

“The Scottish Pillory”

Forms of legal punishments administered by the official Court of Law in both Scotland and Scottish colonies in North American during the 17th and 18th centuries were far different from what they are today. Alongside prison and death sentences, public punishments, administered usually in the town’s square continued to be a common form of courtly justice on townspeople of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Among the list of punishment and devices used to instill justice was Punishment by the Pillory. The Pillory, also known as the Stocks, is a devise usually made of a wooden or metal framework erected on a post in the center of the town’s square. The Pillory consisted of hinged wooden boards with three holes through which the head and hands and/or various other limbs of the captive were inserted and secured. The various types of punishments in which the usage of the Pillory appeared was public humiliation, public flagellation (flogging), or other forms of legal corporal punishment.

The Pillory, especially in the Scottish colonies and clan-doms, was also used to punish children. Now considered barbaric, if not a complete private family matter, children of the Scottish towns were often brought to the local Fiscal and administered public punishment for whatever the child had done wrong. Among the common child punishments performed on the Scottish Pillory were ear-nailing, binding, and amputation.

According to the context of the crime or the wrongdoing, children and adults alike were subject to such forms of public punishment through the town’s Pillory.

The town of Pictou had their own Pillory located at what is now Market Square on Water Street.