

Documenting Working Class History: North American Traditions and New Approaches

by RUSSELL G. HANN AND GREGORY S. KEALEY

Recently British working class historian E.J. Hobsbawm began an important theoretical paper on the state of the discipline with the assertion that "labour history is today flourishing in most countries as never before."¹ This is certainly true in Canada where the last five years have witnessed a remarkable renaissance in working class studies. The political upheavals of the 1960s, the increased militancy of the Canadian working class, and the structural problems of world capitalism have led to a significant new interest in working class history. This paper surveys briefly the history of North American labour studies and labour archives, and then turns to late nineteenth-century Toronto for examples of interest areas for archival work to aid the new working class history.

I

A short account of the North American archival traditions concerning working class materials must blend intellectual, political and working class history. In the late nineteenth century, class conflict helped generate an intellectual curiosity and concern that led to the first serious attempts to collect labour materials. Out of the post-Civil War class struggles in the United States came the first states' bureaus of labour statistics which represented an initial effort to gather data on the American workers who were staffing the factories of a rising industrial capitalism. In Canada a similar type of data collection began a decade later with the Ontario Bureau of Industry Reports. On both sides of the border these institutions were initially staffed by labour activists and the information that they collected and published demonstrated contemporary working class concerns about standard of living.²

1 E.J. Hobsbawm, "Labor History and Ideology." *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974): 371.

2 On the post-Civil war struggles see David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality* (New York, 1967). For the state bureau tradition see Wendell D. Macdonald, "The Early History of Labor Statistics in the United States," *Labor History* 13 (1972): 267-68 and the

In the 1880s American academic interest began to catch up with the rapidly changing North American social context. Economists trained in German graduate schools absorbed aspects of the critical method of the German historical tradition; other economists came under the influence of socially concerned English scholars such as the reformer Arnold Toynbee (1852-1883). They returned to North America to commence a telling intellectual assault on the prevailing orthodoxies of classical political economy and the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer which had stood as roadblocks to social reform. In the United States Richard Ely of John Hopkins University set off a wave of controversy with his sympathetic *Labor Movement in America*, published in 1886. An English scholar with similar sympathies, W.J. Ashley, taught for a few years at the University of Toronto in the early 1890s where he sponsored a series of pioneering studies in Canadian social questions. The historical orientation of this first wave of scholarly interest in labour questions led to a quick recognition of the need to collect source materials. Ely began a personal collection in this period which would later form the core of the John Crerar Library labour collection. Regarded as a rebel at Johns Hopkins, Ely made a controversial move in 1892 to the aspiring new University of Wisconsin where the social involvement of scholarship was a more accepted notion and where one of Ely's former Hopkins students, Frederick Jackson Turner, was building an interdisciplinary social science department with a strong historical focus.³

Ely became an important and respected figure with the political triumph of progressivism in the first decade of the twentieth century. He found new friends in the National Civic Federation who provided funding for the expanded study of the American working class. Ely used this money to recruit a former student, John R. Commons, to head the American Bureau of Industrial Research (ABIR) at Wisconsin.⁴ With the help of his graduate students, Commons immediately began to collect material on the history of American labour. The vast amounts of new material that they discovered led to the publication of the massive

invaluable *Index of All Reports Issued by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States Prior to March 1, 1902* (Washington, D.C., 1902; reprint. New York, 1970). A useful but non-critical overview of U.S. labour studies is Mark Perlman, *Labor Union Theories in America* (Evanston, 1958). The collector of labour statistics in the Ontario Bureau, for example, was D.J. O'Donoghue, a printer, former Labour M.P.P., and perhaps the most important Toronto labour leader in the 1880s.

- 3 For Ely's career see his *Ground Under Our Feet: An Autobiography* (New York, 1938). For one example of Ashley's influence see Jean Scott, "The Conditions of Female Labour in Ontario," In *Toronto University Studies in Political Science* (Toronto, 1892).
- 4 For details about Commons see his *Myself: The Autobiography of John R. Commons* (New York, 1934), and the quite useful critique by Maurice Isserman, "'God Bless our American Institution': The Labor History of John R. Commons," *Labor History* 17 (1976): 309-28.

Documentary History of American Labor, a preliminary project followed by the collaborative *History of Labor in the United States*.

The majority of progressive labour scholars were economists. Styles current in economic history at the time stressed the crucial role of markets in economic development. This emphasis led to a nearly exclusive concern in early American labour history with institutional forms such as the trade union, and seriously flawed their interpretations. Moreover, these scholars were middle class and Anglo-Saxon blinkers which radically attenuated their appreciation of the profoundly ethnic character of the American working class experience. This nativism unfortunately permitted them to ignore almost everything besides the trade union as an institutional form. The union could safely be traced to democratic Anglo-Saxon roots by a germ theory version of the evolution of working class organization.⁵

The Commons school provided much of the intellectual leadership for social reform movements involving arbitration, conciliation, and various welfare capitalist schemes. This progressive synthesis was celebrated by the liberal American historiographical tradition, but more recent work by scholars such as James Weinstein and Gabriel Kolko has exposed the conservative, corporatist, and conspicuously pro-capitalist nature of the progressive programme. Commons' autobiography, *Myself*, provides an instructive tour of the nooks and crannies of some of these aspects of progressivism. Close ties to liberal capitalists proved eminently useful on occasion to Commons in archival collecting. After discovering an early nineteenth-century labour newspaper at the New York Historical Society, he was horrified when the librarian refused him access because the item he was seeking was "covered up by the accumulation of seventy years of newspapers." Commons subsequently discovered that Cornelius Vanderbilt had promised the Historical Society a new building. Commons' request for stack assistance from Vanderbilt resulted in "the librarian putting two men in overalls to work for two weeks, excavating for *The Man* (the newspaper in question)."⁶

The material accumulated by Commons and his students was later transferred to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Together with similar collections of trade union materials at Johns Hopkins and the John Crerar Library, these holdings represented the bulk of the archival inheritance left by the progressive students of American labour. Rich as they were, they suffered from theoretical gaps and from underuse. The Wisconsin material, for instance, was left to gather dust for years.

Another emerging tradition of labour collecting and of labour scholarship at this time shared a similar weakness and fate. The Detroit

5 For another critique of Commons see Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976), pp. 3-19.

6 Commons, *Myself*, p. 135.

anarchist and labour activist, Jo Labadie, donated to the University of Michigan an extensive collection of material which he had gathered during a lifetime in the labour movement. Wanting these materials to stay close to the people who had made the history, Labadie resisted many lucrative offers from the ABIR at Wisconsin in order to give the collection to a local archives. Michigan's archivists were not demonstrably grateful for Labadie's regional loyalty and did not begin to catalogue the collection for twelve years. Even when begun, the work was performed by a personal acquaintance of Labadie who volunteered to put the collection in order.⁷ Different in emphasis from the Wisconsin collection, it represented a second major tradition—labour history from within the movement and outside the universities. This tradition reflected and accentuated Commons' weakness of identifying the working class and the labour movement with an almost antiquarian concern for the preservation of materials dealing with sectarian rivalries.⁸

The last major variant of archival collecting that served the older labour history was concerned with the preservation of the papers and records of famous men. One would have thought that the very nature of the working class movement would have militated against the creation of an "only-great-men-make-history" school of labour history. Yet there is an unfortunate tendency to try to enshrine labour leaders in the same way as political leaders have been memorialized. The working class movement produced numerous prominent leaders who saved their papers for posterity and thus became prime candidates for biographical treatment. One example of this type of collection is provided at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., which holds the papers of T.V. Powderly, John Hayes, Mother Jones, Phil Murray, and John Brody. It should be added that in some ways these collections contain more important information on the movements to which these individuals belonged than they do on the individuals themselves. This is especially true for the Knights of Labor which left no institutional papers; however, its history can be extensively reconstructed from the Powderly and Hayes papers.⁹

The initial surge of labour collecting in the United States associated with progressivism and the militant class struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries died out in the 1920s. The already established collections at Wisconsin and Michigan fell into disuse and relatively little energy was devoted to further acquisitions. This changed radically with the new wave of industrial militancy in the 1930s and the concomitant rise of industrial relations as a field of scholarly interest. Cornell's new School of

7 Eleanor H. Scanlan, "The Labadie Collection," *Labor History* 6 (1965): 244-48.

8 E.J. Hobsbawm, "Labor History and Ideology," *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974): 371-81.

9 These papers have been microfilmed recently and are now available at the Public Archives of Canada.

Industrial and Labor Relations began collecting in 1945, the same year that Wisconsin renewed its interest in labour materials.¹⁰ By the 1960s two new trends had emerged which led to a renaissance in American labour archives. A more stable and less embattled trade union leadership dropped some of its hesitations about archives and historians. At the same time political developments nurtured a much greater interest in the history of workers and the labour movement. The congruence of these two trends has resulted in a new regional vibrancy in both labour history and archival collecting. Wayne State, Texas, Pennsylvania State, and Georgia State universities have pioneered in establishing important new labour archives with concrete links to the trade union movement. At the same time, the Pacific Northwest, Southwest, and Southern Labor History groups have organized impressive conferences bringing together labour leaders and labour historians.

In Canada the story is somewhat briefer. It is fair to say that the same weaknesses mar our existing collections which are, of course, much smaller in quantity. Although there has been a greater continuity of interest in the history of Canadian labour in politics, our labour history has been cut from the same cloth as American labour history.

The Canadian progressive tradition took root in the new Department of Labour set up by the Laurier Government in 1900.¹¹ William Lyon Mackenzie King was trained in the new field of labour economics at the universities of Toronto, Chicago, and Harvard and went to Ottawa as the founding editor of the *Labour Gazette*. Shortly after, as the first Deputy Minister of Labour, King established a series of agencies to compile research on Canadian labour. Correspondents for the *Gazette* were immediately appointed throughout Canada to collect systematically a wide range of data on the current situation of Canadian labour. In addition, King established an extensive newspaper clipping service, set up a cost of living index, and initiated discussions with Queen's University economist Adam Shortt on the possibility of starting a project on Canadian labour history equivalent to Commons' United States enterprise.¹² The Department of Labour also began collecting labour newspapers in a systematic fashion and in the process preserved the few nineteenth-century labour papers that we now have.

King's success in entrenching progressive labour reform in Liberal government policy was much admired by the American progressives.

10 J.G. Miller, "Labor Resources in the Cornell University Libraries," *Labor History* 1 (1960): 319-26.

11 The most useful of the many accounts of King is Harry Ferns and Bernard Ostry, *The Age of Mackenzie King* (London, 1955).

12 James J. Atherton, "The Department of Labour and Industrial Relations, 1900-1911," (Master's thesis, Carleton University, 1972), p. 99.

When the Rockefeller interests needed a labour expert to help refurbish their corporate image in the wake of the Ludlow massacre, they turned to King. In this role King had considerable contact with John R. Commons who had been appointed to the American Industrial Relations Commission, chaired by Frank P. Walsh. Commons joined King in disapproving of Walsh's muckraking approach which they both regarded as unscientific. Walsh gave King considerable difficulty during his testimony on behalf of the Rockefellers.¹³ Nevertheless, despite their politically ambiguous attitudes toward labour, the progressives commenced the formal collecting of labour archives on both sides of the border. The work of King's Department of Labour represented the first systematic Canadian collecting.

The progressive tradition was also paralleled in Canada by the acquisition of material by labour activists. For example, Toronto socialist J. McArthur Connor donated records relating to his years in the movement and a number of his unpublished manuscripts to the University of Toronto. The papers of Jimmy Simpson and John Buckley were given to the Metropolitan Toronto Central Library and a few collections of labour leaders' papers even managed to find a place in the Public Archives of Canada. Two important late nineteenth-century Toronto labour figures represented by small collections in Ottawa are A.W. Wright and Phillips Thompson, but such examples are the exception not the rule.

Recent developments such as the appointment of a labour archivist at the PAC, the establishment of the Committee on Canadian Labour History, the publication of the new journal *Labour/Le Travailleur*, this issue of *Archivaria*, and increasing trade union interest in labour history augur well for the future. The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour has recently designated the Dalhousie University Archives as its official depository and the Alberta Federation has set up a similar relationship with the Glenbow-Alberta Institute. McMaster University has also just inaugurated a labour archives. Nevertheless, most of this collecting aims primarily at trade union history. The acquisition of such material is crucial but it is not sufficient for the writing of working class history. Recent historiographic trends demand far more.

In the last fifteen years the emergence of new approaches to social history has been truly global in scale. A growing appreciation of how "material experiences are handled . . . in cultural ways" has informed most of the newest work.¹⁴ The approach of the *Annales* school of history

13 For an American view of this episode see James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (Boston, 1968), ch. 7. For King's testimony see United States Senate, *Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington, 1916), 1:713-18, 732-38.

14 Mike Merrill, "Interview with E.P. Thompson," *Radical History Review* 3 (1976): 23.

in France has demonstrated the value of sophisticated historical knowledge of material change. Without that knowledge, the emerging order of the new industrial society cannot be fully understood. While few of the leading scholars associated with *Annales* have shown much interest in working class history, their work has suggested to others means by which a more precise understanding of a particular technology can yield important information on the lives and struggles of affected workers. When combined with other kinds of softer data generated by the workers themselves, such an approach has vastly increased the themes on which social history can be written. Where once the historian of the working class could be satisfied with delineating the steady growth of a national trade union, the newer history showed that the growth and victories of these labour institutions on the national level could mask a long story of defeat in the local workplace. The new economic realities of industrial society which an older scholarship had seen as the natural outcome of immutable laws of social evolution could now be perceived as the dictated peace settlement of the victors ending a long history of class contention.

The major inspiration for the new working class history was E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* which appeared in 1963. Thompson rejected the mechanistic notion that the working class could be considered a "thing." Instead, he showed that cultural resources (traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms) constituted the "class consciousness" with which English workers responded to the upheavals of industrialization. He insisted that the concept of class should refer to specific historical relationships and that it should not be used, along with "class consciousness" to make historical argument resemble syllogism. North Americans started to investigate working class history at a time when they could profit from the mature works of Thompson and other international scholars who have reshaped contemporary social history. The work of Herbert Gutman, Eugene Genovese, David Montgomery, and others in the United States owes a great debt to a range of earlier international work.¹⁵ In some areas, most notably the history of American slavery, American scholars have made substantial contributions to the theoretical advancement of the new social history.¹⁶

In Canada, much work inspired by the methodology of the new social history is under way.¹⁷ To some extent this work has benefited from the

15 Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, and his *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York, 1976); Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1975); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*.

16 A useful popular guide to American and Canadian material is Jim O'Brien *et al.*, *A Guide to Working Class History* (Toronto, 1975). A useful overview of the new literature is Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (New York, 1975).

17 Russell Hann *et al.*, "Introduction," *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class*

emphasis on regional social development in Canadian historiography, for a profound sense of the importance of locale has made the local study the basic genre of the new social history. As Richard Cobb has stated: "Popular history can be studied only in very limited, regional terms."¹⁸ If Canada is to win and maintain a place of respect in this international community of social historians local history can no longer be regarded as a minor tradition safely left to amateur antiquarians. We have been fortunate that local history has been as vital as it has in this country and should make every effort to expand the resources and institutions which can foster its growth.¹⁹

Moreover, the documentary heritage on which this new kind of history relies requires the existence of a healthy and widely diffused body of informed and sometimes even specialized archivists working at both the national and local levels. As the influence of this scholarship spreads, archivists will increasingly find researchers in working class history who are as interested by popular theatre as by mass meetings, by the minutes of fraternal societies as by those of trade unions, by the proceedings of the daily police courts as by injunctions issued by superior courts, and by the inner life of taverns as by gatherings in union halls. Historians of the working class will continue to be very interested in evidence that pertains to the growth of industrial capitalism and the spread of trade union organization, but they will be increasingly interested in data that illuminates the shadowy realism of working class culture. Until scholars have explored more fully the strengths and ambiguities of that world, it will not be possible to provide satisfying answers to some rather old conundrums about workers in North American society. A discussion of the relation of some of the themes of the new working class history to the study of the working class in late nineteenth-century Toronto can highlight the strengths and weaknesses of archival resources and serve as a guide to future collecting in working class history.

II

The history of the Toronto working class in the late nineteenth century must necessarily begin with a close study of the immense economic changes wrought by the transition to industrial capitalism. Toronto experienced its industrial revolution in the years between 1850 and 1870. The invaluable 1871 manuscript industrial census reveals that in that year

History, 1860-1930 (Kitchener, 1973) and Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, "Introduction," *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976) provide an overview of some of this work and a general outline of Canadian working class development.

¹⁸ Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People* (New York, 1970), p. xvii.

¹⁹ For a fine statement of the importance of local archives see Kent Haworth, "Local Archives: Responsibilities and Challenges for Archivists," *Archivaria* 3 (1976-77): 28-39.

38 percent of Toronto's industrial work force was employed in factories of more than one hundred workers. Another 21 percent worked with between fifty and ninety-nine other employees and 11 percent worked in shops with between thirty and forty-nine other workers. Thus, fully 70 per cent of Toronto's industrial workers in 1871 were employed in shops or factories employing over thirty men or women. These statistics are cited only to illustrate the extent and rapidity of industrialization in central Canada after the railroad boom of the 1850s. After 1870, the triumph of industrial capitalism was cemented by the development of the National Policy strategy of high protective tariffs which were vigorously promoted by Toronto industrial capitalists. The 1880s saw the maturing of industrial capitalism and by the early 1890s there was already a significant movement toward monopoly capitalism developing in Toronto. This trend was best evidenced in the agricultural implements industry where the Masseys were deeply involved in mergers and the direct purchase of competitors.

The transformation which accompanied industrial capitalism affected much more than the size of the workplace. The creation of a capitalist labour market totally changed the social relations of production. The ever increasing centralization and concentration of capital also stimulated rapid urban growth which in turn vastly altered patterns of residence, consumption, and communication. In Toronto's hinterland a related revolution in agricultural production gradually created a growing surplus labour force which migrated to Toronto and other urban areas to join the urban labour pool. Toronto factories drew on the large-scale international shift of population that accompanied the latter stages of the industrial revolution elsewhere and which brought vast numbers of immigrants into the North American labour force. The radically new urban environment in late nineteenth-century Toronto provides a suitable laboratory for the study of the emerging working class. The records from which these vast changes can be historically reconstructed are adequate and generally well represented in collections.

Materials for the study of this economic transformation lie mainly in fields which at first sight might seem distant from a labour archives' concerns. Many of them exist in the field of business history where company records often include wage books, records of work, commentaries on labour discipline, indications of labour recruitment patterns, and sundry other records of great interest to the working class historian trying to transcend simple labour history categories. An example of the value of this type of approach can be seen in the fascinating reconstruction of management strategies and working class response depicted by Bruce Scott in his article on the Massey-Harris Company in the 1920s.²⁰ Photographs,

²⁰ Bruce Scott, "'A Place in the Sun': The Industrial Council at Massey-Harris, 1919-1929," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976): 158-92.



This photograph, taken 1900-1910, of children gathering coal near the railway tracks in Toronto illustrates one means children used of assisting the family economy. The working class response to industrial capitalism took many forms and this picture alerts researchers to one which might otherwise have been inaccessible to the historian. (Public Archives of Canada, C-85579)

maps, illustrations, and booster literature of various kinds can also be of great use in reconstructing the internal workings of industrial capitalism.

If economics and material change were omnipotent, the story of Toronto's workers could be related simply by reference to the urban industrial mould into which they were poured in the late nineteenth century. However, workers did not automatically assume the shape of the matrix designed for them. Many residual cultural values persisted, spoiling the grandiose plans of ambitious promoters. Many a planner was left dumbfounded when his scheme foundered on the stubborn resistance of ordinary workers. Contemporary businessmen concluded simply that proletarians were either stupid or lazy when they failed to warm to schemes to increase production. In order to move beyond the limitations of such entrepreneurial analysis, students of the working class must place this long story of stubborn resistance in its proper context.

Such a study must necessarily begin with the variety of cultural resources and private identities that were the underpinning of the resistance. Then a fuller appreciation of the nature of the struggle can emerge by examining the forums in which the resistance occurred. Finally, it should be noted that the history of the working class in the late nineteenth century is one of heroic resistance, not of ultimate triumph. While the final victory of industrial capitalism was not consolidated until well into the twentieth century, the early forms of that consolidation were evident

throughout the period. By the end of the nineteenth century, the forerunners of the institutions that would contain and defuse the varieties of class struggle that had characterized this period were already evident and their purposes readily apparent.

Toronto's population in the latter half of the nineteenth century ranged from 66 percent foreign-born in 1851 to 35 percent in 1891. Thus for most of the nineteenth century, the majority of Toronto workers were experiencing a dislocation associated with emigrating to a new physical and cultural environment as well as the wrenching experience of industrialization. Irish peasants, Scottish crofters, and English artisans crossed the Atlantic to form the new Toronto working class. They brought with them shared experiences and cultural traditions which they adapted to their new context as a bulwark of resistance to industrial capitalist society.

Generally sources in this area consist of formal materials such as the ethnic press, ethnic pamphlet literature, promotional literature, and the records of government departments. The non-British ethnic press has recently profited from the vogue of multiculturalism and valuable work has been done in microfilming ethnic newspapers. Perhaps the most comprehensive material on the immigrant experience in Canada consists of government records; much work needs to be done so that they can be made more accessible to scholars through comprehensive and reliable guides. There is a dearth of material of a less formal variety such as letters and diaries giving first-person accounts of the actual experience of immigration to a new land. A few immigrant accounts published recently suggest the vitality of this genre of writing. In Toronto, immigrant English craftsmen played important roles in the emergence of the trade union movement. At least one of them, carpenter James Rose, recorded his migration to Canada and his early experiences in a new country. His diary in the Public Archives of Canada provides many invaluable insights into the experience of one early Toronto union leader.

Ethnic traditions are evident in other sources as well. Late nineteenth-century Canadian writers, from the furniture carver and poet, Charles Heavysege, through ex-Chartists Thomas McQueen, Alexander McLachlan, Alexander Somerville, and John Fraser (Cousin Sandy), to Hamilton working class poet Alexander Wingfield, were deeply influenced by their origins in the British Isles.²¹ Perhaps the most famous of these writers, Alexander McLachlan, continued to write in Scottish dialect and to be inspired by Robert Burns, "the bard wha did belang/ To nae mere class or clan,/ But did maintain, and not in vain,/ The Britherhood o' Man!"²²

21 For Heavysege and McQueen see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 9 (Toronto, 1976). For Wingfield see his *Poems and Songs in Scotch and English* (Hamilton, 1873).

22 Alexander McLachlan, *The Poetical Works of . . .* (Toronto, 1974).

The old struggles of the Irish and of the Scottish crofters burned deeply in Toronto and the connections between them, organized labour, and radical politics can be traced in the biographies of Toronto working class leaders. Like Henry George in the United States, the Toronto journalist and radical, Phillips Thompson, moved easily from the specificity of the Irish Land League to the generality of his anti-capitalist classic, *The Politics of Labor*. However, this was but one ethnic response. Other Toronto workers generated different world views from equally deep roots adapted to their new world. Orangeism, for example, with its trinity of crown, protestantism, and empire, had a tenacious hold on large segments of the Toronto working class.²³ Too often simply dismissed out of hand for its bigotry, the Orange world was complex. The Order functioned effectively as a quasi-political organization to effect electoral results in times when manhood suffrage appeared to be a utopian dream. It also engaged in ritual riot in which, on important dates in a peculiarly Irish calendar, Orangemen battled with green rivals. Yet the Order also served as a key immigrant aid society which eased the initial transition to Canadian society. As the Order adapted, it provided a tenacious institutional check on elitist and anti-democratic tendencies. Although it drew a few members from the upper class, the Orange Order remained predominantly a working class organization.²⁴ This is especially striking when it is compared with the more conventional Toronto St. Andrew's, St. George's, or even St. Patrick's Societies. These organizations enlisted the successful members of their particular ethnic groups to aid their less favoured brothers and sisters.

Toronto society was riddled with other voluntary associations in the late nineteenth century. A review of city directories or civic booster literature reveals hundreds of lodges of Masons, Oddfellows, Foresters, Phythians, and United Workmen.²⁵ Until recently, fraternal societies have been viewed with deep suspicion by most historians because of the central place that ritual and secrecy had in their activities. One should not forget that the first great advances in labour organization were made by groups that conducted themselves in the tradition of secret fraternities. The Knights of St. Crispin, the Knights of Labor, and most other labour groups adopted these institutional forms. Secrecy had a powerful effect in creating trust and familiarity in times of social confusion. No matter how dislocated the physical community might be, the urban worker could count with

23 The Baldwin Room of the Metropolitan Toronto Central Library holds an extensive collection of Orange Lodge manuscripts, but printed Orange material such as proceedings and rituals are scattered.

24 Gregory S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class," in Kealey and Warrion, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976).

25 For one such list see C. Pelham Mulvany, *Toronto: Past and Present* (Toronto, 1884), pp. 128-41.

certainly on seeing the same friends on lodge night when he might not be able to count on knowing where that friend might live from month to month. There is a vast amount of collected data on these organizations. As those that have a continuing existence decline or lapse into inactivity, they present to archivists a unique opportunity to gather crucial data on one of the most secretly guarded features of nineteenth-century working class life. The role of these fraternal and benevolent societies demands increased historical attention and only manuscript sources will allow the reconstruction of membership lists, the examination of their class base, and the careful consideration of their social role.

The nineteenth-century working class family constitutes one of the most difficult cultural resources to examine and analyse. The little that we know about family life comes from quantitative history, which yields information on family size, age of marriage, and family mobility, but says nothing of the strengths that bound members of the working class family together nor of the limitations that it necessarily imposed on freedom of social action. However, we do know that the separation of the home from the work place that began with the Industrial Revolution saw its most complete expression in the last years of the Victorian era. The home and family became a kind of retreat from the world, and the family circle became the most important focus of leisure activities in working class life. It should also be remembered that the home was the place where working class men considered and made their most important political and economic decisions.

Although we know relatively little about the working class family as an institution, there are many kinds of evidence that can be used to reconstruct some of its aspects for Toronto. Exploration in material culture can provide us with details of sizes and types of housing, diet, patterns of consumption, and style of life. Commercial records, wage data, catalogues, and advertisements can all be used to reconstruct the material basis for family life. Reformers interested in the eradication of slums left behind a wide range of photographic evidence which shows us graphically the severe limitations under which some of the poorer families laboured. Nevertheless, it should be noted that pictorial evidence of this kind and a variety of other kinds of literature and manuscripts left behind by reformers external to the working class community were propaganda in a crusade for a particular programme of reform rather than the calmly assembled records of dispassionate observers.²⁶ Obviously, such evidence must be used with extreme caution. In each case the evidence must be judged alongside a growing body of oral history resources gleaned from actual participants.²⁷

26 For a perceptive examination of the meaning of data gathered on the family by nineteenth-century reformers see C. Lasch, "What the Doctor Ordered," *New York Review of Books* 22 (11 December 1975).

27 For an instructive look at the way oral history can be used to probe the working class

The growing collections of oral history give a much more sympathetic view of family intentions than do posed photographs of children with dirty faces. As contacts with the actual participants of family life increase, it should be possible for archivists to augment dramatically the rather meagre traditional documentary sources of family life such as diaries and letters.²⁸

Of all the media available to the working class of the late nineteenth century, the printed word was one of the most significant. The situation in Toronto illustrates this importance. For instance, in 1891, when two promoters were interested in acquiring the Toronto Street Railway franchise, they approached the editor of a labour newspaper and offered to turn over a percentage of the anticipated profits for the creation of free reading rooms in working class sections of the city. In return, the editor was to support their quest for the franchise. They obviously felt that the growing sentiment for public ownership of the railway franchise could be overcome by pandering to the general rush of the working class for culture.²⁹ While this scheme came to nothing, the wide variety of printed matter that the working class devoured leaves us with a voluminous record that both describes aspects of working class life and provides clues to the range of ideas available to workers.

The daily press is the most fruitful source for the depiction of nineteenth-century working class life; all the studies that are under way rely heavily upon it. Working class history will spread and prosper as longer runs of the daily press become more readily available. The most imaginative of Toronto's journalistic entrepreneurs in the last third of the nineteenth century founded a number of popular evening dailies aimed at the working class market. Ironically, the most successful of them, recently called the "people's press," have remained the last journals to be microfilmed and the least accessible to scholars. Toronto evening papers such as the *Telegraph*, *Telegram*, *News*, and *Star* were the most easily accessible print resource available to the working class reader and were certainly the ones most regularly read. In the same way, popular weeklies that were favourites of the Toronto working class, such as *Truth*, *Grip*, and, in a later period, *Jack Canuck*, have also remained inaccessible to scholars. This has been most unfortunate when one considers the many unexplored aspects of a periodical like *Grip* which provides the modern researcher with more than a mere gauge of popular taste. The editor of *Grip*, John Wilson Bengough, was a trained shorthand reporter and often used a brief column, "Talk of the Street," as a filler. The following

family, see the entire Family History Issue of *Oral History* 3 (Autumn 1975). See also Jane Syngé, "Immigrant Communities," *Oral History* 4 (Autumn 1976): 38-51.

28 One particularly good example of the potentially rich resource that a working class diary can be is that of Arthur Edwin Cannon, Metropolitan Toronto Central Library.

29 *Labor Advocate* (28 August 1891).

excerpt, recorded early in 1891 provides a rare example of accurately rendered working class speech:

“An’ were ye no at the Paveelion on St. Andrew’s Night? Man, but it was just grand!”—“Gillespie? Gillespie’s a Grit, ain’t he? Got no show at all.”—“Parnell’s all right. The boys is wid him.”—“*News*, Jimmy, *News*! That feller other side of street wants one an’ I’m sold out.”—“Told him to git right outer the house, and served him right. The fellow is in debt all over town, and can’t support a wife.”—“Vokes is going to get it in the neck this trip, you bet!”

Such material provides many insights into the daily life of nineteenth-century working class Torontonians who did not survive long enough to preserve their dialects and everyday concerns on the tape recorder of the oral historian. Popular dailies and weeklies should be accorded the same archival and library respect that has been lavished on influential journals of “elevated opinion” that were read by a fraction of the audience that supported popular journals. While twentieth-century scholars may prefer the tone and style of dailies such as the *Globe* and the *Mail* and of weeklies such as the *Nation* and the *Week*, more can be learned of the range of ideological possibility that framed the worker’s universe from the popular press.³⁰

Toronto workers did not rely merely on the daily press for their reading material. The pages of most nineteenth-century periodicals abound with advertisements for inexpensive editions of the classics of the western tradition; growing numbers of these and other works found their way into working class homes. Many of the more radical journals encouraged study groups; the readings for such groups ranged from the periodicals themselves to the most abstruse works of political economy.³¹ Cheap editions of Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* were read extensively. Phillips Thompson vigorously “remaindered” the slower selling *Politics of Labor* to his study group attached to the Toronto Nationalist Association. The important role such books had in the emerging working class consciousness can be judged from the case of John S. McDonough, a Hamilton blacksmith and dairyman, who had been a Knight of Labor. In 1891 he completed an application and paid a deposit to join the Kaweah Cooperative Colony in California. He indicated his willingness to move his wife and five children across the continent to the colony. The sole work that he cited to support his belief in the principles was *Looking Backward*.³² Even those who were not able to afford books themselves were not denied access as the library of the Toronto Mechanics’ Institute became the Public Library. Historians

30 Paul Rutherford, “The People’s Press: The Emergence of the New Journalism in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 56 (June 1975): 167-91.

31 See Hamilton *Palladium of Labor*, “Our Social Club,” (September 1883—24 November 1883) for a description of a study group of labour reformers.

32 Paul Kagan, *New World Communities* (New York, 1975), p. 85.



Toronto Telegram Linotype Operators (circa 1905) manning the machines which transformed the printers' world. However, by the time the machines arrived in the 1890s, the International Typographical Union was strong enough to protect its members. Former hand compositors were given all the new mechanized jobs. (Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)

working with library records in other countries have been able to reconstruct remarkable accounts of the popularity over time of particular books and periodicals.³³ As libraries amalgamate and pool their resources, there is an obvious role for the archivist in saving records which can help scholars in the twentieth century understand the cultural milieu of the nineteenth.

In many ways, new historical approaches involve asking new questions of old materials as much as they demand totally new materials. More conventional labour records are still of great importance to the writing of working class history. The records of organized labour in Toronto were fortunately better preserved than those of most cities. The Minutes of the Toronto Trades Assembly (1871-1878) and the Toronto Trades and Labor Council (1881-) are available. In addition, the minute books of the Toronto Typographical Union (1845-), the Toronto Printing Pressmen's Union (1883-1890), and the Toronto Musicians Association (1874-1877) are in archives. Of equal importance the Proceedings of the Canadian Labor Union (1873-1877) and the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (1883, 1886-) provide considerable local information because of Toronto's crucial role in the organization of each body.

33 See Hywel Francis, "The Origins of the South Wales Miners' Library," *History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians* 2 (Autumn 1976): 183-205.

The Toronto labour press has also been relatively well preserved. Incomplete runs of the *Ontario Workman* (1872-1874), the *Trade Union Advocate* (1882-1883), the *Palladium of Labor* (Toronto edition, 1886), the *Canadian Labor Reformer* (1886-1887), and the *Labor Advocate* (1890-1891) remain. Unfortunately lost is D.J. O'Donoghue's *Labor Record* (1886). Moreover, the journals of international unions provide extensive coverage of their Toronto locals' activities. For example, the Iron Molders' *Journal* allows us to recreate in some detail the world of the Toronto metal trades. At the same time it tells us much about broader developments in the industry and in the union which are important to any understanding of local events. The same is true of international union proceedings which can either fill gaps in local records or provide a framework for understanding local developments. The extensive Powderly and Hayes papers give us an intimate view of the Knights of Labor in Toronto. Both D.J. O'Donoghue and A.W. Wright carried on a voluminous correspondence with the Knights' General Master Workman. O'Donoghue's letters richly document the Toronto trade union scene and give an insider's view of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLC), and the partisan fight for the working class vote in Toronto.

These are all examples of the importance of traditional sources, yet these same collections also lend themselves to other uses. Minute books often contain attendance records, and international union material sometimes provide lists of the movements of their members from city to city. For the historian interested in geographic mobility, this allows a total tracing of the movement of Toronto printers, moulders, or coopers over a lengthy time span. Powderly's papers, in addition to expanding our insight into labour organization, politics and leadership, also contain letters from rank and file Knights expressing their views of local developments. The correspondence lends itself to numerous uses ranging from organizational reconstitution to an analysis of the importance of ritual. A series of Toronto letters, for example, concerned a woman Knight who had divulged the order's secret handshake. The gravity of this misconduct and the near horror expressed about the breach of secrecy demonstrate the import of what many twentieth-century writers on the Knights have hurriedly dismissed.

Trade union rules, constitutions, minutes, and proceedings often convey the best sense of how work was organized and the key role of skilled workers in maintaining or even extending workers' control in this realm during the late nineteenth century. At the same time, these materials reveal much about working class value systems through their negative description of fellow workers who failed the various tests of fire that the boss created. Denunciations and numerous epithets such as "rat," "unmanly" and "dishonourable," tell us by inversion about the workers

high regard for self-respect and “manly” behaviour. Some trade union records also tell much about the unskilled who worked beside the skilled in many factories. In short, traditional sources still provide crucial information about the Toronto workers’ world.

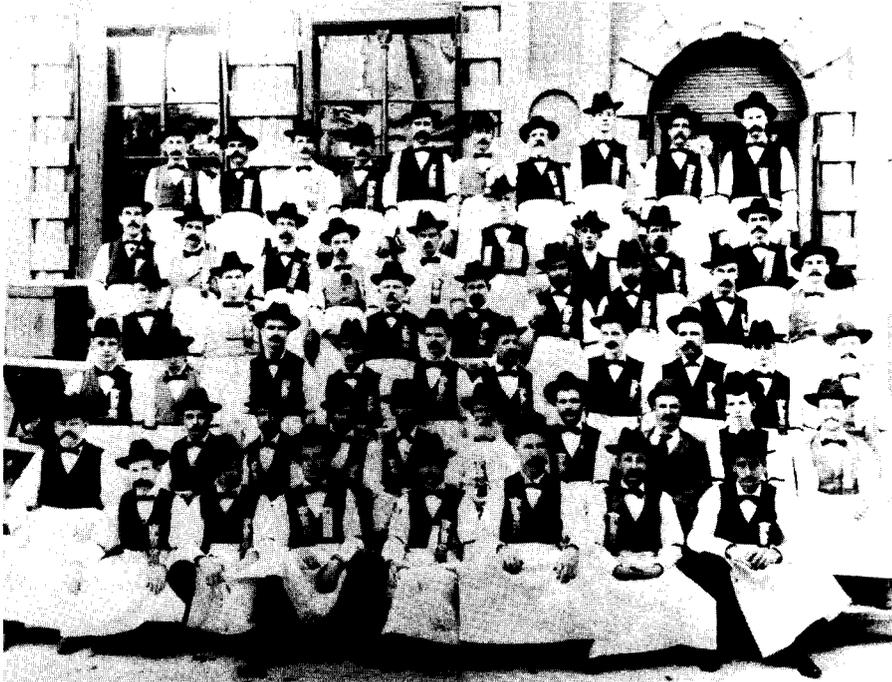
The workplace itself would seem to be the most natural focus for working class history. Yet until recently, labour historians were quite cavalier in their treatment of the organization of work, industrial discipline, and technological change. Where traditional labour historians felt that there was a clear distinction between job consciousness and political consciousness, more recent scholarship does not maintain that such a dichotomy is natural.³⁴ Indeed, it sees the workplace as pre-eminently political, where conflicts over control constantly occur. The early Canadian industrial worker was slow in warming to the canon of efficiency enunciated by his employer. Primitive rebellion can only be dismissed out of hand by the detached observer; to the participant it is a serious political endeavour. It is now possible to write the history of his resistance in the workplace without nostalgia for a lost golden age or condescension for the recalcitrant worker.

The Knights of St. Crispin’s struggle against the new Toronto shoe factory owners in the early 1870s included an attack on the machines which had helped capital destroy the shoemakers’ craft.³⁵ Toronto stonecutters, on the other hand, managed for many years to prevent the use of stone-cutting machines.³⁶ Toronto printers employed a different strategy and in the early 1880s ensured that all typesetting on the new Mergenthaler machines would be controlled by union members at restricted rates of

34 The pioneering work in this field was undoubtedly Sidney Pollard’s *The Genesis of Modern Management* (London, 1965). This was followed by the brilliant article by E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56-97. In the United States, key work in this area has been done by Herbert Gutman, “Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America,” *American Historical Review* 78 (1973): 531-88; David Montgomery, “Workers’ Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century,” *Labor History* 17 (1976): 485-509, and his “The ‘New Unionism’ and the Transformation of Workers’ Consciousness in America, 1909-1922,” *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974): 509-529. See also Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly* (New York, 1974), and Bryan Palmer, “Class, Conception and Class Conflict: The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labor, and the Working Class Rebellion, 1903-1922,” *The Review of Radical Political Economics* 7 (1975): 31-49.

35 G.S. Kealey, “Artisans Respond to Industrialism: Shoemakers, Shoe Factories and the Knights of St. Crispin in Toronto,” *Historical Papers* (Canadian Historical Association, 1973), pp. 137-57.

36 Wayne Roberts, “Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Trade Unionism among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976): 92-121.



The Toronto Stonecutters Association of North America on Labour Day, 1904. The skilled worker in all his glory peers at us from this posed ceremonial photograph. The aprons are worn as symbols of the trade. Like the printers, the stonecutters were quite successful initially in protecting their trade from the incursions of mechanization. (Public Archives of Ontario, S15089)

production.³⁷ These are only three examples of the crucial importance of an understanding of the work process for the historian of the working class. Material that can be used to reconstruct historically the tensions of the workplace include business records, engineering records, technological specifications, material on vocational education and apprenticeship, and trade union rules and proceedings.³⁸ More collecting can probably be done relatively easily in this area because there is a great deal of material not housed in archives at present with which either businesses or unions may be willing to part. Business and working class history clearly intersect at some points, and business archivists should keep the working class historian's interests in mind when collecting and organizing material.

37 Gregory S. Kealey, "'The Honest Workingman' and Workers' Control: The Experience of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976): 32-68, and Wayne Roberts, "The Last Artisans: Toronto Printers, 1896-1914," in Kealey and Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976).

38 For an interesting collection of materials on Canadian technology see Bruce Sinclair, et al., *Let Us Be Honest and Modest: Technology and Society in Canadian History* (Toronto, 1974).

Where traditional styles in labour history, particularly in Canada, insisted on the primacy of third party politics as an expression of working class life, the newer approaches attempt to examine the world of traditional politics as a social process. Collections of politicians' papers always seem to receive the best treatment in our archival institutions. The working class historian can profit from this organization and give a far better portrait of traditional political life. Perhaps this is an area in which Canadians have a unique problem, for our political history has always consisted largely of glowing biographies of great men. Any systematic study of the John A. Macdonald Papers at the Public Archives of Canada will yield a wealth of material on formal protests by labour as well as informal material on Tory workingmen across the country. The growth of alternate parties and styles of opposition is important for history of the working class, but the bulk of the working class remained in the service of the traditional parties. The rise of new political and social doctrines in the late nineteenth century was an important development and reveals much about responses to industrialization, yet it remains an area in Canadian history which has been little explored. However, third party radicalism cannot be seen as the purest expression of working class life without ignoring the majority of the working class. Again, examination of the Macdonald Papers turns up considerable evidence. For instance, the Workingman's Liberal Conservative Union was founded by Canadian Tories in the late 1870s to capture the working class vote when the decline of Orangeism and the rise of trade unionism seemed to endanger Conservative fortunes in Toronto and other industrial centres. The Macdonald Papers also depict in great detail the methods of party organization employed by the Tories in Toronto. The vast network of ward associations and patronage appointments tell much about workers in politics in the late nineteenth century. The Toronto Tory machine by the 1880s had enlisted such stalwart trade union leaders as printer John Armstrong, bricklayer Andrew McCormack, and carpenter Sam Heakes. It had also well rewarded earlier trade union leaders from the 1870s. J.S. Williams, printer and former editor of the *Ontario Workman*, had become a paid party functionary in Toronto; cooper and nine-hour workday leader John Hewitt was employed in the Toronto Water Works; printer and *Orange Sentinel* publisher E.F. Clarke became a Member of the Provincial Parliament and Mayor of Toronto with Tory backing. Such information can be culled from the Macdonald Papers and, when combined with working class sources, begins to make sense out of a political history which in Canada has for far too long totally ignored class. Liberal sources are less rich for Toronto politics, but the letters of Knights' leader D.J. O'Donoghue in Powderly's papers are revealing about Grit efforts to attract working class support. A national political history which has ignored the impact of suffrage extension, the legalization of trade unionism, the surge of independent labour politics in the mid-1880s, and the lobbying presence of the Knights and TLC in Ottawa and Toronto

demands critical attention from historians of the working class. This is especially true since it was through politics and the state that Canadian capitalists exercised their ultimate hegemony over the Canadian working class no matter how strenuous was its resistance. Nor should political research into local government be ignored. In Toronto, workers first tasted political power in the realm of local politics, where the real building blocks of party politics existed. The locality was the crucial arena in which many of the battles fought by the working class were won.

Research into formal working class political activity should not obscure the fact that political activity was not confined to the political platform or party. Workers resolved many problems without recourse to formal organization. Riots, demonstrations, and other types of spontaneous activity were often used to press for immediate concessions. On some occasions these were successful. Street actions during the first Toronto Street Railway strike of 1886 prevented the company from maintaining business as usual and helped gain the workers a compromise settlement for a short time.

Unfortunately, the goal was not always noble; racial violence against orientals occurred continually throughout this period. Reprehensible as this was, it nevertheless constituted a political statement that Canadian government immigration policy favoured cheap labour. The forum for this kind of behaviour was the city, the town, and the village. From the early years of the Ottawa Valley timber trade when lumber workers terrorized the towns in which they lived, workers found that they could exercise class power most effectively over local authorities, either formally or informally. There is no easy means of unearthing this long history of popular riot. Every incident usually emerges from a careful reading of the daily press, but because of the nature of the enterprise, no incident is fully documented.

By the end of the nineteenth century it was clear that for the new order to triumph totally, the more boisterous remnants of traditional behaviour which had survived the transition to industrial capitalist society would have to be constrained by legal sanction. Throughout the late nineteenth century, institutionalized coercion gradually replaced the older missionary efforts to alter habits through individual persuasion. Temperance reformers replaced the earlier strategy of individual pledges with a programme of total prohibition. Toronto street children who had freely hawked papers on street corners found themselves required to live in the Newsboys' Home if they wanted a licence to sell newspapers. Prostitutes were controlled more closely by being detained at the Magdalen Asylum if apprehended. Outrageous characters such as Doc Sheppard, an eccentric drunkard, and Don Dwan, the Mayor of Stanley Street, who had caused police magistrates so much anguish gradually disappeared from the forefront of

civic consciousness. The process of institutionalization transformed the agents of moral reform more drastically than it did those upon whom they were ostensibly acting. Women who had taken up the cause of helping the distressed quickly adopted the habits of scientific philanthropy. Toronto's chief police magistrate in the latter part of the period, George Taylor Denison, fancied himself a member of the landed gentry and, as such, tolerant of the foibles of the "Irish element" and the "negro element." However, during his years in office, Denison became as faithful a defender of industrial discipline outside the workplace as any labour-crushing foreman inside the factory walls.³⁹ In the twentieth century, few aspects of the worker's life inside or outside the factory would be free from supervision. The information generated by these new institutions constitutes perhaps the largest body of data available on the private lives of Toronto workers. Recently acquired police records and Childrens' Aid records both promise much to historians concerned with the worker off the job.

An evaluation of the archival holdings related to the working class demonstrates that there are large amounts of data in existing collections which are relevant to the new working class history. The study of Toronto has uncovered a range of material in various local, provincial, and national institutions. At first glance, some of the material did not seem especially relevant to the history of the working class or it appeared to be merely ephemeral. A closer look, however, established its utility for serious scholarly inquiry.

Archivists should be aware of the ways in which more traditional material can be used in working class history and should be sensitive to some of the more important uses to which seemingly irrelevant information can be put. Access to this documentation could be improved by the preparation of comprehensive guides to existing collections demonstrating the nature of the material. In the area of public records, work on thematic guides to particular collections must begin if scholars are to have any notion of what is contained in some of the more unwieldy groups of records.

As far as material that is not already deposited in archives is concerned, the priorities for collecting should recognize the serious scholarly nature of working class studies. There is a great deal of formal trade union information in the community which was somehow missed by the first generation of labour archivists. Furthermore, much of the material on labour in political papers has been collected according to political biases that ignored many of the other political options open to nineteenth-century labour. Formalized links between archives and existing labour organiza-

39 George T. Denison, *Recollections of a Police Magistrate* (Toronto, 1920).

tions could result in modern records programmes that would limit the recurrence of the tragedies which resulted in the loss or destruction of nineteenth-century records. Unfortunately, the difficulties of collecting records of institutions which have lapsed, or where the links between a working class past and the present are obscure, are in many ways greater. Suffice it to say that archivists should be as sensitive to the records of the archaic losing side as to those of the progressive winning side. The prevailing forces in history are the result of a variety of possibilities and the existing direction cannot be understood apart from the lost causes and blind alleys. As Fernand Braudel has said: "It is necessary to give them their place because the losing movements are forces which have at every moment affected the final outcome."⁴⁰

The importance of locale to the new working class history has been stressed, for it has serious archival implications. Where comparable care can be obtained for the material near the area where the document was produced, it would seem preferable to leave it there. In this age of the microfilm and xerox copy, there seems little need for central archives to demand originals. Furthermore, unless a vital system of local archives can be established throughout the country, much of the important material relevant to working class history will not be collected at all.

Finally, much of the material used in working class history cuts across some of the boundaries which have developed around archival work. Newspapers, the major source for working class history, are not being collected and preserved adequately, and indeed, are often not even considered archival material. Other sources such as catalogues, almanacs, and oral history, are being left to libraries where too often there is a consciousness even more limited than in archives of their value as documentary evidence. Archivists hoping to reflect the history of the working class in its proper perspective must realize that the established attitudes and patterns of archival collecting need adjustment to meet the requirements of changing historiography. Archives after all have histories too.

⁴⁰ Fernand Braudel, as quoted in Herbert Gutman and Gregory Kealey, "Introduction," in *Many Past*s (Englewood Cliffs, 1973), 1:3.

Résumé

Cet article brosse un tableau général des sources d'archives pertinentes à la recherche en histoire de la classe ouvrière en Amérique du Nord. S'inspirant de l'approche de E. P. Thompson, l'auteur se sert de l'exemple des travailleurs de Toronto pour démontrer que l'histoire de la classe ouvrière dépasse largement le cadre de l'histoire des syndicats et décrit les diverses sources primaires qui peuvent la documenter. En conclusion, il lance un appel pour que les institutions d'archives reconnues mettent sur pied des programmes plus concrets susceptibles d'assurer un versement continu de documents pertinents à l'histoire de la classe ouvrière.