

The House on the Hill

Ontario Reformatory-Guelph Correctional Centre 1910-2002

A new Beginning - Guelph Innovation District



THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

1910-2010

Hundred Years of Memories and a new Beginning

A pictorial journal of people and programs

That made this institution such an excellent example
of a new innovative approach to prison reform

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The organizational genius of William J. Hanna, Ontario Provincial Secretary from 1905 to 1916 provided a blueprint for the institutional operation that was flexible enough to grow and improve with the times. Of course, plans are only as good as the people who have to execute them. The Guelph institution was fortunate in this respect, as it managed to attract many dedicated and hardworking people to turn these plans into a reality. This album will only be able to highlight a few of these, but there are many more who should be recognized.

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In the year 2002 the institution closed down and all inmates were moved to more modern facilities leaving the property available for other uses. City of Guelph staff and other community members developed a plan called the "Guelph innovation district". The City of Guelph developed a plan for the Victoria Road land while Conestoga Community College proposed a Guelph Community Campus on the site of the former prison buildings. The remaining 36 acres of landscaped park land on York Road is now the subject of interest for a community group called "Yorklands Green Hub", who see many innovative uses for part of this land. The remaining landscaped land is perfect for a beautiful park.

Acknowledgement

It is with deep gratitude that Yorklands Green Hub acknowledges the generosity of Karl Grottenthaler in sharing with us his important documentation of Guelph's landmark heritage site at 785 York Road, prior to his death in 2014. Karl was immensely proud of the “House on the Hill” and, as the title of his book infers, fondly hoped that the rich cultural heritage landscape that was created through innovative thinking early in the 20th century would be preserved and thrive in the Guelph Innovation District.



The publishing program used for this album does not have a provision for footnotes to denote detailed attribution. Therefore, credit is given in the following notes.

I have drawn heavily on clippings from the Guelph Daily Mercury and the Toronto Star. The Provincial website ontariorealty.ca was also very helpful in confirming time frames and site specific information.

William Taylor, Superintendent from 1977 to 1986, provided many pictures, documents, and artifacts.

Pauline and Maureen Corcoran wrote their own story about their beloved father Kevin, his work at the G.C.C., and all the stories they were told by his co-workers about the extraordinary influence he had on their lives.

Frank Dobias, Recreational Director at G.C.C. for many years, was a most valuable source of information. The picture album assembled by an appreciative inmate shows the positive influence recreational and sports activities can have in the life of an institution.

Henk Dykman, chaplain at the G.C.C. from 1978 to 1985, wrote his own story about the time he spent at the institution, touching on many subjects, as well as the personalities he came in contact with during his stay. His personal pictures give a unique perspective of the chapel experience.

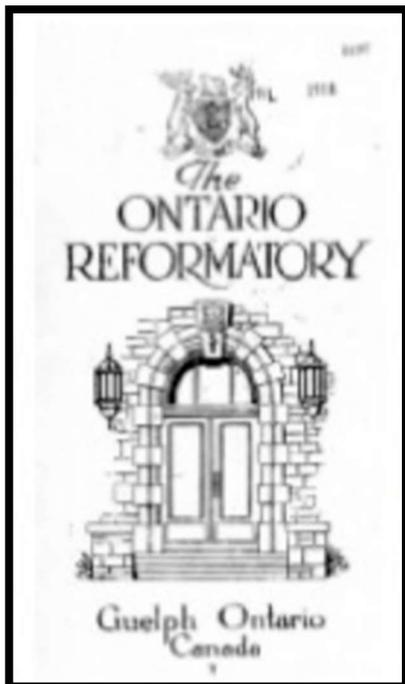
William (Bill) Dick provided some interesting pictures connected with staff training, and John Boorsma provided his personal baton for display at the Guelph Civic Museum.

Brook Leader, who took over as Chief Engineer after I moved up to the front office and who is still looking after the building complex on a contract basis, was a font of information while taking me on an informal tour of the institution during the Open Door event in June 2009. We had worked together closely during my 23 year tenure at the G.C.C., and he still hasn't lost his enthusiasm for keeping things in working order.

Kay Chitrin, daughter of Gordon Ferguson, herdsman at the Reformatory from 1941 to 1964, provided an extensive collection of pictures and articles about the most famous Holstein herd in Canada.

Guelph Civic Museum staff members Judy Prigionni and Kathleen Wall went out of their way to share pictures and other information connected to the history of the Guelph Reformatory. They made me feel that I was pursuing a worthwhile project.

Doug Oliver, Deputy Regional Director, Community Safety and Correctional Services provided advice and a great picture of Col. Headley Basher, Superintendent 1948-1952.



The Beginning

Excerpt from 1914 Report

On April 11, 1910, two guards, a cook, a farmer and 14 prisoners moved into farmhouses on the property. They prepared the site by clearing the land, building roads and laying small gage tracks to transport material from the quarry and lime plant. By mid-June 1910 there are 64 prisoners at work; approximately 100 Holstein heifers are on site; temporary buildings are standing with a capacity for 300 prisoners.

QUARRY

There is an abundance of dolomitic lime-stone rock in high cliffs on both sides of the river which is of superior quality and suitable for building purposes, lime manufacturing and road making. Two quarries have been opened up, from which all stone used in construction, lime manufacture and stone crushing is quarried.

LIME-PLANT

As an enormous amount of lime will be used in the construction of buildings on the site, a lime kiln has been erected, and a modern Hydrated-Lime plant is being operated. The advantages of hydrated lime over ordinary lump lime are many but the most important of all is the purity and uniformity of the product, complete hydration or "slacking", and the storage of of product indefinitely without loss. In all concrete construction on the buildings, ten percent of cement is displaced by ten percent of hydrated lime.



By the summer of 1911, the Lime Kiln was completed, hydrating lime plant and stone crusher installed, and the bridge across the Speed River was also ready for use.

The Machine shop building was completed. The powerhouse was completed, electrical supply and secure water supply was in place, and authority was given to go ahead with constructing the other permanent buildings.

At this point as well, work on the most modern Dairy buildings is proceeding in good time. The laundry building and another industrial building are also proceeding as planned.

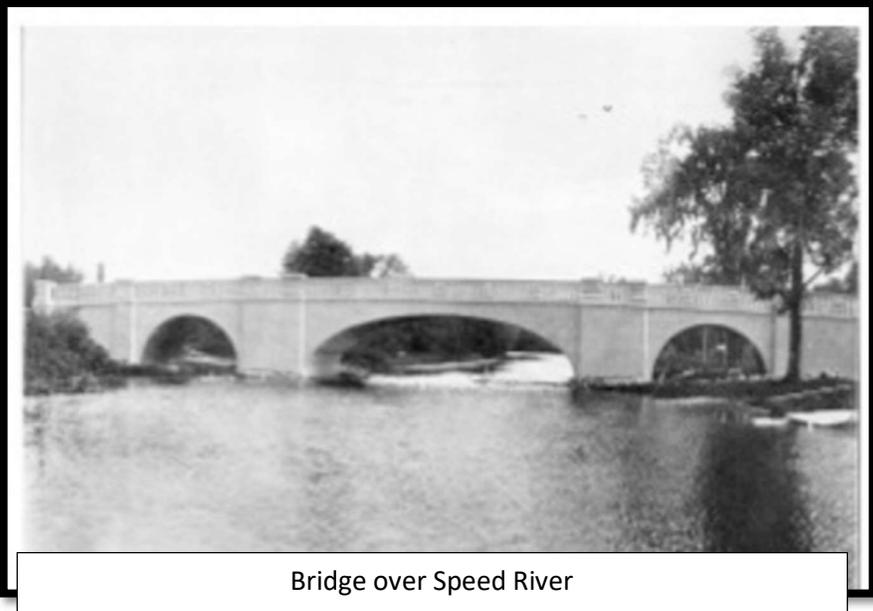
Excerpts from the 44th Annual Report:
...to date over eight hundred men have been taken to the farm and given a degree of liberty that amazes the fossilized official. The results have been successful to an extent we hesitate to define...
...Like Paul approaching Rome, we are able: 'To thank God and take courage.'
...The vast amount of work and development on the prison farm through the last official year are too great to be enumerated in this report. The year's history would certainly illustrate that fact is stranger than fiction.



Stone Crusher and Hydrated Lime Plants



Stone quarry



Bridge over Speed River

The Administration Building

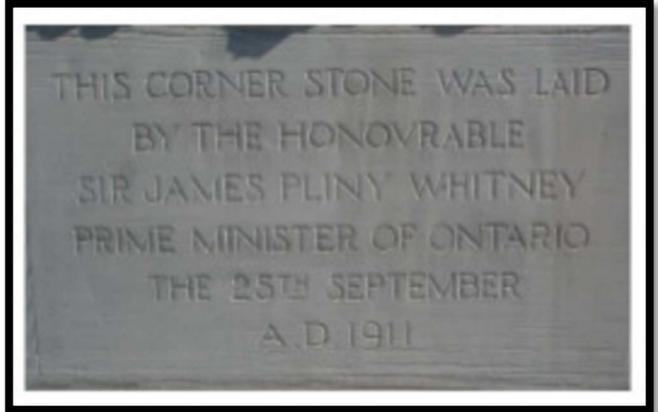
John M. Lyle, a leading architect, created a unique building in the BEAUX-ART style which he was known for. The lay-out is formal but simple, and all the rooms are spacious and functional. The construction is solid and has passed the test of time. It is even now ready to be moved into without major renovations.

The stone Masons of the Balconi Construction Company did an excellent job, even if there was not a Scotsman between them. They did an equally good job on the so-called Marker building (license plate production).

Good progress was made during the summer of 1911, enabling the laying of the cornerstone for this building. It was a festive occasion, and as the inscription says, it was laid by the Honorable Sir James Pliny Whitney on the 25th of September, 1911.

The building was basically finished before winter set in. Of note in the picture are the small gauge tracks for the little train bringing in the stones and other material from the quarry.

All the windows, doors, oak paneling, and other trim were brought in from the prison farm in Toronto.



Administration Building under construction. Notice the small gauge railway tracks for moving material from the quarry and lime kiln.



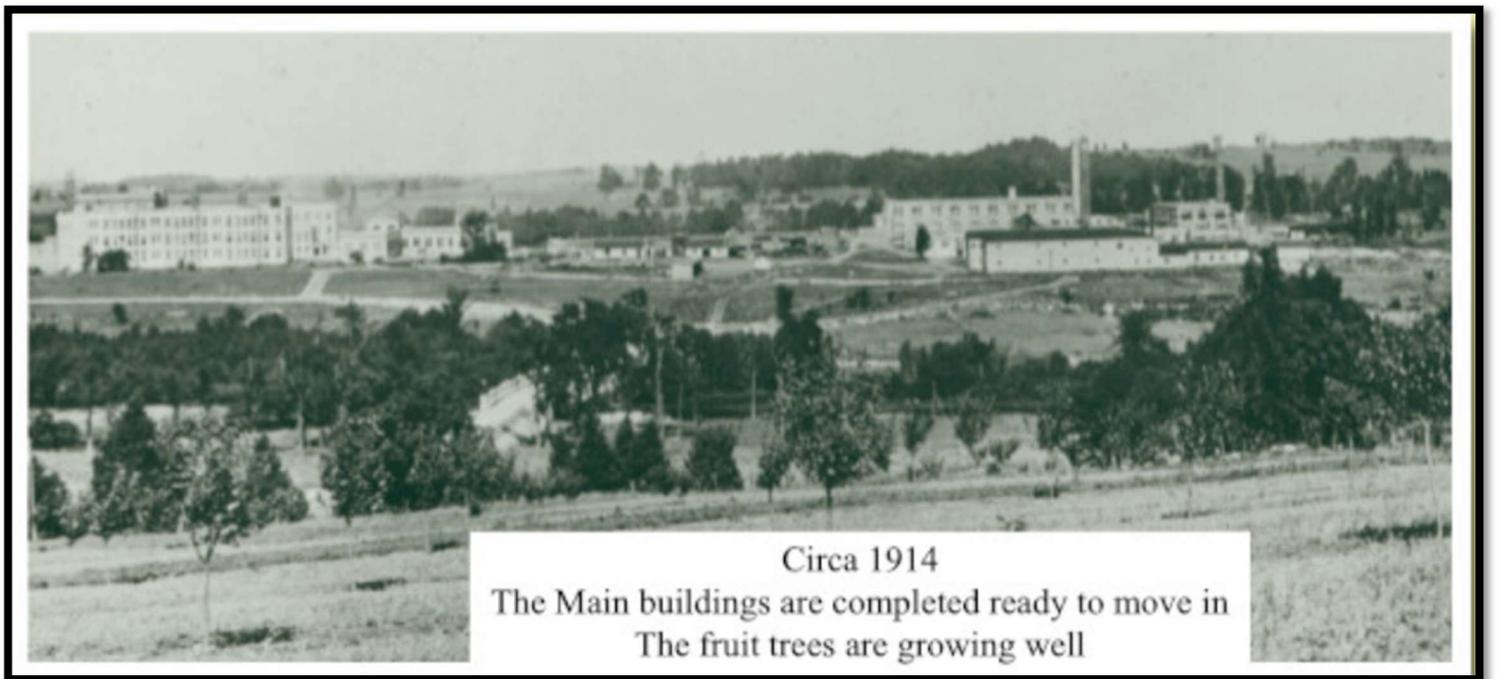
THE BALCONI BROTHERS and their Stone Masons



The first industrial Building, called the Marker plant, where license plates were made.



Work in progress circa 1913



Circa 1914

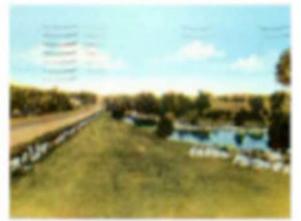
The Main buildings are completed ready to move in
The fruit trees are growing well

YORK ROAD LANDSCAPING

A Gift to the City of Guelph



Scene by the Highway near Guelph, Ont., Canada.



A View of the Pond at the Ontario Parliament, Guelph, Ontario, 1911



The lakes and the Royal City Bicentennial Park

Agricultural operations are seasonal, with long periods of idle time to let nature do its work. Landscaping can be done anytime, and the Reformatory Bull Gang worked hard at it. They had an endless supply of well worn rocks, the piles of which seemed to grow faster than the potatoes. They made good use of them, as can be seen in the pictures. After working for ten years on the Clyde Creek beautification shown on the previous page, they finally tackled their biggest project, the two big lakes along York Road.

Several years later, the project was completed. The final step of removing the temporary dam to the creek is shown in the picture. There was an official ceremony with some important people watching from the road. The water level of the creek and the lakes was controlled by a weir down stream. Sometimes the water level would rise for no apparent reason, and it was discovered that beavers had built a dam at that spot. After several years of having their domicile removed the beavers got the message. The large flocks of Canada Geese were more persistent. Attempts to reduce the numbers were unsuccessful and they dominate the area now.

In 1980, the large field adjacent to the lakes was prepared for recreational use by installing a tile draining system. It was then leased to the City of Guelph, and the Royal City Jaycees sponsored the creation of the Royal City Jaycees Bicentennial Park.

However, there is still a large field opposite Willow Bank Hall which is calling for attention. It is another tile drained field enclosed by a priceless example of loose rock wall fencing. It looks like it could last for centuries without maintenance. It deserves heritage protection. In fact the whole area including the two lakes and the two ponds behind the Superintendent Residence should be added to the park and made more accessible to the citizens of Guelph.



Up to eighty prisoners from the Bull Gang worked for two years to dig the holes and add the stone work for the two lakes.



The final touch joining the lakes to the Clyde Creek.



A beautiful example of fieldstone fencing excavating for the lakes and ponds provided most of the material



Canada Geese have taken over.



The Ontario Reformatory in Guelph
 1909-1972
 Guelph Correctional Centre
 1972-2002

As a report from the Provincial Secretary's Department in 1914 points out quite eloquently, the Reformatory in Guelph, including the industrial and farm operations, were fully operational and fulfilling all expectations. It also points out that the operation was divided into two branches, "Custodial" and "Construction", with the Superintendent in charge of custody and discipline of the inmates while the Assistant Provincial Secretary was in charge of business administration, engineering, and construction.

As time went by, the day-to-day operations of the industries came more and more under the supervision of the Superintendent of the institution and most functions of the Provincial Secretary's organization were done at the local level, although the accounts and budgets were kept strictly separate. Industrial sales for all institutions were done by a skeleton staff from Head Office, and this was re-enforced in 1990 when the provincial prison industries were incorporated as the "Trillium Corporation" Services, which is in charge of all Ontario Government Property.

With the number of inmates of various criminal backgrounds increasing, it became essential that the authority of the Superintendent be strengthened to make on the spot decisions specific to the institutional situations. Consequently, every Superintendent left his own mark during the duration of his assignment to an institution.

Following is a list of Superintendents who had the responsibility of leading this institution through its almost one hundred years of existence:

1914-1917	Mr. J.T. Gilmore	1952-1956	Mr. G. Wright	1989-1996	Mr. Greg Simmons
1917-1920	Dr. G.N. Urie	1956-1969	Mr. Charles Sanderson	1995-1986	Mr. Douglas Dalglish (Act.)
1920-1921	Dr. Bryce McMurrich	1969-1972	Mr. John R.C. Lee	1996	Mr. George Simpson (Act.)
1922-1930	Mr. C.F. Leelands	1972-1976	Mr. Scott Keane	1996	Mr. Jack Lockhart
1931-1937	Mr. J. Hunter	1977	Mr. Hector Harloff (Act)	1996-2000	Mrs. Sherry Cybulski (Act.)
1937-1945	Mr. J.D. Heaslip, M.D.	1977-1986	Mr. William Taylor	2000-2002	Ms. Dianne Doherty
1946-1951	Mr. G. Headley Basher	1986-1989	Mr. Lyndon Nelmes		

Guelph Military Convalescent Hospital Speedwell



In 1917, correctional services were suspended, and the property was transferred to the Military Hospital Commission for use as a vocational training center for returned soldiers. The facility was officially known as the Guelph Military Convalescent Hospital, but was named Speedwell by its residents – mostly soldiers from southwestern Ontario. At Speedwell, disabled soldiers received therapy, while others received training in agriculture, woodworking, and motor mechanics. Soldiers were required to wear their uniforms, and the military command structure remained in place. Hospital staff had either served overseas or with the military stationed in Guelph.

Some temporary structures were built during this time to accommodate staff families, teamster dormitories, and even a large greenhouse that is still in existence. The top photo shows the temporary extensions to the main building, while the second photo shows the soldiers working on some early Massey-Harris tractors, which were becoming very popular with the farming community at that time. Recreation was not forgotten, and the pool table in the next photo was located on the second floor of the Tower. The military hospital functioned at the Guelph Reformatory until 1921, when it reverted back to correctional use.

