SECTION THREE

HOUSES OF CORRECTION IN HALIFAX: 1749-1790

Anthony Thomson (1996)

Within a few years of the founding of the town of Halifax, the Council’s concerns about the able-bodied dependencies had led to the suggestion that a workhouse be established. There was no suitable place for confinement. In 1753, the supposed "ringleaders" of the Hoffman Rebellion in Lunenburg were imprisoned in a military fort on George's Island. Consequently, the Justices were instructed by the Council to seek a proper house for building a block-house, to estimate expenses and devise rules and regulations for a House of Corrections. Such Houses had been widely employed in Britain and the Continent, and had been introduced into the American colonies.

Houses of Correction

In his book, *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England: A County Study*, J. A. Sharpe notes that the House of Correction in England, "an excellent device for dealing with the petty offender", was "merely the national variant of a remedy for disorder and petty crime" which appeared in Europe in the sixteenth century. The Amsterdam Rasphuis was "the most famous product of this tendency". Workhouses emerged in response, he argues, to the great increase in the number of poor brought about by large population increases. The poor were more numerous as well as "intrinsically disorderly and potentially criminous". Houses of correction were designed to dissuade the poor from "begging, vagrancy, or petty crime" by a "healthy dose of labour discipline".

The prototype was the London Bridewell, which, from its inception in 1555, combined the attributes of a hospital, a workhouse, and a reformatory. The first attempt to create such institutions nationally was Elizabethan, but James I (Stuart) in 1610 established such houses throughout the country. Soon, Powers asserts, "the idea that the house was the medium through which the offender might be reformed and changed into

Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

an honest and hardworking citizen rapidly assumed a central importance." The Book of Orders, which was reissued in 1631, recommended that prisoners who were awaiting trial should no longer be sent to the county gaol but, rather, should be "set to work in the house of correction ... since they may learn honestly by labour, and not live idly and miserably long in prison, whereby they are made worse when they come out than they were when they went in". For Powers, the "distinctive feature" of the House of Correction was that prisoners would not be idle. Instead, they "would be engaged in manual labour, enforced by the whip if necessary, and be exposed to some moral and religious instruction."

Sharpe's primary research was in Essex County, in England, where the earliest mention of a House was in 1587. Continuous evidence of a House comes from Chelmsford, beginning in 1607, which left excellent records. It was regularly delivered, provided quarterly returns to the quarter sessions, and was primarily used against minor offenders. A 1651 inventory listed spinning wheels and a loom as well as "leg irons, handcuffs and a pillory".

The main purpose of confinement was to punish and potentially reform petty offenders who committed such offences as vagrancy, living a "disorderly life", being a "deserter of family" or "runaway servant" or guilty of pilfering and theft. One woman was confined because she was a "scold"; four lunatics were confined. Of 846 persons committed between 1620 and 1680, 245 had their crimes unspecified. Sometimes people raised petitions against resident nuisances and sometimes "requested that they be sent to the house of correction".

Besides "rude" fellows who were "disobedient", the House served to supplement the county gaol. Some were held in the House awaiting trial; others were there for additional punishment or correction after being branded; some were incarcerated after being acquitted at the assizes, since there was some presumption of guilt. For example, "spinster acquitted of infanticide were sent to the house of correction for a year, the obvious justification being that they should suffer the standard punishment for bearing bastards, even if they had not killed them".

---

9 Sharpe, Crime and Punishment in Early Massachusetts, p. 150.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

The concept of a Bridewell was subsequently transported to America. Powers noted that the General Court in the Bay Colony established in Massachusetts ordered in 1655 that a House of Corrections be established there, and Plymouth Colony did the same three years later. The Bridewell was generally built next to the prison. For example, Powers stated, the Bridewell in Plymouth Colony was built as an addition, 14 feet long, at one end of the existing prison, the addition to include a yard fenced with an eight foot board fence. Later, however, the Court ordered that the two institutions be built "in distinct places, at farther distance" to avoid confusing one with the other.

Those confined in the Plymouth Bridewell were to be "such vagrants as wander up and downe without any lawful calling and alsoe all Idle persons or rebellious children or servants that are stuborne and will not worke to earn their owne bread". They were to be maintained only on the basis of what they earned from their labour.

HALIFAX WORKHOUSE, 1754

In December, 1752, three years after the founding of the city, the Halifax Justices sent a memorial to the Council to initiate the idea of building a workhouse, in which they argued:

That there are many idle and disorderly persons within the Town of Halifax, who have no visible means of supporting themselves and are daily through idleness and a Vagabond way of Life committing Thefts and Petty Larcenies, whereby to subsist themselves, And as there are also many disorderly servants who by means of the above said people are enticed to defraud and pilfer from their masters, and absent themselves without leave from their service, and there is no other punishment provided but sending them to Prison, where they remain useless and Idle, and are a charge to the Government, and incapable of paying any charges of Prosecution, or where they are servants are a charge to their Masters who suffer also by loss of their time.

The Justices would humbly represent to your Excellency and this Honourable Council, That they apprehend if a Bridewell or Workhouse were erected, to which such offenders might be committed and there employed in hard labour, and also be subject to such Punishment as your

---

15 Powers, Crime and Punishment in Early Massachusetts, pp. 223-224.
17 Powers, Crime and Punishment in Early Massachusetts, p. 224.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

Excellency and Honours shall think reasonable by a law of this Colony to be enacted, and a more speedy method of tryal for such petty larcenies than tryal at Sessions by jurys, as it is portrayed in the neighbouring colonies, it would have tendency more effectively to root out and prevent such vicious courses of life, as it would ensure them to a habit of labour, and afterwards prompt them to support themselves by their own industry. That in the neighbouring colonies the labour of such people do in a manner pay for their subsistence as they might also here by picking of oakum, and making Netts etc. for the fishery.18

The Justices also complained about the many "disorderly houses" which were "great inducements to their people to steal and commit many other disorders". They entertained such people "at unreasonable times of night to the great disturbance of His Majesty’s peaceable subjects and from whence many mischiefs arise.” They requested fines for such offences. The Justices also noted that many complaints had been received concerning fraudulent use of weights and measures, such as with cordwood, boards, shingles and bread, all goods, which required closer inspection.19

According to R. E. Kroll20, the petition of the Halifax Justices of the Peace was occasioned by what they perceived to be an increase in petty thefts and the regularly full docket in court "to which such offenders might be committed and there employed in hard labour, and also be subject to such punishment as your Excellency & Honours shall think reasonable".21

The Council considered the Justice apprehension that building a Bridewell "would be a means of suppressing and preventing many disorders and irregularities within this settlement", and it was resolved that "the Justices should be directed to look out for a proper place for the same to be erected upon and to form a plan for the building of a blockhouse for that purpose and to make an estimate of the expense of building and inclosing the same, and that they make a report thereon as soon as possible, and of such Rules and Regulations for the Government of the same as they shall think necessary.” In addition, the Justices were to order the Constables "to go about the streets on Sundays to see that no disorders are committed and to make a return to the Justices in the evening.

---

20 R. E. Kroll, "Confines, Wards, and Dungeons", (pp. 93-107 in), p. 94.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

after divine services, and that they be ordered to go about the streets in the night, at such times as the Justices shall think necessary, and apprehend all persons committing disorders in the houses or streets, in order to them being punished according to law.”

Marble adds that the Halifax Gazette (23 December 1752) explained the need for a workhouse. It would suppress petty theft and “other Evils” that are brought about by “the Idleness of several persons of both sexes who refuse to labour at their proper callings for reasonable Prices.”

Subsequent to directing the Justices to secure a site for the House of Correction, the Council passed a law to prevent the destroying or stealing of fences. Offenders were to be "publicly wip't at the Common whipping Post...any number of Stripes not Exceeding forty at the Discretion of the said Court and shall likewise be committed to the House of Correction for the Space of Six Months, there to be kept to hard Labour, and to receive the Discipline of the said House in such manner as by the said Court shall be directed, Or Otherwise, and until such House of Correction shall be Erected, to receive such Corporal Punishment as aforesaid, and be Committed to His Majesty’s Gaol in Halifax aforesaid, there to remain for the like Space of Six Months, without Bail or Manprice.”

Marble cites the 22 December Minutes of Council, showing that the Estimates sent to the Board of Trade for 1754 included the construction of a Workhouse. What was intended at the time was a thirty-by-forty foot log building with a picket fence built on an acre of land that would also hold a house for the keeper, a kitchen, and a brewhouse. It was to be a log structure built on a stone foundation, forty feet by thirty feet, located in an acre of ground surrounded by a high picket fence. There was also to be a building for the keeper as well as a kitchen and a brewhouse. The cost of the project was just £300.

When the Lords of Trade refused to allot the requested sum for the Workhouse, Marble adds that, one month later, Governor Lawrence made an additional plea, arguing that, as a new settlement, Halifax “seemed to act as a magnet to a great number of

---

22 Minuets of Council, RG 1 Vol. 186 pp. 279-280 PANS.
24 26 March 1753, Minutes of Council, RG 1 Vol. 187 pp. 350-351, PANS.
25 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 75. Marble cites here: "Minutes of Council, 22 December 1752, PANS RG 1 Vol. 186. The five justices of the peace who signed the memorial were Charles Morris, John Duport, William Bourne, James Monk, and Joseph Scott. Bridewell takes its name after St. Bride's Well, which was located near a prison in London. Oakum -- hemp fibre obtained by untwisting and picking out the fibres of old rope -- was used for caulking seams in various seagoing vessels." (p. 263n).
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

dissolute people." In June 1754, the Council enacted a law to establish a House of Correction or Workhouse in Halifax. It was resolved that a Stone House, situate on Hospital Street, built by Richard Wenman on land of this Government, should be taken and appropriated to the use of a Workhouse or House of Correction until a more proper one could be Erected by the Government. And to appoint the said Richard Wenman Master or Keeper thereof, Subject to such Rules and Orders as shall, from time to time, be made by His majesty's Justices of the Peace in Sessions....

It shall and may be Lawful to and for His majesty's Justices of the Peace of this Province or any of them or any other of His Majesty's Civil Officers thereof, so authorized by law, to commit to the aforesaid Workhouse or House of Correction, and Offender or Offenders, who, upon lawful conviction before them or any of them, are made subject to such Commitment by any of the Laws of this Province, there to remain for such purposes and for such time as, by the said laws or any of them, are directed. And the said master or Keeper of the said Workhouse or House of Correction is hereby authorized to Receive and detain in his Custody all persons so Committed for such Times and purposes as shall be expressed in such Commitment.

That year, the government appropriated "Richard Wenman's stone house as a Bridewell." Marble reports that "Richard Wenman kept the workhouse in the stone house on Hospital Street during the latter part of the 1750s, receiving twenty pounds in September 1756 for his services." In Kroll's description, the Bridewell was designed for petty criminals. Serious criminals, such as robbers and burglars, were branded with a "T" on their left thumb for a first offence while, for a second offence, " a judge sentenced the offender to 'dance' at the 'Sheriff's Ball'".

Wenman's Bridewell was described by Kroll as "an unventilated hellish cell, 30 feet by 40 feet." In his account, thieves were whipped with 39 stripes prior to their

---

27 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 75. Marble cites here: "Lawrence to Lords of Trade, 1 August 1754. PANS RG 1 Vol. 36, Document 7.
28 An Act to Establish a House of Correction or Workhouse, 27 June 1854, Minutes of Council, RG 1 Vol. 187, pp. 77-78, PANS.
30 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 76. Marble cites here: " Abstract of the account of Duties and Bounties at Nova Scotia from the commencement thereof to 25 September 1756" PANS CO 217, 16:101.
31 Kroll, "Confines, Wards, and Dungeons", p. 94.
32 Kroll, "Confines, Wards and Dungeons", p. 94.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

incarceration, which typically followed a one-year sentence. Drunkards and prostitutes served three-months, in addition to a period of time in the stocks, which were on the market wharf. Discipline within the Workhouse was maintained through additional whippings, Kroll says, and convicts were given a reminder of their crime with ten lashes upon release.33

Kroll argues that the workhouse did not initially represent a change in the attitude to punishment towards reformation by less punitive means. Criminals were not treated humanely because, the argument went, they had "denied themselves" such treatment. In his view, the ideology of punishment was still rooted in medieval demonology, according to which evil-doers “possessed” and corporal punishment was to drive out the devil, while capital punishment was designed to deprive the devil of a body to inhabit. At first, then, imprisonment was in addition to corporal punishment. Over the next few decades, Kroll says, the tactics of punishment began to change and imprisonment itself became a punishment. Kroll provides the case of Mary McDaniel (1781) as an example. Declining to sentence her to death, the courts caused her thumb to be branded with a "T" (her crime was armed robbery) and sentenced her to one year at hard labour in the workhouse.34

HALIFAX WORKHOUSE, 1759

According to Marble, Wenman’s stone building was too small for the number of inmates. In June 1758, Governor Lawrence proposed building a larger workhouse, and recommended a description submitted by Josiah Marshall:

Dimensions and manner of Building a Workhouse, viz, 50 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 8 feet high in the clear, to be made of hewed timber, laid close, with a Roof double boarded and shingled, the walls inside to be lined around with Plank, the Floors each of them to be laid with plank, supposed to have 4 windows on each side containing nine lights of glass to each window and 3 iron grates, two partitions of plank with a stair case in the Entry and a Whipping Post, to have one outside Door with a good lock and Iron Barr, to have two Doors within with a good lock to each, to have a stack of chimneys at each end, the above building to be set on a good dry wall which shall be sunk at least 2 feet in the ground to prevent its being hurt by

33 Kroll, "Confines, Wards and Dungeons", p. 95. Kroll cites: Governor’s Correspondence, Aug. 19, 1764, RG 1 Vol. 39, Wilmot to Lords of Trade, and Statutes of General Assembly of Nova Scotia, Chapter 1, 1759.
34 Kroll, "Confines, Wards, and Dungeons", p. 95. Kroll cites: Supreme Court Judgement Book, 1781, King vs. Mary McDonald, PANS. (Her name was given as McDaniel in the text).
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

the frost.\textsuperscript{35}

With an estimated cost of £200, the Council appointed Charles Morris to administer the contract. Marble reported that the sum was expected to come from the tax on liquor. Marble concluded that “It is likely that Josiah Marshall’s proposal was not carried out.”\textsuperscript{36}

The Assembly finally passed, in 1758, "an act for erecting a house of correction or work-house within the town of Halifax." According to an Assembly committee struck in 1854 to enquire into the decision to sell the land on which the House of Corrections stood, it appears that the act was "not published at length in the provincial acts, but is marked executed opposite the title". By a second Act passed in the year 1759, a sum of £500, "then in the treasury of the province, collected per the duties on spirituous liquors, was appropriated" for the purpose of erecting a work-house within the town of Halifax.\textsuperscript{37}

The overseers of the poor in Halifax were authorised, so soon as the Bridewell should be finished, to agree with a keeper, and generally to direct the affairs of the said house, and make rules for the government thereof. The said act also authorised the sessions to send offenders to the said house of correction.\textsuperscript{38}

The House of Assembly, in October 1758, ordered that a bill be prepared for the establishment of a workhouse.\textsuperscript{39} On Friday, the 20th of October, the House appointed a committee, consisting of Joseph Rundol, John Burbidge, William Best and Henry Ferguson, "to search for a proper piece of ground to build a Workhouse upon" and report on the following Monday.\textsuperscript{40} On Wednesday the House voted to make an application to the Governor "for that piece of land to build a Workhouse upon formerly intended for a Publick Rope Walk". A committee was sent to the Governor who agreed to inquire into the matter. In his reply, the Governor informed the House that the requested land had already been granted to Mr Green. He directed them to choose some "unappropriated spot". Thereupon, the committee viewed a second spot "lying Southerly from Mr Saul’s Garden

\textsuperscript{35} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 76. Marble cites: "Minutes of Council, 21 June 1758, PANS RG 1 188:27.

\textsuperscript{36} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 76. Marble cites: "Minutes of Council, 31 July 1751 (O.S.), PANS RG 1 186: 130. ‘Three years earlier, the Lords of Trade had disallowed an amount of £295 for the building of a workhouse, but this was not mentioned in Council’s deliberations in June 1758.’

\textsuperscript{37} Journal and Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Nova Scotia, 1854, Appendix 49, p. 255. ‘Whether the above sum of £500 was ever drawn from the treasury and expended on the building, your committee cannot ascertain.’


\textsuperscript{39} Journals of the House of Assembly, 13 October, 19 October 1758, pp. 10, 13.

\textsuperscript{40} Journals of the House of Assembly (JHA-NS), 20 October 1758, p. 15.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

toward his magazine."\(^{41}\) Two days later, however, this was also declared "no proper spot for that purpose". The third choice was a tract of land consisting of four acres "lying between the Governor's farm and Fort Cornwallis."\(^{42}\) The committee decided to apply for this land to the Governor, southwest of the Governor's farm, and also for a tract at the north end of the Parade for a Court House. The Governor replied that the former piece of land had been originally intended for the enlargement of his farm. Although he did not intend to make use of it, "it might be injurious to any succeeding Governor if he should part with it." He recommended searching further. Consequently, the committee viewed a piece of land where the Jew's burying ground was, made a favourable report on it, and received approval from the Governor.\(^{43}\) Marble locates the workhouse just east of current-day Queen Street and north of current-day Spring Garden Road, providing a sketch based on "a plan of Halifax said to have been drawn in the year 1762".\(^{44}\) Marble also reprints "Richard Short's drawing of a portion of the town... [which] shows the workhouse as the building ... with two tall chimneys surrounded by the remnants of a fence."\(^{45}\)

The Bill for building the Workhouse was read for the first time on 18 November 1758 and was passed on the 21st. On November 25, the Assembly asked the Governor to appoint a Committee from both Houses to manage the building of the Workhouse, and also the Light House. Appropriations for the Light House at Sambro were 1000 pounds, exactly twice the amount for the Workhouse (500 pounds).\(^{46}\) Bills for erecting these two establishments were agreed to in December and sent up.\(^{47}\)

In March 1759, the Council gave consideration to a Bill for regulating the House of Correction.\(^{48}\) On the 19th, the Clerk of the Council brought to the House "A Bill for Regulating and Maintaining a House of Correction and for Binding Out Poor Children".\(^{49}\) On the 26th, however, the House had not agreed to the Council's Bill, "which Bill the Council "judged extremely useful and necessary" and sought reconsideration.\(^{50}\) During

\(^{41}\) JHA-NS 1758, 25 October, p. 17.
\(^{42}\) JHA-NS 1758 27 October 1758, p. 17.
\(^{43}\) JHA-NS 2 Nov. 1758; 2 Dec. 1758 p. 19.
\(^{44}\) Marble, *Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor*, p. 77. Marble cites here: 'PANS Vertical Map Case, Town of Halifax, V6/240.'
\(^{47}\) JHA-NS 13 December 1758, p. 42.
\(^{48}\) JHA-NS 3 march 1759, p. 53.
\(^{49}\) JHA-NS 19 March 1759, p. 50.
\(^{50}\) JHA-NS 26 March 1759; 2 April 1759, pp. 61, 64.
August, the Clerk of the Council again brought down a bill for regulating the House of Correction, which was read and this time agreed to, and sent back to the Council.\textsuperscript{51}

The "Bill for Regulating and Maintaining an House of Correction and for Binding out Poor Children" received Governor Lawrence’s assent in August 1759.\textsuperscript{52} Marble provides a long passage from the Bill, which reads in part:

That the overseers of the Poor of the Town of Halifax be, and accordingly they hereby are authorized and empowered, when and so soon as the said House of Correction shall be built and finished, to agree with some discreet and fit persons to be the master and keeper, and needful assistants for the care of the same. And to provide, as there shall be occasion, suitable materials, tools, and implements, necessary and convenient for keeping to work such persons as may be committed to the said House, and generally, to inspect and direct the affairs of the said House...

That it shall and may be lawful for the Justices of the Peace in their General Sessions, or for any one Justice of the Peace out of Court, to send and commit to the said House of Correction, to be kept, governed, and punished according to the rules and orders thereof, all disorderly and idle persons and such who shall be found begging, or practising any unlawful games, or pretending to fortune telling, common drunkards, persons of lewd behaviour, vagabonds, runaways, stubborn servants and children, and persons who notoriously misspend their time to the neglect and prejudice of their own or their family’s support...

That no person committed to the said House of Correction shall be chargeable to the government, for any allowance, either at going in or coming out or during the time of their abode there, but shall be maintained out of their earrings, and the remainder thereof shall be accounted for by the master or keeper...

That if any person or persons committed to the said House of Correction be idiots, or lunatic, or sick or weak, and unable to work, they shall be taken care of and relieved by the master or keeper of the said House, who shall keep an exact account of what charges...

That the pay of the said master or keeper of the said House of Correction and the charge for any materials, tools, or implements purchased

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[51]{JHA-NS 3 August 1759, p. 78.}
\footnotetext[52]{Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, p. 77. Marble cites here: Nova Scotia, \textit{Journal}, minutes of 19 December 1759.}
\end{footnotes}
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

... shall be defrayed out of the surplus of the earnings of the labour done in the said House.

That the said overseers of the poor shall take order from time to time, by and with the consent of two or more Justices of the Peace for the County of Halifax for setting to work the children of all such, whose parents shall not, by said overseers, or the greater part of them, be thought able to keep or maintain them, or any poor orphans, or by indenture to bind any such children or orphans as aforesaid to be apprentices, where they shall see convenient, till such man child shall come to the age of twenty one years, and such woman child to the age of eighteen years.\footnote{Quoted at length in Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, pp. 77, 79.}

At the same time, another Council Bill, an Act for Relief of the Poor in the Town of Halifax, was also approved by the House.\footnote{JHA-NS 13 August 1759, p. 80.} Passed on 13 August 1759, Marble reports that it provided one hundred pounds for poor relief to be used by the Overseers of the Poor.\footnote{Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, p. 80.} Marble adds that the Halifax office of overseer of the poor was created on 22 March 1759, “pursuant to an Act for Preventing Trespass”,\footnote{Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, p. 79.} and in April, a Committee of Council appointed four officers as overseers.\footnote{Marble here cites: "Nova Scotia, \textit{Journal}, 11 April 1759." Four overseers were: "William Nesbitt, Henry Newton, Henry Ferguson, and John Burbidge." In April 1760, (PANS RG 1 Vol. 411 Document 1) the following were appointed: "William Schwartz, Richard Gibbons, John Gillis, and Richard Wenman. Overseers of the poor would be, presumably, leading citizens of Halifax known to have a benevolent attitude towards the poor."} Marble notes that, in their instructions to the Governor of Nova Scotia, the Lords of Trade gave "no direction...concerning the care of the poor, or persons considered to be idiots and lunatics."\footnote{Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, p. 80.}

In 1760, Treasury vouchers for the expenses of the Workhouse, for fencing in the grounds, etc., amounted to 726 pounds 8 shillings and 8 pence.\footnote{JHA-NS 1760 p. 130.} According to Saunders, the workhouse was to contain a wide variety of social deviants, including "disorderly and idle persons... common drunkards, persons of lewd behaviour, vagabonds, runaways, stubborn servants and children". The list included those who found precarious ways of making a living on the street such as beggars, those who "pretended to fortune telling" or practised "any unlawful games". In addition, "idle persons" and those "who notoriously...
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

misspend their time" to be incarcerated. These persons were to be given work in the Bridewell and were to be punished for idleness or disobedience by being whipped, shackled, or deprived of food.60 Along with the destitute and petty criminals, obvious lunatics were sometimes interned in the Work House, many from other parts of the province.

Bridewells were not to be temples of idleness. The Act of 1758 provided that inmates were to be given work of a "useful" kind and were to be punished for idleness.61 Not only was the prisoners’ labour to provide for their own maintenance, since the institution was supposed to be self-supporting,62 an actual surplus was expected from which the disabled poor were to be maintained. In February 1760, however, the Overseers of the Poor wrote a memorial to the House complaining that, as Overseers, they had no authority “to send any poor to the Workhouse, either to be relieved or set to Work, nor to release them from thence”. Furthermore, for the general poor in the Town, there was no provision for their relief “other than being sent to the Workhouse, or by Voluntary Subscription”. They complained that voluntary subscription was an inconvenient way to receive funds “and is disagreeable to the Publick; who say that everyone ought to pay their equal proportion toward relieving the said poor”. Many of the poor were “Industrious Families with Children whom only want Temporary Relief and are not proper Objects for a Workhouse”. In addition, “the Vessels who come from different parts of the Continent frequently bring into this Port Lame, Aged and distressed People, who become a great Burthen to the place.”63

The only fruit from this Memorial responded to the immigration of undesirables. In March 1760, the government passed an "Act to Prevent the Importing [of] Disabled, Infirm, and other Useless Persons into this Province”.64 This Act, however, was disallowed by His Majesty on the recommendation for the Lords of Trade who objected to the "loose and general” intention of the act and the undue burden it placed on masters of vessels.65 In March 1760 the House passed an Act for the Relief of the Poor in the Town of Halifax, which Marble says was "the first instance of a poor tax being levied on the citizens of Halifax."66

---

60 Williams, "Poor relief and medicine", p. 39.
61 N.S. Statutes, 33 Geo. II, Cap. 1.
62 Saunders, "Conditions" p. 175. The type of work was not specified.
63 JHA-NS, 19 February 1760, p. 1103.
64 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 80.
65 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 81. Marble cites here: Nova Scotia Journal, minutes of 17 July 1761; 10 September 1761; PANS CO 218, 6:84, Lords of Trade to Belcher, 21 April 1761.
66 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 80.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

Marble adds: "The workhouse was probably in the final stages of completion in April 1760, for Council minutes\textsuperscript{67} record a resolution 'that the sum of Fifty Pounds be paid out of the Public Treasury to the Overseers of the Poor in order to purchase materials and Implements for setting to work the persons in the Workhouse.' The total expense, including fencing the workhouse grounds, was £726."\textsuperscript{68} He adds that "Jonathan Harris\textsuperscript{69} was appointed keeper of the workhouse by the overseers of the poor in October or November 1760."\textsuperscript{70}

In July 1761, the House was giving consideration to a resolution from the Council concerning poor relief. A sum of 700 pounds was sought from wine, beer and rum duties. The House, however, felt that "no money can be Immediately drawn for these out of the growing Duties without doing Injury". The Overseers of the Poor had already distributed the money assessed for 1761 and there was presently no finds to relieve the poor of Halifax, "nor to purchase materials for keeping the people at work in the Workhouse."\textsuperscript{71}

The intent of the Council to provide for the poor and establish a House of Corrections was contentious in the House of Assembly, whose members were disinclined to spend public money for these purposes. On the 24th, a Bill came down from the Council amending the Act for regulating the House of Corrections. In turn, the House made an amendment, which, however, the Council refused to pass.\textsuperscript{72}

In June, 1762, Johnathan Harris, Keeper of the Workhouse, sent two petitions to the House "setting forth the great difficulties he labours under for want of Supply from the Government to keep at work such as are able, and to purchase provisions for the support of the Poor and Indigent." The second petition reiterated his inability to support the poor for want of government assistance. Keeper Harris further petitioned for payment of the sum of 205 pounds 6 shillings to cover accounts to 1 November 1761.\textsuperscript{73} The Council recommended that a committee of both Houses be set to examine the accounts of the

\textsuperscript{67} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 80. Marble cites here: Minutes of Council, 19 April 1760, PANS RG 1 188: 146.
\textsuperscript{68} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 80. Marble cites here: Nova Scotia Journal, minutes of 24 September 1760. One of the suppliers of materials for construction of the workhouse was William Best, who was paid 300 'on account of the Workhouse.' (p. 265n)
\textsuperscript{69} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 82. Marble here cites: Jonathan Harris arrived in Halifax during his last week of June 1749 on the Winchelsea; was listed in the 1752 census of Halifax. "He died in March 1768 (Nova Scotia Gazette, 24 March 1768)."
\textsuperscript{70} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{71} JHA-NS 20 July 1761, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{72} JHA-NS 27 July 1761.
\textsuperscript{73} JHA-NS 29 June 1762, p. 210.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

Workhouse, a motion accepted by the Assembly.\textsuperscript{74} The Joint Committee recommended paying Harris 205 pounds, due 1 November 1761, a sum he received in full in August 1762.\textsuperscript{75}

The Workhouse had no regular budget. The procedure for payment was to petition the House, which would present a money Bill which also had to be approved by the Council (and Governor). Money was usually expended long before the sum was finally reimbursed. Inevitably, disagreements about expenditures arose among the different levels of government. In February and July, 1762, Marble reports, Governor Belcher directed\textsuperscript{76} the provincial treasurer, Benjamin Green, to provide 100 pounds to the Overseers of the Poor "for artificer and materials employed at the workhouse 'necessary for keeping to work such persons as have been committed to the said House."\textsuperscript{77} With expenses mounting, however, the House of Assembly had second thoughts about the cost of maintaining the Bridewell. In April 1762, the House prepared a Bill to repeal the Act for erecting a House of Corrections in Halifax as well as the Sambro Light House, and to discontinue all Public Works under their Inspection.\textsuperscript{78} The Council refused to agree to this bill.

In addition to the institutional drain on the provincial treasury, the House was regularly petitioned for money to support the unincarcerated poor of the town. On 17 August 1762, the House voted that £50 be borrowed from public money to relieve the distressed poor in Halifax, as a temporary measure prior to the passing of a law making an assessment on the town inhabitants. In part, the issue was who should pay the cost of relieving the poor and for housing the inmates in the House of Corrections. Revenues that were expended by the House of Assembly were provincial. If most of the poor, and most of the inmates of the Bridewell came from Halifax, it was argued, taxes should be raised locally.

The immediate issue continued to be the "present distressful condition of the Poor in the Township of Halifax", and the House authorized borrowing 50 pounds from public money to supply the poor until a Bill could be passed making an assessment on the inhabitants, a Bill for relief of the Poor.\textsuperscript{79} Council, however, did not agree to this measure and also rejected the Act for the Relief of the Poor in the Township of Halifax, passed by

\textsuperscript{74} JHA-NS 29 June 1762, p. 210.
\textsuperscript{75} Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{76} Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, p. 82. Marble cites here: "Belcher to Green, 10 February and 31 July 1762, PANS RG 1 166A: 42, 60."
\textsuperscript{77} Marble, \textit{Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor}, pp. 82-83.
\textsuperscript{78} JHA-NS 16 August 1762, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{79} JHA-NS 21 August 1762 p. 229.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

the House on 25 August 1762. Marble reports that in April 1763, in his Address to the second Session of the House, Lt. Governor Belcher commented on the contradiction between collecting revenues to fund necessary public expenses from the sale of liquor, a substance which government otherwise should seek to curtail. On the same day of the Address, the House reconsidered the rejected poor-relief bill. This time, out of a sense of necessity, the Bill was accepted rejected by Council the Council and Governor.

In the following year, the House agreed to a more permanent means for maintaining the poor in the townships in the province, passing two Acts in 1763 imposing an assessment on residents for the purpose of poor relief. Marble says that the Acts "transferred the burden of supporting the poor from the provincial government to the township officers".

Meanwhile, many indigent poor were still being sent to the Workhouse, where they could neither work nor contribute to their maintenance. In October 1763, Harris again petitioned the House for more money, stating that "for almost three years he has laboured under great difficulty, being not able to support a number of helpless Men, Woman and Orphan Children for want of proper assistance from the Government", and declaring his accounts ready for inspection. Putting the able inmates to work also required the expenditure of money for materials. A committee consisting of Malachy Salter, Charles Morris, Charles Proctor, and Mr. Best was set to examine the accounts and also to report their opinion "how far the Workhouse is properly Established and what Regulations may be necessary for putting it upon the Best and most useful footing for the future." In November 1763, the joint committee of the two Houses gave consideration to the question of managing poor relief and the House of Correction. They recommended “that the persons entitled to receive alms should be separated from those committed to the House of Correction for being disorderly”. Furthermore, the poor and disorderly populations should be administered separately. While the poor should continue “to be under the Inspection of the Overseers” as well as “those committed to the House of Correction, under the Direction of the Justices of the Peace,” the committee recommended a Bill “for appointing Commissioners to regulate the ... Workhouse and for setting the

---

81 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 82. Marble here cites: Nova Scotia Journal 25 April 1763.
82 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 82. Marble here cites: Nova Scotia, Journal 7 May 1763.
84 JHA-NS 25 October 1763, p. 264.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

people to work."\textsuperscript{85} After further amendment by Council, both legislative bodies finally agreed to the regulations.\textsuperscript{86} The House then voted to give Jonathan Harris, keeper of the workhouse, 255 pounds, due 1 November 1762, out of public money.\textsuperscript{87}

The small institution had several layers of bureaucratic control. The government of the House of Corrections was still under the supervision of the Justices of the Peace meeting in Quarter Sessions. The 1763 Act further established a system of routine inspection through which one of the Justices would, in turn, visit the institution at least weekly to ensure that those committed “kept diligently at work; and to rectify any abuses that may be found in the management thereof.”

The problem of indigent and transient poor outweighed the problem of offenders. The numbers of the poor far exceeded those incarcerated for offences, and by 1763, three rooms in the workhouse were set aside for the poor under the supervision of the Commissioners (Overseers) of the Poor.\textsuperscript{88} Marble reports that only these overseers were authorized “to send such sick and weak persons to the Workhouse, there to be relieved by their direction, and the expense thereof to be defrayed out of such taxes or poor’s rate, as shall be granted and collected for the Town of Halifax.”\textsuperscript{89}

By 1764, the provincial treasury was in a desperate state, Marble explains, so much so that the newly appointed Governor (Montague Wilmot, served 5 October 1763 - 2 May 1766 and who died that year), wrote to the Lords of Trade, noting that the Assembly had taken money from the treasury (derived) and had ”erected a gaol, and a workhouse of masonry”. The Workhouse, which also served as a Poor House, he said, was maintained at £500 per year from provincial revenue, primarily from duties on spirituous liquors, in addition to the annual assessment of £100 from the inhabitants of Halifax. The institution, he reported, “is the receptacle for all the old, the infirm, the decrpid, and the indigent who have come in this Province at different periodes within these fifteen years, together with the dissolute and abandoned which are too frequently imported.” Treasury funds also supported the Assembly officers, the Sessions, and indigent persons in the new settlements. Consequently, the Assembly “had recourse to borrowing on interest by which there is a Debt of more than Twelve thousand pounds accumulated at this time.”\textsuperscript{90} Marble says that, “[f]or the first time, the term `poor house' appears in the records of Nova

\textsuperscript{85} JHA-NS 24 Nov. 1763, p. 285.
\textsuperscript{86} JHA-NS 25 Nov. 1763 p. 288; 26 Nov. 1763 p. 289.
\textsuperscript{87} JHA-NS 26 Nov. 1763 p. 290.
\textsuperscript{88} N.S. Statutes 3 and 4 Geo. III, Cap. 4.
\textsuperscript{89} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{90} Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, pp. 84-85. Marble cites here: Wilmot to Lords of Trade, 24 June 1764 PANS CO 217 21:192.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

Scotland.⁹¹

There were other expenses in maintaining the poor and decrepit inmates. In July 1767, the Assembly received a petition from Thomas Reeve, Surgeon Apothecary, who had attended the sick in the Workhouse since 1 July 1766 "with great care and Trouble, and Expense for Medicines and praying that some allowance may be made for the same." The House granted 60 pounds for his services in the past year.⁹² The situation of the poor generally had not improved. The Overseers of the Poor in Halifax petitioned in July 1767 for more money to cover the "great increase of the Poor in the Province", for which the 1767 grant had been "greatly insufficient". A further 60 pounds was allotted for maintaining the poor in the Poorhouse.⁹³

In 1766, however, less than a decade after it opened, the Workhouse was closed because it had been continuously running at a deficit and the Town of Halifax was not prepared to make additional operating grants.⁹⁴ The closure of the Workhouse came about through a financial crisis in the province. Governor Legge, who came out in 1773 as a new broom, was faced with a parliamentary grant that had decline from as much as 50,000 pounds in 1757 to an average of about 5,400 pounds per annum between 1762 and 1782. Legge reported that "moneys [were] going to a lighthouse which frequently did not light, [and] to a tumbledown orphan house that benefited its custodians and chaplain and employers of child labour instead of its inmates".⁹⁵

According to Marble, by June 1765 the provincial debt had risen to £16,000.⁹⁶ To better impose austerity on expenditures, in 1765, the Assembly demanded an itemized rather than a consolidated account from the Treasurer. One such measure was a recommendation from a joint committee (House and Council) that the Workhouse be closed, a move which the committee claimed would save at least £165 per annum. Following the session, Brebner says, the Executive Council "decided to farm out the lighthouse and market house, close the workhouse and increase the responsibilities of the J.P.’s and the overseers of the poor in Halifax."⁹⁷ On 2 July, Council endorsed this plan by declaring "that the Keeper of the Workhouse have notice that the Government will not

---

⁹¹ Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 85.
⁹² JHA-NS 30 July 1767, p. 44.
⁹³ JHA-NS 31 July 1767, p. 46.
⁹⁴ Saunders, "Conditions", p. 175.
⁹⁵ Brebner, Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia, p. 110; author cites: See Breynton’s inhumane reflections on its workings, June 22, 1764, N.S., A74, 110.
⁹⁶ Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 86.
⁹⁷ Brebner, Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia, p. 199; author cites N.S. B13, 184; July 2, 1765.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

grant any supplies or maintain it and that he shall shut up the same, and apply to the Justices for further orders.” Marble notes, however, "this did not happen"99 – at least immediately.

The government still had recourse to the British government. Benjamin Green wrote to the Lords of Trade in August 1766, Marble says, deploiring again the repeal of the legislation to prevent indigent immigrants. He complained that the province had been inundated by useless, dissolute, infirm, decrepit, insane and indigent persons, even claiming that neighbouring Colonies had paid for the cost of passage to Halifax for inmates of their gaols, hospitals and workhouses. Consequently, the inhabitants of Halifax were subject to "a grievous Tax thereby, and are disabled from affording the Relief they are willing to do to their own honest poor, the Expense of whose support, especially in the Winter Season, is very considerable".100

Despite the decision to close the establishment, it continued to operate and drain further revenues, though most of these costs may have supported the poor. Receiving money from the public treasury was an uncertain process, and often a lengthy one. In 1766 the Overseers of the Poor had made another claim totalling £445 for provisions for the workhouse. Jonathan Harris also petitioned for a sum on account of the poor house. The House was not inclined to award these sums, having formally decided to close the institution. As Marble points out, however, Council asserted in November that the claims had to be honoured. “The House reconsidered and agreed to pay £248 for the workhouse and £197 for support of the poor house.”101

In July 1768, the House authorized the payment of 4 pounds and 4 shillings for "bread for Workhouse."102 In a report to the House, however, there is mention of Jonathan Harris, "late Keeper of the Workhouse", petitioning for an error of 20 pounds short paid to him. The House, however, denied this, not being satisfied "in what manner the said Error arises."103 Harris died before he could receive his payment; in the 1768 session, a grant of 61 pounds 3 and 10 pence was made to "Widow Harris".104 In October 1769, Jane Harris, widow of the late Keeper of the Workhouse, petitioned for 20 pounds owing on the 255 pounds voted for her late husband in November 1763. The House voted to pay the

---

99 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 94.
100 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, pp. 86-87. Marble here cites: Green to Lords of Trade, 26 August 1766, PANS CO 217 44:18.
101 Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor, p. 87.
102 JHA 4 July 1768.
103 JHA-NS 4 July 1768, p. 33.
104 JHA-NS 9 Nov. 1768.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

amount.\(^{105}\) A warrant was finally issued in June 1770.\(^{106}\)

The accounts of the workhouse and poorhouse continued to be combined. In October 1768, Mr. Day was given leave to bring in a Bill adding to and amending the original Act establishing the Workhouse.\(^{107}\) In 1768, Dr. Reeve again petitioning for money for attending the sick and for the cost of medicines distributed in the Workhouse.\(^{108}\) In 1770, the House of Assembly informed Dr. Reeve that "there will be no further allowance for such purposes" -- attending sick in the Poor House.\(^{109}\) However, Marble notes that in practice "his allowance was continued until October 1774, when he received a final payment of sixty-four pounds for his services."\(^{110}\)

In 1773, the House received a Memorial from John Woodin, Master of the Work House and Poor House, Halifax, stating that he had maintained "a Number of poor, old, sick and lame People in said House, who have not any legal settlement in the Province, for which he has not received any Allowance since January 1772." The House voted to give him 143 pounds.\(^{111}\) He petitioned for a further 50 pounds 17 shillings for the 1 April to 1 October period.\(^{112}\) The building was still referred to as the Work House and Poor House. In October 1774, Woodin petitioned for money to pay carpenters for work done in the Work House in 1772 and 1774, a sum of 174 pounds.\(^{113}\) The House of Correction was still being debated in the early 1770s, indicating that the establishment was still functioning. In October 1774 the Council sent down another Bill in addition to the Act on the House of Corrections, and Binding out Poor Children. The Bill was read, the question put and resolved in the negative and returned to Council.\(^{114}\)

Between the end of the seven-years war in 1763 and 1775, the provincial debt substantially increased. Marble attributed this growth to the policies of the Lords of Trade who did not forbid the influx of destitute and indigent people into Halifax, which became a "magnet for numerous poor people" filling the poor house and workhouse with "transient poor". By 1770, the provincial debt stood at £23,500, remaining at that level until 1776.\(^{115}\)

\(^{105}\) JHA-NS 2 Nov. 1869, pp. 21-22.
\(^{106}\) JHA-NS 29 June 1870, p. 30.
\(^{107}\) JHA-NS 2 November 1768, p. 9.
\(^{108}\) JHA-NS 4 July 1768 p. 22.
\(^{111}\) JHA-NS 23 April 1773, pp. 5-6.
\(^{112}\) JHA-NS 4 Nov. 1773, p. 20.
\(^{113}\) JHA-NS 17 Oct. 1774, p. 15.
\(^{114}\) JHA-NS 18, 19 Oct. 1774, p. 15.
\(^{115}\) Marble, *Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor*, p. 98.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

The original House of Corrections in Halifax died a slow and drawn-out death. By the later 1780s, however, a new Bridewell was under discussion. In 1790, a new County gaol was built in Halifax and part of the County gaol was established as a Bridewell.\(^{116}\) In their financial report, the Commissioners reported a bill for masonry work of 70 pounds, 14 shillings and six pence.\(^{117}\)

According to a yearly return made by Hugh Kelly, the Keeper, over the course of 1790, 42 prisoners were committed, 25 men (including five blacks) and 17 women (including "a Negro wench" and "a black woman"). As of the 31st of December, only one man had not been discharged, and he had been incarcerated for 23 days. These 42 individuals had served a total of 435 days imprisonment, ranging from one day to 52 days. The average period in the gaol, then, was about 10 days. Eight had been released after being "paid for by their master". The offences are not listed on this document, but it is indicated who committed the individual. An individual whose name was listed as Gauthier committed most. In this return, Keeper Kelly also listed his expenses, which included 20 pounds for his yearly salary. In addition, he listed expenses for straw, hard bread, vinegar and six panes of glass, amounting to five pounds, three shillings and six pence. This list of expenses was brought before the Court of Quarter Sessions (11 January 1791), examined by three Justices of the Peace (including John Newton), and found "justly and truly stated".\(^{118}\)

An amendment to the Act passes in 1792 prohibited the overseers of the poor “from maintaining any poor person as an out-pensioner; but were compelled to maintain them in that part of the work-house allotted to them.” Then, by an act passed in the year 1801, a board of commissioners were constituted. According to an 1854 committee of the House, (appointed to enquire into the sale of the land on which the 1815 House of Corrections stood), “for want of a separate building for that purpose,” the House of Corrections “was partly kept in the building called the poor house and partly in the prison”. The acting commissioners of the poor were accorded “the direction and superintendence of all such


\(^{117}\) Financial Report of Commissioners, PANS RG 5 Series A Vol. 3 (Assembly Papers 1790), # 104. This was signed by Pyke, William Taylor, Geo. Smith, and Newton.

\(^{118}\) Hugh Kelly, Keeper, "Account of Persons Committed to the Work House (or House of Corrections) of Halifax, from the 1st day of January to the 31st day of December 1790, both days inclusive". PANS, RG 34, Vol. 312.
idle and disorderly persons, and may direct their removal to and from the poor house.”  

Gaols, workhouses, and poor houses were conceptually separate institutions, but over time in Halifax the functions of one of these establishments folded into the others. While the workhouse existed as such, it functioned perhaps primarily as a poor house. As the original workhouse deteriorated, convicts were confined to gaol—the 1790 gaol was used for purposes of both confinement and, hypothetically at least, for “correction”. Only in 1815 was a designated Bridewell established in the city, distinct from the continuing Poorhouse and Gaol.

The Orphan House

Two other important early institutions constructed during this period were the Asylum for the Poor, which resulted from an Act passed in 1759, and an orphanage which opened in 1752. Prior to the opening of the Orphan House, abandoned orphaned children were looked after by foster families in the town who were paid three or four shillings a week.

The regime of the Orphan House has been described in some detail by Williams who provides a useful description of the practice and ideology of this mid-18th century carceral institution.

In 1773, Francis Legge became Governor and embarked on a crusade to reveal the details of the spoils system in Halifax: "Every source of graft and profit was threatened -- the duty system, the smuggling system, salaries ..., the pilot boat, the lighthouse, the orphans' home, the debt structure, and so on". From the Orphan House Accounts of the early 1750s and a report on the state of the House written in 1754, Williams describes the concern of contemporaries with the neglect of these children. This neglect meant that the children did not receive appropriate training in "the common Principles or seeds of Industry" which in turn produced, as one social consequence, a tendency to criminality. The children, who were allotted an annual allowance of one pound per year, were made to dress in strict uniformity. To avoid "idleness and irreligion", the regime of the Orphan House was strict. Morning and afternoon instruction in "their duty to God and their neighbour" was interspersed with labour (to preserve them from "the Habits of Idleness"). The girls were expected to card and spin wool or knit stockings while the boys were to

---

120 Williams, "Poor relief and medicine", p. 40.
121 Williams, "Poor Relief and Medicine", p. 40.
123 Williams, "Poor relief and medicine", p. 41.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

pick oakum in the winter and gather stones or weed gardens in the summer. Little profit was actually obtained from the labour of orphaned children because the children were bound out as apprentices or servants by the ages of seven or eight. Orphans were not only bound out as though they were slaves, but rewards were posted for the capture of runaway orphans. In 1785, "The Orphan House being no longer in use, was ordered to be let on a lease for one year." By the mid-1770s, however, the Orphan House had gone the way of the early Workhouse and was closed for the same financial reasons.

The Poor House

Fundamentally, both the Workhouse and the Orphan House were housing the poor and the infirm. Under the "bloody code" most criminals were not routinely incarcerated. Since these early institutions were primarily for the indigent population, it was only the Poor Asylum which was continuously supported from public funds. The first alms house, which was originally founded as a hospital, was located just to the north of the present Government House.

By 19 March 1750 a place had been erected for a public hospital, and a school building commenced for the orphan children. It "stood on part of the land now occupied by the Government House, to the north of that building". In about 1767, "at the request of the Magistrates, the Hospital was granted for an alms house." In 1765 "there were two hospitals in the North Suburbs, near the beach at the foot of Cornwallis Street, called the Red and Green Hospitals. They were there in 1785."

A later poor house was erected outside the southern part of the town, opposite the Governor's Garden space, on Spring Garden Road. Akins described it as "a rough stone

---

124 Williams, "Poor Relief and Medicine", pp. 41-42.
126 Akins, History of Halifax City, p. 87. He added: "The location of this Orphan House is uncertain." (p. 87n).
127 Akins claims that the location of this house was uncertain. History of Halifax City, p. 87n. Fitzner locates it at the corner of Barrington and Bishop Streets, opposite Government House. "Development of social welfare", p. 13.
128 According to Akins, History of Halifax City, p. 69, the old poor house and the old county gaol stood in the vicinity of Luttrel's fort, which was on the line of Salter Street. This House was made over from an original hospital in 1766 and was located to the north of the present Government House.
130 Akins 1973, p. 25.
131 Akins 1973, p. 69.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

building white-washed on the outside".\textsuperscript{133}

The Poor House held an average of 17 people in 1779. These inmates were described in the House of Assembly as "poor, sick, lame, blind and lunatic persons". "Here was confined not only the poor but the insane. One of its most used fittings was a whipping post, for these were the days when lunatics were flogged as if some sort of devil lived within their flesh....The poorhouse dead were buried hastily in shallow graves in the yard."\textsuperscript{134}

In 1786, a House of Assembly Committee investigated the state of the Poor House, and found the House: "On examination ... in exceeding good order and managed with cleanliness, prudence and economy", with the exception of "the Doctors whose charges are very extravagant". The house expended £1,200 in 1785, exclusive of £260 paid to the doctors. In that year, 175 persons of both sexes were "releived" and 43 remained in the House at end of the year on the provinces account, eight on the town account, and there were in addition four orphans. The committee concluded that the establishment of the poor house exceeded the ability of the province to pay.\textsuperscript{135} In their words:

They therefore beg leave to recommend a reform therein to the immediate and serious consideration of the House. For especially they find with the best information they can procure that almost the whole that are relieved in the Poor House are not objects of charity but persons whose abandoned and profligate way of life has compelled to seek relief in that way.

The committee therefore proposed "a reform with respect to the poor to the advantage of the province." They proposed that an Act be drawn up empowering the trustees to sell at public auction the gaol and the former orphan house. The proceeds from these sales were to be placed in the hands of Commissioners to be appointed. They would use the money to build a small stone building with three strong cells for capital criminals, adjoining the Poor House, and the yard to be enclosed with a sufficient fence. That should be sufficient for a province and county gaol as well as a Bridewell and workhouse, under the care and management of one keeper. Second, they recommended that a small building should also be constructed consisting of four rooms to be used as a public hospital under the direction of the Oversees of the Poor and the Justices of the Sessions. This building would then be sufficient to contain such poor persons as may be afflicted with sickness or otherwise hurt or disabled until they may be cured, and may be supported at a small

\textsuperscript{133}Akins 1973, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{134}Raddall, Halifax: Warden of the North, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{135}Report of the Committee to Take Into Consideration the State of the Poor House, 16 June 1786, PANS RG 5 Series A Vol 2 # 33.
expense provided such persons, except real objects of charity, after being cured, shall be retained in the workhouse until they shall labour for the public to the amount of the expense of their care and maintenance. Third, that there shall be established a Poor House for the province that paupers and orphans shall, as usual, be under the care of the Governors of the Poor, who shall put them out to board with such families and in such way that would be best for the benefit of the public. Fourth that the Justices of the Peace for the County of Halifax shall be obliged in rotation to visit all licensed houses thrice a week in the night time and to apprehend and detain all vagabonds and disorderly persons who they shall find therein or in the streets until the morning. If upon examination such persons cannot give a proper account of themselves, to commit them to the Work House. Fifth, the Governor should appoint three to five Commissioners for granting licenses to persons retailing spirituous liquors to ensure that all proper duties are paid. The Committee are fully of the opinion that almost the whole of the distress of individuals in this community arises from the bad conduct of the persons who retail spirituous liquors. Good regulations in that department will tend not only to the great increase of that branch of revenue but also to the peace and good order of society. Six, that the House of Correction or Work House should be under the direction of the Justices of the Sessions who should keep the persons confined therein to daily labour on the highways and the digging of public wells and all the public labours. They money collected for the repairs of the highways should be applied to the maintenance of the persons so confined and the deficiency, if any, to be made up out of the money arising from the licensed houses.136

In 1790, the Committee again reported on "The State of the Poor House" that the "House appears to be kept with the order, neatness and propriety which does honour to the humanity of those concerned in the superintending of it." Of 83 men, women and children in the institution, 44 were maintained in the Poor House and the remainder were out pensioners. Many of these were declared to be not "transient poor" but belonged to the class of County poor. While a "great" sum was spent on the transient poor, expenditures were reported to have been "fairly and justly made and the books very clearly and regularly kept." Those maintained inside the House appeared to be entitled to public charity, although the Committee claimed that they could not form a judgement respecting the out pensioners.

The Committee claimed to be at a loss with respect to suggesting a remedy which would reduce their number or render their maintenance less expensive. "They conceive, however, that a law to oblige all Masters of vessels on their arrival from foreign countries or from our sister colonies, to give security not to leave behind them any persons

136Signatures appear to be as follows: Hill, William Tonge, Mitch Wallace, Joseph Appluny.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

incapable of maintaining themselves and obliging all innkeepers and other persons keeping lodging houses to make report of such persons not belonging to the province as shall from time to time remain at their houses more than twenty four hours, would be very salutary."\(^{137}\)

The Poor House was expanded in 1811 when the Commissioners of the Poor were granted money to accommodate the transient poor and lunatics from other parts of the province. In the next year a hospital wing was opened.\(^{138}\) Almost 2,300 pounds had been expended by the Commissioners in 1812 "for the erection of a House...for the reception of Lunatics".\(^{139}\) By 1815, this separate building for the reception of "lunatic and deranged persons" had been fully constructed. Under the management of the Commissioners of the Poor, this building was soon in financial difficulties. The initial cost of two thousand five hundred pounds was more than twice the allocation, and sums had been borrowed on the basis of the Commissioners personal lines of credit. The Commissioners used the occasion of a petition seeking provincial assistance to present a rosy image of their function and personal sacrifice: they had conducted the "business trusted to them, with prudence and humanity", had "cheerfully" discharged "the various painful and disagreeable duties" of their office, and assured the Assembly that they sought "no compensation for themselves".\(^{140}\) This was notoriously untrue. Not only were the able poor farmed out to prospective employers, but the Commissioners ensured that they had access to supply contracts. These were considered normal practices. The Commissioners were subsequently granted one thousand pounds to help cover their debts.\(^{141}\)

1828-1834

The Grand Jury visited the Poor House in March 1828 (along with the Bridewell and gaol). "These establishments were severally found to be clean and comfortable and in complete order and reflect much credit on those to whom their management is entrusted."\(^{142}\) In 1831, however, the Grand Jury was seeking assurance that because they "not aware if the Poor Asylum should come under their particular notice".\(^{143}\) In

\(^{137}\)Report of the Committee, State of the Poor House, 6 march 1790, PANS RG 5 Series A Vol. 3 # 20.
\(^{138}\)Saunders, "Conditions", p. 71.
\(^{140}\)Petition from the Commissioners of the Poor, Journals and Proceedings of the House of Assembly of the Province of Nova Scotia, 24 February 1815, p. 31.
\(^{141}\)House of Assembly, 29 March 1815, p. 94. In this same session an equivalent sum of 1,000 pounds was voted to purchase plate for the Governor's residence.
\(^{142}\)Proceedings of the Grand Jury of the County of Halifax, P. A. N. S. RG 34, 312, P. 13 (1828-1834); 11 March 1828.
\(^{143}\)Proceedings of the Grand Jury December Term 1831.
March 1832, the Grand Jury visited the Poor House and concluded that "immediate steps should be taken for putting in a more efficient state the Privies and Drains connected with [this]...Establishment. The privies were very seriously affected and "it is desirable [they] should be removed to a greater distance. The Drains also require early attention."\(^{144}\)

In 1832, the Grand Jury proceeded to visit the County establishments, including the Poor House, without giving prior notification of their visit. They reported themselves very satisfied with "the order and cleanliness prevailing generally". They noted "the pains manifested to promote as far as circumstances permitted the health and comfort of the unfortunate inmates of the Asylum".

In doing this justice to the several persons directing and executing the affairs of these public Institutions the Jury cannot forbear at the same time to state that the Alms House is very much too small for the accommodation of so many as are there now assempled, of all ages and conditions, and that it is in other respects very unfitfor thje various purposes it now serves of Asylum for the Poor, Lunatic Asylum, Orphan Asylum, & Hospital. A proper and necessary separation of the different classes and descriptions is quite impossible and all the apartments severally contain more than ought to be allotted to each. In order to --- ---[?] space Children are put into beds with adults and yet it is only by making others on the floor in addition to the number far too great on the bedsteads that the Matron can manage to provide for all. In the present crowded state of the Asylum it is impossible for health to find a place, a fact generally impressed on all, who but look attentively at the children and enquire into their common fate.

By finishing the upper part ofthe building under the new roof erected last year, some further room may be obtained but by no means sufficient or such as is most required. The Jury do hope that the day is not far distant when better and more suitable provision and accommodation will be made by the Province for the great number of poor and diseased persons found at the Metropoles[?] utterly unable to provide for themselves, who although for the most part not

\(^{144}\) Proceedings of the Grand Jury of the County 10 March 1832.
natives of the country are no less in common humanity to be maintained and taken care of. A burthen already too great for the Town of Halifax even under the present inefficient Establishment and arrangement notwithstanding the aid afforded by the annual grant of the Legislature.  

Also in March 1832, a petition was read by the Grand Jury from several medical gentlemen "calling...attention...to the present state of the Poor House" and for the necessity of a public Hospital. The next day the Jury resolved to request from the Commissioners of the Poor a return indicating the number of children admitted to or born in the Poor House in the last two or three years; the number who had died there or "been bound out"; the proportion in the Asylum at the time above the age of 10; the number of adults; and other admissions and deaths.

The Committee to report on the Poor House charges and vouchers found them corresponding and correct. "The Committee have not had it in their power to enquire particularly into the process of the various articles supplied, but they are of opinion that Flour and perhaps some other might be more advantageously furnished, as in the case of Beef, by contract." The charges of the Institution, however, were not deemed extravagant "as the average expense of each individual per diem does not exceed six pence farthing."

Later in March another petition was received from the medical community, from Dr. Stirling and others concerning the Asylum for the Poor. It was their opinion that all competent members of the Medical Faculty should be admitted to a full participation of the advantages afforded by that Institution, provided they gratuitously perform a portion of the duties, which now devolve upon the Medical attendant. The Sick in the Asylum would thereby be not less efficiently treated and some expenses to the County would be saved. The Jury do not consider the arrangement made by the Commissioners whereby professional men and their students are merely admitted during a certain hour of the day, as complying with the spirit of the recommendation of the former Grand Jury. They are of opinion that the Asylum should as speedily as possible and in so far as it is practicable be so laid open as to make it a useful medical school, towards

Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

the funds of which each student admitted should pay a small annual fee.\textsuperscript{149} Following their visit, the Grand Jury reported "order and cleanliness prevailing" in the Poor House, although the privies and drains required attention.\textsuperscript{150}

In December, "Mr. Tobin Chairman of the Board of Commissioners for the Asylum for the Poor having laid before the Jury a letter addressed to him by Mr. Morris, acting Commissioner for the Month accompanied by another from Dr. Almon, pointing out the very crowded state of the Asylum and the necessity of providing some additional accommodation for its inmates it was Resolved That the Jury will authorize the expenditure by the Commissioners of a sum not exceeding £75 towards completing the upper part of the Building."\textsuperscript{151} In its final Presentment, the Grand Jury noted that the Asylum had been much too crowded in 1832 "with Inmates of all conditions", and particularly crowded "at this period those being nearly seventy above the number at this time last year."\textsuperscript{152} The Jury of 1832 reviewed the accounts against the Asylum against the vouchers and found them "correct and satisfactory". The £75 added to the estimate for the completion of the top story was added: "In order to afford greater accommodation to the Poor Children at present in the Asylum ... but as they are strongly impressed with the necessity of withdrawing those helpless beings from a situation which is a constant seat of some malignant disease they are desirous that an arrangement should be completed for the erection of an Orphan house at the joint expense of the Province and the County, and recommend the subject to the favourable consideration of the Court." As usual in their December visit, the Grand Jury reported: "Great order and cleanliness", although the Asylum was noted as being over-crowded.\textsuperscript{153}

The Poor House accounts for 1835 were found to be "correctly stated and duly vouched". £1200 was estimated as the cost of the support of the poor in 1836.\textsuperscript{154} The Grand Jury visited the Poor House in December 1836 and found it "in good order". £1200 was estimated for the support of the Poor in 1837.\textsuperscript{155} In 1837 the Grand Jury visited the Poor House (along with the two other public institutions) "and cannot but express their sense of the highly creditable state in which these establishments are kept."\textsuperscript{156} In its December 1838

\textsuperscript{149} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 19 March 1832.
\textsuperscript{150} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, March Term 1832.
\textsuperscript{151} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 14 December 1832.
\textsuperscript{152} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, December Term 1832.
\textsuperscript{153} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, December Term 1832.
\textsuperscript{154} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, December Term 1835.
\textsuperscript{155} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 7 December 1836.
\textsuperscript{156} Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 17 December 1837.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

presentment, the Jury added £150 to the assessment for 1839 "to be at the disposal of the Commissioners of the Poor for the purpose of rendering the Building now occupied as an hospital more Commodious and Comfortable, for its inmates, or to be disposed of by them in such other way as they may deem most proper to accomplish the above object & purpose." £1200 was estimated for the expenses of the Poor Asylum in 1839.\(^{157}\)

In December, 1840 the Jury examined the Poor House accounts and found them "correct & satisfactory". In their final presentment the Jury reported as follows: The Poor House "having been referred to in the Charge from the Worshipful Court, the Grand Jury have given it their closest attention and having carefully inspected every department" they have pleasure "in calling the attention of their fellow townsmen to its highly efficient condition which reflects the greatest credit on those Gentlemen who so kindly give their gratuitous services and attention to its interests." In their presentment the Grand Jury expressed "much pleasure in bearing testimony to the Comfort regularity and cleanliness which prevail in the poor Asylum, and while they express their satisfaction that so comfortable a refuge is provided for their sick and destitute fellow Creatures, that the thanks of the Community are due to the Gentlemen who act as Commissioners for its management." The Jury estimates the expenses for 1841 at the usual £1200.\(^{158}\)

A similar report was made by the Grand Jury following their visit to the Asylum in March 1841, the Jury expressing "high satisfaction ... in witnessing the good order cleanliness and general management that prevail throughout this establishment and the measures taken to promote the health and comfort of the unfortunate inmates."\(^{159}\) The Poor House was again found "clean and in good order" in December. These points were reiterated in the December presentment to the Sessions, in which the Jury noted the "highly efficient state" of the institution as well as their satisfaction with the state of the Poor House accounts.\(^{160}\) Similar reports continued throughout the 1840s. For example, following the September 1846 visit to the Bridewell and Poor House, the jury expressed "their approval of the manner in which these institutions [are kept, the inmates are apparently comfortable and clean ...], they recommend however large repairs to be done to the Poor Asylum".\(^{161}\) In 1847 they commended those in charge and noted that no complaints were made by any inmate.\(^{162}\)

Mr Shield[?] appeared before the jury in December "respecting a drain from the

\(^{158}\) Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 6 March 1840; 12 December 1840; December Term, 1840.
\(^{159}\) Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 15 March 1841.
\(^{160}\) Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 15 March 1841; 16 December 1841; December presentment 1841.
\(^{161}\) Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 10 September 1846.
\(^{162}\) Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 6 April 1847.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

Government Field in the rear of the Poor House property.” A committee of two was struck to examine the said nuisance. The committee reported a few days later and were instructed to draft "a remonstrance to Colonel Calder respecting said nuisance”. The Poor House Commissioners had constructed a drain, but it was insufficient during heavy rains. The committee concluded: "much damage will certainly ensue to the buildings from the pounding of water at their back”. A draft of their report was sent to Colonel Calder, the Commanding Officer, Royal Engineers, requesting attention to the matter.  

The Poor House was often used by the medical faculty for clinical instruction. Sometimes medical experiments, which were perceived as potentially dangerous, were tried out on inmates of the Poors’ Asylum. In one example from 1848, which turned out for the better: "Doctor Almon amputated the thumb of a woman in the Poor Asylum ... in presence of Doctor Parker, of this city, and Doctor Brown of Horton. This case ... is published", declared the Novascotian, "...for the purpose of inviting attention to the effects of the agent employed to prevent pain. The Chloroform was administered by inhaling it from a rag". The operation took about ten minutes and was completed "before sensibility returned. On waking, the poor woman expressed her gratitude in the warmest terms." 

By 1851 the Poor House was still apparently "clean and well kept", but the Jury reported “that there is not sufficient room for the present number of inmates.” Furthermore, "having inspected some of the provisions in use this day they found the Corn Meal utterly unfit for food and that at least one third of the potatoes which they saw ready to be served for dinner ought never to have been admitted into the building.”

Until the construction of one specialized institutions, notably the Mount Hope Asylum for the insane, the poorhouse served as a combination house of internal exile, lunatic asylum, orphanage, debtors prison and general dumping ground for social rejects. By 1854 the Poor House was receiving 760 people (including 247 women and 200 children). In that year MacKinnon found that the expenses for the Poor House had been about 3,450 pounds and the paupers had earned about 485 pounds. Many of them left the asylum by way of the adjoining Poor House graveyard. In 1855 there had been 123 deaths, 64 of them being children. In each year the Commissioners of the Poor reported that the building was seriously overcrowded. The usual complaints about finances led the

164 http://www.medicine.dal.ca/dmaa/virtual.html#The_Poor_Houses.
165 Novascotian, 7 February 1848, p. 43.
166 Proceedings of the Grand Jury, 16 September 1851.
168 MacKinnon; cites 1857, Appendix 68.
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

Commissioners to request that the institution become a provincial responsibility.\footnote{MacKinnon, pp. 221-222; cites 1865, Appendix 51.} In 1864 a law was passed concerning a new Poor House. Charles Tupper recommended that the land on which the Poor House and the Bridewell stood should be sold and a new Poor House be erected on the South Common adjoining the Hospital.\footnote{Extract from a letter of Charles Tupper to Mayor Pryor of Halifax and P. C. Hill, 5 March 1866, Journals of House of Assembly, 1866, Appendix 40; cited in MacKinnon, p. 223.} According to Mr. Blanchard, the Chairman of the Committee on Humane Institutions, "no language would be too strong to express the absolute necessity for some change." He declared the Asylum a disgrace. Of the 500 inmates crowded into the institution, he wrote, many were "in the last stages of disease and 50 of them being incurably insane."\footnote{The Novascotian, 2 April 1866, p. 7; in MacKinnon p. 222.}

In 1866 authorization was given by the House of Assembly to buy land for the erection of a new Poor House.\footnote{Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1866, Cap. 42; cited in MacKinnon, p. 224.} This neo-gothic building, which was planned to accommodate up to 600 persons, was eventually erected by Henry Peters on the South Common, bounded by Morris Street to the north, facing South Street, and near Robie. At five stories, it became the tallest building in the city and the second-largest in the province, "intended to adorn and to glorify the generosity of the City of Halifax."\footnote{http://www.medicine.dal.ca/dmaa/virtual.html#The_Poor_Houses.} The architect, David Stirling, planned it in the form of a Latin Cross, with four wings extending from a central building. The original design was intended to house 1,200 people, but the plan was scaled down in construction, and only the central building and two wings extending south and west were built, making room for 600. The Poor House cost about 112,000 dollars, with the province paying two-thirds and the city one-third of the cost. It was completed in December 1869, and the poor were transferred from the old building on the Bridewell site.

Raddall quotes a brochure of 1876 as describing the new Poor House as follows: "'This palace of brick is free to the poor at all times and the inmates sometimes number over 500.'"\footnote{Raddall, Halifax: Warden of the North, p. 214.} At the time of Confederation, then the poor were still housed in buildings on the site of the Bridewell, in a building part of which was constructed in 1758. It also housed its elderly, infirm, chronically ill, and even unwed mothers and their children.

According to Fingard, magistrates sentenced offenders directly to the Poorhouse if their physical or mental health was deemed to warrant this form of commitment.\footnote{Judith Fingard, The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax, (Porter’s Lake: Pottersfield Press, 1989), p. 21.} Prisoners in Rockhead were sent to the Poorhouse if they became ill because the city
Halifax Houses of Correction, 1749-1815

prison did not contain an infirmary. During the Victorian period, Fingard asserts, the poor were housed in "four consecutive facilities", each similar to the prisons, with a regimen of "[d]iscipline, work and regular meals". In the Poor's Asylum, numbering several hundred, in addition to the criminals who became ill, were the elderly, seasonally unemployed, unwed mothers as well as "the mentally and physically handicapped, ranging in age from infancy to old age". According to Fingard:

Most of the work of running the institution was one by the inmates, including such tasks as nursing the sick and stoking the furnaces. Other forms of labour provided in a stone-shed or wood-yard were also promoted to discourage 'idleness' among those men who entered the poorhouse for employment relief.... [I]n the poorhouse ... drunkenness often prevailed and blacks were usually [/] segregated. There was however a greater chance for sociability in accommodation based on dormitories instead of cells.

About midnight in 1882, the Poor House was destroyed by fire with the loss of 31 lives of the 343 inmates and over $80,000 worth of property. Most of the dead were trapped on the fifth floor. After the fire, "The Board of Charities obtained permission from the Dominion Government to use the old Penitentiary at the North West Arm for the temporary accommodation of the inmates of the Poor House.... It was fitted with stoves[?], bedding and other supplies." On 7 November the men were taken by omnibus to the old penitentiary. The poor remained at the old penitentiary until 1886. "The Commissioners had decided to erect a new poor house on the site of the old one because the out buildings were still intact." The new Poor House was a more modest, three-story building, which continued to house the poor “until the early 1970’s when it was demolished as an eyesore.”

179 Blakeley, Glimpses, p. 82.
180 Blakeley, Glimpses, p. 84.
181 http://www.medicine.dal.ca/dmaa/virtual.html#The_Poor_Houses.