RESEARCH REPORT/
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Hidden Workers:

Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario

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THE SECRET OF A successful farm, wrote Canniff Haight in 1885, lay in "the economy, industry and moderate wants of every member of the household."[1] Haight was simply repeating the conventional wisdom of the age in his recognition that all members of a farm family, including children, contributed to the successful functioning of the household economy. Haight and many of his contemporaries, however, would not have applied the same description to families in urban-industrial centres. The movement of the focus of production from farm to factory, many social analysts believed, decreased the interdependency of the family and offered individual members a greater number of occupational choices.[2] According to this interpretation, a typical urban family relied

[1] Canniff Haight, *Life in Canada Fifty Years Ago* (Toronto 1885). Cited in Michael S. Cross, ed., *The Workingman in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto 1974), 34.

[2] Late nineteenth-century writers commonly saw their society in transition from a rural-agricultural setting to an urban-industrial one. This simple dichotomy facilitated discussion of new social developments and emphasized the threat to tradition posed by emergent urban-industrial life. Modern historians, taking into account the growth of capitalism and waged labour, have offered a more complex and sophisticated analysis of social change. Michael Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern, for example, construct a three-stage paradigm which claims that "North America shifted from a peculiar variety of mercantile-peasant economy to an economy dominated by commercial capitalism to one dominated by industrial capitalism." *The Social Organization of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA 1982), 364. Despite these more complex undercurrents of social transition, most late nineteenth-century workers identified with the rural-urban praxis. Historians develop comprehensive theories of social change over time; workers deal with the realities of life from day to day. This paper focuses on the second set of concerns.

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solely on the wages of a working father and the home management of a mother for its day-to-day survival. This notion of the difference between rural and urban families survived into the twentieth century and surfaced in a number of standard historical works. As late as 1972, for example, Blair Neatby wrote: "The urban family . . . bears little resemblance to a rural family. On a family farm children can make a direct economic contribution by doing chores and helping in many of the farm activities. . . . In the city only the wage-earner brings in money; children . . . become a financial burden who add nothing to the family income."[3] Like many myths of modern civilization, these perceptions of the urban family rested primarily on outward appearances and vague unfounded suppositions.

In the past fifteen years, social historians have uncovered patterns of urban survival which indicate that many working-class families, like their counterparts on the farm, depended on "the economy, industry and moderate wants of every member of the household," including children, to meet the demands of city life. Several well known primary and secondary sources describe in graphic detail the onerous trials of youngsters as wage-earners in the manufacturing and commercial establishments of large industrial centres such as Montreal, Toronto, and Hamilton.[4] But child labour was by no means limited to factories and shops. Children also performed important economic duties in their homes and on city streets as a regular part of their contribution to the family economy. This article concentrates on youngsters between the ages of

[3] Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto 1972), 45. E.P. Thompson writes: "Each stage in industrial differentiation and specialisation struck also at the family economy, disturbing customary relations between man and wife, parents and children, and differentiating more sharply between 'work' and 'life.' . . . Meanwhile the family was roughly torn apart each morning by the factory bell. . . ." *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York 1963), 416.

[4] See for example *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Working of Mills and Factories of the Dominion, and the Labor Employed Therein*, Sessional Papers, 9, XV, no. 42, 1882; *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor in Canada* (Ottawa 1889), (hereafter *Royal Labor Commission*); *Annual Reports* of the Quebec Department of Labour; and *Annual Reports* of the Inspectors of Factories for the Province of Ontario. Among secondary sources, see Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal 1897-1929* (Toronto 1974); Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1979); Fernand Harvey, "Children of the Industrial Revolution in Quebec," in J. Dufresne, *et al.*, eds., *The Professions: Their Growth or Decline?* (Montreal 1979), reprinted in R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Toronto 1982); Gregory S. Kealey, *Hogtown: Working Class Toronto at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto 1974), also reprinted in Francis and Smith; Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982); Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto — 1900-1921* (Ottawa 1979); and Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979).

seven and fourteen who worked outside of the industrial and commercial mainstream of late nineteenth-century urban Ontario, usually for no wages, but who still contributed in important ways to the day-to-day survival of their families. The latter part of the paper includes a brief examination of the special circumstances of foster children.[5] The article will describe the various types of work children performed, evaluate the contribution youngsters made to the family or household economy, determine the extent to which economic responsibilities affected a child's opportunities for personal development and social mobility, and judge the reaction working children elicited from middle- and upper-class members of society. Such an examination illuminates the social and economic structure of urban-industrial Ontario in the late nineteenth century, and casts light into the shadowy corners of urban poverty, business practices, reform mentality, and class structure.

Urbanization, like its companion, industrialization, marches to its own rhythm; it does not unfold in carefully planned and even measures. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Canada's urban population increased at roughly three times the rate of the general population, a pattern that struck stalwarts of agricultural society with worry and despair.[6] *The Globe* acknowledged the trend in 1894, but conceded: "The complaint about the continual movement of population from country to city is a good deal like a protest against the law of gravitation."[7] Urbanization could take several forms. Many sons and daughters of Ontario farmers, victims of land exhaustion and exclusionary inheritance customs, recognized the diminishing promise of rural life and fled to the cities in search of work and spouses with whom to begin their own families. In other instances, immigrant families, mostly from the cities and countryside of Great Britain and continental Europe, settled in Canadian cities in the hope of escaping poverty and oppression. In the latter case, fathers and

[5] The youngsters chosen for examination here by no means exhaust all possibilities. Children also worked in institutions such as orphanages, asylums, industrial schools, and reformatories. See Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum: From Child Rescue to the Welfare State in English-Canada (1800-1950)* (Lanham 1983); Harvey G. Simmons, *From Asylum to Welfare* (Downsview 1982); Susan E. Houston, "Victorian Origins of Juvenile Delinquency: A Canadian Experience," in Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes From Ontario's Past* (New York 1975); and Susan E. Houston, "The Impetus to Reform: Urban Crime, Poverty and Ignorance in Ontario 1850-1875," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974). These children have not been included as subjects of this paper on the grounds that they did not belong to families or households, in the conventional sense of those terms.

[6] In 1851, Ontario's rural population stood at 818,541 and its urban population at 133,463. By 1901, at 1,246,969, the rural population was still greater, but the urban population had increased dramatically to 935,978. Source: Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Report on Population*, 1, (1901). In Toronto alone the population increased from 30,775 in 1851 to 144,023 by 1891. Source: Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), 99.

[7] *The Globe*, 1 April 1894.

older sons often emigrated first and sent for remaining family members once employment and residence had been established.

All newcomers to the city discovered an environment and value system starkly different from rural society. While there is no question that life on the farm rarely resembled the bucolic paradise portrayed by romantic novelists, the city's emphasis on materialism, competition, standardization, and consumption constituted virtual culture shock for many recent arrivals. Skilled and unskilled workers alike adjusted their lives to the vagaries of the factory system, the business cycle, and the seasons, in an attempt to eke out a living above the poverty line. All workers lived in fear of unemployment, which struck especially hard in winter when outdoor work was scarce and the higher costs of food and fuel could wipe out a family's modest savings. Poor families huddled together in crowded and ramshackle rental units that lacked adequate water and sanitation facilities. For some demoralized labourers, the local tavern or pool hall provided the only escape from a working life of long hours, dangerous conditions, and abysmally low wages. In the face of these oppressive conditions, workers instinctively turned to the one institution that had served their ancestors so well for generations — their families. Although old rural traditions did not survive the trip to the city completely unscarred, workers still found their most reliable and effective support system under their own roofs. Within this scheme, children played a critical role.

In most working-class homes, children assumed domestic responsibilities before they reached the age of eight.[8] Their first duties usually took the form of assisting in the daily upkeep of the home. At any hour of the day, youngsters could be found sweeping steps, washing windows, and scrubbing floors. In neighbourhoods where dirt roads, animals, wood stoves, coal furnaces, and industrial pollution were common features, keeping a home even relatively clean and liveable could require several hands and many hours of labour. In the absence of fathers whose work kept them away from home ten to fifteen hours per day, six days a week, busy mothers frequently called upon children to make minor repairs to poorly constructed houses.

Other common children's chores contributed in a more direct sense to the day-to-day survival and economic status of the family. Youngsters routinely gathered coal and wood for fuel from rail and factory yards, and fetched water from community wells for cooking and washing. To supplement the family's food supply, children cultivated gardens, and raised and slaughtered animals. What home-produced food the family did not consume itself, children could

[8] Most of the following examples are drawn from Toronto Board of Education Records, Archives and Museum (hereafter TBERAM), W.C. Wilkinson Diaries, six vols., 1872-74; TBERAM, Management Committee Minutes, 1899-1901; Hamilton Children's Aid Society, Scrapbook of Clippings, vol. 1, 1894-1961, Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections; Susan E. Houston, "The Impetus to Reform;" and Alison Prentice and Susan Houston, eds., *Family, School and Society in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto 1975).

Young girls scrubbing front doorstep. Source: unknown.

sell to neighbours or at the market for a small profit. In an age when sickness could spell disaster for a family, youngsters provided care for ill family members and sometimes offered themselves as substitute workers. It was also common for older children to assume the duties of a deceased parent, girls frequently taking up mother's responsibilities and boys stepping into father's shoes. On occasion, parents lent their children's services to neighbours in return for nominal remuneration or future favours. Although youngsters who worked in and around their homes did not normally encounter the dangers associated with industrial life, in at least one case a young Ottawa lad who was gathering wood chips outside of a lumber mill succumbed to his youthful curiosity and wandered into the plant only to meet his death on an unguarded mechanical saw.[9]

Children filled useful roles at home in at least one other crucial area — babysitting. Many working-class families found it necessary to depend on

[9] Testimony of John Henderson, manager for J. McLaren & Company Lumber Merchants, Ottawa, *Royal Labor Commission*, Ontario evidence, 1137-9.

Bringing home the coal. Credit: Public Archives of Canada /PA-118224.

second and third wage-earners to keep themselves above the poverty line. In some cases, especially in families where children were too young for formal employment, economic need forced mothers to set aside their daytime domestic duties and take up employment outside the home. The introduction of machinery in sectors such as food processing and the textile industry created jobs for unskilled female labour, although it also depressed the general wage level and guaranteed that female earnings in particular would remain pitifully low. Such industries, along with retail stores, welcomed this cheap labour force with open arms. Wage-earning mothers, consequently, placed even greater housekeeping and other domestic responsibilities onto the shoulders of their children. Most importantly, mothers enlisted older children to babysit younger siblings in their absence. In cities where day nurseries were available, even the smallest cost proved prohibitive for many working-class families.[10] These duties took on particular importance in households headed by single parents, male and female.

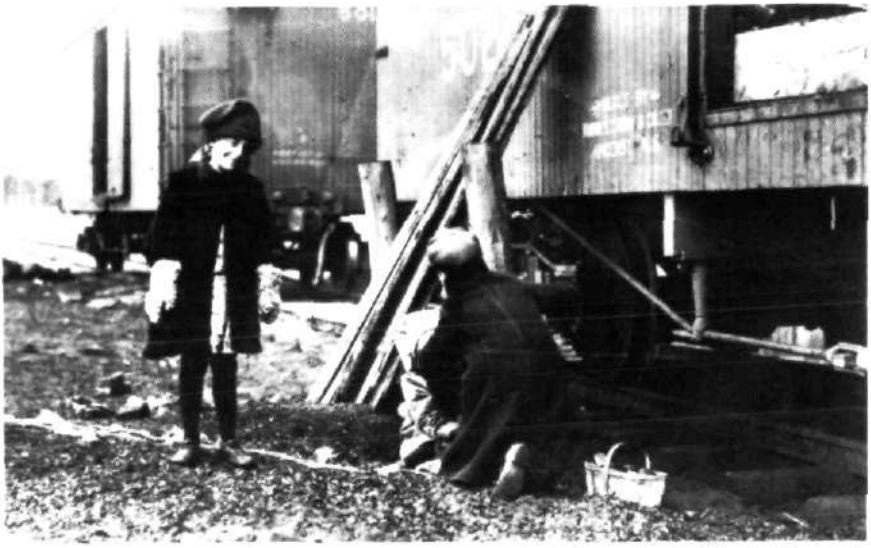
[10] "Annals of the Poor (The Creche)," *The Globe*, 4 January 1897.

In most cases, children's duties around the home were divided according to sex. Girls more often babysat and attended to housekeeping matters within the confines of the home while boys commonly performed tasks outside the home. This practice was consistent with both rural traditions and the sexual discrimination characteristic of urban life. A typical example can be found in the diary of Toronto truant officer W.C. Wilkinson. Paying a call on the Stone family in 1872, Wilkinson discovered thirteen-year-old Elizabeth cleaning house with her mother while her eleven-year-old brother Thomas was busy helping their father in the garden.[11] Sexual categorization, however, was not impenetrable. Families that lacked children of both sexes simply handed chores over to the most capable and available member. In these instances, domestic necessity conquered sexual stereotyping.

The frequency and regularity with which working-class families called on their younger members to assist in a wide variety of domestic duties highlights the continuing importance of children as active contributors to the family economy. This practice also reveals that working-class families could not rely on industrial earnings alone to provide all the goods and services demanded by urban life. The entrance of mothers into the wage-earning work force undoubtedly disrupted traditional family relations. But the family responded rationally by shifting responsibilities to other members. Single-parent families adjusted in the same manner. Children's chores usually corresponded with a sexual division of labour, except in cases where this was impractical or impossible. Unfortunately, not all observers recognized the significance of youngsters' work in and around the home. Truant officer Wilkinson, for example, complained in 1873 that "in many instances children were kept at home for the

Children gathering coal cinders from a Toronto rail yard. Note the modified baby carriage. Credit: Public Archives of Canada/C-85579.

[11] TBERAM, Wilkinson Diaries, vol. 2, entry for 7 October 1872.



Children gathering coal cinders from a Toronto rail yard. Credit: Public Archives of Canada/PA-118222.

most *frivolous* reasons by their parents, such as to run messages, assist in domestic duties, cut wood, and many such reasons that I am compelled to accept, although reluctantly, as the law at present only requires the[ir] attendance four months in the year."[12] (emphasis added)

Working-class parents had more pressing concerns than truancy on their minds when they kept children at home to perform important economic duties. In some cases, children's domestic responsibilities included participation in home-centred industries that formed a branch of the notorious "sweat shop" system. The term sweat shop usually described a tiny workplace, sometimes attached to a residence, where a predominantly female and child labour force toiled long hours under contract, or subcontract, producing saleable materials for large retail or wholesale outlets. A federal government inquiry in 1882 found sweat shops "sometimes being in the attic of a four-story building, at others in a low, damp basement where artificial light has to be used during the entire day."[13] The same investigation noted: "The rule, apparently which is observed by employers, is, not how many hands should occupy a certain room or building, but how many can be got into it."[14] The ready-made clothing industry, in particular, depended on sweated labour. In the simplest terms, this

[12] Toronto Board of Education, *Annual Report of the Local Superintendent of the Public Schools* (Toronto 1874), 45.

[13] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Working of Mills and Factories*, 4.

[14] *Ibid.*, 7. See also *The Globe*, 23 September 1871, and "Toronto and the Sweating System," *The Daily Mail and Empire*, 9 October 1897 (part two).

work extended and exploited the traditional role of women and girls as sewers for their own families. Workers discovered that they could earn a few extra dollars through this nefarious trade by fulfilling contracts in their own homes, or by bringing home after a regular shift unfinished material produced in a factory or workshop located elsewhere. In both cases, children accounted for a substantial portion of the work force.

The Globe found this to be a common practice among working-class families in Toronto as early as the 1860s:

> . . . frequently the industrious efforts of a whole family are employed to fill the orders of the employers. Often, in such instances, the child of eight or nine summers is made a source of material help in the construction of the coarser descriptions of men's garments that are now prepared for the ready-made clothing market. In the same way the female head of the house, a group of daughters, and, perhaps, the male members of the family, if no better occupation is available, turn in to assist the father in adding to their means of support.

The same article described one family that worked on clothing contracts sixteen to eighteen hours per day, six days a week.[15]

More than decade later, in 1882, a federal government inquiry studied the conditions of 324 married female workers. The investigation revealed that 272 women performed most of their work in their own homes. The women

Sewing at home. Note strong family resemblance. Credit: Desmond Morton Collection.

[15] "Female Labour in Toronto: Its Nature — Its Extent — Its Reward," *The Globe*, 28 October 1868.

explained that in this way they could elicit the assistance of older children and watch over infants at the same time. Of the original 324 women, 255 worked in the clothing industry.[16] Three years later, federal inspector A.H. Blackeby reported that he encountered difficulty amassing information on the wool industry specifically because so much of the work was done in private homes.[17]

In 1896, a petition from the Trades and Labour Congress moved the federal government to appoint Alexander Whyte Wright to undertake a thorough investigation of the sweating system in Canada. Wright visited factories, workshops, and private homes in Halifax, Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Hamilton. He found appalling conditions and paltry wages to be the rule in factories and shops but discovered that workers toiled longer, earned less, and suffered more in their own homes: "When a comparison is made . . . between the condition of the people who work in contractors' shops and the conditions which attend the making of garments in private homes, the advantage is, in a marked degree, in favour of the former system."[18] Wright encountered scores of children working in excess of 60 hours per week in converted bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms. Home labourers competed with contractors for available work, thus, in Wright's words, "bringing the wages down to the lowest point at which the employees can afford to work."[19] Furthermore, most employers paid by the piece, a practice that encouraged longer hours and a faster pace of work, and discouraged regular rest periods. Wright's report also revealed that home workers occasionally needed to carry damaged materials to the employers, "frequently losing half a day because of having to make an alteration which in actual work only requires a few minutes of time. To avoid this they are often willing to submit to a fine or reduction of wages far in excess of what the making of the alteration would be worth to them."[20] Even in unionized shops where hours of labour were restricted, Wright discovered workers anxious to bring material home to accumulate some precious overtime. "The advantage of having the assistance of their families," he pointed out, "is a further inducement."[21]

Four years after Wright filed his report, a young Mackenzie King undertook a similar investigation on behalf of the postmaster-general. King found sweat shop conditions to be the norm in the carrying out of government clothing contracts: ". . . by far the greatest part of the Government clothing was made by women and girls in their homes or in the shops as the hired hands of subcontractors. . . . In some cases the different members of the family assisted in

[16] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Working of Mills and Factories*, 10-1.
[17] "Report of A.H. Blackeby on the State of the Manufacturing Industries of Ontario and Quebec," XVIII, Sessional Papers, 10, Report 37, 1885, 31.
[18] Alexander Whyte Wright, *Report Upon the Sweating System in Canada*, Sessional Papers, 2, XXIX, no. 61, 1896, 8.
[19] *Ibid.*, 9.
[20] *Ibid.*, 11.
[21] *Ibid.*, 8.

Boy with rough material on Queen Street, Toronto. Credit: Public Archives of Canada/PA-70110.

the sewing, and in a great many cases, one, two, three or more strangers, usually young women or girls, were brought from the neighbourhood and paid a small sum for their services by the week or piece."[22] Like Wright before him, King discovered that private homes, not factories or workshops, exhibited the harshest working conditions. Children routinely assisted in the sewing process and worked as carters carrying material between home and supply houses. King also reported that home workers were required to supply their own thread, a cost which he claimed composed "a substantial fraction of the gross earnings received."[23] Many shop workers brought unfinished material home at night and completed their work with the help of their families. King concluded: "It was pretty generally conceded that, except by thus working overtime, or by the profits made by the aid of hired help, there was very little to be earned by a week's work."[24]

Home sweat shop workers received no protection from government. Although the Ontario Factories Act of 1884 and the Shops Act of 1888 restricted the age and hours of child workers in industrial and commercial establishments, both pieces of legislation specifically exempted family work from any type of regulation. Thus, in 1900, Mackenzie King could write:

[22] W.L. Mackenzie King, *Report to the Honourable the Postmaster General of the Methods adopted in Canada in the Carrying Out of Government Clothing Contracts* (Ottawa 1900), 10.
[23] *Ibid.*, 19.
[24] *Ibid.*

"When clothing has been let out to individuals to be made up in their homes, with the assistance only of the members of the household, there was absolutely no restriction as to the conditions under which the work of manufacturer had to be carried on."[25] When the Ontario government's Committee on Child Labor reported seven years later, the situation looked much the same. Wrote the commissioners: "In poor neighbourhoods in cities the practice of employing children [in private homes] is very common. The sweat shop has been termed the nursery of child labour."[26] Unlike Wright and King, these government inspectors seemed not to realize that these conditions were not the creation of cruel parents who enjoyed subjecting their children to long hours of mind-numbing work. The iniquity lay in the callousness of a competitive economic system that mercilessly squeezed workers for the last drop of their labour power while building private fortunes for retail outlet owners, such as the renowned Canadian businessman Timothy Eaton. Business practice, not family practice, underlay this widespread suffering.

The example of the residential sweat shop demonstrates that the rural tradition of family work in the home survived in the city. But new circumstances forced this old custom to undergo a severe transformation. In one sense, the image of parents and children working together invites a comparison to the shared family responsibilities characteristic of rural society. But the urban sweat shop was a long way from the country quilting-bee. Clothing contracts violated the privacy of working-class homes and subjected adults and children to strenuous conditions over which they had little influence. Long hours of tedious labour brought a minimal return. Workers danced to the demands of a consumer market while competing contractors systematically drove wages down. Middlemen turned the sweat shop system into a chain of command that featured lower wages and harder working conditions with each successive downward link. Naturally, children occupied the bottom position in the work hierarchy. Yet it is apparent from the evidence collected by Wright and King that child workers proved to be the decisive factor in the economic feasibility of many contracts. This observation exposes the cruel paradox of child workers in a competitive labour market: the more the sweating system exploited the free or cheap labour of children, the less of a chance adults faced of ever receiving a fair wage for their own work.

In other areas, working-class families used their homes as bases for personal service industries. Young children carried laundry to and from their homes while older siblings assisted in washing and ironing. In cities where young single men and working fathers temporarily separated from their families composed a significant proportion of the population, the services of room and board were always in wide demand. Family-run boarding houses daily called on children to change sheets, clean rooms, serve meals, and wash dishes. Some homes took in extra customers, or "mealers," at the dinner hour,

[25] *Ibid.*, 28.
[26] Ontario, *Report of Committee on Child Labour 1907* (Toronto 1907), 5.

often resulting in several sittings per day. In other instances, children prepared and carried homemade lunches to workers at their place of employment. One Hamilton woman who as a child helped her aunt and uncle operate a boarding house reminisced about her youth with telling detail: "Others were a family. We were a business. . . . I couldn't take friends home. . . . I always seemed to be so busy working that I never had time to really make friends."[27] Although these home-centred industries rose above the conditions of residential sweat shops, child workers still made significant contributions, and sacrifices, on a regular basis.

Reaching beyond the perimeters of the home, many working-class children added to the family coffers through their participation in a variety of street trades. Nineteenth-century families immensely enjoyed socializing in public, and downtown streets always bristled with activity and excitement.[28] A police survey of 1887 uncovered approximately 700 youngsters, the vast majority of them boys, who regularly performed, polished shoes, or sold newspapers, pencils, shoelaces, fruit, or other small wares on the streets of Toronto.[29]

Two Toronto bootblacks demonstrate their trade. Credit: Public Archives of Canada /C-4239.

[27] Interview conducted by Jane Synge. Cited in Irving Abella and David Millar, eds., *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto 1978), 98. See also C.S. Clark, *Of Toronto the Good* (Montreal 1898), 62.

[28] Conyngham Crawford Taylor, *Toronto "Called Back" From 1888 to 1847, and the Queen's Jubilee* (Toronto 1888), 189.

[29] Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), J.J. Kelso Papers, MG30 C97, vol. 4.

W. McVitty, chief constable of Ottawa, reported in 1890 that the streets of the capital city supported approximately 175 newsboys but very few girls.[30] Some children, under instruction from their parents, simply begged for money from passers-by.[31] There is plentiful evidence as well of teenage prostitution.[32] Collectively, these youngsters composed a unique and vibrant street culture which occasionally exhibited elements of ritual and hierarchy. Of all the young street vendors, one group stood out — the newsboys.

Newsboys were serious businessmen, not simply charity cases trying to scrape together a few pennies like the other waifs and strays common to city streets. Some of these lads lived on their own in cheap boarding houses or at the Newsboys' Lodging and Industrial Home in Toronto, or its Catholic counterpart, the St. Nicholas Home. These privately-run institutions attempted to provide independent newsboys with decent accommodation and moral and industrial training. At the Newsboys' Lodging and Industrial Home, 10¢ per day bought supper, bed, and breakfast, while $1.30 per week fetched full room and board. Many free-spirited boys, however, bristled at the home's regular curfew of 7:00 PM, and extended curfew of 9:00 PM two nights a week, and sought its services only during the most desperate of the winter months. The majority of newsboys lived with their parents and pounded the streets daily as part of their contribution to the family economy. A small percentage of boys delivered door to door, but the greater number worked late into the evenings selling on the street. Some lads worked alone, while more experienced boys headed up teams of sellers. A common trick of a newsboy was to approach a customer with a single paper claiming that it was the last one he had to sell before heading home. If the unwary citizen fell for the con, the newsboy then returned to his hidden pile of papers and repeated the trick. Newsboys stationed themselves near the entrance of hotels, where they undersold the stands inside, and always stood out prominently, along with other young street traders, around the train station.[33] A

[30] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Prison and Reformatory System of Ontario* (Toronto 1891), 372-3, (hereafter *Prison Reform Commission*).

[31] See PAC, J.J. Kelso Papers, vol. 4; PAC, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, MG28 I84, Minutes, 1893-1906; and "Industrial Schools," *The Globe*, 4 November 1878.

[32] See J.J. Kelso, *Second Report of Work Under the Children's Protection Act for the Year Ending December 31, 1894* (Toronto 1895), 12; *Hamilton Spectator*, 23 January 1894; C.S. Clark, *Of Toronto the Good*, 136; and *Prison Reform Commission*, testimony of W.H. Howland, 689; David Archibald, staff-inspector, Toronto Police Force, 701-2; and J.J. Kelso, 724.

[33] These descriptions of newsboys are drawn primarily from PAC, J.J. Kelso Papers; *Prison Reform Commission*, testimony of J.J. Kelso, 723-9, and George Alfred Barnett, superintendent of the Newsboys' Home, Toronto, 729-30; Ontario *Report of Committee on Child Labor;* "The Tag System Abortive," *The Toronto World*, 22 November 1890; "The Waifs of the Street," *The Globe*, 18 April 1891; "The Industrial School," *The Telegram*, 18 April 1878; "Around Town," *Saturday Night*, 10 (21 November 1896); C.S. Clark, *Of Toronto the Good;* J.J. Kelso, *Protection of Children: Early History of the Humane and Children's Aid Movement in Ontario 1886-1893*

passive visitor to Toronto, unable to resist the persistent overtures of the newsboys, bootblacks, and fruit vendors, would at least leave Union Station well informed, well polished, and well fed.

In some instances, the earnings of a newsboy shielded a poor family from utter destitution. When W.C. Wilkinson inquired into the absence from school of fourteen-year-old William Laughlan, the lad's mother told him: ". . . the boy was the principal support to the house, the father having been ill for a long time. The boy carried out papers morning and evening."[34] This entry from Wilkinson's diary also indicates the importance of children as substitute wage-earners. In his notebooks, newspaper reporter J.J. Kelso speculated that some newsboys, who he estimated earned between 60¢ and $1.00 a day, fully supported their parents.[35] Despite their importance as wage-earners, the vast majority of newsboys, bootblacks, and other street vendors occupied deadend jobs that promised no viable future employment. Although some business skills could be learned on the street, only a tiny percentage of enterprising newsboys managed to climb the professional ladder. Moreover, the "privation, exposure and irregular life" that characterized the street traders' existence frequently led

A Toronto newsboy announces the top stories of the day. Credit: Ontario Archives.

(Toronto 1911); and Karl Baedeker, *The Dominion of Canada* (London 1900). I am indebted to David Swayze for bringing this last source to my attention.

[34] TBERAM, Wilkinson Diaries, vol. 5, entry for 9 December 1873.

[35] PAC, J.J. Kelso Papers, vol. 8.

to petty crime and permanent vagrancy.[36] In the estimation of W.H. Howland, the reform mayor of Toronto, "it was ruinous to a boy to become a newsboy, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand."[37] J.J. Kelso added: "The profession of selling newspapers is in my opinion pernicious right through."[38]

Newsboys and other young street vendors attracted the attention of a new group of middle-class social reformers and self-styled child-savers. These individuals objected to the presence of so many roughly hewn youngsters on public streets and feared that extensive exposure to the harsher elements of city life would turn vulnerable children into vile and irresponsible adults. This, in turn, would place greater burden on the public purse through the maintenance of jails and houses of refuge. In an attempt to ameliorate this situation, J.J. Kelso and other leading philanthropists petitioned the Toronto Police Commission in 1889 to adopt measures to regulate the street traders. Kelso and his cohorts succeeded, and the resultant law, enacted in 1890, required newsboys and other vendors under the age of sixteen to apply for a licence, and forbade boys under eight and girls of any age to participate in the street trade at all. To qualify for a badge, a boy had to maintain a clean criminal record, avoid associating with thieves, and attend school at least two hours per day. In addition to having their privileges revoked, violators could be fined or sentenced to the industrial school or common jail. Although over 500 boys applied for licences in the first year, the police failed to enforce the regulations rigorously and the law quickly fell into disuse.[39] Two years later, the Toronto Board of Education established special classes for newsboys, but met with little success. In both cases, reformers failed to recognize the enormous distance between controlled orderliness as prescribed by law and the burden of poverty. Irrespective of the intentions of social legislation, many working-class families depended on the contributions of children.[40] Furthermore, the arguments reformers put forward in favour of regulation revealed a deeper concern with public morality and family values than with the economic circumstances of newsboys and their families. This attitude is especially evident in the extra restrictions placed on girls, the future wives and mothers of the nation. Susan Houston's comment on child beggars is

[36] Ontario, *Report of Committee on Child Labor*, 11.

[37] *Royal Labor Commission*, Ontario evidence, 161.

[38] *Prison Reform Commission*, 723. Various police chiefs across Ontario upheld the views of Howland and Kelso. See *Prison Reform Commission*, testimony of W. McVitty, chief constable of Ottawa, 372-3, and Lieut.-Col. H.J. Grasett, chief of police, Toronto, 700. See also Ontario, *Report on Compulsory Education in Canada, Great Britain, Germany and the United States* (Toronto 1891), 89.

[39] "The Waifs of the Street," *The Globe*, 18 April 1891.

[40] Undoubtedly, some newsboys pursued their profession as a matter of personal choice, preferring the small income and independence of the street to the demands and discipline of the school system.

equally applicable to newsboys and other young street vendors: "... it was their habits rather than their condition that roused the ire of reformers."[41]

Ironically, middle-class reformers had no farther to look than their own neighbourhoods if they wanted to observe the conditions of child workers. Although little information exists on the work experiences of the natural children of the middle class, there is a substantial body of material that describes the role foster children played in middle-class homes. The care of orphans and vagrant children had always posed a delicate problem for civil authorities. From the early years of Upper Canadian society, officials usually dispensed with parentless and needy youngsters by arranging apprenticeship agreements for them. By the mid-1800s, private charitable institutions such as the Protestant Orphans' Home provided shelter and training for helpless children until placements could be found for them or until they reached an age of independence. By the latter years of the nineteenth century, however, new perceptions of child welfare had emerged. Most reformers now agreed that only the natural setting of a family provided dependent children with a fair opportunity to develop proper social and moral values. Parentless youngsters and those whose natural family settings were found to be unwholesome or inadequate were now to be placed in foster homes where they would be treated as regular members of another family. In this way, reformers hoped to reduce the public cost of child welfare and at the same time prevent the creation of a future vagrant and criminal class. The primary institutional expression of this view was the Children's Aid Society (CAS), the first Canadian branch of which appeared in Toronto in 1891 as a result of the initiative of J.J. Kelso. This approach gained ground in 1893 when the Ontario government sanctioned the activities of the CAS with the passage of the Children's Protection Act and appointed Kelso as the superintendent of neglected and dependent children.[42]

Although the CAS preferred to place its charges in the countryside, in the belief that the wholesomeness and honest toil of farm life would develop moral and industrious habits, a small percentage of older children ended up in lower middle- and middle-class urban homes where they performed the normal roster of domestic duties. Despite the society's efforts to insure that each child placed out would receive elementary education and affectionate treatment, a

[41] Susan E. Houston, "Victorian Origins of Juvenile Delinquency," 86.

[42] For a thorough discussion of the new approaches to child welfare, see Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum:* Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In The Children's Aid: J.J. Kelso and Child Welfare in Ontario* (Toronto 1981); Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto 1976); Richard Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario: A Study of Public Welfare Administration* (Toronto 1965); Jane-Louise K. Dawe, "The Transition from Institutional to Foster Care for Children in Ontario 1891-1921," (MSW thesis, University of Toronto, 1966); and Terrence Morrison, "The Child and Urban Social Reform in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario 1875-1900," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1971).

youngster's ability to perform work around the home often proved to be the decisive factor in his or her placement. In a circular letter dated 15 September 1893, J.J. Kelso instructed CAS agents to be wary of homes that treated foster children as servants, a practice which he admitted was "altogether too common among those who apply for the care of dependent children."[43] A second letter, dated 22 April 1894, warned about parents with young children of their own who used their CAS wards as live-in nursemaids.[44] The demand for child workers also revealed itself through the report of a representative of the Girls' Home in Toronto who stated that her institution received twenty times the number of requests for girls between the ages of ten and thirteen as it did for girls five or six years old.[45]

The CAS must accept partial blame for the numerous instances in which its wards ended up as nothing better than underpaid domestic servants in comfortable urban homes. Although its members unquestionably exhibited genuine concern for the welfare of neglected youngsters, the CAS, like most childsaving agencies of the time, believed fervently that early exposure to work and discipline would guarantee the development of an upstanding and industrious citizenship. The society's literature unambiguously stated that "girls at twelve years of age, and boys at fourteen, should become self-supporting."[46] For children twelve years of age and over, the society used a special placement form that committed the child to domestic service in return for modest payment. The CAS's unbending adherence to the work ethic created a hazy atmosphere that clouded the distinction between healthy work habits and child exploitation. Even if the CAS had developed more stringent regulations pertaining to the type of work children could perform in the home, it would have been impossible to enforce them. Although the Children's Protection Act provided for the creation of local visiting committees with the authority to monitor foster homes, J.J. Kelso reported in 1894 that the province's 25 to 30 active committees represented well less than half of the needed number.[47]

Canadian households in search of cheap domestic labour could also look to any one of a dozen or more charitable institutions that specialized in the placement of British children in Canadian homes. From the time that Maria S. Rye arrived at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1869 with a party of young orphans, the demand for British children always outpaced the supply.[48] By 1879, approximately 4,000 British youngsters were living and working with Canadian

[43] PAC, J.J. Kelso Papers, vol. 4. Kelso also mentioned this problem in his *First Report of Work Under the Children's Protection Act, 1893 For the Six Months Ending December 31 1893* (Toronto 1894), 26.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Proceedings of the First Ontario Conference on Child-Saving* (Toronto 1895), 59.
[46] J.J. Kelso, *First Report of Work Under the Children's Protection Act*, 27.
[47] *Proceedings of the First Ontario Conference on Child-Saving*, 46.
[48] See Wesley Turner, " '80 Stout and Healthy Looking Girls,' " *Canada: An Historical Magazine*, 3, 2 (December 1975), and Turner, "Mis Rye's Children and the Ontario Press 1875," *Ontario History*, 68 (September 1976).

families.[49] This number would exceed 70,000 by 1919.[50] Like the Children's Aid Society, the British agencies preferred to send children to the countryside, but they also faced an overwhelming demand from city households for older girls to perform domestic work. In most cases, prospective guardians took few measures to camouflage their desire for help around the house. Moreover, correspondence and newspaper advertisements referring to available youngsters frequently emphasized the children's abilities to perform specific domestic tasks.

The best known of the child immigrants are the home children who arrived in Canada under the auspices of philanthropist Dr. Thomas John Barnardo.[51] A second group of children, which journeyed to Canada in the late 1880s and early 1890s under the watchful eye of social worker Charlotte A. Alexander, has also left useful records.[52] Alexander primarily handled girls between the ages of ten and fourteen, many of whom found places with families in urban Ontario. Some of Alexander's girls joined in home-centred industries, such as eleven-year-old Jane Busby who helped her mistress produce waistcoats.[53] The vast majority of girls, however, assumed the normal responsibilities of domestic servants or nursemaids. Although an extremely competent and hard-working girl could increase her wages from a starting salary of $2.00 a month to $9.00 after a few years' service, she still earned less than a regular domestic servant. In a letter to a friend, young Maggie Hall described a typical work day:

> I have to get my morning's work done by 12 o'clock every day to take the children for a walk then I have to get the table laid for lunch when I come in then after dinner I help to wash up then I have to give the little boy his lessons then for the rest of the afternoon I sew till it is time to get afternoon tea and shut up and light the gas then by that time it is time for our tea after which I clear away get the table ready for Miss Smith's dinner then put the little boy to bed & after Miss Smith's dinner I help wash up which does not take very long then I do what I like for the rest of the evening till half past nine when we have Prayers then I take Miss Smiths hot water & hot bottle, the basket of silver & glass of milk to her bedroom shut up & go to bed which by the time I have done all it is just ten.[54]

The letter's lack of punctuation perhaps unintentionally corresponds with the rapid pace of Maggie Hall's work day.

The letters among the Charlotte Alexander papers disclose a life of hard and

[49] Ellen Agnes Bilbrough, *British Children in Canadian Homes* (Belleville 1879).
[50] Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*, 4.
[51] A handful of informative monographs on the Barnardo children are now available. The best among them is Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada 1869-1924* (Montreal 1980). For a more anecdotal approach, see Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Toronto 1980); Gail Corbett, *Barnardo Children in Canada* (Peterborough 1981); and Phyllis Harrison, *The Home Children: Their Personal Stories* (Winnipeg 1979).
[52] PAC, Charlotte A. Alexander Papers, MG29 C58.
[53] *Ibid.*, vol. 3, Indexed Register, 1885-93.
[54] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, Maggie Hall to Miss Lowe, 13 February 1890.

tedious work that offered little in the way of security and opportunity. Alexander negotiated each placement individually, thus failing to insure that her girls would all receive the same treatment. This practice also left many girls at the mercy of particularly demanding guardians. Although Alexander obtained signed indentures for most of her placements, she had no regular visitation system which would allow for verification of the contract. Many guardians complained of the children's rough manners and poor work habits. Others unilaterally altered the terms of the agreement if the girl did not meet their expectations. Extremely dissatisfied customers simply returned unwanted girls to Alexander, or shunted them off to other residences. When children complained of unfair treatment, Alexander encouraged them to be tolerant and reminded them of how fortunate they were to have a position at all. Many children clung to their placements out of fear that another position would present even greater hardships. All girls suffered from a basic insecurity that accompanied the performance of unfamiliar duties in a strange environment. As Joy Parr has stated: "To be young, a servant and a stranger was to be unusually vulnerable, powerless and alone."[55] One letter among the Alexander papers unintentionally projects a vivid image of how onerous life could be for a working child. Lamenting the recent death of a foster child, a friend wrote to Charlotte Alexander on 29 June 1888: "Poor dear little Ada Hees passed away from this cold world — what a happy change for the dear child."[56] In the temporal sense, a more brutally frank assessment of the life of a working child would be hard to imagine.

In private homes and on public streets, children in late nineteenth-century urban Ontario routinely performed a variety of important economic duties that directly contributed to the successful functioning of the family or household economy. Youngsters not only assisted their families in this way, but in many cases provided valuable services to a demanding urban clientele. In working-class neighbourhoods, the widespread practice of child labour exposed the poverty and insecurity that plagued many families which could not rely on industrial wages alone to meet the demands of urban life. At the same time, the use of youngsters as regular or auxiliary workers denoted a family strategy that was both rational and flexible in its response to new and challenging circumstances. In the short term, working-class families could depend on children to add the last necessary ingredient to their formula for survival. In the long term, youngsters paid the price. The most significant of these costs lay in the area of education.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, most children in Ontario enjoyed free access to primary education. But this held little promise for youngsters whose economic responsibilities at home prevented regular attendance at school. School inspectors repeatedly identified the non-enrollment and

[55] Joy Parr, *Labouring Children*, 82.

[56] PAC, Charlotte A. Alexander Papers, vol. 2, Alice Maude Johnson file, Mrs. Coyne to Charlotte Alexander, 29 June 1888.

irregular attendance of working-class children as the education system's primary problem. A Toronto School Board census of 1863 revealed that of 1,632 children between the ages of five and sixteen not registered to attend school, 263, or 16.1 per cent, regularly worked at home during the day. Only full-time employment appeared more frequently on the chart as an explanation for non-attendance. This category contained 453 youngsters, or 27.7 per cent of the total. Of the remaining 7,876 registered students, only middle- and upper-class children posted a record of regular attendance.[57] Ultimately, the irregular school attendance of workers' children exposed the class bias of urban-industrial society. In Hamilton in 1871, for example, Ian Davey has shown that working-class children attended school far less regularly than did the sons and daughters of entrepreneurs. Youngsters from female-headed households occupied the bottom position.[58] Children of the working class were thus denied the full opportunity of personal development and social mobility that regular school attendance offered other youngsters. Although school attendance among working-class children improved near the end of the nineteenth century, youngsters from the middle and upper classes still enjoyed their traditional advantage. Mandatory attendance laws, first passed by the Ontario legislature in 1871 and strengthened in 1881 and 1891, affected the situation little.[59] Even when parents exhibited awareness of attendance laws, which was infrequent, such regulations proved unenforceable and irrelevant to families dependent on children's work.

This view of public education, of course, rests on the premise that working-class children had something tangible to gain by attending school. This is an arguable point in historical circles. Harvey Graff claims that for many children "the achievement of education brought no occupational rewards at all."[60] Michael Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern offer an identical assessment: "School attendance played no role in occupational mobility."[61]

[57] Toronto Board of Education, *Annual Report of the Local Superintendent* (Toronto 1863), 43. To avoid the impression that this period lacked normal youthful playfulness, it should be noted that Toronto truant officer W.C. Wilkinson regularly discovered youngsters engaged in the usual truant shenanigans of fishing, swimming, and attending the races. See TBERAM, Wilkinson Diaries.

[58] Ian E. Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class: School Attendance in Hamilton, Ontario, 1851-1891," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975), 187.

[59] The Ontario School Act of 1871 required children seven to twelve years of age to attend school four months of the year under normal circumstances. In 1881, an amendment to the act required children seven to thirteen years of age to attend school eleven weeks in each of two school terms. In 1885, another amendment reduced compulsory attendance to 100 days per year. In 1891, attendance became compulsory for the full school year for all children between eight and fourteen years of age.

[60] Harvey J. Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York 1979), 75.

[61] Katz, Doucet, and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*, 197.

These authors contend that "ascriptive" conditions, such as class, ethnicity, sex, and geographic stability, exerted greater influence on social mobility than did education. This argument, however, largely depends on data drawn from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a period when neither the public school system nor the urban-industrial labour market had advanced much beyond their formative stages. Early school promoters unquestionably placed greater emphasis on social control than they did on the creation of occupational opportunities for working-class children.[62] By the latter decades of the century, however, less obsessive school boards injected more skill-oriented programmes into the educational curriculum, such as bookkeeping and commercial arithmetic.[63] This development occurred at the same time that the urban-industrial labour market began to place a premium on these and other basic academic skills. The rapid growth of the white-collar work force sustains this argument. In 1898, Imperial Oil Canada employed only eleven white-collar workers. This number grew to 6,000 by 1919. In addition, public service employment in Canada increased from 17,000 in 1901 to 77,000 by 1911.[64] Although policies of social control and other "ascriptive" conditions remained dominant factors in late nineteenth-century society, improvements in school curriculum, coupled with the opening of new sectors in the labour market, increased the value of education for working-class children.[65] Lastly, it can be argued that if education did not provide workers' children with opportunities for upward mobility, it at least offered them lateral mobility in the form of a greater number of occupational choices within their own class.

One further dimension to the school issue warrants brief examination — the question of technical and manual training. By the 1890s, most Ontario schools offered these programmes to boys, while girls were invited to study domestic science.[66] School officials claimed that technical and manual training provided

[62] For discussions of the motivations of early school officials, see Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto 1977); Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton, eds., *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto 1978); and James H. Love, "Cultural Survival and Social Control: The Development of a Curriculum for Upper Canada's Common Schools in 1846," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 30 (November 1982).

[63] See TBERAM, Management Committee Minutes, 1899-1901.

[64] Gregory S. Kealey, "The Structure of Canadian Working-Class History," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St. John's 1985), 28.

[65] Combining "ascriptive" conditions and educational opportunities, J. Donald Wilson adds another dimension to the school question: "What happened to children in schools, how long they stayed in school, and how much they were influenced by schooling depended to a considerable extent on their ethnic and cultural background." " 'The Picture of Social Randomness:' Making Sense of Ethnic History and Educational History," in David C. Jones, *et al.*, eds., *Approaches to Educational History* (Winnipeg 1981), 36.

[66] Douglas A. Lawr and Robert D. Gidney, eds., *Educating Canadians: A Documentary*

boys with practical skills and guaranteed them a secure place in the job market. Trade unionist Daniel O'Donoghue disagreed. Testifying before a royal commission in 1890, O'Donoghue declared that Ontario's labour unions were "unanimously opposed to manual training in the schools."[67] In O'Donoghue's estimation, these programmes lacked the depth and detail necessary to turn out competent workers. A careful reading of O'Donoghue's testimony, however, reveals that his real concern was that these programmes would flood an already crowded labour market, thus driving wages down and threatening the control of the workplace skilled workers had traditionally exercised through strict regulation of the apprenticeship system. Significantly, O'Donoghue did not suggest that the school board improve the quality of its programmes. Rather, he recommended that young people be sent to work on farms. Between the lines, one can detect O'Donoghue's hope that this practice would remove these children from the labour market altogether. Moreover, not all unionists shared O'Donoghue's opinion. In 1901, the secretary of the Plumbers' and Gas Fitters' Union sent a letter to the Toronto School Board commending it on its programmes of manual training.[68] This position was more consistent with the labour movement's traditional support of general primary education, as evidenced by numerous resolutions and petitions submitted to all levels of government.[69]

Discussions of the actual value of education aside, it appears that most parents believed that their children had something to gain by attending school. This is suggested by the strikingly high enrollment figures recorded by almost all urban school boards. Working-class children dutifully registered for school at the beginning of each semester, but found it impossible to maintain regular attendance in the face of economic pressures at home. In an attempt to combine economic responsibilities with educational opportunities, many working-class families sought, and received, special consideration from local school boards. Inspector James Hughes reported in 1874: "We have in Toronto a considerable number of Pupils who desire to be absent regularly for a part of each day, either as newsboys, or to perform some necessary work at home."[70] J.B. Boyle, Inspector of Public Schools in London, Ontario, reported that parents withdrew their children from school when the family economy demanded extra workers: "Sometimes they become errand boys in shops, or they sell papers, or they do

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History of Public Education (Toronto 1973), 161, and Harvey Graff, *The Literacy Myth*, 210.

[67] *Prison Reform Commission*, 739.

[68] TBERAM, Management Committee Minutes, 14 February 1901.

[69] For numerous examples see Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada*. For a more detailed look at labour's view of technical and manual training, see T.R. Morrison, "Reform as Social Tracking: The Case of Industrial Education in Ontario 1870-1900," *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 8, 2 (August 1974), 106-7.

[70] *Annual Report of the Normal, Model, Grammar and Common Schools in Ontario* (Toronto 1874), Appendix B, 84. Similar requests with positive replies can be found in TBERAM, Management Committee Minutes, 1899-1901.

what they can."[71] Lastly, children who attended school irregularly missed the full benefit of the new physical education and health programmes most schools offered by the late 1880s.[72]

Children who worked at home or on the street instead of attending school received little compensation in the form of job training. The street trades and sweat shop industries in particular exposed youngsters to elements that were both socially and physically harmful while offering no promise of occupational advancement. Although contractors often relied on the ruse of apprenticeship to encourage home workers to exploit their own children, the only opportunities associated with such labour were missed opportunities. Home-centred enterprises also deprived working-class children of the solace, privacy, and security that most middle- and upper-class youngsters enjoyed as a matter of natural right.

Social legislation and various reform movements had little immediate impact on the conditions of working children. In their attempt to make society safe for middle-class values, and at the same time guard against future costs of public welfare, reformers concentrated more on the symptoms of social maladies than on their causes. Legislation could set standards for proper social conduct, but it did little to relieve poverty. Most reformers, of course, did not view the unequal distribution of wealth and power as the root cause of social problems. In most cases, they preferred to blame the poor for their own condition. W.C. Wilkinson and the Toronto Public School Board, for example, believed that "lack of proper control by parents" was the source of irregular school attendance among working-class children.[73] Yet Wilkinson himself had recorded numerous instances of school-aged children performing important economic duties at home. Wilkinson and his cohorts might have arrived nearer to the truth had they set their sights on business élites whose hold over economic power forced many working-class families to stretch their resources to the limit simply to survive. Even trade unions exercised little influence over the conditions of many working-class families. Indeed, evidence shows that union time restrictions in clothing workshops that paid by the piece forced employees to continue their work at home with the assistance of their families.

New charitable organizations such as the Children's Aid Society unquestionably rescued numerous youngsters from the clutches of poverty and neglect

[71] *Royal Labor Commission*, Ontario evidence, 604-7.

[72] See Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*; Sutherland, "'To Create a Strong and Healthy Race:' School Children in the Public Health Movement 1880-1914," in Katz and Mattingly, *Education and Social Change*; and Robert M. Stamp, "Urbanization and Education in Ontario and Quebec, 1867-1914," *McGill Journal of Education*, 3 (Fall 1968), 132.

[73] Archives of Ontario, responses to G.W. Ross' inquiry of July 1895 regarding revisions of the Truancy Act, RG 22, Acc. 9631, Printed Circular no. 47, W.C. Wilkinson, secretary-treasurer, Toronto Public School Board, to Hon. G.W. Ross, Minister of Education, 8 October 1895. I am indebted to Terrence Campbell, formerly of the Ontario Archives, for bringing this file to my attention.

by placing them in the care of benevolent and compassionate foster parents. But records left by the CAS and other child welfare agencies sadly indicate that many foster children ended up as underpaid domestic servants in middle-class homes. In addition to shouldering the burdens common to all working children, these youngsters also bore the cross of class prejudice. While labouring children in working-class homes performed economic duties directly related to their family's survival, foster children provided personal service for the affluent. They were as much a symbol of a successful household as they were a component of it.

One group of historians has argued that "the family is an institution which industrialization shaped by removing the home from the site of the workplace."[74] Most others would agree in principle. Once free from the production-oriented nature of farm life, the family could devote more time to social development and material consumption. Yet for many children from lower-class families, work and home remained one, and the greater social and economic opportunities that allegedly accompanied urban life never materialized. Urban poverty forced many working-class households to apply the rural tradition of shared family responsibilities to meet the challenge of city life. But the transposition was not an easy one. Urban-industrial life provided less insular protection than the farmstead and presented workers with a greater number of competing forces. Consequently, old customs were forced to adapt to new and demanding circumstances. Despite the different pattern of social and economic relations forged by urban life, country and city still shared one common feature: in many lower-class neighbourhoods at least, work in and around the home remained a family affair.

I would like to thank Michael Piva, Ian Forsyth, Joan Sangster, and Gerald Tulchinsky for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

[74] Russell G. Hann, Gregory S. Kealey, Linda Kealey, and Peter Warrian, "Introduction," *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History 1860-1930* (Kitchener 1973), 18.

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