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An Introduction

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Article abstract

The papers introduced deal with changes in the condition of women in Canadian cities. These changes were closely associated with movements of charity and urban reform and they might better be regarded as "counter-reforms" that imposed a new social discipline. In age-sex structures presented for Montreal families and institutional "families" in 1861, women can be identified as subjects and instruments of the new social "order."

Paternalism and Urban Reform:
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Abstract

The papers introduced deal with changes in the condition of women in Canadian cities. These changes were closely associated with movements of charity and urban reform and they might better be regarded as "counter-reforms" that imposed a new social discipline. In age-sex structures presented for Montreal families and institutional "families" in 1861, women can be identified as subjects and instruments of the new social "order."

Résumé

Les articles présentés dans ce numéro traitent des changements qu'a connus le statut de la femme dans les villes conadiennes. Ces changements ont été étroitement liés à des mouvements de bienfaisance et de réforme urbaine, et on devrait peut-être plutôt les considérer comme des «contre-réformes» ayant entraîné une nouvelle organisation sociale. Dans les données par âge et par sexe relatives aux familles montréalaises et aux «familles» dans les institutions, en 1861, les femmes peuvent être identifiées comme les instigatrices et les instruments du nouvel «ordre» social.

The present generation of historians and social scientists are delving into family life, particularly the "everyday lives" of the working class. They are attempting to document populations whose voices were long suppressed — women, the poor, the very old and the very young, the dependent and the exploited. Seeking new kinds of documents, they are trying to articulate the wider range of aspirations.[1]

Efforts to unveil the lives of hidden populations have brought to light certain ambiguities in reform movements of the early 20th century in Canadian cities.[2] "Reformers" uncovered shocking living conditions, but their prescriptions, we now discern, produced new forms of repression. People they sought to protect became victims of a new form of political and institutional paternalism — less personal, more professional.

As new institutions of charity were organized, from the late 1840s through the 1870s, the prime beneficiaries were women and children, widows and orphans, the sick, the aged, the blind and those of unsound mind. The recipients of aid were also victims of deep contradictions in the charity movement, and, at the turn of the century, targets of "charity reform" and the shape it took as a feature of the urban reform movement which had elements of social control. Women were thus instruments of both compassion and repression.[3]

In the ideology of reform, public health was a concept shaped by experiences of mass contagion. The reforms of the early 20th century were associated with awareness of the ravages of typhoid fever and tuberculosis. Fear of contagion stimulated recognition of an array of "social problems" for professional and municipal management. As cities competed for new industries, they became self-conscious about death rates; removed the industrial smoke from their public images; provided public baths, showers, and fountains for "the great unwashed;" inspected and vaccinated

school children to extirpate lice and cavities; and provided "drops of milk" for babies.[4]

Drawn together because of a perspective on women, all the articles in this issue of the **Urban History Review** offer insights into the ambiguity of urban reform. Bettina Bradbury discusses the condition of widows in 19th-century Montreal. Rosemary Gagan points to the ambivalence of a health officer's interpretation of death rates in Hamilton in the early 1900s. Dawn Sebire reports on living at the YWCA and the alternatives for young "business girls" in Hamilton in the 1910s as the clerical and retail sectors expanded their female labour force. From the case of the nursing school of Toronto General Hospital, Pauline Jardine details the changes that made the nursing profession attractive to women of middle-class rural backgrounds. Andrée Levesque documents the persistent conflicts among Montreal health officers, police chiefs, and judges over the industry of sex. She notes the occasional intervention of women reformers and the virtual silence of the prostitutes themselves.

Although none of the articles deals directly with the labour market, all identify discrimination in the workplace as a factor underlying those forms of dependence and marginality. Even the most vocal and visible women reformers expressed an idealization of a "maternal role" which devalued most forms of female labour. The evidence is compelling that powerful wage differentials meant that women could not survive independently or support families on their incomes.

Labour historians have documented a shift in the mid 19th century, away from family-centred work units which had incorporated apprentices, servants, and family labour and provided training, discipline, food, clothing, and nursing. The new factory system cast aside all responsibility for functions other than production itself. Numerous institutions of charity were founded to cope with "all that wreckage of the industrial system." The

asylums, hospitals, refuges, and reform school founded between 1845 and 1875, were expressions of a complex ideology of charity and discipline. The transformation was completed in the early 20th century by a second wave of reform — "charity reform" itself — which meant professionalization and the introduction of system, order, and efficiency. The problems of poverty were reformulated as problems of the urban environment and municipal reform. Should the sweep of urban reform be regarded, therefore, rather as a **counter-reform**, by which a new social discipline was imposed?

Each "problem population," perceived as a target of rescue and rehabilitation through discipline, required the deployment of women's organizing talents and the "leisure" of bourgeois women, as well as massive doses of female labour and immeasurable quantities of drudgery by the dependent poor themselves.

As an exploration of the target populations, we have traced profiles for 1861: sizes of the populations, their sex ratios and age-structures (see Table 1). Which groups were living in conventional households and which in institutional settings? The "pyramid" from published census data for Montreal in January 1861 shows a classic "bulge" of young female domestic labour and the rising proportion of widows in successive age ranks (see Fig. 1a). Of a population of 90,323, servants accounted for 3,314 (3.6 per cent), 90 per cent female and heavily concentrated around the age of 25 in the city's households, one person in eight was reported as "not a family member."[5] Another 3,318 people (3.6 per cent) were living in religious institutions, most of them as dependants.

Because the published census lacks cross-tabulations, we have extracted samples of "special" populations from the nominal census. From these samples we can sketch both conventional households and institutional "families." Scarcely anyone lived outside those two structures. While today one-third of all households in Montreal are one-person households — aged, students, singles, divorced — lifestyles of individual autonomy were virtually unknown in 1861.[6] Neither a man nor a woman could manage alone. Widows, widowers and young single men and women were forced to board with families, live in boarding-houses, or resort to institutions.

Represented in Figure 1 are four sets of conventional families at the same life-stage: that is with at least one child under two years old. Working-class households, whether French Canadian (Fig. 1b), Irish Catholic (Fig. 1c), or Protestant (Fig. 1d), had much the same structure — an average of six or seven people, most of them members of the nuclear family, with two or three per cent employing a servant. In French Canadian households there were more boarders, and it is more to difficult distinguish boarders, servants, and relatives.

High-rent households (Fig. 1e) show a very different structure, with a larger average size (9.4 persons) and a larger proportion of individuals outside the nuclear family. A striking image of 19th-century paternalism, they reveal a stronger asymmetry of age, with the husbands older than the wives, the wives a little older than the female servants, and the servants a little older than the children. A man with a high income surrounded himself with a harem of female labour.

The domination of sex and age is further complicated by ethnic relationships. While working-class families of each community lived primarily "among their own," the high-rent households differed — their husbands and wives were for the most part born in the British Isles, their children in Montreal, and their servants in Ireland. Half of wealthy Protestant households included a mix of elements from Protestant, Irish Catholic, Irish Protestant, and French Canadian communities. Where there were several servants, they were rarely from the same community. Commercial boarding-houses were even more motley, and the age profile of boarders (Fig. 2f) closely resembles that of the scattered boarders in private families.

The people on the margins of family life were forced from time to time to resort to institutions. Servants, boarders, widows, orphans or singles were at risk when their incomes failed, their jobs disappeared, or they became ill, feeble, or handicapped. The complex paternalism of sex, age, class and ethnicity evident in the profiles of wealthy families was inscribed in the urban institutional structure. The Lying-In Hospital, for example, was supervised by a committee of Protestant clergy and a board of prominent bourgeois women, operated by an elite of male doctors, and managed by three or four older women: it serviced women in the their early 20s, most of whom appear to have been unwed servants.

Concentration in the various institutions further illustrates the vulnerability of women, servants, and orphaned children. Residents of the Hotel-Dieu (Fig. 2k) included older nursing sisters, a younger cohort of sisters, novices, and servants, blind and infirm women in their 80s, young orphan girls, and still younger orphan boys.[7] Domestics accounted for half the patients and half the deaths.[8] There were separate wards for Irish and French Canadian patients, and men and women.

The age profile of unwed mothers and wayward girls (Fig. 2j) closely matches that of female servants in the sample families. From the complementary profiles of soldiers (Fig. 2g), boarders (Fig. 2f), male servants and immigrant brothers and nephews living in wealthy families (Fig. 1e), dare we infer an image of unwed fatherhood? These were presumably the parents of infants baptized as "of parents unknown," of which there were about 400 a year.

The institutions that cared for the marginal populations depended largely upon a female labour force. A newly established order such as the Sisters of Providence had a young population; its age profile (Fig. 2i) corresponded to that of servants in private households (Fig. 2e) and boarding-houses (Fig. 2f).[9] Older orders, such as the nursing sisters at the Hotel-Dieu, had women of a wider range of ages (Fig. 2k). In their workforce were servants whom they had originally taken in as orphans. The Grey Nuns (Sisters of Charity), as well as Protestant benevolent agencies, operated homes and services for placing unemployed young servant girls. A task still waiting to be done is to estimate the frequencies with which an orphan became a postulant, a servant an unwed mother, an unwed mother a hired wetnurse, a 'madam,' or a soldier's wife, and a soldier's wife a widow or a boarding-house keeper.

By 1861 the principal hospitals of religious orders were moving out of "Old Montreal" to healthier peripheral sites (none was really remote except an asylum and orphanage at Longue Pointe). New institutions were appearing with specialized aims such as the education of deaf-mutes. The garrison disappeared in the 1870s. French Canadian institutions regrouped in Saint-Jacques ward. Both French- and English-speaking institutions tended to concentrate in upper- and middle-class "respectable" streets, in response to gifts and bequests of buildings, and the convenience to residences of their benefactors and volunteers. By the end of the 19th century, Montreal was studded with imposing buildings designed for the triage, segmentation, and regimentation of marginal populations by the hundreds.

Tragedy filtered along a chain of complicated relationships between families and institutions, with devastating effects on the most vulnerable. Of the approximately 400 illegitimate children born each year, nearly all died within a few months. Of 82 infants born in 1859 at the Protestant Lying-In Hospital,

Table 1
Sample Sizes and Sources Relating to Figures 1 and 2
Distinctive populations in Montreal, January 1861

	No. of Families	Population	Household Mean Size
a Entire census population of Montreal	90	323	
Samples of families with a child < 2 years old[1]			
Low-rent families			
b French Canadian	59	425	7.2
c Irish Catholic	59	342	5.8
d Protestant English-speaking	56	339	6.1
High-rent families (annual rent > $100)			
e Protestant English-speaking	124	1165	9.4
Institutional "families"[2]			
f Boarding-houses	19	283	14.9
g The garrison: Royal Artillery barracks	-	227	-
h The jail	-	301	-
i Sisters of Providence asylum and orphanage	-	233	-
j Homes for unwed mothers and wayward girls[3]	-	293	-
k Hotel-Dieu and Mont Sainte-Famille hospital	-	374	-
l Saint Patrick's asylum and orphanage	-	245	-

[1] Identification of census families with children under two years of age was carried out as part of the author's research with Patricia Thornton, with funding from SSHRC, FCAR, and McGill and Concordia universities, and with the help of Quoc Thuy Thach, Paula Kestelman and André Duchêne. Methods and findings are reported in **Annales de demographie historique** (forthcoming 1988).

The low-rent samples are taken as follows: (b) from Saint-Jacques Ward, (c) from Sainte-Anne Ward, and (d) from lower Saint-Antoine Ward. The high-rent group (e) is a 100-per-cent sample, of Protestant English-speaking families who had children under 2 years old and paid rents over $100 per year, concentrated heavily in upper Saint-Antoine. The sample of 19 boarding-houses is taken from "Old Montreal" (East, West and Centre wards).

[2] Except for the Lying-In Hospital, all samples were compiled from the 1861 nominative census. Institutional populations are recorded in reel 1249, folios 15021-600.

[3] The population structure of the Lying-In Hospital is based on the 82 women who gave birth in 1859, from registers in the McGill University Archives. Populations of the maternity home La Miséricorde and the Bon Pasteur home for the wayward are the 139 present in January 1861 when the census was taken. Age-structures of the three institutions are very similar, and the pyramid is derived by combining the samples.

two-thirds appear to have been abandoned to the Grey Nuns as soon as the mother was released from hospital, whether she was Protestant or Catholic. All infants born at the Miséricorde (148 reported for 1860) were turned over to the Grey Nuns immediately. Scores were abandoned, as were day-old 'Joseph l'Esperance' and 'Joseph l'Escalier' on the church steps. Others were delivered with notes such as "Her name is Bridget." They were baptized and handed over to foster families, one of whom lived in Cathedral Street near the railway station; the father, aged 39, was a labourer, the mother a "nurse" aged 38, and their daughters were 16, 15, 12, and 9 years old. In 1861 this family reported to the census-taker the deaths the previous year of four baby boys named Joseph and four baby girls named Marie.[10] None of their foster children had survived.

The names themselves were minute symbols of the idealization of family life, the fierce intensity with which it was guarded, and the kinds of voluntary commitment and involuntary sacrifice required of all those on its margins. The unwed mothers were given institutional aliases such as "Magdalen" and "Mary of Egypt." The Sulpicians organized an association "de la Sainte Enfance" to assist solitary young servant girls, and the hospital ward where so many of them died was dedicated to the Holy Family.

Notes

1   See, for example, Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices in Canada 1869-1924* (Montreal, 1980); Bettina Bradbury, "The fragmented family: family strategies in the face of death, illness and poverty, Montreal, 1860-1885," in *Childhood and Family in Canada*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto, 1982); D. S. Cross, "The neglected majority: the changing role of women in nineteenth century Montreal," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 6:12 (November 1973): 202-23.

2   See, for example, J.C. Weaver, 'Tomorrow's metropolis' revisited: a critical assessment of urban
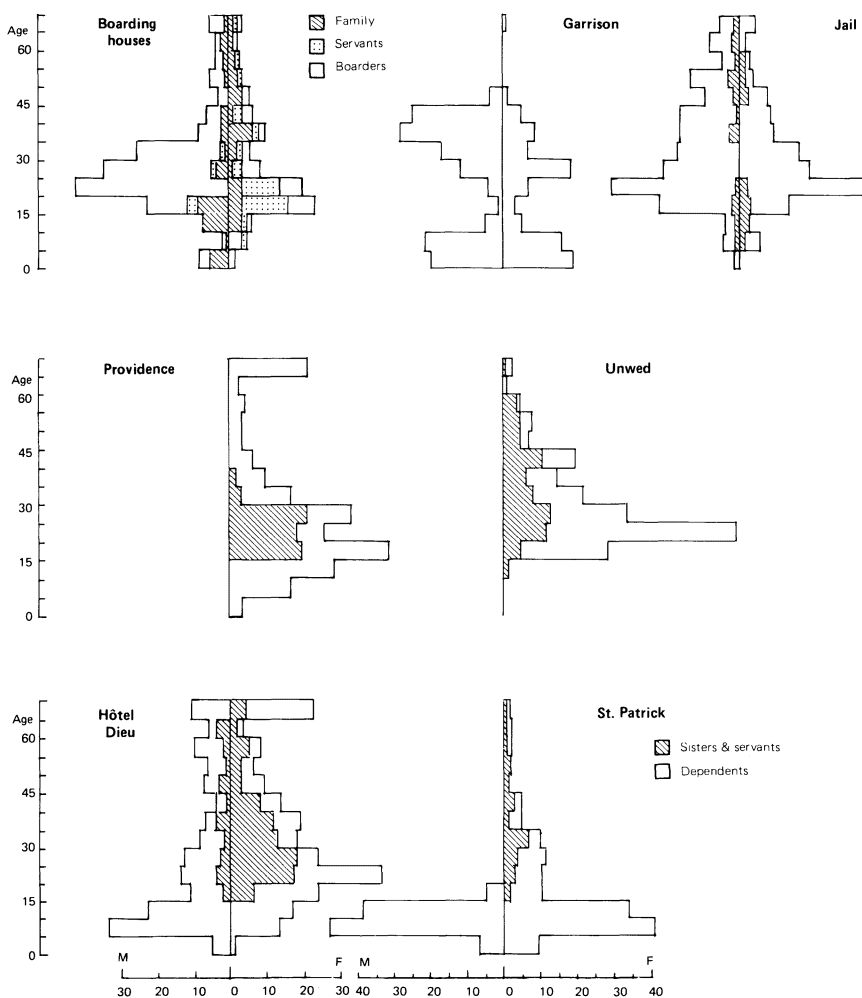
Figure 1
Population of Montreal, 1861
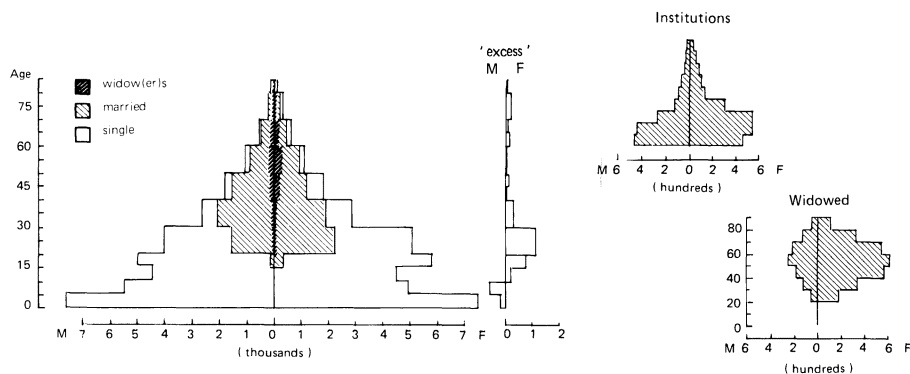
Conventional Families
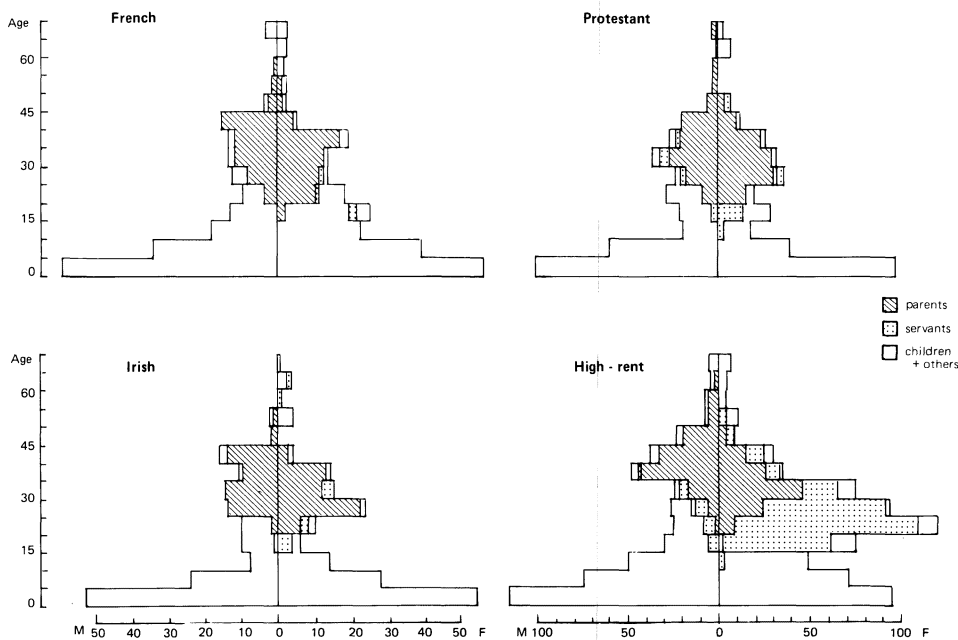
Figure 2
Institutional Families

reform in Canada, 1890-1920," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, ed. G.A. Stelter and A.F.J. Artibise (Toronto, 1979): 393-448.

3   The complexity of this role is captured by Yolande Pinard, "Les débuts du mouvement des femmes à Montréal, 1893-1902," in *Travailleuses et feministes, les femmes dans la société québécoise* (Montréal, 1983) and Micheline Dumont, "Vocation religieuse et condition feminine," *ibid.* 271-92. See also Marta Danylewycz, "Changing relationships: nuns and feminists in Montreal, 1890-1925," *Social History* 18 (1981), *Not an Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto, 1979), L. F. Hurl, "Restricting the child factory labour in late nineteenth century Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail* 21 (Spring): 87-121, and Huguette Lapointe-Roy, *Charité bien ordonnée: le premier reseau de lutte contre la pauvreté à Montréal au 19e siècle* (Montréal, 1987).

4   The first "Goutées de Lait" in Montreal was organized in 1900.

5   The question about membership in the family was variously interpreted and responses are not entirely consistent.

6   According to the 1986 census of Canada, one-person households accounted for 36 per cent of occupied private dwellings in the City of Montreal, 25 per cent in the Montreal metropolitan area.

7   When the census was taken at the beginning of 1861, the Religieuses hospitalières de Saint-Joseph were in the process of moving various units from the Hotel-Dieu hospital in "Old Montreal" to their new site at Mont Sainte-Famille. We have grouped these populations together. *L'Hotel-Dieu de Montréal, 1642-1973*, ed. Robert Lahaise, (Montréal, 1973).

8   Claudette Lacelle, *Les domestiques en milieu urbain canadien au XIX siècle* (Ottawa, 1987).

9   Denise Robillard, *Emilie Tavernier Gamelin* (Montréal, 1988); Diane Belanger et Luce Rozon, *Les Religieuses au Québec* (Montréal, 1982).

10 Census of January 1861, City of Montreal, Saint-Antoine Ward, folio 4914. For accounts of the institutions at various dates, see Andrée Levesque, "Deviants anonymous: single mothers at the Hopital de la Miséricorde in Montreal" (Société historique du Canada, *Communications historiques*, 1984): 168-84, Peter Gossage, "Les enfants abandonnés à Montreal au XIXe siècle: la crèche d'Youville des Soeurs Grises, 1820-1871," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* (40-44): 537-59, and *La Presse*, 5 Nov. 1988.