

Case Records as Sources for Social History

by G.J. PARR

A decade ago the first studies of geographic and social mobility based on manuscript census returns, city directories and parish records were accorded a richly deserved welcome as the "new social history." Reviewers suggested that this quantitative work would lend healthy depth and precision to more traditionally-based inquiries into the daily life of the labouring and unlettered in the nineteenth century.¹ In many ways the new history has fulfilled this promise.² Our understanding of the ethnic, demographic and occupational complexion of rural and increasingly urban communities on both sides of the Atlantic has been substantially enriched. Yet this new quantitative precision has not been so successfully married with depth as had been hoped. Recent work employing more traditional methodology has often succeeded better in illuminating the texture of life among the "submerged" four-tenths of the last century.³

With the admirable eclecticism which distinguishes the profession, historians have reached across their worktables stacked high with

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- 1 Among the most enduring of these earlier works are: E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollancz, 1963); Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964) and *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); Caroline Ware, *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1931).
 - 2 See, for example, D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (Chicago: Aldine, 1965); Peter Laslett and Richard Well, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964); Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, eds., *Nineteenth Century Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).
 - 3 See Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

impedimenta from IBM and Honeywell for assistance from the innumerate. The best of the new social history couples traditional techniques with cliometric analysis. Note, for example, the way in which Michael Katz has integrated the tribulations recorded in the autobiography of Wilson Benson, an 1841 immigrant to Canada West, into his statistical evidence concerning transiency and inequality in Hamilton at mid-century.⁴

Nevertheless, the literary legacy of Wilson Benson is an extraordinary one among men of his period and position. Few narratives survive which transcend the short-sightedness and shorthand of the census-taker and describe family formation, occupational adjustments and standards of life over considerable periods.⁵ The problem of securing profiles for considerable numbers of ordinary folk upon which a more intricate and intimate treatment of the quality and working life could be based, therefore, remains. There are too many important questions which the census-taker never asks, too many reasons to suspect the typicality of the labouring man or woman of literary inclinations.

One approach to this problem is the use of case records generated by public and philanthropic social welfare institutions. As sources, case histories demand a severe sacrifice in breadth by comparison with census, assessment or parish records. The institutionally dependent are not, for most periods, representative of the population as a whole. Only with careful caveats can their experience be generalized to describe groups of substantial size among the poor. But this narrowing of focus allows for considerable sharpening in detail. Case files systematically record personal information rarely available elsewhere. With the information which beadles, bailiffs and the benevolent felt necessary to manage the life of an inmate or applicant, a social historian can craft a collective biography which supplements the depth of the census and the breadth of the literary sources, adding a dimension heretofore available through neither.

There is considerable chronological variation in the availability and usefulness of case records. As sources, they pose a number of analytical problems for the historian and difficulties in access and ordering for the archivist. If researchers do begin to examine documents of this type more extensively, some observations upon each of these topics may prove helpful.

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Case records are the product of the more systematic approach to philanthropy characteristic of the last third of the nineteenth century.

4 Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 94-175.

5 How useful these sources can be is amply demonstrated in the well-annotated collection of British working class autobiographies in John Burnett's *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820's to the 1920's* (London: A. Lane, 1974).

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Admitted July 26th, 1875.



Came here by himself on the above-named date, with the now common story of "I have got no father nor mother and no home."
 He last resided with his mother at 27, Albert Street, Shadwell. His mother, he says, is a dressmaker. The reason he came to the Home was because his mother went away for some days, and his mother's landlady told him he had better come here.
 His father was a ship carpenter, and has been dead about two years. He died at Rio Janeiro.
 He says he has a sister somewhere in America.
 The street in which his mother resides bears a very bad name, and is the resort of prostitutes, and there are several "Brothels" there.

JOHN STATEMENT.
 "I was born in St. George's in the East. Father died at Rio Janeiro out at sea. He has been dead two years. I have one sister away in America. My mother lives in Albert Street, Back Row. She is a dressmaker. Mother couldn't keep me no longer, so I came in by myself. When I lived with my mother I went to St. Andrew's Church School."
 Education—Can read monosyllables.

READLER'S REPORT.
 July 30th, 1875.
 This boy's father was a ship carpenter. He died 18 months ago of yellow fever at Rio Janeiro, leaving the mother with two children, the above boy, and a girl of 14, who is in Canada. After her husband's death she received what money was due to him, which she soon spent, then took to the streets, and is now living at 27, Albert Street, a common brothel she walks Ratchiff Highway, and is one of the worst of her kind. She has no regular home, and leaves the boy sometimes for days to get his living as well as he can. On the 20th instant she left him with a woman named Doyle, who keeps three lod houses in Albert Street, who, not hearing anything of his mother, sent him to the Home. Since then I found the mother in a brothel in Beth Street, drunk, with some more prostitutes and sailors. I told her where her boy was, when she said "she did not care where he is, she wishes he was dead."
 I have made enquiries and find there is no one belonging to him alive except his mother and sister.

Subsequent Report

1886
 Jan'y 19 Mr. Best could not get leave to learn from Mother. Did not come back to Home.
 Engaged himself to someone in the neighbourhood.
 Sep. 17 Mr. Buff informant that has met with serious accident in harvest field, having fallen on a hay fork. Is at work again.
 17.6.87 John called on the Home hoping to see Dr. Barnardo who seems very happy with Mr. Busch and is earning 12.9 a month.
 10.9.87 John called hoping to see Dr. Barnardo. He happened to be back at the end of November, and is desirous of obtaining

No.	Employer	Address	Occupation	Terms	Date
1	Mr. Wm	Ormeau	Carver	David & Company and Spring	12.11.86
2	Mr. Wm Cummings	Enniscorthy St. B. Pellican			19.1.88
	Mr. Wm Busch	Horwood	Farmer	88.00 per month	1.2.88

Address maintained

An early case record from Dr. Barnardo's Homes, Barkingside, Essex. This example is drawn from the British record group. The post-emigration notes are condensations provided by Home officials in Peterborough and Toronto from their more extensive Canadian files. (Barnardo Photo Archives)

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John C. —
 a place near Newwood Co. Haller where his cousin
 Thomas C. Weston is working.
 Dec. 1897. Mother's letter from 234, 15th Street, London E.C. 4.
 Partwright at London E.C. enquiring if his son is dead
 as alive, not having heard from him for ten months
 write to her and also to John.
 Dec. 29. Capt. C. writes — "John" called, he left Mr. Buck
 Oct. 18. worked 5 weeks at Fall ploughing with Mr. C. & Cap.
 is now working in the lumber trade for the winter in
 partnership with Mr. C. of Newwood — hopes to be
 able to rent a farm soon in partnership with Mr. C.
 Jan. 1900. Mr. Owen reports — Date of latest information
 19. 1. 93. Health good. Conduct fairly satisfactory
 is married and lived for some time in the village of
 Newwood working as a labourer. Will probably
 never rise much beyond this position and his wife
 and her relations are not likely to help him.

Evangelical protestants in the forefront of British charitable work were concerned to select only worthy candidates for assistance and to monitor the effects of their charitable intervention. In the words of one prominent East London revivalist:

As a missionary band, we prayerfully wished to take a life long interest in those we sought to assist, recording their well-doing or their ill-doing upon our books, assisting the weak and sick, rewarding the industrious, and giving wholesome advice to those who fall back to their old habits.⁶

In succeeding decades the professional social workers who came to control public and philanthropic welfare agencies adapted the instruments of spiritually motivated rescue work to meet their secular aspirations for uniformity and rationality in the administration of policy.

Several fine sets of records of particular Canadian interest were created in Britain during the pioneering years in casework. These series describe the British background and Canadian circumstances of the thousands of orphaned, deserted and dependent children who emigrated to the Dominion between Confederation and the Great War.

Documents concerning individual immigrant children are of two types. Government inspection reports upon some youngsters record the name,

⁶ Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report of Andrew Doyle to the President of the Local Government Board on the Emigration of Pauper Children to Canada," 1875, LXIII, p. 5.

address, age, religion, English provenance and Canadian condition of many emigrants at a particular place and time. The earliest of these were created by Dominion immigration agents from 1875 to 1878 during the investigation of pauper and philanthropically assisted children undertaken to rebut the conclusions of Andrew Doyle, an English Local Government Board inspector who had filed a report highly critical of the movement.⁷ Similar materials, upon pauper children only, exist in the Records of the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture at the Public Archives of Canada and in the Ministry of Health series at the Public Record Office.⁸ Except in extreme cases, these reports are cryptic concerning the child's Canadian circumstances. But they are the only source through which the geographical distribution of British Boards of Guardians resorting to emigration can be determined, the religious balance between Protestants and Roman Catholics estimated, and the distribution areas for a large number of emigrating agencies defined.

The best sources for the children's history are the records on the English background and Canadian circumstances of former wards maintained by the emigrating agencies. The largest, longest and most detailed set of case records preserved and under certain circumstances, accessible to the researcher, are those of Dr. Barnardo's Homes, currently housed at the agency's headquarters at Tanner's Lane, Barkingside, Essex. A quarter of all the child emigrants came to Canada under the auspices of this one agency, the largest among the more than fifty engaged in such work. By the 1890s, Barnardo's dominated the juvenile immigration programme and their methods were studied and imitated by other Evangelical protestant agencies and by British Catholic emigration agencies. Barnardo's maintained branches both in Ontario and Manitoba and their children were more widely dispersed throughout rural Canada than those of any other agency. They emigrated both boys and girls from toddlers to adolescents. As a result, their wards' experiences are more representative of the range of circumstances in which child emigrants found themselves in Canada than those of smaller, more localized agencies. Because the last Barnardo branch in Canada did not close until 1963, their records on wards reaching adulthood are likely to be more informative than those of agencies which closed their doors soon after the emigration ended.

Within the Barnardo organization the detail in the emigrant children's case histories is exceptional. Until 1941, only admission reports and photographs were maintained for children under care in the English Homes.⁹ This difference in practice for Canadian apprentices is readily

7 These reports are preserved in the Toronto Emigration Office Records, vol. 22, at the Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

8 This series begins in 1876 and continues consecutively after 1883. The volumes for 1905 and succeeding years at the Public Record Office, London (Home Office 167) are closed under a hundred-year rule.

9 Verbal communication, R. Clough and T. Bailey, Dr. Barnardo's Homes, Barkingside, Essex, 24 June 1974.

explained.¹⁰ The bulk of the emigrants' records were generated in Canada while the children were still wards of the Homes. During this period, correspondence and written visitors' reports had to substitute for the daily personal supervision by staff afforded institutionalized children in England. The responsibilities of guardianship were intensified by the evangelicals' particular commitment to monitor the progress of each child's spiritual development.

Throughout its long history the emigration programme retained something of the nature of an experiment. Detailed record-keeping became essential as a means of monitoring and modifying experimental results in the face of higher turn-over in a smaller Canadian staff. As the policy was under continual criticism both in Britain and in Canada, elaborate records were needed in the English head office to create at least the illusion of competent handling in the Canadian work. Successful case histories were selected to defend and publicize the policy in the British press. Barnardo was candid with his Canadian staff about the polemical value of their regular reporting to him and doubtless they responded with material suitable for his purposes.¹¹ Yet, if British spokesmen for the Homes found highly coloured reports useful, their Canadian counterparts did not. In the face of acute local scrutiny and the need to retain sufficient public sympathy to allow the work to continue, the Canadian staff created internal records in their branches containing accurate information upon which to ground decisions concerning legal actions, discipline and deportation.

Four groups of Barnardo records have been preserved. For each child there is a printed admission history providing a physical description, medical evaluation, list of the occupation and whereabouts of all known relatives, and a brief account of the circumstances which led to the child's entry into the Homes. Often a photograph has been pasted onto the admission history. The summaries of Canadian circumstances provided by branch officials in the Dominion were transcribed in the London Headquarters onto these printed forms. Interleaved is correspondence between parents and the Homes and letters between parents and children intercepted by the agency. This set of records will in future be available on microfilm at the Public Archives of Canada.

At the time of emigration, a list of all party members was prepared. This list—not usually in alphabetical order—includes the Board of Guardian's children seconded to the Homes for emigration as well as

¹⁰ Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, "Report of the Departmental Committee, appointed by the Local Government Board, to inquire into the existing systems for the maintenance and education of children under the charge of managers of district schools and Boards of Guardians in the Metropolis," 1896, XLIII, v. 2, p. 351.

¹¹ Sylvie Barnardo and James Marchant, *Memoirs of the Late Dr. Barnardo* (London, 1907), pp. 181-2. See also Annie Macpherson in *The Christian*, 15 June 1888, p. 18, for the usefulness of former wards' communications with the Homes for publicity.

Barnardo's own children, serving well to define the population from which the researcher may draw a sample.

The records of Barnardo's four Canadian branches were maintained in two series, organized by sailing party: bound Registers and Notes and Correspondence Books. In these volumes, the type of notification given parents of their child's departure is recorded, and letters and visitors' reports are summarized. This information was entered regularly until the child completed the indenture at age eighteen, and included summary notes thereafter.

It is possible, in a limited way, to follow the child immigrants into adulthood through the correspondence between former wards and the Homes preserved at Barnardo's headquarters on 258 reels of microfilm. Immigrants wrote to the Homes seeking family information, financial help and documentary proof of birth. The agency inquired after emigrants in order to answer queries from relations, to solicit donations and to evaluate the longer term impact of their work. The files include many original inspectors' reports, summaries of interviews with former wards made incidentally during the inspection of current wards, and correspondence with British, American and Canadian authorities concerning individual cases. They are remarkably thorough and provide a useful means of following the emigrants' progress later in life.

The staff who created these records were, by and large, Britons with some experience in the evangelical rescue movement. They came from more comfortable backgrounds than their wards, and were maintained through private means or salaries from the institution in the manner to which they were accustomed. The officials of the Boys' Homes were themselves immigrants. Alfred de Brissac Owen, the chief of the Canadian work from soon after its inception until 1919, was the son of an Anglican minister and a public school boy who had lived for a time in the Canadian West.¹² In 1911, he was receiving a salary of £ 450 yearly. His inspectors were retired officers from the British services, and younger men who had been teachers or local government clerks in England. His successor, J. W. Hobday, had previous experience with the YMCA.¹³

The superintendents, visitors and matrons in the Girls' Home were, with one notable exception, experienced staff members from the British Homes who did a term of service in the Canadian work. They were usually paid only a small honorarium by the institution. The Canadian born exception, Jennie G. Kennedy, entered the organization as secretary and school teacher at the Toronto Boys' Home. After a decade of experience, she became superintendent of the girls' Canadian Home. Most of the

12 Dr. Barnardo's Headquarters, "Girls Canada," microfilm, reel 27.

13 *Ups and Downs*, January 1896, p. 4 and February 1897, p. 2 (*Ups and Downs* was the house organ of Barnardo's Canadian work); Dr. Barnardo's Headquarters, "Boys Canada," microfilm, reel 118.

English staff stayed long enough with the Peterborough branch to gain a familiarity with Canadian conditions which served them well, when back in Britain, in choosing future emigrants. Previous acquaintance with many of the immigrants provided a foundation for trust and friendship which increased the effectiveness of their supervisory work.¹⁴

The most striking implication following from the employ of English inspection staff was that the children's circumstances were evaluated by English rather than Canadian standards. As a result, the records they maintained are more useful in comparing the English emigrants' childhoods in Canada with that left behind in Britain than with the experience of youngsters of analogous backgrounds in Canada.

By modern standards, inspection visits did not occur frequently. The aim of the institution was to visit each child annually. This goal was usually but not always met. Correspondence between children and the Homes was often restricted by masters and mistresses, and some young people wishing to leave behind the brand of "Home Child" purposefully avoided any contact with supervisory staff. As a result, information concerning placement conditions is sometimes spotty, if not cryptic, and some of the most important questions concerning the quality of life of immigrant children during their apprenticeships must be approached obliquely.

Clearly the drastic nature of the juvenile emigration policy forced a certain precocity in record-keeping upon the agencies which practised it. Four other sets of case histories for juvenile immigrants are known to exist: the records of Annie Macpherson's London Home of Industry and her Belleville reception centre, Marchmont; the series for Louisa Birt's Liverpool Sheltering Home and her distributing home at Knowlton, Quebec; those for William Quarrier's institutions at Bridge of Wier, Renfrewshire, and Brockville, Ontario; and the case book and letter file for Charlotte Alexander's work in Sutton, England and Eastern Ontario.¹⁵

Late eighteenth-century legislation in Upper Canada provided that municipal officials might apprentice orphaned and abandoned children with local families until their majority. During the union period, these powers were extended to encompass youngsters whose parents were in gaol or receiving charitable support. Voluntary institutions which sheltered and subsequently apprenticed orphans also existed in several centres by

¹⁴ *Ups and Downs*, June 1902, p. 33; January 1897, p. 9; February 1897, pp. 35-6; January 1898, p. 1; July 1900, pp. 55, 69; January 1901, pp. 57-8; January 1906, pp. 51-2; September/October 1902; October 1925, p. 9.

¹⁵ The Macpherson and Birt records are at Dr. Barnardo's Homes, Barkingside, Essex. The Quarrier collection is at the Quarrier Homes Bridge of Wier, Renfrewshire. Public Archives of Canada, Charlotte Alexander Papers, MG 29 B43, vols. 1-3. Portions of the Alexander case book are reprinted in Alison L. Prentice and Susan E. Houston, eds., *Family, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 262-6.

mid-century. But, until the 1870s, municipal and charitable officials accepted that the well-being of apprenticed children was a household matter and that masters and mistresses had every right to resist "official interference with the freedom of their family affairs."¹⁶

During the last quarter of the century, this attitude slowly changed. Conceptions of the legitimate scope of government intervention and charitable responsibility widened.¹⁷ The first useful series of Canadian case records dates from this period. However, the fact that children were sheltered within the local community or in rural areas cloaked in arcadian myth, seems to have permitted lax after-care to persist for wards of Ontario houses of industry and orphan asylums for some considerable time. As a result, collections such as the Record of Orphan's Apprenticeships, 1881-1905, for the Hamilton Orphan Asylum do not yield significant continuing accounts of the children's progress through apprenticeship to adulthood. The terms, earnings and locations of apprenticeships are systematically recorded, but only one preadmission questionnaire bearing information about parents, friends and extended kin has been preserved, and the interleaved correspondence between the Asylum, masters and wards, while interesting, is not extensive.¹⁸

Until about 1890, the case records of the Toronto Protestant Orphans Homes are equally cryptic. Copies of indentures, custody agreements and masters' comments accompanying the payment of wages are routinely preserved, but detailed accounts of the children's preadmission circumstances or their adjustment to apprenticeship are rare. In succeeding decades the files fatten. After the establishment of the Ontario Department of Neglected and Dependent Children in 1893, reports of visits to orphan homes' wards in their situations by provincial officials become part of the record. Blotter copies of correspondence with parents, apprentices and masters appear more often. In the decade before 1914, lengthy reports by the Social Service Commission of Toronto and the Protestant Orphan Home's own "Record of Child" establish the youngster's preadmission kinship network, the circumstances which prompted institutional entry and progress through apprenticeship. The detail preserved on each of these records becomes more extensive through the twenties.¹⁹ Reports by the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment Board for children of military men receiving Dominion assistance supplement the agency's own

16 Susan E. Houston, "The Impetus to Reform: Urban Crime, Poverty and Ignorance in Ontario, 1850-1875," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1974), pp. 284-5, 303; Richard B. Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario, 1871-1893* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 215-6, 225-6.

17 Houston, "The Impetus to Reform," pp. 309-10; Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*, pp. 94-107.

18 Hamilton Public Library.

19 Baldwin Room, Toronto Central Library. I am grateful to Howard Watson of Family Day Care Services, Toronto, for permission to examine this collection.

documentation, and records of physical examinations become part of each ward's dossier.

It is likely that welfare records for the interwar period will provide even more depth in individual profiles and considerably more breadth as material becomes available about assisted families who remained together in the community. Not all material of this type remains with the creating municipal or charitable bodies. For example, while the Adoption Books of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Vancouver for the period 1910-1927, which include surrender and placement records, have been deposited in the Catholic Charities Building in that city,²⁰ the records of the Mother's Allowance Commissions for Middlesex, Norfolk and Oxford Counties and the City of London Welfare Records, now form part of the Regional History Collection at the University of Western Ontario.²¹ We can expect that the usefulness of case files to the social historian will increase exponentially in succeeding decades.

PROBLEMS IN ANALYSIS

Researchers employing case records have two principal aims in mind: to construct a standardized profile for every person under study, and to preserve such information peculiar to individual cases as revealing anecdotes concerning preadmission circumstances and evocative passages from later correspondence. In order to craft both a convincing narrative and meaningful statistically-based analysis when the information in case records varies markedly between files and through time, it is often preferable to postpone all coding decisions related to the computer-assisted study until data collection is complete.

In one study of juvenile immigration, the records for the largest agency were surveyed and then a sampling convention was established: the selection of every twentieth child from the passenger rolls for the twenty thousand wards emigrated through this Home during the year 1882 to 1908.²² Each of the four record series retained by the institution were then searched for references concerning the 997 sample members. This information was noted within broad categories upon separate loose-leaf sheets for each youngster. These sheets could be reordered, chronologically, alphabetically or by institutional affiliation in order to conform to the structure of successive document groups. These notes served as the reference first for coding and later for illustrations to the analysis.

20 John Dwyer, comp., under the direction of Peter Ward, "The Poor in Vancouver: A Preliminary Checklist of Sources," Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library.

21 Stephanie Sykes provided me with this reference. Queries concerning access to these records should be directed to the Librarian-in-Charge, Regional History Collection, University of Western Ontario.

22 G.J. Parr, "The Home Children: British Juvenile Immigrants to Canada, 1868-1924," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976).

Constructing a codebook for historical data is a complex enterprise. Although from the 1890s, many sets of case records contain information comparable in completeness to modern social indicators survey, the provenance and structure of the data impose several serious constraints upon their use. The standard introduction to codebook design in historical research is Edward Shorter's *The Historian and the Computer*.²³ The discussion which follows will deal only with the most striking problems encountered in working with case files: the biases of the record-keepers, fluctuations in the periodicity of contact with clients, and missing data difficulties caused by attrition and differential densities in the series.

BIASES OF THE RECORD KEEPERS

It is readily apparent that the sympathy or antipathy of agency officials for their clients often exceeds their understanding. In orphanage and refuge records, for example, reporting upon parental character and family ties is particularly suspect. But because agency attitudes and ensuing distortions in recorded accounts affected crucial decisions concerning children's welfare, it is as important to note officials' predispositions as to read through them when handling such documents.

Consequently, it can be helpful to establish variables in pairs in areas where a strong variance between reality and reporting is suspected, using one set of categories to describe the record-keeper's subjective evaluation and another to record relevant objective circumstances. Thus, the welfare worker's appraisal of the suitability of parents as guardians might be linked with a separate reckoning of family stability as measured by the continuity of parents' co-residence with their offspring. The patterns which emerge for these variables in simple frequency distributions or cross-tabulation tables²⁴ can then be used in conjunction with other relevant factors, such as the citing of moral versus economic provocation for admission, to delimit record-keepers' blindspots.

PERIODICITY

There will always be considerable variations in the duration of individuals' contact with social agencies and the stage in the life cycle at which this contact occurs. These irregularities introduce problems of comparability into the analysis of case histories. Information concerning the occupation of a former client gleaned from his or her correspondence with the agency in late adolescence, for instance, does not establish a level of socio-

23 Edward Shorter, *The Historian and the Computer: A Practical Guide* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971) chapter 2; Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West*, Appendix 2, contains useful advice upon occupational coding for Canadian sources.

24 Shorter, *The Historian and the Computer*, chap. 5.

economic status analagous to reports supplied by a middle-aged respondent. It is therefore advisable to code a series of chronological benchmarks into the variable structure so that key pieces of qualitative data may be linked with a particular period in the subject's life. Roughly comparable groups can then be selected for analysis.

In the juvenile immigration study based upon Barnardo case records, information concerning apprenticeship in the Dominion was partitioned by the age at which the child had been emigrated and bound in his or her first indenture. Adult occupational data was linked with the emigrant's age at last communication with the assisting agency. Similar precautions will doubtless be necessary in the analysis of other case records generated by such agencies as the armed forces, the criminal justice or the penitentiary systems.

MISSING DATA

Attrition

Through neglect, accident or design, clients slip away through time from regular contact with helping agencies. As a result, case records vary substantially in duration. Attrition is a problem endemic to all research employing record linkage, but with case histories, it can be handled better than in the more sparsely delineated field of census research.

Key variables registering a high incidence of missing data can be regrouped by a simple transformation programme into reporting and non-reporting cases. Each of these groups can then be compared with a selected series of other variables for which relatively complete information has been found. From this analysis it is sometimes possible to suggest whether or in what ways reporting cases are typical of the sample as a whole. With clearly specified caveats, it may then be reasonable to resurrect information from the original untransformed variable categories and incorporate it into the analysis.

In the juvenile immigration study, missing data incidence was high in the variables describing adult occupation, key information to any evaluation of the effectiveness of emigration as a child-saving policy. It was important then to establish that the missing cases for this variable include a high proportion of emigrants who arrived at a later age, who did not successfully complete their indentures, and who had less stable work histories during their first five years in Canada. The occupational profile which the case records does yield thus describes the circumstances of men and women who adapted more readily to life in the Dominion during their first years here.

Density

Individual case files are likely to vary markedly in the amount of information contained even when their duration and the period in the life

cycle which they describe are similar. Deficiencies in record-keeping may mask the incidence of a certain event in the life of one individual and accentuate it, by dint of absent qualifying statements, in another. In juvenile records, for example, estimates of the incidence of premarital pregnancy in adolescence are particularly vulnerable before variations in the quality of record-keeping. In these circumstances, a variable which merely noted the presence or absence of an illegitimate birth would have little meaning. But adjustments to accommodate unevenness in quality and quantity in the sources are nevertheless possible. The variable itself can be structured to record likelihood rather than presence or absence. The categories in this variable then incorporate references to "loss of character," "moral fall," being "in disgrace" or "in trouble," and admissions to a magdalene for periods of varying duration as well as explicit references to a confinement and birth. A corollary variable established to rank completeness in other aspects of the young girls' records during their teenage years is also useful. Analysis can thus be based upon more information, and information whose reliability has been more effectively monitored.

All this tinkering with case records well repays the trouble. When coupled with conventional historians' dictums concerning document use, they can substantially extend the insights gained from newspapers, government records and autobiographical accounts into many important questions in social history. Although case records sacrifice breadth by comparison with manuscript census or assessment records they provide the researcher willing to use the data processing techniques or the "new social history" with an intricacy and intimacy in detail unavailable in other sources. The observations here are based upon only one experiment in the use of philanthropic case files. Several similar studies employing reformatory, industrial school and juvenile court records are currently underway. Further experience will doubtless reveal limitations in these kinds of documents as yet uncovered or unresolved. But their fundamental value, particularly as they become more generally available in the future, is unlikely to be questioned.

PROBLEMS IN ACQUISITION, ACCESS AND SORTING

Decisions by public and private agencies upon whether or not to surrender their case records to a public repository seem to proceed from a tension between the desire to eliminate or reduce the documents' physical bulk in storage and professional responsibility to preserve their confidentiality. Many British parish officials resolved this conundrum in patriotic glow by consigning accumulated workhouse and casual ward registers and release books to the pulping machines in wartime paper drives. While there is no reason to believe that Canadian social welfare institutions might be inclining toward a contemporary expedient of this sort, there is certainly a need to acquaint them with the alternative of placing their records in an archives.

An agency which opens case records to researchers places in the public domain information about individuals who never chose to enter public life. Boards of directors necessarily undertake this decision without the consent of the parties directly concerned: their former clients, families of clients or members of adoptive and foster households. They surrender information provided in confidence or under duress, an action which challenges directly the ethics of the helping professions.

Often in the past, requests for access have been denied. In 1927, officials of Dr. Barnardo's Homes, the juvenile immigration agency whose large collection of correspondence and visitors' reports has been described above, refused to allow an investigator from the Canadian Council of Child Welfare to examine case files on the grounds that the records were not, strictly speaking, theirs to supply.²⁵

They are the records of the children rather than the records of the Homes, and they are certainly not records intended for the public. The view taken by Dr. Barnardo's has always been that these usually humble members of society are entitled to demand that the history of their childhood should be as much shielded from public curiosity as the history of more fortunate children, who have been brought up in the privacy of their parents' homes.

Several resolutions to this dilemma have been tried. Some collections have been given to public repositories, but will remain closed until ninety years after the birth of the youngest client described in the files. Others will be available after a shorter interval has elapsed provided that researchers supply the archives with a written declaration agreeing not to cite the names of individuals. Little work in social history will be seriously hampered by such restrictions upon name-specific citations. It is, of course, useful to record names in working notes for later comparison with assessment and census series; however, as the name-specific restriction is now being applied, researchers are afforded this opportunity.

To date, most institutions seem to have preferred to retain their own records in order to personally screen researchers seeking access and to have their files close at hand when answering correspondence from former wards. The Board of the Toronto Family Day Care Services, successors to the Toronto Protestant Orphan Homes, have dealt with this latter difficulty by placing their records in a local repository, the Baldwin Room of the Toronto Public Library, to which convenient references can be made in case of need. This collection is not, however, at present generally accessible to researchers.

The most onerous constraint is the application of the ninety-year rule. Clearly, most collections of case records do not arrive at repositories in chronological order by birthdate. Welfare records are more likely to be

25 J. Breckenridge McGregor, "Several Years After: An Analysis of the Histories of a Selected Group of Immigrants Brought to Canada in 1910 and in 1920 by British Emigration Societies," (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Child Welfare, 1928), p. 58.

alphabetical by surname or roughly chronological by date of initial contact with the agency. The juvenile immigration series filmed for the Public Archives of Canada are chronological by sailing parties, and internally ordered neither alphabetically nor by age. The Toronto Protestant Orphan Home group, encompassing approximately one thousand files, correspond to a numbered agency key. Otherwise they demonstrate no apparent pattern in sequence. As a result, whole record groups or substantial portions of series are restricted by reference to birthdate of the youngest ward or client therein described.

It is easy enough for a researcher to recommend that these holdings be broken up and reordered according to birthdate, ignoring the principle of original order and knowing that the task proposed is work for the archivist. Clearly the burden of such reorganization would be sizeable, particularly for collections sufficiently large to attract researchers. Furthermore, the changes might not be suited to the requirements of ongoing institutions needing to consult their own records in the repository from time to time. But under present circumstances, extremely valuable materials are being withheld for from twenty to fifty years longer than the period agreed to be necessary to protect the privacy of individuals.

Notwithstanding difficulties of access and interpretation, case records are obviously a valuable new source for the social historian. They will greatly expand the range of both traditionally-minded scholars and cliometricians by bridging their approaches to working class culture and society. Greater demand for case records presents new problems for archivists. Traditionally, case files have not been retained by government records archivists; policy and operational files, with a token sample of case records, have usually been deemed sufficient documentation for any agency. The skills of the new cliometricians, therefore, challenge archivists to define anew their acquisition and selection criteria. If budget, space, and manpower limitations prevent the permanent retention of all case files, then archivists must refine very carefully their sampling techniques. Once acquired, case records with their personal sensitivity and distinctive provenance will require vigilant control of restrictions and accessibility. These are not very easy challenges, but by successfully meeting them archivists will ensure that future generations of historians will open to view a part of the past rarely before glimpsed.

Résumé

A partir de son expérience d'utilisation de dossiers individuels d'institutions de charité publiques et philanthropiques, l'auteur analyse leur portée pour l'étude de l'histoire sociale canadienne. Tout en reconnaissant l'existence de certaines difficultés d'utilisation et d'interprétation, elle démontre leur utilité et remet en question la destruction systématique de ce genre de documents par les gestionnaires d'archives historiques.