

Our present Court House was built in 1847, and the building of 1817 was only used as a jail till St. Catharines became the County Town in 1862, and a jail was built there in 1864. The cruel and harsh treatment of Robert Gourlay and the imprisonment of a Niagara editor for publishing one of his letters, the imprisonment accompanied with a heavy fine and standing in the pillory, seems to us in these days a perversion of justice not easily understood. But these were also the days when hanging was punishment for theft, as shewn by a notice in the newspaper of 1826. "David Springfield convicted of sheep stealing, sentenced to be hanged; Ben Green, stole 10s., sentenced to imprisonment and 30 lashes; Oct. 28th, 1826, great disappointment, great numbers, many from the United States, came into town to see three men hung, but His Excellency had suspended the sentence. A wagon load of cakes and ginger bread had to be sold at reduced rates." The mingling of the horrible and the grotesque, the desire of the crowds to see the gruesome sight and appeasing their hunger with cakes and ginger bread, is a sad picture of these times. In Sept., 1826, Wm. Corbin and A. Graves, sentenced to be hanged each for stealing a horse. In 1837 occurred the remarkable slave rescue, which reads to us like a romance too strange to be true. A slave, Moseby, who had escaped from Kentucky, was followed by human bloodhounds and claimed as guilty of stealing his master's horse to escape. While awaiting the decision of the court he was confined in the Niagara jail, and when finally an order was given for his return to slavery, a gathering of several hundred blacks watched the jail day and night for two weeks to prevent his being given up. Finally the slave escaped but two of the leaders were shot, the military being called out, the Riot Act read, etc. The people of the town generally sympathized with the slave and those who made such efforts to save him from return to bondage.

Here too we read of men being imprisoned for debt, a letter in a paper of 1832, referring to a charitable lady, Mrs. Stevenson, sending comforts to the prisoners, and the postmaster, John Crooks, sending wood in winter to allay the sufferings from cold. In later days several prisoners were confined here for their share in the Fenian Raid of 1866.