

Their children were made wards of the provincial government and sent to school while the parents were serving their jail terms.

Partly to avoid overcrowding at the penitentiary and partly because the government did not look upon these people as ordinary criminals to be mixed with the prison population, a penal colony was established for them on tiny, unpopulated Piers Island at the northern tip of the Saanich Peninsula. Men and women were to be confined to separate compounds located about fifty feet apart and surrounded by a high barbed wire fence.

Three of us, under the supervision of a sergeant, escorted the first thirty on board a Union Steamship vessel. The prisoners were placed in the hold of the ship and we kept an eye on them through the open hatch. Few of them spoke any English. They spent most of their time en route praying and singing doleful songs or hymns from their homeland. They seemed resigned to their fate — separation from their children, spouses and other loved ones for a period of three long years. One could not help but feel sorry for them.

On arrival at Piers Island the men and women were separated amid laments and tears, and herded into their respective compounds. Their living quarters, newly built, were roomy, light and comfortable. The inmates were made responsible for keeping the place clean and carrying out any chores detailed by their custodians.

One of their tasks was to carry supplies from the dock to the compounds, mainly food. One day their leader received a message from on high bidding them not to do any more manual work, so food supplies were left on the dock to spoil. After a few days without food and living in their own filth, the disciples pressured their leader to get the strike order rescinded.

Segregation of the sexes was strictly enforced. No conjugal visits in this jail. But in spite of this rule some of the women became pregnant. How this came about was a mystery never solved. Love obviously found a way.

In the fall of 1932, World War I veterans staged a demonstration against a cut in their pensions. We recruits were ordered to stand by in case of trouble. Walking toward the stables I fell in step with Sergeant Grennan, who was in charge of our detail. A war veteran himself, he looked troubled. "This is the most unpleasant assignment I have had to face since joining the Force," he said.

As it turned out, this and other demonstrations to which we were called on a standby basis as backup to the Vancouver City Police passed without our troop seeing any action. This was during the depth of the Depression when the unemployed sporadically went on window-breaking rampages in the Carral-Hastings area of the city.

When recruit training was completed at the end of 1932, our squad was split up and transferred, one half going to Lethbridge, the other (myself included) to Edmonton. While we were given no choice in posting, Alberta looked pretty good to us. The RCMP had just absorbed the Alberta Provincial Police and contracted for policing of the province. After the long training period we could now look forward to some real police work while the Alberta men were undergoing training for assimilation into the RCMP. So, in spite of the sad farewells to comrades and girl friends at the CNR station that balmy morning in December, we were of good cheer. We were not told what sort of duty we would be assigned in our new postings. Had we known, there would have been no cause for cheer.