

Social Control, Martial Conformity, and Community Entanglement

The Varied Beat of the Hamilton Police, 1895-1920

John C. Weaver

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Article abstract

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Résumé

Cette étude porte sur la direction et la composition du corps de police de Hamilton au début du XXe siècle. Elle vise à nuancer certains jugements d'historiens sur la police en montrant tout à la fois que l'action policière

On the surface, urban police in the early 1900s embodied and enforced order. During a previous half century, police forces in North America had begun to evolve from haphazardly-organized civic departments into bureaucratically administered agencies with codes of conduct. In the larger Ontario centres, the police had been placed under the authority of appointed commissions in 1858, a half century before the progressive-era enthusiasm for government by commission. In Hamilton by 1900, the uniform and drill, the "telephone signal boxes" enforcing specified beats,¹ the many publicly stated missions for the police, and the statistics selected for annual reports contributed to an impression of the force as an exemplar and enforcer of civic order. This was what the elite expected from the police and, in the half century after the founding of the Hamilton force, the force itself had been moved toward outward compliance with standards of moral conduct. The firing of Chief McKinnon in 1895 for consorting with two women in a public hotel in Toronto was one symbolic turning point. His protestation that his plight was "owing to wine and not women" elicited no sympathy.² When in 1898 the force joined the international Bertillon identification system for identifying criminals headquartered in Chicago, it had obtained the latest fad for institutions aligned against crime and disorderly living. Fingerprinting was introduced in 1912.³ There was evidence of innovation and progress by the standards of the day. But had policing become an effective instrument of social control or even an urban profession?

That the police had been missionaries for orderliness was a compelling revisionist thesis proposed by British historians writing in the 1970s. These historians dealt with the policing of working-class communities in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ When labour historians of the trans-Atlantic world subsequently dealt with the police, they too focused on its function as protector of property, particularly corporate property during labour actions. United-States historians of the police,

meanwhile, stressed the disorder in urban policing caused by political tampering. They noted as well how the class mission evident in British policing had been diluted in the United States by ethnic participation and by an assortment of social service tasks assigned to the police when city councils cast about for ways of providing new urban services.⁵ Source material for Hamilton can illustrate all of the above interpretations. They amply demonstrate too that constables formally and persistently resisted certain imposed work conditions. Internal friction as well as hiring, training, routine tasks, and wages were once rarely discussed in the historical literature dealing with policing.⁶ This has changed. One goal of the current article is to follow the lead of Canadian historian Greg Marquis and to present policing as a job from the perspective of the constables. When considered from this angle, the notions of order, professionalism and social control are found to be inadequate descriptions for policing in the turbulent early 1900s. It is evident that there was a significant dialectic of order and disorder within the police force itself and the police were not entirely outside urban working-class society.⁷

What the established grand bourgeoisie of Hamilton wished for was a disciplined corps of morally upright and energetic guardians of public order. They wanted their commercial property and industries inspected at night, their homes watched over during their holidays,⁸ and their streets free from the nuisance, disarray and competition of unlicensed activity.⁹ These things the police did do. The question to be asked is how effective were services in these areas? Looking first at the calls for special attention to individual properties, the answer is that the police were not zealous guardians. Certainly special requests for extra attention to the protection of private property proved problematic. Constables felt that inspection of private residences should have brought in extra revenue for their benevolent (retirement) fund.¹⁰ They resented the pressure to volunteer for special duty. As we will see,

manquait d'efficacité et d'esprit de suite sur le plan de la mise en oeuvre des mesures de contrôle social, et comportait une dimension positive de service social. Pour les élites sociales et religieuses, il incombait à la police municipale d'assurer l'ordre moral, et ses membres étaient des « missionnaires intérieurs ». Mais les soumettait leur travail faisaient d'eux des défenseurs de la moralité peu conséquents sinon mal convaincus. Lorsqu'ils avaient à protéger la propriété privée à l'occasion d'une grève, ils s'acquittaient de la tâche, mais n'avaient pas les ressources nécessaires pour être un complément efficace aux mesures anti-trêve à visées plus larges. Bien que leur présence même ait pu limiter la criminalité, leurs activités de prévention et de détection du crime étaient sans effet. Mais ils accomplissaient d'autres tâches suscitées par la réalité urbaine : ils veillaient à l'application de lois et règlements touchant tous les domaines, du commerce à la santé publique, cherchaient les personnes disparues, ramenaient les enfants perdus, entretenaient un refuge pour sans-abri, et devaient faire face à toutes sortes de situations de violence, réelle ou potentielle. De tous les fonctionnaires municipaux, ils avaient la mission la plus vaste et la plus délicate, en même temps que la formation la moins poussée et le niveau d'instruction le plus bas.

there are very good reasons for believing that some policemen were lackadaisical defenders of property. There also were limits on how far the commission would go in having private interests protected by a public agency. An attempt by the Hamilton Iron and Steel Company to have its watchman appointed a special constable was rejected by the commission as incompatible with its authority; in other words, the institution's managers had developed a spirit of autonomy.¹¹ A classed-based analysis of policing in this community must be subtle and able to accept facts that point to a more extensive set of conflicts: conflicts between the constables and the administrators; conflicts between the administrators and special interests.

If special favoured arrangements for the protection of private property were problematic, those for the defence of moral order were too. Moral uplift groups, invariably headed by the civic elite, demanded that the force maintain what they perceived as morality. Their presence was modest and their influence minimal. From 1900 to 1914, the heyday of the social gospel and of well-documented crusades against alcohol, gambling, prostitution, and violation of the Sabbath the police commission seldom heard from pressure groups and when it did it tended to deflect their rare entreaties or heeded them only in the short term.

Led by two prominent Presbyterian ladies — Mrs. John Gibson, wife of a provincial cabinet minister and corporate lawyer — and Mrs. Samuel Lyle, wife of the minister at Central Presbyterian — the church favoured by the civic elite — the Local Council of Women in 1903 requested censorship of naughty theatre posters.¹² Alas, reported the commission, the city had no applicable by-law. A Citizens League petitioned the commission in late 1908 and early 1909 to assign some members of the force to the special tasks of enforcing the laws on liquor licensing, gambling, and prostitution.¹³ The commission promised to give the matter full consideration, but it may not have acted, for

several months later it received an appeal by the same group to close down the houses of illfame. This time the pressure brought results. During 1909 and 1910, there were substantially more raids on gambling establishments and houses of illfame. As well, the police magistrate handed out more severe fines than in previous years, but the court records suggest that the raids declined in subsequent years. Moreover, the vice crusade of 1910 seems to have required direct orders from the provincial Attorney General.¹⁴ To the shifts in policy which can be documented, there was the exercise of discretion and favouritism by constables. One recorded incident shows what could happen. Constables Aitkin and Creen discharged a prisoner under arrest for drunk and disorderly conduct because they knew it was his first offense. The commission ordered them and the deputy chief who knew of their action to adhere strictly to regulations.¹⁵ But how many more discretionary actions went unnoticed?

The conduct of the police force mitigates the idea that it was a consistent or even forceful agency for social control. When it did choose to listen to the moral order interest groups, it acted from cultural bias. Constables arrested prostitutes — less frequently the clients — swept up an extraordinary number of Chinese for gambling, and clamped down on “foreign” boarding houses for the illegal sale of alcohol.¹⁶ In reluctantly enforcing moral order laws, the police chose routes of least resistance and hauled in members of marginal groups. There was nothing modern about this, for the forerunners of the police had been doing the same in and around Hamilton in the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁷ In this regard, the police had not progressed. The sporadic and biased application of moral order measures modifies one critique of the police — their alleged social control function — and leaves another confirmed — prejudice. The matter is topical today in Canada, because the agents of law and order have been exposed too often as acting on racist assumptions. In that, sadly, they may only be showing themselves to be no better

than a maincurrent in the dominant culture. This was the case at the turn-of-the-century. Newspaper reports of that era spewed out racial slurs. After a 1909 raid on a craps game which netted 27 black males — an interesting episode in itself — the *Spectator* reporter remarked on the cheerful singing in the no.3 station house: "It was the strangest combination of crap shooters, coon shouters, and dark town revivalists that the police have met in many a day."¹⁸ Raids on chinese gamblers invariably were followed by reports with racist comments.

Some features of moral order enforcement were more ridiculous than others and the judicial system recognized this. It seemed foolish to many contemporaries that Sunday ice-cream vendors should be issued the "blue invitations" to stop by and see the police magistrate. The police also served summons on Greek peanut vendors. The law demanded these actions, but the police magistrate convicted very few and levied light fines. At the other end of the scale, the attacks against prostitution may have snared relatively few males, but it was certainly the case that the keepers of brothels were dealt with firmly.¹⁹ Even more complexity about social control is added by putting the moral order crusades in perspective. Not all pressure group activity falls readily into the category of social control. A Civic Improvement Association complained several times about the failure of many citizens to remove snow from their sidewalks and it got results.²⁰ A number of surprised residents found themselves in police court facing fines for lack of attention to civic responsibilities. On the one hand, selective use of historical evidence easily can make the police appear to be oppressive and more completely harmful than they were. On the other hand, the the omission of activities can strip the police of a record of useful if mundane service.

The conduct of the police during major labour actions and political demonstrations offers further and dramatic opportunities to

consider their situation in urban social relations. The Hamilton police were called upon to protect property and persons during strikes. The most publicized occasion was the November 1906 street railway strike. After strike breakers were bought in to operate the cars, strike sympathizers attacked Hamilton Street Railway cars property and places where the company had housed the strikebreakers. The police found that they could not readily separate antagonistic crowds from the strikebreakers, though the latter proved capable of self defence. On November 5, the first night of violence, several police were injured. Ordered by the commission to be more forceful in dealing with crowds in future, the police chief expressed reluctance. The crowds contained women and children and the force lacked the numbers to deal with a serious riot.²¹

The inadequacy of the force came to the fore again on November 23 when police near city hall were jostled and jeered at by a crowd. That same night, in an attempt to protect strikebreakers from a mob, a few police fired over the heads of the assailants and then lost a number of their recently acquired Colt revolvers in the melee. The following day militia units from out of town arrived and were used to enforce the Riot Act. Backed up by militia, the police charged a crowd which had not dispersed and people now were beaten by constables. The force defended these actions on the grounds that people had been given a chance to disperse quietly after the reading of the Riot Act.²² But the beatings were denounced by several aldermen and the Trades and Labour Council later called for an investigation of the actions of the police.²³ After the conclusion of the strike, the company paid each member of the force a ten dollar gratuity in appreciation for its efforts in protecting its property.²⁴ Certainly, the force had compromised itself, but the events also revealed it as a hesitant and ineffectual auxiliary of corporate capitalism's union crushing tactics. Small and comprised of city residents, the city force was not capable of large scale and sustained duty on behalf of a

major and unpopular enterprise. The company had used private detective agencies to get "intelligence" about the union and to secure tough strike-breakers. The militia had actually restored the order necessary for the running of the streetcars. In many comparable instances across Canada, local police were supplemented by outside forces.²⁵

One later incident deserves mention. In mid-July 1914, the deputy chief of the force ordered constables to break up a "socialistic mass meeting". He defended his action on the grounds that Great Britain, the United States, and the institutions of law and order were being defamed. The language, he claimed, incited riot. Public and press opinion seemed to run against the action and he was left on his own to defend his order. He later spoke with socialist leaders and said he would permit future assemblies if they were "of a quiet nature and not calculated to create ill feeling or disorderly conduct."²⁶

Local governments did not maintain civic police departments principally to intervene in labour disputes or crush political dissent, rather tight-fisted councils kept forces busy performing a multitude of services to earn their civic salaries.²⁷ If the roles of municipal police forces as defenders of persons and property integrated them into corporate union breaking tactics, then this situation derived from the provocative manipulative offensive of companies against unions and not directly from the civic police.

Moral order campaigns and strikes have secured prominent places in the writing of social history in Canada. However, to dwell on them as features of urban policing is to misunderstand policing as badly as to maintain that policing was largely concerned with apprehending criminals. To critics, police forces oppressed the workingman and "foreigners"; to its advocates it prevented crime and caught malafactors. These things they carried out, although they did them almost incidently and largely ineffectually. Not

only was the Hamilton force weak and muddled in the crisis of the 1906 strike, but it left powerful citizens dissatisfied with its responses to crime. Lawyer and politician S.C. Mewburn demanded that the commission "investigate the methods of the Police Department in the attempt to capture parties breaking into his premises" on the night of 9 July 1901. The commission concluded that there had been "negligence and mismanagement" on the part of the Sergeant Major and the Chief.²⁸ In late 1908, constable Duncan lost a day's pay for failing to report a robbery which had occurred on his beat.²⁹ The capture of burglars was so noteworthy a demonstration of "bravery and courage" that when it occurred early in 1908 the policeman involved was advanced one year towards becoming a first class constable.³⁰

Policemen could not have been expected to prevent or solve the majority of crimes. Sometimes they were at fault. Generally, they were stretched to the limits of their capacity and could not deal with every threat to property or person. The city council and the police commission added to their work. In addition to attempting to enforce order and interdict or solve crimes, the police, until the advent of mass ownership of automobiles, operated as a diversified urban social agency. Moreover, forces were financed by local governments which, though interested in order, were headed by civic boosters who measured progress in serviced land and not more uniformed guardians. The chief's requests for additional men and new stations were met, but typically the increases lagged behind the expansion of the city and followed a series of petitions from citizens in lightly patrolled areas.

Police administrators, dealing with councils which liked to see value, worked to demonstrate efficient and modern conduct. They were also striving to establish department to command the respect which the constables undoubtedly required in those few public contacts which required force. A

consequence of these goals of police commissions and chiefs was that, in the larger scheme of things, the police did help to effect the transition from preindustrial social behaviour to more orderly conduct supportive of urban industrial routines and power relationships. Nevertheless, the story of policing ought not to be reduced to this coherent and simple account. The annual reports covered up failure by presenting data which was misleading due to its incompleteness. The uniform cloaked foibles; the brawn belied humanitarian urban social services.

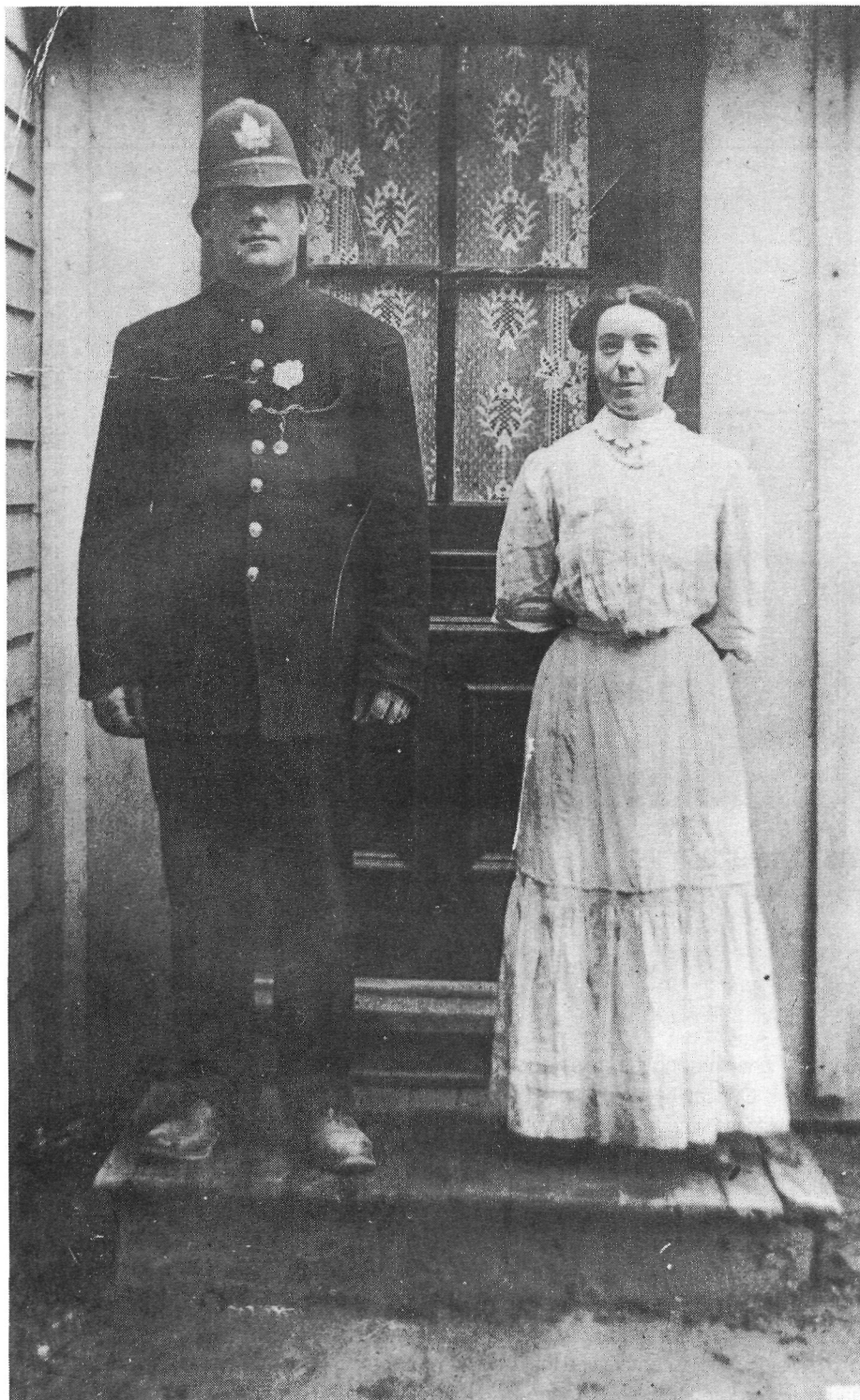
These humanitarian services were too large to be considered purely a public relations smokescreen. To most men on the beat these social services, even if originating to some degree with a public relations ploy, were popular enough to be seen as deserving attention. Once launched, they grew as any relatively desirable work will prosper within an organization. The remainder of this article will treat two topics. Most of it offers a further critical assessment of the myths of uniformity, finding some to be valid and others erroneous. Finally, it will look briefly at a pair of relatively unheralded activities of the civic police: sheltering the homeless and bylaw enforcement.

Military ideals by the 1880s had permeated the structure, drills, and rules of the force. Regimentation, regulations, incentives for advancement, and patrol routines worked to discourage intimacy with the community. Group photographs expressed eloquently uniformity achieved by enlistment requirements and uniform. The men stood shoulder to shoulder for the good reason that physically they were alike. From 1900 to 1945, most stood between 5'11" and 6'1" and weighed between 170 and 190 pounds with chest measurements of 37 to 40 inches. Unsuccessful applicants were slightly smaller on average. This observation and the very fact that measurements appeared on the application forms attest to the importance ascribed to size.

Although the nature of their work would change substantially, particularly in the 1920s as the automobile overwhelmed policing, the commission wanted constables to establish a commanding presence on the streets and to be able to subdue malefactors. Once on the force, the men were expected to keep in shape. Here again the aspiration for adherence to a standard ran into the independent views and conduct of the men. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, instructors conducted footdrills for all men at the armouries about every two months. In 1900 the commission heard complaints about these assemblies and entertained a recommendation from the men that Indian club drills and dumb bells be employed instead.³¹ Constables insisted that walking the beat kept them fit enough. In an effort to keep the men trim, the department in 1912 took out a group membership at that quintessential expression of muscular Christianity, the YMCA.³² Athleticism proved no stronger than a love of drill; in 1913 the commission dropped group membership at the YMCA "on account of so few members of the force taking advantage of the gymnasium".³³

None the less, a physical uniformity was achieved. The turnover in constables and the hiring of new young men as well as the walking on the beat probably achieved more in this regard than any drills. The desired physical attributes extended to outward appearances of full natural sight, speech, and hearing.³⁴ Constable Springer was reported as unfit for duty in June 1907 because of "an impediment in his speech". With notice that "his articulation had improved", the matter was dropped.³⁵ At least as late as 1914, constables were only permitted to wear glasses temporarily and with special permission.³⁶ Constable Meyers, suspected in 1913 of being a bit deaf, had to have his hearing monitored for a year.³⁷

The notion that constables had to be a certain physical type to maintain order remained axiomatic. Following a parade of the force in 1907, a reporter remarked on the gratifying



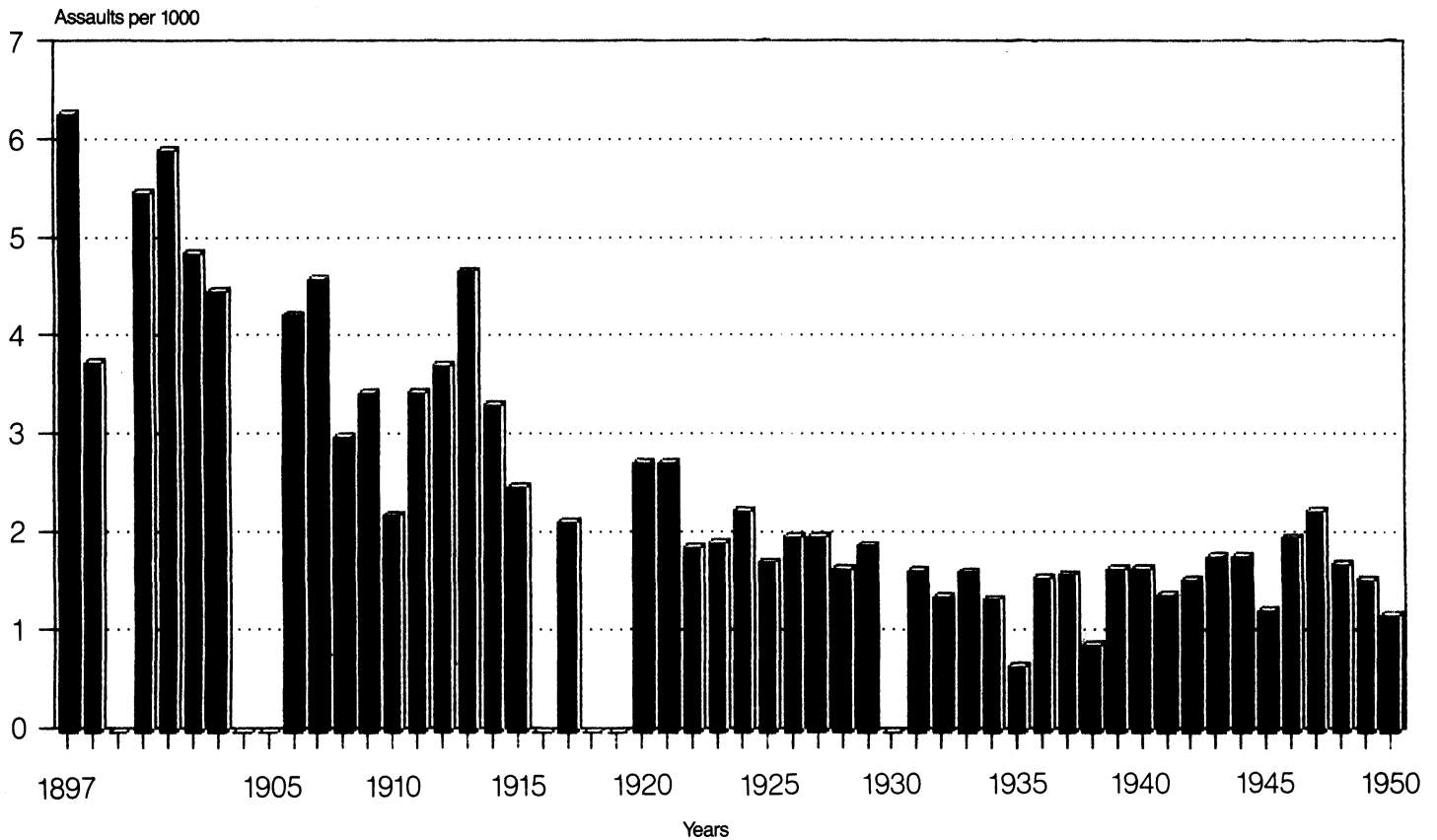
In the late nineteenth century, constables were hired on the basis of brawn; the police commissioners hired large intimidating men who could deal with the most common offense: drunk and disorderly.

spectacle of "big strapping fellows, who looked as if they could put up a strong argument in making an arrest and were a typical terror to evil-doers."³⁸ After February 1904, constables were to be outfitted with Colt revolvers, following the death of a policeman by gun fire, an episode which showed that size now afforded no protection from a few serious occupational risks.³⁹ Several commonplace routines of policing unquestionably demanded brute strength. There were risks to the job. A part of a crowd assembled to watch a road race on 30 October 1907 attacked a pair of constables who had attempted to arrest a drunk.⁴⁰ Data from annual reports suggests that only in the 1920s would the rate of assaults drop significantly enough to recommend that the city had become less a violent place (Graph I). Mayhem on the roads replaced punch-ups as a source of bloody urban violence.

A lingering assumption that the clash between order and disorder should be waged as a contest of strength uncomplicated by weapons puts the physical emphasis in perspective. A few constables on night duty had been carrying guns decades before it became approved policy, but the ideal and official policy of restraint, broken by a criminal in 1904, reveals something about an intolerance toward life-threatening carnage. For the first half century of its existence, the Hamilton force had relied upon truncheons and muscle which could inflict awful damage, though nothing like that of firearms.

There may have been more to the physical requirement than this equation between brawn and performance of duties. Scale and uniformity were retained as aids in building an élan that added to the satisfaction or rewards of employment; policing was not open to just anyone, but to a special muscular breed. In an age of bloody empire building, bareknuckles boxing, and flourishing amateur athletics, physical prowess and size linked into popular notions about manliness. This physical and martial atmosphere was not

Graph 1
Assaults Per 1000 Residents, 1897-1950



Sources: Annual reports and newspapers

associated, however, with frequent brutal interventions. On the one hand, given the thousands of arrests for assaults and drunk and disorderly conduct which could have involved violent encounters, the complaints against the police for acts of violence were rare. On the other hand, it is plausible to think of the complaints against the police as a fraction of the total sum of real incidents or to be disturbed that any had occurred. In any case, the records show that from 1900 to 1914, the police commission dealt with only five complaints against constables for use of excessive force. One episode involved Constable Duncan who roughly handled a

young boy when moving the lad's wagon off the sidewalk. Duncan had to pay for a broken crock, the witness' time, and was "directed to use more judgment in handling these small offenses."⁴¹

The remaining four actions concerned Constable Champaign who surely qualified as the force "bully" or maybe as enforcer. A hint of troubles ahead appeared in July 1898 when a Major O'Reilly complained that Champaign ordered him — "in a very offensive manner" — to move along as he was talking to a friend on King Street.⁴² "Move along" orders were one of the great sources

of friction between policemen and citizens in United-States cities. Also, it has been alleged that American policemen in the late nineteenth century had developed through steet and station house lore a practice of swift preemptive action against perceived danger; they responded to verbal abuse as if it were going to lead to physical assault.⁴³ Champaign appears to have adopted this strike-first-and-ask-questions-later approach. Dennis Bennett complained that Champaign had struck him over the head with his baton on the night of 5 November 1906, the first night of rioting during the streetcar strike.⁴⁴ Of course, the commission,

which took a hard line on the mobs assembled against the company, concluded that the constable had done nothing other than the circumstances had required. But a pattern of dubious conduct unfolded in subsequent years. Champaign broke Andrew Wilson's jaw while arresting him on 12 January 1911, assaulted Charles Layton, 24 May 1912, and "acted in an ungentlemanly manner" toward J.M. Farewell on 24 December 1913.⁴⁵ In every instance, a mitigating second side to the story could be found and Champaign was officially exonerated.⁴⁶ But he alone of the 60 to 70 man force ran up a record of accusations for rough conduct.

Male vanity and esteem were served by the uniform and identification with a cadre of like mighty specimens, for after all the young men who joined the force were indeed young men. Three quarters of those taken onto the roster from 1900 to 1914 were between 21 and 25; 21 was the most common age for successful applicants. There was a direct explanation for the age profile. In April 1900, the commissioners had set a rule fixing the age of applicants at 21 to 25.⁴⁷ In 1910, they raised the maximum to 30.⁴⁸ Youth was a factor in the high turnover rate in the Hamilton force in the years just before World War I. The discipline and the low pay for probationary constables were thought to have driven quite a number of recruits out of the force.

Other attributes set the police apart from the public, but height and age requirements were the most public ones. Whatever the managers of the force sought to create by recruitment standards, codes of conduct, and drills, they had actually assembled a mixed body of material with which to work; that body of personnel was never so uniform and so fully "apart" from the public as to jeopardize its image as an agency that could serve most citizens. Moreover, the personalities, backgrounds, and expectations of the men

who joined was varied; the labour market in the city was often in such a vigorous state that the force found that it could not readily secure and retain good men.

Labour relations or working conditions might have contributed to the departure of many men. What Greg Marquis has observed for the Toronto force in the same period holds true for Hamilton. Many young recruits on the Toronto force became dissatisfied with their prospects, rejected the authoritarianism, and could not endure the monotony of the beat.⁴⁹ Petitions from Hamilton constables to the board mostly dealt with wages and the benevolent fund.⁵⁰ There is evidence of well-organized and vigorous negotiation on the part of the constables in the years after 1905. The brief for a wage increase in January 1912 included "a tabulated account of the scale of wages paid in other cities, including Ottawa, London, and Montreal".⁵¹ In 1913, there were rumours of "a threatened desertion from the ranks by the men" over the refusal of the commissioners to raise salaries.⁵² The chief later denied that men were "quitting wholesale." Though there was no great exodus, three men had resigned.⁵³

Resentment flared up on several occasions over the fact that the men paid a greater percentage of their wages into the benevolent fund than did the Chief and Sergeant Major and that fees earned for attending coroner's inquests went into the same fund.⁵⁴ The work itself led to organized complaints and silent protests. In June 1896, 39 constables — virtually the entire force — protested against the reorganization of beats. They complained that there was insufficient time allowed "to thoroughly examine doors, windows, and gratings."⁵⁵ Constable Myers, found guilty of neglect of duty, had absented himself from his beat on the night of 20 August 1905. He stated that "the reason he did not go over the beat was that he had too many doors to try."⁵⁶ Using "the closet" seems to have been a common explanation for being absent from the beat.⁵⁷ In December 1909, the members of the force raised a petition for an additional

day off duty per month. They had been granted one day off a month at the chief's discretion beginning in 1905. The new request was granted three years after it was first presented.⁵⁸

Policemen who kept their noses clean were spared layoffs and unemployment; they or their widows received retirement benefits from the benevolent fund. A 1913 inquiry into their living conditions concluded that they had done well by their work, for over half appeared on the assessment rolls as home owners.⁵⁹ However, the work was as physically demanding, as tedious, and as vulnerable to speed-up measures as industrial employment.

In the early twentieth-century, Canadian cities, swelling with migrants and immigrants, were vital and distressing places where sudden and massive investment unexpectedly had forced the pace of municipal growth. Local governments coped with demands on existing services and new challenges by innovation but also by simple expediency. City governments built and hired at great speed. The boom from 1905 to 1913 had developed swiftly and civic officials had to scrambled to put services in place. In Hamilton, as branch plants and working-class suburbs mushroomed across the east end, the city simultaneously tried to modernize and expand urban services. Unglamorous but essential work extended sewers and strengthened health services. Unprecedented growth in the police force shared with many civic undertakings a drive for efficiency and professionalism, but also complications following expediency. For years, there had been civic expediency aplenty as council and commission heaped new chores on the force. Now, after 1900, hiring became frantic.

In one invisible way, the force remained nearly homogeneous during years of remarkable growth. It was overwhelmingly Protestant. Many successful applicants between 1900 and 1914 failed to cite religious denomination,

but of those who did 85 per cent were Protestants. In subsequent eras, almost all applications stated religious denomination. From 1915 to 1918, 90 per cent of the new members were Protestants; from 1919 to 1929, it was 94 per cent; as late as 1940 to 1945, it was 88 per cent. Baptists, possibly manifesting their cultural distrust of the state, shunned police work.⁶⁰

The Protestant domination of the force was not the product of discrimination in the treatment of applicants, rather there was an extraordinary abundance of Protestant applications. Official discrimination seems to have been unknown, but something was happening, because the Roman Catholic proportion of the city's population was approximately 25 per cent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶¹ It seems probable that initially the information that the force would be hiring circulated through certain associational networks. However, by 1906 if not earlier, the department's clerk had to advertise for constables in the city's newspapers.⁶² In Toronto, the police force had a reputation for having strong connections with both the Orange Lodge and the Masonic Lodge.⁶³ The tendency cannot be documented for Hamilton. It is possible as well that the city's Irish Roman Catholics retained an historically based distaste for policing, associating it with the Royal Irish Constabulary, several of whose former members served on the Hamilton force.

One could make too much out of the Protestant character of the force; it was not, after all, a matter of a minority group dominating an important institution in the midst of a hostile population consisting of an overwhelming number of citizens of another religion. In fact, moving away from the physical aspects which distinguished it from other residents, the force had much in common with the populace. The city was not only predominantly Protestant but very British. Recent immigrants to Hamilton were largely from England and Scotland and the

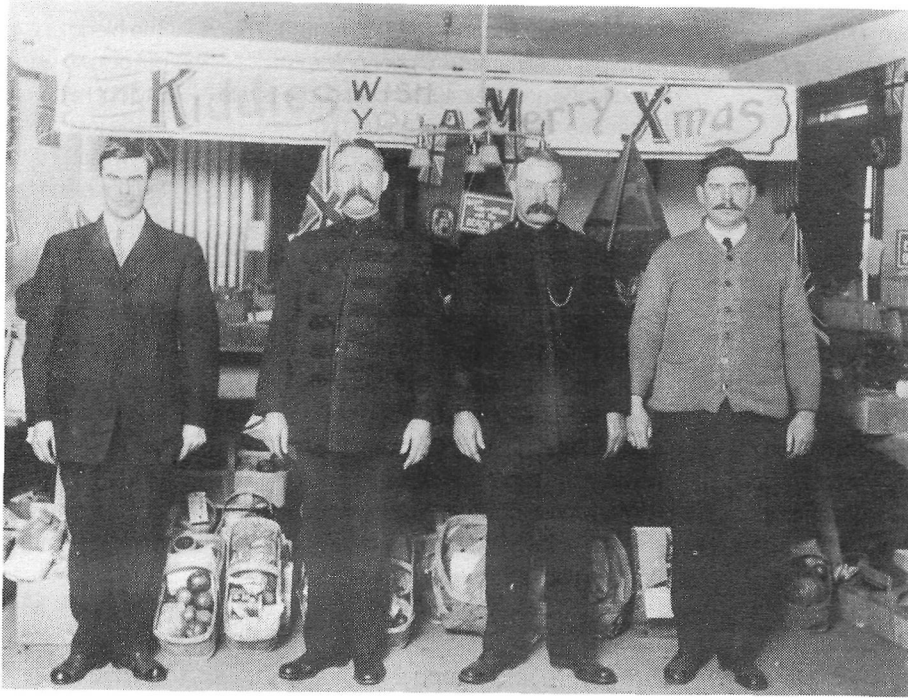
police force had a very substantial English and Scottish contingent from 1900 to 1914. Roughly four out of every ten men hired in the period were from either England or Scotland. The proportion would fall to three in ten from 1915 to 1930 and tumble thereafter to about one in ten. At all times, Canadians formed a majority, but the British minority was significant. The city's police force exaggerated and did not distort the religious and national traits of its citizens.

In the early 1900s, the city took in thousands of Canadian migrants as well as immigrants; to an astonishing degree, the police force roster followed the undulations of the migrant flow. Fewer than 10 per cent of the new men taken on in the first 14 years of the century were born in Hamilton, a proportion that would rise to 24 per cent in 1919 to 1929, and 44 per cent during the depression. It should be added that while few of the great influx of new men of the early 1900s had been born in Hamilton, 69 per cent resided in the city at the time of their application. The city of the early 1900s had exploded and police hiring captured the flavour if not the exact proportions of the origins of its labour force.

What could be of some importance in generalizing about the relationship of the force to its city is the fact that one third of newly hired constables in all time periods from 1900 to 1945 came from at least 50 km away from the city. During these years, it was the component born overseas that would decline, but there always would be a fair number of men who still were not "homers." In some of its cultural and demographic traits, then, the force was ambiguously located. It did not perfectly reflect the city; it was not wholly of the city. Neither could it be said that it intruded as an alien presence into at least the masculine culture of a British city. The department had hired matrons for duty at the lock up, but had yet to appoint its first policewomen.

The trade background and social standing of members of the force provides another measure of the youthfulness of applicants. Young men 25 and under were not likely to have had much opportunity to have formed a strong attachment to and success at a prior trade. Consequently, in the very dynamic first years of this century, the force may not have embodied the aspirations and values of the city's substantial skilled labour force. The organization that occasionally was instructed to intercede on behalf of employers was not predisposed to strong fraternal identification with striking labourers. Here again, however, ambiguities about the composition of the force enter the discussion. There were ambiguities too about constables' attitudes on labour organizations, for in 1919 and 1920 the commission crushed an attempt to unionize the force.

The hiring done just before WWI had implications for the character of the force for many years, because only after WWII was there a greater period of expansion. The average of 25 new constables hired annually from 1911 to 1914 would be double the number taken on during the best year from 1921 to 1945. Since the booming industrial labour market readily absorbed skilled labourers and clerks, the force had to draw heavily upon farm lads and the common labour pool. Over 40 per cent of the new constables (54 men) from 1900 to 1914 came off the farm or considered themselves common labourers. Unable to pick and choose as readily as they could at later times, the chiefs and commissioners accepted about a half of the sons of the soil and a third of the common labourers who submitted applications. The proportion of skilled labourers who joined was at its twentieth century nadir. When a few clerks applied, they had a very high success rate. Even at this early stage in bureaucratic growth in policing, clerical skills were in demand. The first typewriter had been purchased in 1895 and in that same year the commission ordered the chief to maintain a book for recording reports of incidents by "telephone or otherwise."⁶⁴ By



In December 1914, the Hamilton police department collected and distributed food baskets for the city's poor.



The Sherman Avenue station was the assembly point for the Christmas relief baskets in 1914.

The Hamilton Police, 1895-1920

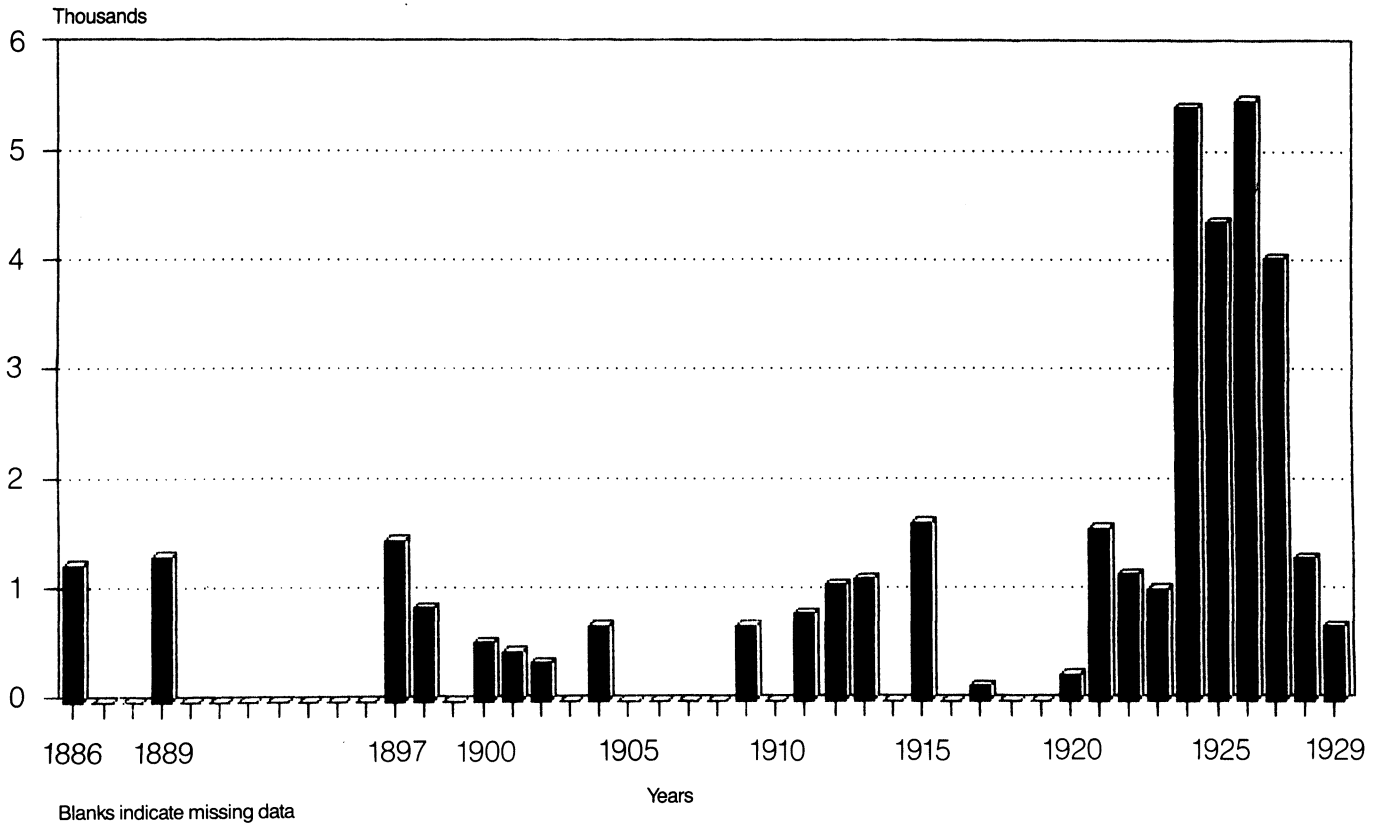
1912, it was necessary to hire a clerk-inspector to manage the financial and clerical duties which had grown too large for the police court clerk to handle.⁶⁵ There was modernization concurrent with inertia, overwork, and backwardness.

More than just large rustic youths donned the uniform. The movement from other forces deserves comment. More than at any other time, the local force in the early 1900s attracted men with prior police experience. Approximately 20 per cent of the men taken on from 1900 to 1914 had experience on other departments. It was not just men that the expansion called for, it was leadership material. Young recruits found themselves under the direction of old country veterans.

Out of 495 applicants from 1900 to 1914, 75 or 15 per cent came with prior police experience and their 40 per cent success rate exceeded that of all other groups of applicants. By far the largest body of former officers applying came from the United Kingdom (50) and they surpassed the success rate of any other set of men in getting onto the force. Twenty-two former British policemen joined the Hamilton department from the turn-of-the-century until the beginning of the war. Two of these men were from the Royal Irish Constabulary. Deputy chief Whatley, hired in October 1910, had seven years experience with the South African constabulary.⁶⁶ Whatley introduced revolver practice in 1912 and ordered the breaking up of the socialist meeting in 1914.⁶⁷

The blend of experienced men applying from out of town with raw recruits who lived in the city but had been born elsewhere must have made for interesting banter. About the conversations that would have enlivened the tedium of the beat or night desk duty, we know next to nothing. We can be sure that some of it was not harmonious and pleasant banter, for insubordination was a common internal charge. Greg Marquis is right to call attention to "the rough culture of the station house."⁶⁸ In November 1912 the commission suspended constable Coombs for 30 days because he had assaulted constable Wallace on duty.⁶⁹ A fair amount can be deduced about the ways in which, through their casual conduct, many constables eroded those barriers between the force and the city which

Graph 2
Persons Reported Sheltered, 1887-1929



had been set up by the administrators of the department. It must have been difficult to maintain a sense of order and discipline when the physically similar men in the uniforms were not the same from year to year.

The prompt hiring of youths on the margins of a strong labour market led to the employment of many who soon left the force. The turnover rate among new constables from 1900 to 1913 was over 40 per cent (66 out of 146). The average length of service for those who left during these years was 20 months; if four long term constables are removed from the group, the mean length of service for those leaving falls to 17 months. A similar volatility affected the Toronto force during the same years.⁷⁰ Nearly half of those who departed (29 out of 66) from the Hamilton force did so in official disgrace. They were let go because they failed to set an example, not because they had done any injury to the public.

From the 1880s forward, the department maintained two default books. One of these ledgers, the departmental default book recorded offenses of a more serious nature: insubordination and drinking on duty were prominent. The divisional ledger listed minor charges such as sleeping on duty and gossiping. The commission had to hear and confirm a complaint before the black mark was entered into either ledger. A default could result in a fine, the loss of merit points, and dismissal. Defaults expressed human frailty but also the boredom of tedious work and the desire of men to fraternize at work. The default books and actions against constables reported in the police commission minutebooks confirm important observations made by Marquis from his research on Toronto. "It was the very working-class origins of the police and the roughness of their culture that disturbed, and continues to disturb, liberal critics and police reformers."⁷¹

The men listed in the default books had been found guilty of loitering, appearing drunk on duty, entering saloons or houses of ill fame in uniform,⁷² habitual gossiping on the beat, and

insubordination. Constable Sharp found a way of relieving the boredom of walking the beat on the night of 28 October 1909. However, patrolling the city "accompanied by a girl" was not believed to be in the public interest.⁷³ The chief in 1913 vowed to put a stop "to the flirtations which some of the constables carry on."⁷⁴ Constable Springer dealt with the ennui of Sunday duty by playing cards in a boathouse.⁷⁵ Very tired and unlucky, Constable Merritt had been heard "snoring in a privy" some distance from his beat by two other policemen. He was dismissed from the force.⁷⁶ Often the chief and the commission dealt with seasoned constables who committed similar transgressions by imposing fines and issuing warnings. In November 1900 Constable John Clark confessed to the board "that he was while on duty slightly under the influence of liquor". His good record saved him from dismissal.⁷⁷ When Sergeant Vanotter brought charges of insubordination against constables Gibbs and Tuck, the board found them guilty. However, "in consideration of the circumstances under which the offence occurred and the good character of the men" they were let go with a reprimand.⁷⁸

Popular constables sometimes had public support. Newcomers were less likely to have built up a cadre of patrons; the chief and the commission seem to have culled out promptly what they might have referred to as "the bad apples" from the barrel of novices. The volume of defaults again indicates a human counterpoint to the bureaucratic drive for uniformity and discipline. The commission also upheld dismissal of several new men for poor health, including one young man committed to the "insane asylum."⁷⁹ Another 40 per cent of those leaving (26 out of 66) resigned, although the personnel records suggest that many had been invited to do so. The rest of those who left had deserted. Uniforms and similar physiques disguised the fact that the force was an unstable entity.

The real nature of police work was unstable too. On the surface, there was a fairly constant

set of prescribed activities, but within these the variety of human needs dealt with by constables was considerable. There were two operations conducted by the Hamilton force that illustrate that the city government added and removed duties not normally recalled today as police functions. In what seems to have been an unusual step, the Hamilton police operated an ambulance service. It was reported as early as 1897 and vanished after 1943. From 1909 to 1943, the police ambulance service made from 2000 to 5000 trips per year (Graph 2). In common with many North-American forces, the Hamilton department maintained facilities for sheltering those in need of temporary accommodations. It is impossible to tell when this began, but it certainly was established by the 1880s when there were over a thousand entries each year in what seems to have been nick-named "the doomsday book." These records have vanished, but a reporter saw them in 1910 and summarized the occupations recorded for some of those who sought shelter between 1892 and 1910.

... phrenologist, embalmer, actor, musician, doctor, steamship captain, papermaker, shoemaker, boilermakers, blacksmith, servant, vagrant, machinist, tailor, farmer, miner, carpenter, baker, coachman, carriagemaker, carriage-trimmer, cabinet maker, housekeeper, peddler, painter, plumber, locomotive engineer, locomotive fireman, metal finisher, rivetter, shipbuilder, boot black, newsboy and urchin, soldier.⁸⁰

This formal sheltering was distinct from an informal practice of the police magistrate whereby some of the city's homeless alcoholics and lumpenproletariat were jailed for a number of days on vagrancy or drunk and disorderly charges.

The magistrate sent people to the jail cells; the police sheltered people in separate but very rough quarters. For many years in the late nineteenth century, the sleeping area was an unsanitary loft with planks for beds. The

The Hamilton Police, 1895-1920

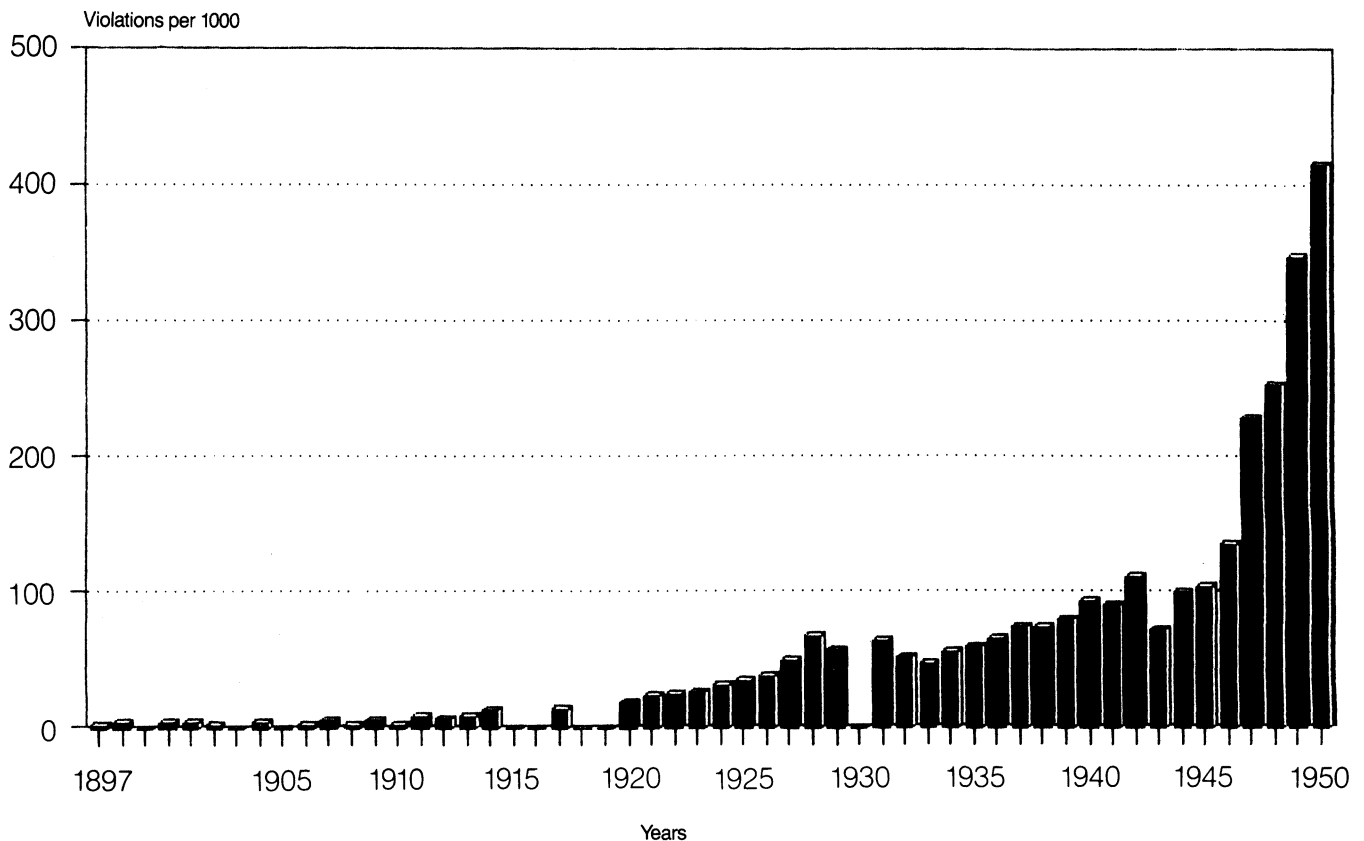
fluctuations in the numbers of men and women (about 10 men for each woman) who were so housed appears to have varied directly with the growth in the labour market. That is to say, the number declined in depression periods like the 1890s and soared during ones when the city's industries were expanding. The police shelter functioned as a common place of resort for men on the tramp who were drawn to reports of jobs or to those people who were "down on their luck."

The reporter who published a sample of occupations also commented on the character of police treatment of the men and women sheltered: "if those of the public who are inclined to talk unkindly of the police could see behind the scenes, watching the

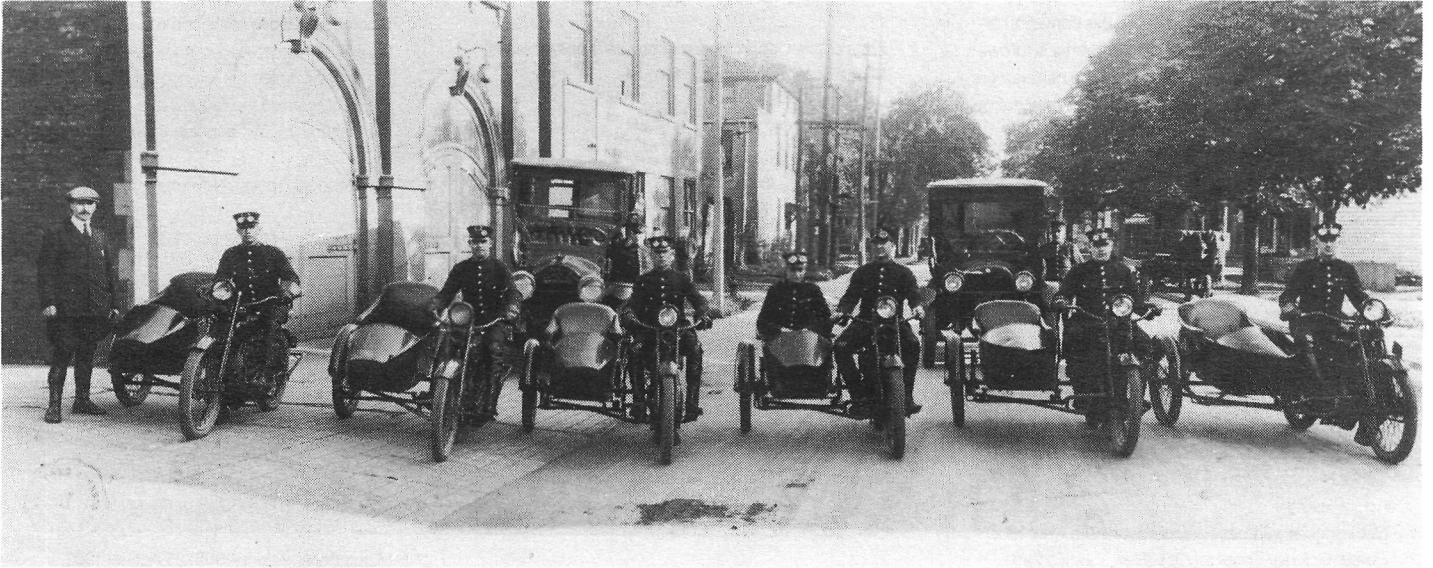
bluecoats gently assisting the doctor to the lodger's quarters, doling out the lodgers' free lunch, bread and sometimes giving him money at the break of day when he starts on the tramp."⁸¹ The service ended in 1929 and the police subsequently would direct men to the Savation Army or the YMCA. During the very hard winter of 1914, when unemployment soared in the city, the police department organized a civic relief effort. Moreover, chief Smith issued instructions in January 1914 that all station duty men were to furnish lodgings to all who sought it. Even after spare cots were filled, the men were to provide shelter. The chief countered criticism that a station would become a "hangout for hoboes" by claiming that most pleading need were deserving.⁸²

Nothing so drastically affected the nature of police work as the automobile. It eventually took many constables off the beat and distanced them from the neighbourhoods they patrolled; it also created new tasks which were folded into the general heading of "bylaw enforcement." This omnibus category of activity came to include parking and driving violations. Originally, bylaw enforcement meant serving a summons on a party who had violated one of the regulations of the city or of the police commission. The later authority had the power to issue licenses to cab operators and secondhand shops. City council generated bylaws dealing mostly with streets. It was the automobile which caused the numbers of street offenses to soar astonishingly. In 1886, the police dealt with

Graph 3
Bylaw Violations per 1000, 1897-1950



The Hamilton Police, 1895-1920



The automobile revolutionized policing. A 1914 bylaw made the force responsible for all vehicular matters. A motorcycle squad was introduced in 1921.

about seven bylaw infractions per constable per year. By 1921, the number had tripled (23) and by 1928 it had tripled again (64) (Graph 3). Murder in the steel city was a rarity, but traffic deaths after WWI had become disturbingly commonplace. As the police ceased to run a hostel and ambulance service, they turned to matters of public safety.

The civic police force constituted an imperfect instrument for the protection of property and for social control, which is not to say that its employers had hoped for more and that the police force had enforced social control measures stringently from time to time. The Hamilton police had managed by WWI to introduce a degree of professional rigour, particularly among the leadership cadre. In their backgrounds and day-to-day activities, however, the constables proved to have been a mixed lot with assorted degrees of dedication to their beat. David Johnson's appraisal of the status of American policemen is applicable to their Hamilton brothers. The police had the appearance of an emerging professionalism, but lacked its substance.⁶³

Their work also defies neat summary. When requested to enforce moral order, they did so without consistency or staying power; when asked to protect property during strikes, they did so without having the resources to conduct their normal duties and cope with major disturbances. When asked to surpress vice, they reacted with a few raids which affected a disproportionate number of people who were from relatively powerless groups. What they did do routinely on a very large scale was listen to citizens' complaints concerning petty theft or domestic disputes. Of course, they handled a number of assaults, but these were declining relative to the growth of the city and the force. Still, thefts and assaults were the abundant routine matters of criminal justice. But constables also spent time trying to locate lost children and missing adults, run a hostel on a shoestring, operate an ambulance service, and increasingly after 1920 cope with burdens imposed by the automobile. None of the other emerging city professionals — engineers, planners, or social workers — had to respond to so varied a set of sensitive urban tasks. However, what might

be called the culture of policing drew upon street wisdom, contact with some of the social elements feared by the urban elite, and the recreations, prejudices and values of working-class Anglo-Saxon males. Policing in the early 1900s was affected by concepts of military order and by technology, but it remained a trade fashioned more by coarse experiences than professional training. Therefore, an important and fairly recent question for historical and contemporary inquiry is not whether urban police forces have been agents of social control, but whether they have been and are adequately trained for their difficult and shifting missions within the changing Canadian city.⁶⁴

Notes

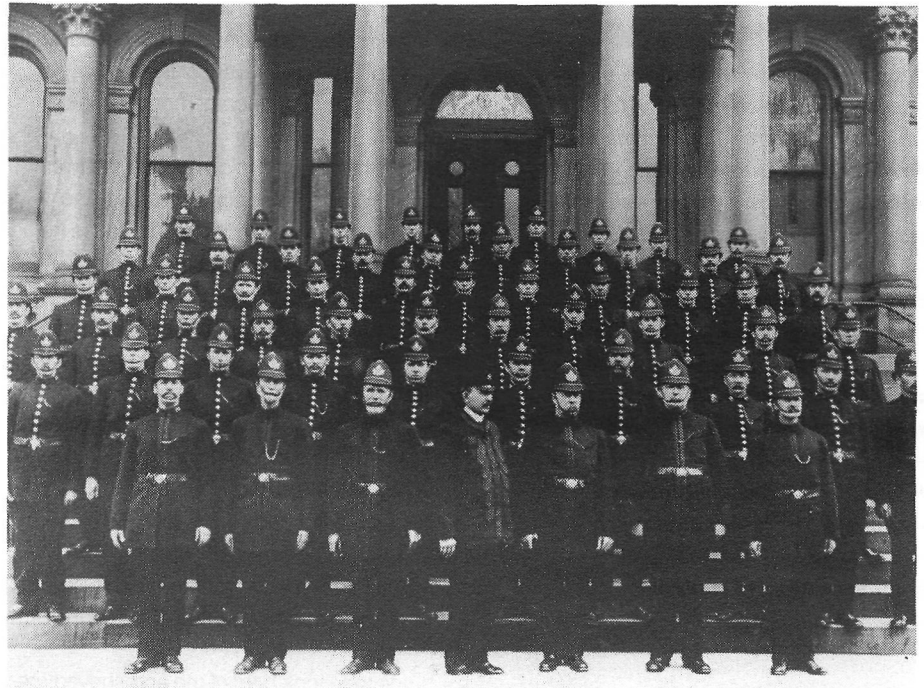
¹ Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections, Records of the Hamilton Police Department, Police Commission Minutebooks 1872-1913 (hereafter cited as minutebook), 11 April 1896.

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- ² Minutebook, 14 January 1895. First names were never cited in the minutebooks and this convention of referring to individuals by rank and surname is followed throughout this article. In many cases the names were not clearly written. Therefore a few names may not be correct.
- ³ *Spectator*, 2 November 1912.
- ⁴ David Philips, "'A New Engine of Power and Authority': The Institution of Law Enforcement in England, 1780-1830", in V.A.C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman, and Geoffrey Parker, eds. *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London: Europa Publications, 1980) 187-189. Also see Robert Storch, "The Plague of the Blue Locusts: Police Reform and the Popular Resistance in Northern England, 1840-57," *International Review of Social History* vol.20 (1975) 87-107.
- ⁵ See especially James F. Richardson, *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Eric Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- ⁶ There are some splendid exceptions. See for example W.J.Lowe, "The Lancashire Constabulary, 1845-1870: The Social and Occupational Function of A Victorian Police Force," *Criminal Justice History, An International Annual*, vol.4 (1984) 41-58. The ongoing work of Greg Marquis on Canadian police forces is notable as well.
- ⁷ The controversy over the relationship of the police to working-class culture and more particularly to the effectiveness of police reformers and the departments in establishing a separate police culture is well presented in two important Canadian works. See Nicholas Rogers, "Serving Toronto the Good: The Development of the City Police Force, 1834-1884" in *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*, ed., Victor Russell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), chapter 11; Greg Marquis, "Working Men in Uniform: The Early Twentieth-century Toronto Police," *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 20 (November, 1987) 259-277. To a degree the articles concern the sources of police conduct or misconduct that have disturbed liberal observers. Rogers focuses on the "apartness" of the police, on the notion of the police as a distinct group whose professional identity and social associations could promote intolerance or dangerous misunderstanding. Marquis calls attention to the working-class roots of the police and to the ways in which constables were a part of the crude and rough urban culture of their class. The nuances in interpretation are worth considerable attention, because they are pertinent to contemporary reviews of police work, recruitment, and training.
- ⁸ Minutebook, 4 October 1909.
- ⁹ For a petition for protection of private property see Minutebook, 6 November 1901.
- ¹⁰ Minutebook 25 July 1901.
- ¹¹ Minutebook 2 October 1912.
- ¹² Minutebook, 4 February 1903.
- ¹³ Minutebook, 13 November 1908; 31 March 1909.
- ¹⁴ Tom Irwin, "Moral Order Crime in Hamilton: 1907-1912", unpublished graduate research paper August 1990 34. The paper was based on a study of the police court records and newspaper reports.
- ¹⁵ Minutebook, 2 October 1912.
- ¹⁶ Irwin, pp.37, 42, 44.
- ¹⁷ John Weaver, "Crime, Public Order, and Repression: The Gore District in Upheaval, 1832-1851", *Ontario History*, vol.78 (September 1986) 193-4. The article is reprinted in R.C. Macleod, *Lawful Authority: Readings on the History of Criminal Justice in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).
- ¹⁸ *Hamilton Spectator*, 28 June 1909.
- ¹⁹ Irwin, p.52.
- ²⁰ Minutebook, 7 December 1899; 31 January 1901.
- ²¹ McMaster University, Mills Memorial Library, Special Collections, Robert L. Fraser, "'We Walk': The Story of the Hamilton Street Railway Strike of 1906" (Unpublished undergraduate research paper 1970), 24-28. This remarkable essay of thesis length anticipated much subsequent labour and social history and explored the connections between Methodism, the social gospel, and labourism.
- ²² Fraser, 72-94.
- ²³ Fraser, 101,140.
- ²⁴ I am indebted to Carolyn Grey for this information. She has worked on the Cataract Power and Traction Company records at the Ontario Hydro Archives in connection with her biographical study of John Gibson.
- ²⁵ Dahn Higley, *O.P.P. : The History of the Ontario Provincial Police Force* (Toronto: The Queen's Printer, 1984), passim.
- ²⁶ *Spectator*, 20 July 1914.
- ²⁷ The city council voted on the budget recommendations of the commission. It occasionally tried to use the police for municipal chores. In 1905, the council wanted the force to conduct a local census: the chief rejected the request and the commission supported him. Minutebook, 6 December 1905.
- ²⁸ Minutebook, 6 and 7 November 1901.
- ²⁹ Minutebook, 4 November 1908.
- ³⁰ Minutebook, 29 January 1908.
- ³¹ Minutebook 6 November 1901.
- ³² Minutebook, 7 February 1912.
- ³³ Minutebook, 11 April 1913.
- ³⁴ Minutebook, 5 May 1905.
- ³⁵ Minutebook, 9 June 1902; 25 August 1902.
- ³⁶ Minutebook, 27 June 1913.
- ³⁷ Minutebook, 10 December 1910.
- ³⁸ Unidentified newspaper clipping in the minutebook, 6 March 1907.
- ³⁹ Minutebook, 3 February 1904.
- ⁴⁰ *Spectator*, 1 November 1907.
- ⁴¹ Minutebook, 29 January 1909.
- ⁴² Minutebook, 27 July 1898.
- ⁴³ These propositions are presented in an interesting book which proposes that policemen have picked up most of their crime fighting and survival techniques by learning from criminals, acting on impulse informed by lore, and "reading" clothes and behaviour. In effect, the book concludes that the police have continued to secure some of their most effective practices from sources other than professional training and attitudes which would legitimately upset liberal reformers. See David R. Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld: The Impact of Crime on the Development of American Policing, 1800-1887* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).
- ⁴⁴ Minutebook, 30 January 1907.
- ⁴⁵ Minutebook, 21 February 1911; 2 October 1912; 17 October 1912; 24 December 1913.
- ⁴⁶ Minutebook, 21 February 1911.

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- ⁴⁷ Minutebook, 1 April 1900.
- ⁴⁸ Minutebook, 7 September 1910.
- ⁴⁹ Marquis, p.261.
- ⁵⁰ On wages see Minutebook, 8 February 1905; 13 January 1906; 22 January 1912.
- ⁵¹ *Spectator*, 13 January 1912.
- ⁵² *Spectator*, 17 February 1913.
- ⁵³ *Spectator*, 3 March 1913.
- ⁵⁴ Minutebook 10 July 1900; 25 July 1901; 7 July 1909.
- ⁵⁵ Minutebook, 24 June 1896.
- ⁵⁶ Minutebook, 28 August 1905.
- ⁵⁷ Minutebook, 4 July 1907; 29 January 1909.
- ⁵⁸ Minutebook, 8 July 1905; 10 December 1909; 28 November 1912.
- ⁵⁹ *Spectator*, 4 March 1913.



With the chief and sergeants in the front row and constables behind them, the force posed on the steps of the court house in 1914.

- ⁶⁰ The data on hiring came from the application forms and oath books of the department deposited with the Hamilton Public Library. These were linked with personnel records in the same collection.
- ⁶¹ John C. Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1982), table VIII, 199.
- ⁶² Minutebook, 31 July 1906.
- ⁶³ Marquis, 273-77.
- ⁶⁴ Minutebook, 10 April and 5 November 1895.
- ⁶⁵ *Spectator*, 6 January 1912.
- ⁶⁶ *Hamilton Spectator*, 17 October 1910.
- ⁶⁷ *Spectator*, 22 March 1912.
- ⁶⁸ Marquis, 270.
- ⁶⁹ Minutebook, 28 November 1912.
- ⁷⁰ Marquis, 261.
- ⁷¹ Marquis, 270.
- ⁷² Minutebook, 13 November 1908. A number of hotelkeepers made a practice of giving liquor to constables. Minutebook, 4 October 1909.
- ⁷³ Minutebook, 10 November 1909.
- ⁷⁴ *Spectator*, 22 May 1913.
- ⁷⁵ Minutebook, 20 December 1912.
- ⁷⁶ Minutebook, 22 October 1904.
- ⁷⁷ Minutebook, 16 November 1900.
- ⁷⁸ Minutebook, 25 July 1901.
- ⁷⁹ Minutebook, 15 October 1913.
- ⁸⁰ Hamilton Public Library, *Hamilton Times* clipping file, 17 November, 1910. I am indebted to Cathy Giudice of the Hamilton and Wentworth Regional Police Force for this reference.
- ⁸¹ *Hamilton Times*, 21 November 1910.
- ⁸² *Spectator*, 22 January 1914.
- ⁸³ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 143.
- ⁸⁴ The introduction of real training and its displacement of or uneasy co-existence with old habits and attitudes will be a challenging new area for research on the development of policing in Canada.