Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

OAKLEY RAMPRASHAD

MEd (University of British Columbia, 2018)
BA (Cornell University, 2016)

“From Spaces of Mercy to Sites of Sanctuary:
A Historical Survey of Canada’s Federal Prison Libraries”

Department of History

Monday, July 20, 2020
1:00 P.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Penny Bryden, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Mr. Jonathan Bengtson, University Librarian, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Alex Thomo, Department of Computer Science, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Since the inception of the first modern Canadian carceral structure in 1835, the prison library has existed. The condition of the prison libraries in Canadian federal institutions, as well as the diversity and quantity of their content has changed dramatically over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The modern-day federal prison library mirrors, in many ways, its “outside” Canadian public library counterpart. This thesis does not attempt to dispute or affirm the likeness between the Canadian prison and public library. Instead, in this thesis, I examine the evolution of the library from a space that reinforced hegemonic carceral control to a space where inmates could seek refuge and sanctuary. The first half of the thesis charts the emergence of the library as a, what I have termed, space mercy. This conceptualization of the library is inspired by Douglas Hay’s concept of mercy, in criminal law, as an ideological tool to reinforce hegemony. In the second half of the thesis I present a case study of the William Head Institution on Vancouver Island. Through the consulting of inmate publications, interviews, questionnaires, and other primary source material I posit that the prison library has evolved into a site of sanctuary. This term is taken from Laura Madokoro’s public history project *Sites of Sanctuary*. The site of sanctuary differs from the space of mercy in a number of ways and marked a distinct shift in the function and use of the prison library, by inmates, in Canada’s federal carceral institutions.