vol. 8, 1949:135)

Tricia in a black threatening mood this morning. Says she will burn herself to death or something equally bad. Had plugged the padlock with particles of wood from a short stick she had managed to hide. With every effort to free the lock Tricia used the stick on our hands or threw water from the toilet in our faces. Miss Frazer was soaked myself not so badly. (Vol. 9, 1950:18)

Rachel flared up in an ugly temper this morning, striking at Mrs. Cook twice with a floor cloth. Refused at first to be locked but finally did. Mrs. James talked to her later. Rachel is to remain locked in her cell for four days - no exercise periods. (Vol.11, 1952:42)

According to log book accounts of these and other inmate assaults on staff, very little, if any, physical harm actually resulted.

Concluding Remarks

Inmates at the Portage Gaol were, by and large, obedient to the rules, routines and directives issued by the staff. When women did openly resist the gaol regime, they were most likely to do so in non-violent ways. Mc Dermott and King (1988:360) have characterized these power struggles as “games” where the staff control all or most of “the legitimate avenues to power, privilege and possessions.” It is not surprising that conflict occurs in this type of environment, where adults are reduced to a state of dependency on others for their basic needs. Altering uniforms and applying tattoos were two ways in which inmates fought institutional efforts to standardize their appearance. Inmates also found a wide variety of ways to express their dissatisfaction within the gaol. Most of these strategies involved inmates actively annoying or inconveniencing matrons. Creating a disturbance, stalling, refusing to be locked up, refusing work and ignoring staff were all commonly used by inmates. When women did behave violently in this environment, they were most likely to harm themselves or destroy their clothing or objects in their cells.

Intimidation, threats and assaults against staff were not commonly used tactics. In fact, most inmates’ assaults on staff were carried out by women who were already in the basement punishment cells. The strategies of resistance that women employed at the Portage Gaol reflect a certain amount of creativity. Lacking access to many

legitimate outlets for self-expression, these women risked being punished to make their voices heard.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this project has been to begin the process of constructing a feminist social history of women's provincial incarceration in Manitoba. More specifically, the focus has been on the history of women's incarceration at the Portage Gaol during the period from 1945 to 1970. In attempting to present a 'history of people,' superintendents, guards, doctors, clergy and, most importantly, the women who were incarcerated at the gaol emerged as the central characters. In setting out to write a 'feminist' social history of imprisonment, I have focused on the women who were gaoled at Portage. Specific questions were raised to achieve this goal.

Chapter One provided some answers to two important questions. The first was, 'who were the women who were incarcerated at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970?' This group of inmates was generally young, poorly educated and either unemployed or employed in low paid, unskilled and unstable jobs. These characteristics remained relatively constant throughout the period in question. The most remarkable shift in the composition of the inmate population was the representation of Aboriginal women. In 1945, the vast majority (95%) of the women admitted to the gaol were white. Only five years later, in 1950, half of the women admitted to the gaol were white and half were Aboriginal. This overrepresentation of Aboriginal women at Portage became more pronounced over time. By 1970, 86 percent of the women admitted to the gaol were Aboriginal. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in provincial and federal institutions continues today.

Chapter One also provided some insight into the question of ‘why were the women imprisoned?’ Gaol calendars furnished a wealth of data regarding the variety of offences for which women were serving sentences. Changing priorities in policing, sentencing and correctional practices led to some changes in the types of offences that were recorded in the gaol calendars. Nevertheless, between 1945 and 1970, the majority of the women at the Portage Gaol were incarcerated for alcohol-related, property and public order offences. In addition, scores of women were admitted to the gaol because they lacked the resources to pay a fine imposed by the courts. Sadly, the contemporary picture at Portage and other provincial prisons across Canada has changed very little (see Shaw 1994; Comack 1993). In sum, Chapter One revealed that the women who were (and are) incarcerated at the Portage Gaol share the distinction of being one of the most socially and economically marginalized groups in Canada.

Chapter Two established an administrative context for some of the changes that occurred at the Portage Gaol over the 1945 to 1970 period. As superintendents, Mr. Calder, Miss Macpherson and Miss Des Lauriers determined many of the policies and practices at the gaol. Their beliefs about the purposes of incarceration, the role of staff and the significance of gender in the treatment of inmates were crucial to the ways that the gaol operated. Superintendent Calder’s apparent lack of attention to gender and his authoritarian style of administration were criticized only one year after all of the male inmates had been moved out of the Portage Gaol. As a

superintendent, Calder focused on issues concerning the maintenance of order and punishment of inmates.

Superintendent Macpherson replaced Calder in 1948 and perpetuated many of the same practices. Like her predecessor, Macpherson exercised a great deal of control over gaol operations although, unlike Mr. Calder, she instructed the matrons to be more interactive with inmates. Macpherson encouraged her staff to become maternal role models for the women. Superintendent Macpherson and her staff insisted that inmates adhere to the value system and behaviours that were associated with white, middle-class notions of femininity and domesticity. If inmates resisted the rehabilitative influences of staff members and the gaol routine, Superintendent Macpherson encouraged conformity through more traditional methods of penal discipline.

When Superintendent Des Lauriers arrived at the Gaol in 1969 with the task of bringing the institution up to date, she found that her predecessor had controlled almost all aspects of the gaol's operations. Des Lauriers initiated a slow process of change that included releasing some of the administrative duties to her staff. Chapter Three details that Des Lauriers abandoned the longstanding practice of separating first-time inmates from repeat offenders. However, under Superintendent Des Lauriers' guidance, inmates spent their time in much the same way as they had for over twenty years. The focus of a number of the changes was to create a more "homey" atmosphere at the gaol. Fresh coats of paint were applied to the walls, women were permitted to talk during meals and guards shed their uniforms and

donned street clothes. Nevertheless, gaol routines retained their focus on domesticity and femininity, as the initial changes left intact the majority of the policies and practices that Superintendent Macpherson had relied upon.

While Chapters One and Two introduced some of the main characters who lived and worked at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970, Chapters Three and Four detailed some of the routines and interactions that these characters were involved in while they were at the gaol. Chapter Three demonstrates that administrative priorities of the superintendent and staff contoured almost every aspect of daily life at the gaol. Inmates were classified and segregated, put to work, educated and socialized together under the ever-watchful eye of the gaol staff. The sometimes explicit, but often implicit, goal of the routines and policies at the gaol was the supervision and management of the women. The processes of examination, documentation and partitioning all contributed to the extensive control that was exercised over inmates. Often, the most overt forms of control were manifested in numerous techniques of discipline and punishment. All three superintendents relied on a wide variety of punitive and often paternalistic forms of discipline to induce conformity among inmates. Various combinations of isolation, deprivation, physical restraint and medical intervention were regularly inflicted upon women. All aspects of the gaol regime were directed at encouraging women to become compliant and adopt the domestic and feminine ideal that was being presented to them by the gaol staff.

In spite of being stripped of their independence and adulthood, many of these women found ways to retain some control within the gaol. Chapter Four located women's conflicts with staff and other inmates within the conditions of confinement at the Portage Gaol. Struggles were typically in response to institutionally imposed restrictions on food, resources and/or communication. Conflicts between inmates reflected other aspects of gaol life, such as the close quarters that women shared and racial tensions. Inmate attempts to gain some power and control in this environment were seldom violent and almost always carried out on an individual rather than collective basis. Gaol documents revealed that while some women openly challenged the rules and routines, the vast majority of women were compliant.

This project has only begun the process of documenting and explaining the history of women's imprisonment. A number of significant findings that have been presented in this thesis lead to new directions for future research. For example, we now know that the inmates at the Portage Gaol were often medicated as a means of control. New research might ask questions such as: 'were other women's institutions employing medical strategies to control inmates?' or 'were medicines used in the same ways at gaols that housed men?' Similar comparative questions can also be asked about the incidence of self-harm within other gaols that housed women and/or men. This research has also uncovered a very important historical shift in the incarceration of Aboriginal women in Manitoba. Between 1945 and 1950, the number of Aboriginal women who were incarcerated at the Portage Gaol increased dramatically, with the most significant change occurring between 1947 and 1948.

More detailed explanations of this finding are required. There is some urgency to conduct this research as Aboriginal people, corrections officials, RCMP and other potential informants are aging and dying. As a result, the answers to this question may be forever lost to history.

The history of the Portage Gaol can now be used as a point of comparison for other histories of women's imprisonment throughout Canada. However, until the histories of women's provincial goals are written, we are forced to assume that the Portage Gaol is unique. While we now know more about the gaol and the women who were incarcerated there, many questions that remain unanswered. Like other writers of social history, I am left with the questions of 'what are prisons for?' and 'is the modern prison necessarily about crime and punishment at all?' (Carlen 1983; Dobash et al. 1986; Howe 1994; Rafter 1985). The Portage Gaol housed populations of women who occupied marginalized social positions before they were incarcerated. These women were most often young, Aboriginal and living in poverty. While they were at the gaol, inmates were stripped of their independence and asked to conform to white, middle-class standards of domesticity and femininity. In spite of the oftentimes good intentions of the staff, inmates were confronted with regimes that were both paternalistic and, at times, highly punitive. By and large, the Portage Gaol housed populations of marginalized women in conditions that were designed to induce conformity to particular standards of domesticity and femininity. Rather than addressing the pressing economic and social needs of these women, they were placed in situations of forced dependency. Regrettably, one is left to question whether this

situation has been altered in more recent times. It is safe to conclude that the history of the gaol is complex. Consistency of practices, contradictions in philosophies and struggles for autonomy make this a rich -- although not easily explained -- history.

Appendix Methodology

Four sources of data were consulted in writing this thesis. The majority of the available information consists of institutionally-produced documents. Archival research is dependent upon the clarity, completeness and consistency of the surviving data. Although not fully preserved, the gaol records were in remarkably good condition. Institutional records in the form of gaol calendars and daily logbooks were located in the attic of the Portage Gaol. Annual Reports from Portage were scattered between the attic of the gaol and the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Reports from the Headingly and Brandon Gaols were also located at the Provincial Archives. In addition to these documents, one semi-structured qualitative interview was conducted with a former gaol superintendent, Noelle Des Lauriers.

Each of the sources contributed something unique to this thesis. Both the archival and interview data are rich in their content and scope, however, they do have some limitations. The primary challenges related to what *was* and *was not* documented or recalled. It is necessary to clarify both the strengths and weaknesses of each source of information.

Gaol Calendars

Gaol calendars exist for the entire period encompassing 1945 to 1970. Most of the information contained in these documents relates some type of demographic data

about the inmates who came to the gaol. Some standard data were documented

about inmates at the time of their arrival. All calendars included:

- 'name' of the inmate
- 'date of admission'
- 'sentence'
- 'offence'
- 'by whom committed' (magistrate)
- 'how sentence was discharged' (expiration, fine payment etc.)
- 'date of discharge'
- 'place of residence'
- 'age' (also represented as 'date of birth')
- 'occupation'
- 'marital status'
- 'color or race'

Other information was collected with less consistency. It is possible that some of the gaps in the data resulted from the fact that the gaol staff had to rely on inmates' knowledge of and ability to recall personal information as well as their willingness to provide it. Less consistently documented information included:

- 'length of residence in Canada'
- 'birthplace'
- 'religion'
- 'grades completed' or 'education'⁵

Information regarding the physical characteristics of gaoled women (such as 'eye color,' 'height,' 'weight upon admittance/release' and 'descriptive marks') was also consistently documented in gaol calendars.

Selected demographic information provided some answers to the questions posed in Chapter One, specifically; 'who were the women?' and 'what brought them to the Portage Gaol?' The categories of 'age,' 'marital status,' 'race,' 'education'

⁵ Demographic data relating to 'education' were not documented until 1950. This information was consistently recorded from 1950 to 1970.

and 'occupation' were selected from the long list of inmate demographics that were recorded. These data were analyzed in order to provide some idea of who the women were. Gaol calendars also provided documentation that related to inmate 'offences.' These data helped to answer the question of what brought this group of women to the gaol.

Calendars provided a rich and detailed account of the inmates' backgrounds. Institutional staff documented most of this information at the time of an inmate's arrival. Despite the apparent organization and diligence of recording practices at the gaol, a number of weaknesses can be identified in the data. One of the 'content restrictions' that I observed was a consistency and reliability problem with particular types of information (Singleton et al. 1993:109). Missing cases were found in several demographic categories such as age, religion and education. Even though very few cases were missing⁶ (less than five in most years) the data set is incomplete. Also, lacking supplementary documents, it is impossible to determine the accuracy of this information.

It must be acknowledged that, as detailed as these documents are, certain omissions are evident. For example, given the data that are available, there are no indicators of whether or not these women had previously served time at the Portage Gaol (or any other institution). It will also remain a mystery as to how many of the women had children of their own or were caring for others at the time of incarceration. Even in categories that contain relatively complete data, significant details are missing. For example, some women stated that they had an 'occupation.'

However, we do not know if the work was full-time, part-time and/or seasonal.

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the data, scores of questions will remain forever unanswered.

Gaol Logbooks

The second source of data was institutionally produced logbooks. These documents were written by the gaol staff⁷ to provide a record of daily occurrences. Three entries were made daily, detailing gaol activities every eight hours. All logbooks from 1940 to 1970 were available and in excellent condition. The consistency and detailed nature of the logbook entries proved to be useful in reconstructing many aspects of the history of the Portage Gaol.

A great deal of descriptive information was gleaned from gaol logbooks. These data contributed to discussions of the administrative history, daily routines and inmate responses to imprisonment. The logbooks were extremely valuable records of daily routines and interactions at the Portage Gaol. The detail, consistency and general quality of the journals was remarkable. In spite of these strengths, several weaknesses were inherent in this data source. For one, it is essential to be mindful of the fact that these documents were institutionally produced and not intended for public consumption. Unfortunately, these types of records are highly susceptible to “selective deposit” errors (Singleton et al. 1993:372). Staff members may have made a number of possible ‘errors’ in their recording practices. This may have involved

⁶ I include both blank and illegible entries as missing cases.

simply forgetting to include some information or the omission of data that were considered unimportant. Other errors might have involved the purposeful omission or alteration of information that was recorded. Another possible error might have been the omission of activities and occurrences that were routine and perhaps taken for granted. Whether or not these errors were made will never be known. However, it is important to acknowledge them as potential weaknesses. Most importantly, gaol logbooks only provide one perspective of a complex, multi-dimensional account of history.

Annual Reports

Annual reports were the only public documents that were produced by provincial gaols in Manitoba. Written by gaol superintendents, the annual reports were summaries provided to the provincial government. These documents detailed the number of gaol admissions and discharges that occurred throughout the year. Also included were some basic demographic summaries of the gaol's yearly population. Annual reports also included the superintendent's comments on events at the gaol that were considered unusual or noteworthy. Even though very few of these documents have survived,⁸ they proved to be useful in writing this thesis. Annual Reports from the Portage, Headingly and Brandon Gaols provided some insights into

⁷ Gaol matrons typically wrote all of the logbook entries, although the superintendent occasionally added a note.

⁸ Six Annual Reports from the Brandon, Portage and Headingly Gaols were found from 1945 to 1970.

the goals and philosophies of the superintendents as well as the daily routines within the institutions.

In spite of the obvious value of these documents, there are several shortcomings that should be mentioned. It is important to remember that these reports were written by gaol administrators for government officials. The authors of these reports likely had some interest in presenting the institutions, themselves and their staff in a positive light. I am not suggesting that these reports are merely examples of creative writing. However, it is necessary to keep in mind the position of the authors and their intended audience.

Interview

One semi-structured interview was conducted with former Portage Gaol superintendent, Noelle Des Lauriers. The interview yielded great detail concerning gaol routines, policies and insight into the former superintendent's own perspectives. Miss Des Lauriers was also able to provide clarification and additional context for some practices and events that took place at the gaol. This type of information was not available in any of the archival documents.

Although the information provided in the interview was valuable, it was not without limitations. All interviews are reliant on the participant's ability and willingness to recall and relate what they know. It was not at all surprising that Miss Des Lauriers had difficulty remembering some details, given that many of the questions were intended to solicit information regarding routines and events that took

place over thirty years ago. This interview (like all interviews) was vulnerable to researcher and/or participant biases. Steps were taken to locate and minimize potential sources of bias. For instance, interview questions were written with care taken not to 'lead' the respondent. Also, because memory was a concern, some of Miss Des Lauriers' comments were compared with other data sources for consistency.

Concluding Remarks

When combined, gaol calendars, logbooks, annual reports and the interview with former Suerintendent Des Lauriers provided a wealth of information that made this particular history of the Portage Gaol possible. In spite of some limitations, this data set was remarkably clear and complete. Institutionally produced documents were well preserved in the attic of the Portage Gaol and the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Regrettably, I believe that any history of the Portage Gaol that is written will be inadequate. Not unlike almost all histories of women's imprisonment, the one side of the story that will never be told is that of the inmates.

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