

Central Prison ^[1]

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by Lisa D. Smith, 2006

Additional research provided by Jo White Linn.



twbuckner, photographer, "Central Prison, Raleigh." Photograph. Raleigh, N.C. September 17, 2006.

^[2]Central Prison in Raleigh has played a significant role in the North Carolina criminal justice system since the nineteenth century. It was established in 1884, after the [North Carolina Constitution of 1868](#) ^[3] mandated the creation of a state prison to address concerns about inconsistent and cruel punishment and mounting costs at county jails. The legislature subsequently ratified an act appointing commissioners to buy land and direct construction using convict labor as much as possible. In 1870 a 22-acre site near Raleigh was purchased, and prisoners housed in temporary structures on the property began building the prison. The entire gothic-style complex was completed in 1884. Stone carver W. O. Wolfe, father of novelist [Thomas Wolfe](#) ^[4], was among the professional artisans hired to help with construction.

In 1968 an inmate riot at Central Prison resulted in the death of 6 inmates and injuries to more than 70 others. The prisoners demanded the formation of a grievance committee that included inmate members and the return of inmates confined to higher-security areas to the general prison population. In the course of the riot, prisoners burned several buildings and assembled a huge cache of weapons.

The original complex has undergone extensive renovation. In the 1940s a prison industries facility was erected to house a state license plate fabrication operation and print shop, and in the 1960s an acute care hospital opened, supplemented by two mental health wings built in the 1970s. A nearly \$38 million renovation project of the [North Carolina Department of Corrections](#) ^[5] in the 1980s added additional inmate housing and administrative office space.

Central Prison's infirmary and mental health facility serve the inmate population from across the state, and it is the intake facility for all male felons over the age of 22 with sentences longer than 20 years. The prison also contains the state's execution chamber, deathwatch area, and men's death row. Inmates receive a variety of job assignments in prison industries, the kitchen, or laundry; they also work as barbers, janitors, and clerks. The prison offers substance abuse therapy, GED and college courses, and worship services.

Additional Resources:

"Central Prison," North Carolina Department of Public Safety, <http://www.doc.state.nc.us/dop/prisons/Central.htm>. ^[6]

Tomberlin, Jason. "This Month in North Carolina History January 1870 - North Carolina State Penitentiary Opens" from North Carolina Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. January 2007. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/jan2007/index.html>. ^[7]

North Carolina Penitentiary Commission. *Rules and By-Laws for the Government & Discipline of the North Carolina Penitentiary During its Management by the Commission*. Raleigh, N.C.: M. S. Littlefield, State Printer & Binder, 1869. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/penitent/menu.html> ^[8]

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twbuckner, photographer, "Central Prison, Raleigh." Photograph. Raleigh, N.C. September 17, 2006. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/twbuckner/266526531/> ^[9]

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. [14]

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