
Kakola, the Best Known Central Prison in Finland

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Kakola is a legendary place, one which is known to every Finnish person. The best-known villains in Finnish history all ‘did time’ in Kakola. The recidivists were often considered too dangerous for other central prisons, and so Kakola was the final place for the most dangerous of criminals. Kakola prison is located in the centre of the city of Turku on a hill called Kakola Hill. Formerly, there were three prisons: Kakola, which was a central prison, Lääninvankila, which served as a county jail, and Vankimielisairaala, a mental hospital for prisoners. They all moved away from Kakola Hill in the year 2007, leaving the old prison buildings empty.

This book is a comprehensive presentation of Finland’s best-known prison. The book is easy to read and it provides many interesting and informative pictures. In addition, it introduces the most famous Finnish criminals in separate information boxes, which was a very good choice on the part of the authors, since almost every Finn knows Volvo Markkanen or Matti Haapoja by name. Most Finns might not, however, be familiar with the particular crime that they committed to end up ‘behind bars’. The first four chapters

introduce the reader to how prisons and the penal system have changed and explain why Kakola was built and why in that particular spot and not somewhere else.

This book gives us some good examples of what happens on a daily basis in a prison, what are the daily routines and how people spend their days in Kakola. The routines include emptying your pots and going to work in workshops, that is, when the prisoners are not locked in their cells. It even describes when did a prisoner have the right to have a visitor, and who had the right to visit a prisoner.

The book proceeds in a chronologic manner, with the chapters being very short, only a few pages long each. The book primarily focuses on six different periods of time. The earliest period of time in Kakola’s history has to do with when the prison was located in Turku Castle while a new central prison was being built on Kakola Hill. The first prison in Turku was in fact located at Turku Castle and a couple of prison cells can still be seen when touring the castle.

The second era in Kakola’s history dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. Finland had just become independent and the times were politically unstable. The prison was full of government enemies. The third period of time includes the Second World War, when many new criminals who were suspected of being spies for other countries were incarcerated. The second and third periods of the prison’s history stand out

precisely because of the number of political prisoners at Kakola.

During the fourth period, the criminal penal institution underwent numerous changes, with the prison guards receiving a better education on how to treat the prisoners more humanely. In addition, the prisoners enjoyed new rights and freedoms. For instance, they received rights to have carpets and curtains in their cells. The book nevertheless does not introduce the changes in the prison system in any great detail. These changes can be read about, for example, in histories of the Konnunsuo prison and Vaasa prison.

The next era that the book focuses on is the last three decades of Kakola's history, a time when criminals and the system of crime and punishment changed a great deal. The biggest change in the Finnish penal system was that prisoners were now obligated to take part in either education or work programmes.

And finally, the last period of time in Kakola's history has to do with what happened after the prisons moved away from the hill in the year 2007. The writers also reflect on the future of Kakola Hill. Between the years 2007 and 2011 a large number of people have visited the prison. A couple of films and several TV series have been set in the former prison. The film groups changed the prison setting to better suit their needs, so the prison no longer looks as it did previously, meaning that it is not an authentic prison anymore.

I found the chapter on Kakola being opened up to tour groups the most interesting in the book. In 2008, Turku Touring began giving guided tours of Kakola's prison cells. They were quite popular: there were 30,000 visitors in the first summer, when the company had expected only 10,000 visitors. The next year was popular as well. The writers of this book introduce the reader to Kakola prison as they experienced it while on one such tour. The tour starts in the right wing of Kakola prison, the so-called 'pohjois-selli', or north cell. The north cell was a place for prisoners who did not work, those who wanted to stay in their cells all day. The cells were called dry cells because there were no toilets. After leaving the north cell, the tour continues on to another wing, the so-called night cell, which was in use until the 1980s; it was

very old fashioned and the conditions were not considered human based on modern standards.

The next place the tour leads visitors to is the prison library, and after that to the church and then to the traveller cells. Prisoners either entering or leaving the prison spent their first or last night in one of the traveller cells. After this, visitors are led to the main building and to the family meeting rooms. Beneath the family meeting rooms was the staff dining hall. From there, the tour continues to the new building, länsiselli, or the west cell, and after that visitors are led to the mental hospital and county jail.

These guided tours had to end because of construction work started in the year 2012. People destroyed the authentic setting by taking souvenirs, this being in addition to the original setting that was spoiled by the film crews, which tore up and painted the walls based on their needs. Nowadays, the area is divided by a street and people are free to enter the hill on their own accord. I once took part in a private guided tour and it was really entertaining. I also visited the county jail in the summer of 2015 to see an art exhibition called Valtio+, or State+. It was a very interesting show, with modern art placed in the cells. The line between real prison 'decoration' and art became very hard to determine in many instances. People were queuing for the exhibition since it was so popular. It had 15,000 visitors in three weeks, quite exceptional on a Finnish scale, and I noticed while touring the exhibition that most of the visitors came mainly to see the old prison walls. People are still interested in the prison complex at the hill. Kakola tours are still a very popular tourist attraction in Turku.

In brief, this book, *Kakola. Vankilan tarina*, is an entertaining and easy-to-read history of a famous Finnish prison and of the Finnish penal system in general; readers can learn a great deal by reading the book. Second, the pictures are good and there is at least one picture per page. And finally, the small information boxes telling about the 'evil villains', men such as Kirves-Koljonen or Volvo Markkanen, were quite interesting. (Volvo Markkanen was a bank robber who stole Volvos as his getaway car, while Kirves-Koljonen was a mass murderer in the middle of the 20th cen-

ture who killed a family with an axe, and he was the last person sentenced to death in Finland.) Within these grey information boxes, readers can also get to know the famous prison administrator, Vihtori Nybergh, and every prisoner's friend

Mathilda Wrede, the woman who devoted her life to helping poor prisoners in their time of need.

Marja-Liisa Räsänen
