

## Women Policing Women: A Patrol Woman in Montreal in the 1910s

Tamara Myers

Volume 4, Number 1, 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031064ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/031064ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Myers, T. (1993). Women Policing Women: A Patrol Woman in Montreal in the 1910s. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 4(1), 229–245. <https://doi.org/10.7202/031064ar>

### Article abstract

The policewoman movement in England, Canada, and the United States begun in the 19th century with the prison reform movement. Just as separate prisons for women would protect them from the sexual danger of incarceration so would police matrons save the detained woman from the threat posed by male criminals and station officials. The next step in the evolution of the movement in the 1910s propelled women onto the streets as safety workers, patrol women, and policewomen, ostensibly to protect young women from lecherous males and to prevent the moral downfall of working-class women. The first generation of policewomen were a combination of social workers and cops, their duties being to chaperon the city's young women at dance halls, in parks and on urban streets.

In 1918, Montreal hired its first policewomen to investigate women criminals. Using the files of one of the protective officers (Elizabeth Wand), Myers analyses the impact of this new disciplinary force. As a pioneer policewoman, whose job it was to patrol women and keep them safe from sexual danger and immorality, Wand expanded the meanings of crime, policing, and discipline. For this she encountered resistance from male officers and judges and from the policed women as well.

# Women Policing Women: A Patrol Woman in Montreal in the 1910s

TAMARA MYERS

## *Résumé*

*The policewoman movement in England, Canada, and the United States began in the 19th century with the prison reform movement. Just as separate prisons for women would protect them from the sexual danger of incarceration so would police matrons save the detained woman from the threat posed by male criminals and station officials. The next step in the evolution of the movement in the 1910s propelled women onto the streets as safety workers, patrol women, and policewomen, ostensibly to protect young women from lecherous males and to prevent the moral downfall of working-class women. The first generation of policewomen were a combination of social workers and cops, their duties being to chaperon the city's young women at dance halls, in parks and on urban streets.*

*In 1918, Montreal hired its first policewomen to investigate women criminals. Using the files of one of the protective officers (Elizabeth Wand), Myers analyses the impact of this new disciplinary force. As a pioneer policewoman, whose job it was to patrol women and keep them safe from sexual danger and immorality, Wand expanded the meanings of crime, policing, and discipline. For this she encountered resistance from male officers and judges and from the policed women as well.*

\* \* \* \*

*Le mouvement pour la création de forces policières féminines en Angleterre, au Canada, et aux États-Unis, trouve sa source dans l'élan de réforme pénitentiaire du XIXe siècle. On croyait que, de la même façon que des prisons spéciales pourraient protéger les femmes des dangers sexuels de l'incarcération, des gardiennes de leur sexe les préserveraient de la menace que posaient les hommes, qu'ils soient criminels ou policiers. L'étape suivante de cette avancée fut l'envoi dans les rues d'agents de sécurité, de patrouilleurs et de policiers de sexe féminin pour voir à la fois à la protection des jeunes femmes contre les hommes au comportement suspect et pour empêcher la déchéance morale des femmes de la classe ouvrière. Ainsi, la première génération de femmes à entrer dans le corps policier représentaient une sorte d'hybride entre la*

---

I would like to thank Andrée Lévesque, Colin Coates, Megan Davies, Peter Gossage, and Peter Myers for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also indebted to the Montreal History Group for creating a space and providing the time in which I could discuss this research. For financial support I would like to thank the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women and FCAR (Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche).

*travailleuse sociale et l'agent de police, leur devoir les amenant à chaperonner les jeunes femmes dans les salles de danse, les parcs et les rues de la ville.*

*C'est en 1918 que le corps de police de Montréal employa pour la première fois des femmes pour mener des enquêtes sur les femmes criminelles. en se basant sur les dossiers des nouvelles recrues dont le rôle était de patrouiller pour les femmes et de les protéger des dangers sexuels, Elizabeth Wand, cet article analyse l'impact de la nouvelle force disciplinaire. Le travail pionnier d'Elizabeth Wand contribua à étendre la signification du crime, de la police et de la discipline. Ce faisant, elle rencontra la résistance de la part de collègues masculins, de juges de même que la part des femmes policiées.*

On a warm summer day in 1918, Flora Barr arrived in Montreal at the city's Grand Trunk Railway station. A pail of freshly-picked berries that swung from one hand summed up the reason for her trip to Montreal: a visit to friends and family. By sundown, though, Barr was back on the train returning to where she had begun that day, having had the dubious fortune of encountering one of the city's first policewomen. Due to wartime circumstances, Barr had been forced to bid good-bye to her husband who had enlisted in the forces at Montreal. Like many women she had come to Montreal that August day on the chance that she might visit with him. As she wandered through the train station alone and unsure of where she might begin a search for her husband, a Travellers' Aid worker approached.

Finding that Barr had no place to stay in the city and that her only lead on her husband was that he might be in Sohmer Park, Barr's "case" was handed over to police officer Elizabeth Wand. Wand assessed the case in the context of the danger the city presented to women and surmised that Barr needed protection. And that is how Wand and Barr ended up at police station 10. Presumably it was Wand's idea to deposit Barr in a police cell while she checked out her story. The problem was, however, that the policemen at the station disagreed with how Wand wanted to use the station facilities. What was Barr's crime, anyway? So Wand did the only thing she could - she persuaded Flora Barr to agree to a quick return home to Huntingdon.<sup>1</sup>

Over seventy years ago Montreal joined many North American and British cities in appointing women to its police force as protective officers.<sup>2</sup> But while women officers were in fact hired by urban police forces, their work remained distinct from that of male officers, the typical patrol woman being a social worker armed with the responsibility of policing the actions of girls and women. As the case of Flora Barr indicates, the policewomen's work bridged a gap between urban policing and rescue work undertaken by philanthropic agencies such as Travellers' Aid. This work required educational

- 
1. Canada. National Archives, MG 28, Records of the Montreal Local Council of Women, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File K. Ward Protective Officer, E. Wand, "Resume of Work for Local Council of Women During the Month of August," 31 August 1918. (Hereafter NA, MG 28 . . .)
  2. Women were also called patrol women, safety workers, women constables, and policewomen.

experience and a methodology and philosophy of policing not common to the male officer. The addition of policewomen to city forces provided college-educated women with a challenging, even dangerous job that took them into a line of work and public spaces that were not ordinarily accessible to women, especially of their social class. The effect of this work was an organized challenge to other women's claim to that same public space.

Elizabeth Wand was one of four women hired by Montreal's civic authorities in the last year of the First World War to patrol the city's streets and deal with women criminals and moral offenders. Her reports have survived, and besides enriching the history of the policewoman movement and the hiring of women by the Montreal police force, they are a fascinating source illuminating the nature of policing practices advocated by women of the time as well as their definition of crime and discipline. They allow us, furthermore, to assess the impact of the women patrols on those who came into contact with them — mostly young, working-class women — and the way in which these young women resisted the new form of discipline practised by the first generation of women police officers.

During the 1920s, women involved in the International Association of Police Women (established 1915) published surveys and histories of women's work on police forces,<sup>3</sup> but in more recent years historians have not given adequate attention to women crime fighters and the international policewoman movement. That is unfortunate, because it is evident from this preliminary analysis of policewomen that the history of female crime fighters is significant to several other areas of historical enquiry: police work, the professionalization of social work, women's paid employment, and the gendered use of public space.

When historians have considered women police officers, even if only peripherally, they have usually done so within the context of juvenile delinquency and the "girl problem." For example, the American Mary Odem and Canadian Carolyn Strange have both dealt with the role of women police in the campaign to control the sexuality of young, mainly working-class women; and both have shown that the construction of a problem — the sex delinquent — created its own solution — the policewoman.<sup>4</sup> The "girl problem," indeed, was discovered or constructed in the early part of this century by Progressive reformers who conducted social surveys of the city.<sup>5</sup> While reformers thought these surveys would aid them in assessing sexual danger in the city, the research

---

3. Mary Hamilton, *The Policewoman: Her Service and Ideals* (New York, 1971 (reprint 1924)); Chloe Owings, *Women Police* (Montclair, N.J., 1969 (reprint 1925)).

4. Mary Odem, "Delinquent Daughters: The Sexual Regulation of Female Minors in the United States, 1880-1920," (PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1989); Carolyn Strange, "The Perils and the Pleasures of the City: Single, Wage-Earning Women in Toronto, 1880-1930," (PhD Thesis, Rutgers University, 1991).

5. Note, for example, New York City (1902), Chicago (1911), Toronto (1915), and a smaller survey in Montreal in 1918 conducted by the Committee of 16.

inevitably led them to focus on the social and sexual habits of “working girls.” From their findings, reformers began to reconceptualize young women’s sexuality. No longer was it accurate to portray these women as victims of male lust, as the campaign to criminalize seduction and the white slave trade panic had done.<sup>6</sup> Rather, working “girls” had established a new relationship to city life that included exploration of commercial amusement places where they were free to develop relationships with the opposite sex,<sup>7</sup> and women who willingly swapped an evening of dancing or a movie for sexual activity were labelled “occasional prostitutes” or sex delinquents.<sup>8</sup>

Having constructed the “girl problem,” reformers prescribed a remedy that involved new forms of sexual regulation, with the result that by the 1910s the leisure activities of young women were heavily scrutinized and labelled deviant and delinquent. When they decided that their “protective” work was an inadequate solution to the problem of young working women who violated social and sexual mores, these urban reformers initially looked to the city’s police forces to solve this problem, but it appeared to warrant a new corrective. A different method of policing the city developed with the “preventive” work of the women police officers. Policewomen, then, became one of the solutions to controlling the girl problem. This paper picks up where Strange and Odem have left off, exploring the work of the policewomen and its implications for “working girls” in the city.

In the nineteenth century, police matrons had been hired to oversee women arrested and detained in police stations, but expanding on this toe-hold and creating opportunities for women to serve on police forces required lobbying, the momentum of an international policewomen’s movement and a well-defined, sex-specific job description of the new female officer’s duties. In the 1910s the pressure to hire women onto Montreal’s police force came from at least two main sources. One was the 1918 report of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research (the Driscoll Report) based on a study of Montreal’s civic administration, which advocated the establishment of a new Committee on Public Safety and the hiring of at least three women officers.<sup>9</sup> The other was the lobbying effort of the

---

6. On seduction see Constance Backhouse, “The Tort of Seduction: Fathers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century Canada,” *Dalhousie Law Journal* 10 (1986): 45-80. On the white slave trade see John P.S. McLaren, “Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada’s Prostitution Laws,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 1 (1986): 125-165; and Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto, 1991), chap. 4.

7. Carolyn Strange, “The Perils and the Pleasures,” chap. 4, on the ‘good times’ girls. On women’s relationship to and their influence on the city in this period see Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago, 1988).

8. See Carolyn Strange, “From Modern Babylon to a City Upon a Hill: The Toronto Social Survey (1915) and the Search for Sexual Order in the City,” in Roger Hall et al. eds. *Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario’s History* (Toronto, 1988), 255-277.

9. Jean Turmel, *Le Service de Police de la Cité de Montréal* (Montréal, 1974), 61; NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File “Women’s Patrols,” K.Chipman, “The Employment of Women Patrols.”

## WOMEN POLICING WOMEN

Montreal Local Council of Women, a mainly Protestant umbrella organization that was concerned with the well-being of women and children in the city.

The Local Council had been investigating the plight of women who were arrested and detained by city officials since the 1890s, and its Committee on Police Matrons had sought a solution to the sexual dangers that incarceration presented to the thousand or so women arrested each year. At the time there was only one police matron for the whole city of Montreal, based at the City Hall station, and MLCW President Julia Drummond insisted that Montreal uphold the principle that institutionalized women be placed only under the care of other women. The committee members were incensed that many of the women brought into police stations were in an “unconscious condition” and were left in the sole charge of men, not always out of reach of male prisoners.<sup>10</sup> The number of police matrons increased very slowly, but by the early years of the 20th-century, the MLCW had registered its voice and opinions with the civic administrators, particularly with the police bureaucracy. The Local Council lobbied persistently in the 1910s for female officers, drawing on examples set by women patrols and safety workers in the United States, Britain, and other Canadian cities.

In Britain, there was considerable agitation for women officers to oversee the protection of women and children. The National Vigilance Association had been calling for women wardens at police stations and courts since the 1880s,<sup>11</sup> and by the 1910s the National Council of Women had launched a public appeal to the Home Secretary to appoint women to the police forces of Britain. Along with lobbying members of parliament to change the laws banning women from police duty<sup>12</sup>, several women’s organizations took it upon themselves during the war to create women police volunteer groups, namely, the Women Patrols and the Women Police Volunteers. Many of the wartime volunteer patrols stayed on to become the first women employed by the Metropolitan force.<sup>13</sup> Their duties included surveying Hyde Park and other open spaces in London for moral offenders and accompanying arrested women to court.

In 1910, the first full-time, permanent policewoman was hired in the United States. Alice Stebbins Wells had been engaged in a long struggle to convince Los Angeles officials to put women on the city’s police force in an effort to improve the preventive-protective work of private organizations.<sup>14</sup> A graduate of a theological

---

10. Local Council of Women of Montreal, *Third Annual Report* (1897), 19. The report notes that the Superintendent of Police reported that over a third of the women arrested were charged with being drunk and disorderly.

11. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (London, 1985), 60.

12. According to the Act of 1890 women were not persons for the purposes of the police. Owings, 13.

13. Owings, 23-24. See also Lilian Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard: Reflections on the Struggles and Achievements of Thirty Years in the Metropolitan Police* (London, 1952).

14. Odem, 170.

seminary and a social worker, Wells exemplified the first generation of women police officers, and she became a national symbol over night. Journalists attacked her for the direct manner in which she pursued her work and portrayed her as most unwomanly, the caricatures suggesting a tightly bunned, gun-wielding, muscular, even masculine woman who was “anything but feminine”<sup>15</sup> — a kind of abuse not uncommon for the first women in other professions.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the sarcastic coverage and the demeaning images of Wells, she became a much demanded expert in policewomen’s work and travelled as far afield as Dallas, New York City, and Toronto, reaching thousands of people and a multitude of organizations. When she was not on speaking tours, Wells was on duty at the city’s commercial amusement sites (dance halls, skating rinks, penny arcades, picture shows), searching for missing persons or scrutinizing young women’s social behaviour.<sup>17</sup> Many cities followed the Los Angeles example and by the end of World War I over two hundred American and Canadian cities had policewomen. Because of her tremendous popularity, both at home and abroad, Wells fostered connections that enabled her to found the International Association of Police Women in 1915. Twenty-two American states and Canada were represented at its first meeting in 1916, and through the association Wells supported sex-specific tasks in woman policing, encouraged women to lobby for separate women’s bureaus within city police forces, and defined the requirements for policewomen as experience with social work methods.

Just as in Britain, the call for a force of policewomen in Canada was sounded by suffrage associations such as the Equal Franchise League in Toronto and the many chapters of the Local Councils of Women,<sup>18</sup> but the Canadian policewomen movement was also heavily influenced by the American model set by Wells. By 1918, cities such as Winnipeg, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Kingston, St. Thomas, London and Halifax all had policewomen.<sup>19</sup> In each of these cities the new officer on the beat was assigned to a “morality squad” as special investigator of female victims of crime, would-be criminals, and prostitutes. The job description for the policewomen of Winnipeg, for example, was to patrol railroad stations, moving picture houses, dance halls, and to apprehend women, especially those who may be “mentally deranged.”<sup>20</sup>

---

15. Owings, 103.

16. Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto, 1991). See the chapter on Clara Brett Martin, Canada’s first woman lawyer, who faced ridicule as a student and much publicity when she entered the profession.

17. Owings, 101-102.

18. Veronica Strong-Boag, *Parliament of Women* (Ottawa, 1976), 191. Lobbying for policewomen on urban forces followed an 1894 National Council of Women of Canada resolution supporting the hiring of police matrons and proposing local investigations into the conditions women experienced when confronted by the law.

19. NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File Women’s Patrol, K.Chipman, “The Employment of Police Women.”

20. Owings, 61.

## WOMEN POLICING WOMEN

During the 1910s the MLCW was made aware of the developments of female policing in Canada through the National Council of Women of Canada. Like Toronto, Montreal had been visited by Alice Stebbins Wells, who addressed the 1914 Annual Meeting of the MLCW (that year it represented 45 societies, 170 associate members, and 44 annual patrons). That same year, the Council sent a delegation to discuss the matter of employing women police with Mayor Lavallée, the City Commissioners, and the Chief of Police. Pressured by their persistent lobbying, Chief Campeau suggested that a woman be sworn in temporarily as policewoman.<sup>21</sup>

The city finally authorized the hiring of women police officers in an amendment to the City of Montreal By-laws,<sup>22</sup> and on April 23, 1915 City Recorder Amédée Geoffrion swore in Lilian Clearihue as the city's sole female officer of the law. Expected to do protective-preventive work with women and girls, Clearihue's background and experience eminently qualified her for the job: a Travellers' Aid worker for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, she had patrolled the city's railroad stations, meeting women coming to Montreal for the first time and directing them to safe lodgings.<sup>23</sup> As a police officer, Clearihue would continue to do that work, but since the city had not provided the necessary budget or infrastructure to develop a women's police force she would do so under the direction of (and would be paid by) Travellers' Aid.<sup>24</sup> In effect, she had been sworn in to perform exactly the same job she had been doing and under the same auspices, and as a result not only was her status on the police force nebulous, but her employment entailed little responsibility for the police administrators.

No flood of hirings followed Clearihue's appointment, and the MLCW soon concluded that the 1915 amendment to the city's by-laws and Clearihue's subsequent appointment were small victories in the war against vice and disease in the city. Turning the tide in this struggle would require a full staff of policewomen. The lobbying effort under Katherine Chipman of the Committee on Reformatory Work was ultimately

---

21. National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook* (1914-15): vi-vii. There was a precedent for hiring women officers, as the *Montreal Star* noted. The *Star* observed that while the Mayor and the Chief of Police were mulling over the concept of policewomen, the federal immigration department had already employed two Montreal women to serve deportation warrants and make arrests of "undesirable" female immigrants. The newspaper applauded the efforts of these two immigration officers who "work(ed) along efficiently and quietly. . . never need(ing) to call on the men officers for help," and advocated the employment of women officers by the city. *Montreal Star*, February 5, 1914, 6.

22. Act 62 Vict., Chap. 58, Article 562a. of the Montreal Charter.

23. Miss Clearihue seems to have been a compromise candidate: in February of 1914 the MLCW submitted to Chief Campeau an application from Mrs. Florence Woodley for a position on the Police Force; the Chief, under pressure from the MLCW, suggested that a solution they both could live with might be that "the present Travellers' Aids be temporarily sworn in and paid by the societies already supporting them." See letter acknowledging receipt of the application, NA, MG 28, File "Women's Patrols." O. Campeau to E. Kohl, 20 February, 1914; and the Report of the Local Council of Women to the National Council, NCWC *Yearbook* (1914-15), vii.

24. *The Montreal Gazette*, 24 April, 1915, p.9.



successful in the spring of 1918 when a new municipal administration established the Committee on Public Safety (le Service de la Sécurité Publique).<sup>25</sup> Whereas the police chief had conceded their demands in half measures in 1915, the Director of Public Safety responded more eagerly to their wishes and made way for the first policewomen to work the streets of Montreal.<sup>26</sup>

Katherine Chipman argued that the strength of the police force had been diminished by military recruiting, a rapid increase in juvenile delinquency, and the rise of “social offenders” in the city. In particular, the police proved incompetent in preventing young working-class women from committing morals offences. The police, she wrote, “which serves as a comb to bring to light active agents against the public welfare needed sharpening.” In short, the police were inadequate for the kind of clean-up she advocated, for “much escaped the policeman . . . (and) for a thorough clean-up a finer implement must be shaped.”<sup>27</sup> That more finely toothed comb would be the woman patrol officer. The woman on the beat would deal with anything passed over by the police because it was defined as out of the court’s jurisdiction. So while policemen dealt with evil on the streets that was in the purview of the law, the policewomen could deal with those undesirables who, “if allowed to flourish unchecked (would) become a fruitful source of evil” — the female pre-delinquents.<sup>28</sup>

Because the goal of employing police women was the overall improvement of the moral environment of the city streets, the MLCW argued for licence to expand the list of behaviours that were policed.<sup>29</sup> In creating a job description for women police officers, the Council employed a rigid standard of middle-class morality with which to measure young women’s social and sexual behaviour. On this issue, the MLCW gained the support of the francophone women’s organization, the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, which also promoted policewomen’s work: “femmes détectives qui devront aider à la surveillance des lieux de réunion . . . seront d’une grande utilité pour le maintien des bonnes mœurs.”<sup>30</sup> The goal, according to the FNSJB, was “l’épuration des mœurs.”<sup>31</sup>

---

25. Turmel, 61.

26. MLCW, *Annual Report* (1919-20); NA, MG 28, I 164, Vol. 7, Women’s Patrols file, J.Tremblay, Commissioner of Public Safety to K.Chipman, 16 May, 1918.

27. NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File “Women’s Patrols,” K.Chipman, “Report: Patrol Work for Three Months, Summer 1918.” For years Montreal reformers had complained about the toleration city police exhibited toward prostitution and the lackadaisical attitude the police held toward vice. See Andrée Lévesque, “Eteindre le Red Light: les réformateurs et la prostitution à Montréal entre 1865 et 1925,” *Urban History Review* 17:3 (February, 1989): 191-201; and Jean-Paul Brodeur, *La délinquance de l’ordre* (Montreal, 1982), on inquiries into the activities of the police.

28. NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File “Women’s Patrols,” K. Chipman, “Report: Patrol Work for Three Months, Summer 1918.”

29. *Ibid.*, K. Chipman, “The Employment of Police Women.”

30. La Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, *La Bonne Parole* 6:4 (Juin, 1918): 14.

31. *Ibid.*, 7:4 (juin, 1919), 2.

In late spring of 1918 the Chief of Police appointed four women (two francophone, two anglophone) to the force and placed them on the city payroll for a trial period of six months. Permitted to select one of the four (the Chief would choose the other three) the MLCW decided upon Elizabeth Wand because of her education and experience. A bilingual, trained nurse and social worker, she had had employment and volunteer experience in New York and Montreal, including a long history of volunteer work with the MLCW representing the Parks and Playgrounds Association. Importantly, the MLCW believed that she was able to cope with the “discouragement and danger of the job.”<sup>32</sup> Because of the nature of her appointment, Wand was ultimately responsible to both the Chief of Police and the MLCW.

The MLCW insisted that Wand be familiar with the methods and ideas of the policewoman movement before embarking on her career as policewoman. Chipman instructed her to immerse herself in the American literature on woman policing, and especially that of Maude Miner, head of the United States War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities’ Committee on Protective Work for Girls. For like Miner, Chipman firmly believed that the social hygiene problem of World War I was not one of commercialized vice (prostitution) but one of girls’ weakness for the glamour of the uniform, and she agreed that the task of the woman officer was to protect young women “from the excitement and thoughtlessness produced by the emotions of war playing upon the emotions of sex.”<sup>33</sup> As a representative of Chipman’s committee, Wand would be expected to integrate Miner’s philosophy and methodology into her work.

Financial contributions of MLCW patrons also enabled Wand to travel to Toronto to survey the work of the two women protective-preventive officers there, and for two weeks in late June she observed their system of protecting girls and preventing immorality. While gaining insight into policewomen’s work and practical training in patrolling public space, Wand was nevertheless disappointed by the fact that Toronto’s policewomen were relegated to mainly office work, focusing primarily on cases of “marital infelicity,” in which their principal task was to interview families in the hope of patching up bad marriages.

On the other hand, Wand found the work carried out by the agencies involved in protective-preventive care like the Big Sisters and Girls’ Protective League instructive. The patrol work of the latter was particularly so. From evenings spent in public places where she witnessed couples improperly entwined on benches, to Toronto beaches where outrageous bathing suits created an outcry, she learned the rudiments of patrolling the public — and how to use a flash of light, for example, to put a stop to affectionate and sexual encounters in public. The supervision of parks and beaches specifically interested

---

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, Committee on Protective Work for Girls to K. Chipman, 17 January, 1918, and K. Chipman, “Patrol Women,” 6 February, 1918.

her as she had noticed that Montreal, too, was fraught with people making exceptional use of the green spaces.

Upon her return Wand and the other three officers were sworn in as protective officers. The women were given some training at City Hall (restricted in the main to learning city by-laws and procedures, duties, and limitations of police work), after which the Captain divided the city into east and west and assigned each to an area. After observing court procedure at the Recorder's and Juvenile courts, Wand began work and, as she put it, to "blaze (her) own trail."<sup>34</sup>

Elizabeth Wand submitted monthly reports to the MLCW and the Chief of Police throughout the six month trial period. These reports offer insight into the work of the first policewomen, a view of the city's public spaces and the actions of young women through her eyes.<sup>35</sup> The other women officers unfortunately remain just a shadow in Wand's reports, so we are left with only one woman's experience, influenced as it was by Protestant and anglophone organizations. Wand's reports are of two types: the first a general assessment of her walks about town; the other consists of case histories of women she investigated.

The summer of 1918 provided Wand with an excellent opportunity to identify the outdoor public and social behaviour of Montrealers and intervene when moral danger looked imminent. While on patrol, she covered railway stations (Windsor and Grand Trunk Railway), squares (Dominion and Windsor), parks (Mount Royal, Fletcher's Field, Ile Ste. Hélène), movie houses, and the barrack environs (including the Khaki Club). In general what she saw she did not like; or rather, her training had provided her with a new way to view and absorb the city and critique the behaviour of its inhabitants.

Public decorum in particular she found wanting. She saw men and women sitting upon benches in Windsor Square "in a most improper manner" and young women flirting on Ste. Catherine Street. Roadside benches along Cedar Avenue were also defined as sites of inappropriate behaviour.<sup>36</sup> One night after one of Montreal's sweltering heat waves Wand strolled up to Fletcher's Field to observe how the space was being used. Among the mothers and their babies who were out enjoying the fresh air was a collection of "unfortunates" (a euphemistic term for immoral girls and women) in need of supervision. She described a "motley throng" on Fletcher's Field, "including soldiers and young girls."<sup>37</sup> A hot July evening on Fletcher's Field, then, brought out the worst elements of social activity and yet the city's policemen were no where in sight. Having

---

34. *Ibid*, E. Wand, "Resume of work done by the protective officer for Local Council and City, from June 1918 to January 15, 1919."

35. These reports are filed in the Montreal Local Council of Women collection at the National Archives. They are in a file that is incorrectly labelled "K.Ward, Protective Officer . . ." It should read "E. Wand."

36. *Ibid*, E. Wand, "Resume of Work for Local Council of Women, July 1918."

37. *Ibid*,

visited St. Helen's Island and Mount Royal Park she reported that unlike Fletcher's Field, these places were quiet and dominated by the family party.

Wand also collaborated with the Travellers' Aid workers to direct women coming into Montreal to "respectable" lodgings. Having surveyed the Montreal lodging homes and hotels that served the female population, she concluded that Catholic women had many options but that few existed for Protestants outside the Y.W.C.A.<sup>38</sup> The limited number of "respectable" boarding houses in the city prompted the Montreal Local Council of Women to take up the issue as one of their causes in the 1910s. The Council would embark on a mission to ensure that boarding and rooming houses were licensed, inspected, and regulated by the state;<sup>39</sup> but until that time, Wand would direct women only to those boarding houses she deemed respectable, that is, provided some form of chaperonage.

For the most part, Wand had been relieved of patrolling barracks by the military police. Wand reported that fewer "of that class of woman" were seen around the Guy and Peel Street barracks, although she was still called in when women were caught hanging around the Khaki club.

In September, she visited moving picture houses: The New Grand, Strand, Holman, Connaught, Princess, Loew's and the Tivoli. The houses were inspected as to the appropriateness of the film for all viewers. Wand followed up orders from the Commissioner of Public Safety that children under 16 years of age were not to be admitted without parents.<sup>40</sup>

Widespread public flirtation, unchaperoned boarding houses, and the proliferation of moving picture theatres suggested to Wand that a chaotic social order had evolved in Montreal. Given the discrepancy between the behaviour Wand advocated and what she found, Wand must have felt intensely frustrated in trying to lift the moral standards of Montrealers. In the fall of 1918, Wand began a more systematic, case by case approach to immorality in the city.

Once the city's philanthropic rescue agencies were made aware of Wand's role in policing Montreal, her work shifted to investigating individual cases. The Women's Directory, (a Protestant organization focusing on single mothers), Travellers' Aid, the Y.W.C.A., and the Department of Inland Waterways all referred cases to her, involving mainly disappearance. In the fall of 1918 twenty cases, some trivial, some serious, were "thoroughly investigated, reported, recorded and followed up."<sup>41</sup> In October, for example,

---

38. E. Wand, "Resume of work for July."

39. Montreal Local Council of Women, *Annual Report* (1917-18): 25-26.

40. NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File K. Ward, Protective Officer file, "Resume for September, 1918."

41. *Ibid.*, File "Women's Patrols," K. Chipman, "The Employment of Police Women."

she was alerted to the case of an office worker who was blowing kisses to employees in the next building. A quick resolution to this problem was found: Wand lectured the woman about stealing her employer's time, and the woman apparently thanked her for pointing this out.<sup>42</sup> At the other end of the spectrum was a case of a woman who was allegedly held captive in a brothel.<sup>43</sup> These cases illuminate the method of policing used by a network of women, including the women police officers. In conjunction with women's organizations such as the Women's Directory and Travellers' Aid, the policewomen tracked down disappearing women, interviewed them, and often strongly recommended institutionalization. In most of the cases it is not clear that specific laws had been broken. A careful read of these cases reveals how young women slipped through the web of investigators, using aliases, frequently changing addresses, leaving town, and by lying in general. Wand rose to the challenge these cases presented, sometimes successfully "rescuing" them, sometimes not.

The reports of the protective officer suggest that women moved about the city easily and regularly during the war. Her subjects offered a multitude of reasons for this transience: some, like Flora Barr, claimed they were searching for brothers or husbands who had come to Montreal to sign up for military duty; others were looking for work; most, Wand feared, were simply drawn into the big city by the allure of the uniform. Chipman and Wand expressed considerable suspicion of women who came to the city with no previously secured place of residence: "it is high time that these undesirables know that our gates are closed to them."<sup>44</sup> In their efforts to quell this unregulated movement about the city they defined a new kind of policing; indeed, a new form of justice was meted out by the women constables.

Laura Thibault (alias Fairfield, Kranz) also had a husband in the forces. Her case is far more complex than Barr's, involving as it did a pregnancy, a disappearance, and possibly forced prostitution. It illustrates the ambivalence felt by Wand and her associates over whether their role was to protect women in need or punish those who did not conform to acceptable standards of behaviour. The case history and reports constructed by Wand are full of contradictions — lies that Laura fed her? — and leaps in interpretation on Wand's part. What follows is the story of Laura Thibault Fairfield as created by Wand and her associates.

Laura Thibault lost her mother when she was but a child. The difficulty of this loss was compounded by her father's alcoholism, resulting in a very unhappy childhood. Eventually Laura ran away from home with George Fairfield, a young man she had known since childhood. It is unclear what prompted her to leave, but it is evident that her father disapproved of her relationship with an English Protestant boy. The two teenagers came to Montreal from the Eastern Townships in the winter of 1918. By this

---

42. *Ibid.*, File K.Ward, Protective Officer, E. Wand, "Resume of work for October for Local Council of Women," 31 October 1918.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, E. Wand, "Resume for September 1918," 30 September 1918.

time Laura was 17 years old and George was old enough to sign up for military duty. Private George Clayton Fairfield enlisted in Montreal on January 3, 1918 and declared Mrs. Laura Fairfield as his next of kin. Wand never found proof that a marriage had occurred, and she did not believe that it had ever been made legal. When George left, Laura moved into a boarding house where she lived between January and April 1918. She was asked to leave in April because she was unable to pay the rent. She was also pregnant. In April Laura found employment and lodging in a boarding house. The woman who ran the house, a Mrs. White, took Laura to the Maternity Hospital for an examination and arranged for her to enter once the baby was due. As a follow up to the interview at the hospital, a visitor came by the boarding house looking for Laura. For whatever reason Laura did not want to talk to the visitor and managed to disappear whenever she called subsequently.

This case of disappearance was turned over to Wand in August of 1918 by the Women's Directory and the Montreal Maternity Hospital. Wand tracked Laura down at 22 Desrivières Street and reported that "a white girl was being held by a coloured woman in a boarding house."<sup>45</sup> Repeated callings at the house did not produce the disappeared woman. Mrs. White managed to stump Wand first by asking for a warrant that she did not have, and then by informing the protective officer that she only allowed white women to enter when accompanied by men of colour. Wand wrote, "unfortunately the captain has no colored men on his staff."<sup>46</sup> Believing that Laura was indeed inside 22 Desrivières, Wand appealed to the chief of police and a judge to do something.

Evidence of alcohol on the premises gave her a pretext to enter the house: the police raided the place and charged White with selling liquor without a license and a prostitution related offense. The judge, however, claimed he could do nothing to Laura as she had not broken any law: "and if she chose to live in the house she could do so."<sup>47</sup> In November, Wand caught up to Laura when she and her baby ended up at the Canadian Patriotic. The sequence of events that led her to her stay at the Patriotic is unclear but it appears to have been the result of an article Wand placed in the Montreal *Star's* women's pages entitled "Where is she?" Interviews with the policewoman and mental tests followed Laura's "rescue" by the Patriotic.<sup>48</sup>

Was Laura Thibault Fairfield held in a house of prostitution against her will in the advanced stages of pregnancy? Were Wand, the Women's Directory, and the Maternity Hospital attempting to rescue Laura and her baby? Or, did they want to punish her for 1) living at a "colored" rooming house, 2) having a baby outside wedlock, and

---

45. *Ibid.* E. Wand, "Resume of work for October for Local Council of Women," 31 October 1918.

46. *Ibid.* E. Wand, "Report from Police Station #6," 22 October 22, 1918.

47. *Ibid.* E. Wand, "Resume of work for October for Local Council of Women," 31 October, 1918.

48. Story compiled from *Ibid.* E. Wand, "Report on Interview with Mrs. Laura Fairfield(?)," November 7, 1918; "RE Mrs. Laura Fairfield," 21 October, 1918; "Case Reported by Travellers' Aid," 31 October 1918.

3) disappearing when they sought answers to their questions? Having “rescued” her they subjected her to intense inquiry and examination. Her crime appears to have been her “wilfulness.”<sup>49</sup> Wand defined her as a pathological liar because her version of the story differed from that of her boyfriend’s father.<sup>50</sup> Isa Cole of the MLCW Committee on Mental Deficiency was brought in on the case. When given the Binet-Simon test by Cole, Laura was assessed as having the mental age of ten and therefore belonged to the class called “morons,” that is, those who were completely lacking in moral sense.<sup>51</sup> Cole wrote to Wand that “it is highly dangerous to the community to have a girl like this at large without restriction or suppression of any kind, and is most unkind to the girl herself.”<sup>52</sup> The story of Laura unfortunately stops there: we cannot be certain whether she was eventually sent home, whether she was convinced to stay in an institution, or whether she once again disappeared.

Cases such as Laura’s convinced Wand that the city of Montreal needed a detention home. The benefit of such an institution would be that when policewomen found women “wandering around” the city they could be temporarily detained until thoroughly examined, both mentally and physically. During the First World War the American Committee on Protective Work for Girls subjected thousands of young women suspected of moral delinquency to compulsory examination and detention.<sup>53</sup>

Through the juvenile court system, it was possible to detain for examination young women who were found delinquent or who were believed to be “predelinquent” — women on the verge of delinquent behaviour. The Juvenile Delinquents Act (1908) and the juvenile court allowed reformatories and industrial schools to detain young people with little or no evidence of criminal activity. For example, in 1918 Margaret “Elsie” Mudd was 15 years old and worked as a nursemaid for a family in Westmount. As a domestic servant she typically worked long hours and had very little privacy, but one summer evening she saw a window of opportunity open to her. The couple that employed her left for a week’s vacation, leaving Elsie with a grandmother. She seized this rare chance and “disappeared” for five days. In interviewing Elsie’s mother, Wand found that the 15 year-old was disobedient and before she had been sent to the family in Westmount she used to stay out late at night. When Elsie was “found” a few blocks from her house, she was whisked off to the juvenile court where her mother appeared against her. On

---

49. *Ibid.*, “Resume of Work for October for Local Council of Women,” 31 October 1918.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, Isa Cole to E. Wand, 26 November 1918. Developed in 1910, the Binet test was used widely in the United States by psychologists and penologists to determine committed criminals’ and delinquents’ mental ability. In several states the experts found that 2/3 to 3/4 of the female delinquents were “defective.” In the 1910s, a Montreal psychologist found that all of the juvenile delinquents at the GCIS were feeble-minded. This test lost popularity shortly after WWI when thousands of American soldiers were tested and the results indicated that half the population was in fact feeble-minded. See Odem, 161-2.

52. *Ibid.*, I. Cole to E. Wand, 26 November 1918.

53. Odem, 193-196.

August 5 Elsie was sent to the Soeurs du Bon-Pasteur reformatory for a month of mental and physical observation.<sup>54</sup>

Many of the cases Wand covered focused on women who had disappeared. Some concerned citizens were willing to believe that the white slave trade did exist in some form in Montreal; or, at least when young women dropped out of sight those responsible were connected to prostitution.<sup>55</sup> But when Wand was instructed to “cherchez la femme,” it was usually the result of the woman in question taking leave of a situation for her own reasons. Disappearing, then, became a misbehaviour or crime when it was proved that the woman acted wilfully and immorally. In the records of Montreal’s Protestant reform school for girls, the Girls’ Cottage Industrial School in St. Lambert, there is evidence to suggest a substantial number of those incarcerated committed the crime of disappearing — that is, their guardians did not know where they were at night. Under the Quebec laws regarding juvenile delinquents, parents or guardians were permitted to bring their child to the court if “he (sic) had abandoned the home of the person who is in charge of him without permission . . .”<sup>56</sup> What did it mean to women to disappear? And why were so many women penalized for doing so?

These are not easy questions to answer, but some hints exist in certain primary sources. In his 1926 study of the girls and young women at the Girls’ Cottage Industrial School McGill, psychology professor J.W. Bridges identified a common experience among the girls: sexual abuse at home. “The following examples are typical of conditions reported, he observed; “one girl at nine years of age was seduced by a boarder, another at seven years of age was led into sexual relations with her foster father.”<sup>57</sup> Once teenagers these young women would leave home. This action would be labelled delinquent by the authorities or by the parents. It could be concluded that an important coping or survival strategy for these young women was to leave home or “disappear.”<sup>58</sup> Ironically or sadly, attempts to escape abusive home lives were sometimes policed with the result being the incarceration of the abused. There were other cases that resembled Elsie’s case where young women appear to have been asserting independence from parental authority, actions that were defined as disappearing, considered immoral, and were punished.<sup>59</sup>

---

54. *Ibid*, E. Wand, “Office Report,” 16 August 1918.

55. Lévesque, “Eteindre..” and Evanston Hart, “Wake Up! Montreal! Commercialized Vice and its Contributories.” Montreal, 1919), 7.

56. Quebec. *Quebec Gazette* An act to amend the Revised Statutes, 1909, respecting Juvenile Delinquents, 3 Geo. V, Chapter 39.

57. NA, Records of the Girls’ Cottage Industrial School, MG 28, I 404, Vol. 1, File 20, “A Study of a Group of Delinquent Girls.”

58. Current literature on female delinquency supports this idea. See Meda Chesney-Lind, “Girls’ Crime and Woman’s Place: Toward a Feminist Model of Female Delinquency,” *Crime and Delinquency* 35:1, (January, 1989), 6.

59. A poignant example of this is the story that Maimie Pinzer tells of her first confrontation with the law, see Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson, eds., *The Maimie Papers* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1977), 193-196.



Indeed, authorities saw only evidence of misconduct not attempts to pursue pleasure, independence or survival.

Elizabeth Wand's career as policewoman came to an abrupt end on January 11, 1919 when, along with her three colleagues, she received a letter from the superintendent of the police department notifying her that her "services will not be needed in this Department from to-morrow morning the 12th of January, 1919."<sup>60</sup> The police administration advanced many reasons for the firings, the main one being that women police were expendable in an era of bad economic times requiring cuts in staff.<sup>61</sup> It is nevertheless interesting that they followed so closely upon the retirement of a sympathetic Commissioner of Public Safety, suggesting, perhaps, that the city's financial difficulties were an excuse to get rid of women officers (especially one connected to the MLCW) who were critical of male policing and the city's tolerance of vice. Although it is not clear whether the recently unionized police force was keen on women invading its domain (even if the policewomen had created a new, sex-specific type of police work), the acting Chief of Police "did not see the necessity of such a service."<sup>62</sup>

The MLCW along with the Women's Directory and the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste called upon the city to change its mind, condemning the firings as a retrograde step in policing vice in the city, but to no avail. Not until the close of the next world war were women again employed by the city to patrol the city streets when, in early 1946, 25 policewomen were hired to solve manpower shortages in the force.<sup>63</sup> Once again, the city looked for women who served with the forces to patrol immoral conduct in public spaces such as parks.<sup>64</sup>

The first generation of women patrols were mostly well-educated, experienced social workers who were supported by middle class feminists and reformers. In North America, Alice Stibbens Wells used the rich network of women's organizations to contact women across the continent with her message of policing as a career for women. The movement reached its climax during the First World War, as cities across North America and England employed professional women to work alongside men in their police forces; in the midst of the war, policewomen created an international association and self-consciously labelled their actions a movement. Although opening this very male dominated and defined occupation to women threatened male prerogative, these women

---

60. NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol. 7, File K. Ward, P. Belanger to E. Wand. 11 January 1919.

61. MLCW, *Annual Report* (1918-20), 37.

62. NA, MG 28, Series I 164, Vol.7, File "Women's Patrols," E. Decary to K.Chipman, 5 February 1919.

63. Just after the Second World War came to a close cities such as Montreal did face shortages of policemen and therefore turned to hiring women to fill the vacancies. By 1946, Montreal faced a shortage of about 800 police officers, and according to one city councillor "if we still cannot get enough men to fill up the ranks of the police force. . . it may be necessary to hire a hundred or more women." *Montreal Star*, February 1, 1946, 1.

64. *Montreal Star*, 1 February, 1946, 3.

## WOMEN POLICING WOMEN

were quick to claim they had feminized the work, that rather than take over men's jobs, theirs complemented male policing.

Elizabeth Wand's experience during her six months as protective officer in the city of Montreal reflected these broader developments. Wand surveyed public spaces and joined philanthropic agencies in "rescuing" women while, at the same time, fostering working relationships with the police, the courts, and the prisons. As a pioneer policewoman, whose job it was to patrol women and keep them safe from the sexual danger of the city and immorality, Wand had also expanded the meanings of crime, policing, and discipline. For all of this she encountered resistance from male officers and judges.

There was also hostility from the policed women as well. Although the original motives behind a woman police corps may seem harmless enough (or even beneficial) for what they did to protect women from the sexual danger of the city, the effect of women policing was a broadening of the definition of crime and of policing that did not always serve their "clients" well. For these patrols met young women at railway stations, interrupted their social intercourse in public parks, and hauled them off the streets in the name of protection and prevention, all the while subjecting them to more intense scrutiny than was applied to young men's social and public behaviour. (Policemen did not walk the same beat as women police, and the latter did not interfere in young men's lives.) All too often, then, Elizabeth Wand and her three colleagues patrolling the streets of Montreal tracked down women who had disappeared, who had committed no crimes, and whose only misdeeds, in the end, were to have avoided the policewomen and their attempts to "rescue" them.