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The Treatment of Tramps in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto

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Article abstract

Pendant les deux dernières décennies du XIX^{e} siècle, le problème du vagabondage devint à ce point crucial que certains le considéraient comme une menace pour l'ordre social existant. Le clochard était perçu comme possédant tous les vices — paresse, intempérance et instabilité — éminemment nuisibles au bon fonctionnement d'une société établie. On s'empressa donc, et ce, dans la plupart des villes nord-américaines où le problème sévissait, de trouver des moyens de diminuer le vagabondage à défaut de pouvoir l'enrayer totalement. L'auteur se penche ici sur les moyens qui ont été utilisés à Toronto pendant les années 1880 et 1890.

C'est surtout l'*Associated Charities of Toronto*, un organisme fondé en 1880, qui se préoccupa de trouver une solution au problème du vagabondage dans la ville. Elle tenta d'abord de fournir du travail aux clochards en ouvrant une carrière et une cour à bois mais ces deux initiatives n'apportèrent pas les succès escomptés. Elle s'appliqua ensuite à faire pression auprès des institutions qui s'occupaient des clochards pour qu'elles imposent une certaine somme de travail à quiconque demandait soupe et asile en guise de compensation pour les services rendus. L'association obtint finalement gain de cause et le système qu'elle préconisait fut mis en vigueur en 1889.

Certes, l'application du principe du "labour test" a apporté quelques résultats tangibles à l'époque; cependant, l'événement tire toute son importance du fait qu'il témoigne du climat d'une époque où des gens qui se disaient philanthropes se sont révélés comme étant surtout préoccupés de maintenir tant l'ordre social qu'ils avaient instauré que l'éthique du travail sur lequel ils l'avaient établi. Dans cette perspective, une réalité aussi pénible que celle du chômage et de la population vagabonde qu'il engendre tend à disparaître bien vite derrière l'image d'un clochard paresseux et instable qui ne peut être qu'indigent et sans travail.

The Treatment of Tramps in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto

JAMES M. PITSULA

During the 1880s and 1890s, the middle class philanthropists of Toronto were alarmed about the "tramp menace" and adopted measures to contain what they regarded as a rampant social evil. The underlying reason for their hostility was that the tramp symbolized rejection of the work ethic and middle class values. If social order was to be preserved, this rebellious figure had to be suppressed.

Before examining the case of Toronto, an overview of tramp historiography is in order. Historians have drawn attention to a pronounced increase in public concern about tramps in the United States in the 1870s. According to Paul Ringenbach, the word "tramp" was not commonly used to describe the homeless unemployed prior to the Civil War. It appeared as a noun in the *New York Times* in February 1875, and found its way into popular publications with increasing frequency through the rest of the decade. The "tramp" first came into legal existence in a New Jersey statute in 1876. The heightened awareness in the United States of the tramp evil which arose in the 1870s persisted with varying intensity in the 1880s, the 1890s, and beyond.[1]

Most historians who write about the tramp agree that his social significance lay, to a great extent, in what he symbolized. In the words of James Gilbert, "tramps were often regarded as the sign of declining morality. . . . [Vagabond-

1. Paul T. Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers 1873-1916: The Discovery of Unemployment in New York* (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), pp. 3, 4, 23. Ringenbach states that as the United States pulled out of the recession following the panic of 1873 the attention given the tramp problem subsided. The depression of 1882-86 reawakened interest, but it declined with the lessening of the impact of the depression. The tramp question came to the fore of public attention again in 1893 at the time of the panic. Other writers who identify the 1870s as the beginning of the period of serious concern about tramps include Allan Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives* (New York: Arno Press, 1969; reprint of 1878 edition), p. 42; Peter Carlin, "Social Outcasts: The Tramp in American Society, 1873-1910", (paper presented to the American Historical Association, 1979), p. 4; Howard Green, "'It's Easier to Beg than Dig': The Tramp as Mendicant and Labourer in Victorian America", (paper presented to the American Historical Association, 1979), p. 2; John D. Seelye, "The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque", *American Quarterly*, XV (Winter 1963), p. 543; and Sidney Harring, "Class Conflict and the Suppression of Tramps in Buffalo, 1892-1894", *Law and Society Review*, XI (Summer 1977), p. 875.

age] represented a failure of the work ethic and a condemnation of the 'American dream'."[2] The connotations surrounding the figure of the tramp help to account for the ferocity of the attacks directed against tramps. The raging indignation of such denunciations is well exemplified in a speech given in 1877 by the Reverend Francis Wayland, Dean of the Yale Law School:

> And as we utter the word 'tramp,' there arises straightway before us the spectacle of a lazy, shiftless, sauntering or swaggering, ill-conditioned, irreclaimable, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage. He fears not God, neither regards man. Indeed he seems to have wholly lost all the better instincts and attitudes of manhood. He will outrage an unprotected female, or rob a defenceless child, or burn an isolated barn, or girdle fruit trees, or wreck a railway train, or set fire to a railway bridge, or murder a cripple, or pilfer an umbrella, with equal indifference, if reasonably sure of equal impunity. Having no moral sense, he knows no gradation of crime. . . . Practically he has come to consider himself at war with society and all social institutions.[3]

The tramp was a "depraved savage", outside the bounds of civilized society. John Seelye goes so far as to suggest that by the 1880s the tramp had replaced the Indian as a threat to American civilization.[4]

Some historians perceive another dimension to the symbolism of the tramp. Besides being a threat to American civilization, he had a role to play in the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Howard Green asserts that

> The idea of the tramp was a tool in the ideological arsenal which middle class spokesmen directed at the largely immigrant working class. . . . Spokesmen sought to inculcate responsibility, discipline and sobriety in the seemingly chaotic, unstable urban mass; to symbolically manufacture the working class in the middle class' self-image.[5]

The harsh treatment meted out to the tramp served as a warning to the working class that anyone who eschewed regular work habits could expect the same punishment.[6] Viewed in this light, the suppression of tramps could be interpreted as a means of enforcing the work ethic on a population still influenced by the irregular work rhythms of pre-industrial America and all too apt to "take a vacation from factory discipline."[7]

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2. James B. Gilbert, *Work Without Salvation: America's Intellectuals and Industrial Alienation* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 23.
3. Francis Wayland, "The Tramp Question", *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction*, (1877), p. 112.
4. Seelye, "The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque", p. 541.
5. Green, "'It's Easier to Beg than Dig': The Tramp as Mendicant and Labourer in Victorian America", p. 2.
6. Carlin, "Social Outcasts: The Tramp in American Society, 1873-1910", p. 5.
7. Daniel Rodgers, "Tradition, Modernity and the American Industrial Worker", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VII (Spring 1977), p. 660.

The tramp was implicated in class conflict in an even more direct sense. Francis Wayland in the speech quoted above charged that "the inner history of the recent disgraceful and disastrous riots in some of our principal cities reveals the fact that to large detachments of our great standing army of professional tramps, and not to the so-called 'strikers,' is mainly due the causeless and criminal destruction of most valuable property."[8] Even those who stopped short of blaming tramps for the great strikes and riots of 1877 were convinced that they constituted the "very lowest layer" of the proletariat "who would gladly participate in any mob action."[9] The labour turbulence of the era undoubtedly coloured the middle class perception of tramps. Sidney Harring, in his study of the suppression of tramps in Buffalo between 1892 and 1894, shows that ties existed between the local working class and tramps. He argues that it served the interests of the bourgeoisie to blur the distinction between tramp and unemployed worker because to do so made criminals of militant workers and "delegitimized" class struggle. Thus he quotes the *Buffalo Express*: "Much of the damage attributed to strikes is really the work of tramps. In nearly every case when a tramp is arrested in a strike he gives his occupation as a railroad man."[10]

The historians who situate the tramp in the context of class struggle tend also to regard the tramp as a victim of economic conditions. The high rate of unemployment, estimated at 18 per cent in 1894 and almost as bad in other years, obliged many to "take to the rails" in pursuit of work.[11] Seasonal production cycles, endemic to several industries, disrupted regular work patterns.[12] Daniel Rodgers perceptively observes that the high rate of turnover in industry in the late nineteenth century can be interpreted two ways. It might suggest, on the one hand, an astonishingly restless and mobile labour force resistant to factory discipline. On the other hand, "Whether seasonal or afflicted by unpredictable changes in demand, few industries escaped repeated cycles of boom and famine which, for the workers, meant that short time and lays offs followed hard on the heels of bouts of overtime and rush work." The instability of employment contributed to the high industrial turnover. Initially steady workers were thrown out of their jobs so often that they lost the habit of steady labour. If Rodgers is correct in concluding that a geographically mobile "reserve army of workers" was needed "to iron out the fluctuations of an expanding economy", then the tramp was condemned for fulfilling a necessary function.[13]

The tramp, according to the historical literature, was both a symbolic threat to the core values of American civilization and one of the most dangerous elements in a potentially revolutionary working class. Paul Boyer's *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820-1920* suggests a third perspective from which to

8. Wayland, "The Tramp Question", p. 117.
9. Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers*, p. 13.
10. Harring, "Class Conflict and the Suppression of Tramps in Buffalo", pp. 882, 890, 894.
11. Green, "Easier to P[illegible] than Dig", p. 3.
12. Carlin, "Social Ou[illegible]ts", p. 1.
13. Rodgers, "Tradition, Modernity and the American Industrial Worker", pp. 666-7.

view the tramp. Boyer uses the "social control" thesis to interpret the history of urban reform. The reformers feared, and devised strategies to overcome, the spectre of disorder presented by class-ridden, industrial cities flooded by foreign immigration. Among the more impressive and consequential urban reform groups was the charity organization movement which spread like wildlife in the later 1870s and 1880s. Charity organization societies were dedicated to the proposition that "the roots of urban poverty lay in the moral deficiencies and character flaws of the poor."[14] They assumed that indiscriminate charity demoralized the poor and made paupers of them. If the poor were encouraged and, if need be, forced to sustain themselves, they would develop character and self-discipline. There was a close connection between the charity organization movement and the anti-tramp campaign. The charity organization society was the major force behind the enactment of repressive Tramp Acts in various states in the 1870s and 1880s.[15] The tramp was the embodiment of all the character defects — laziness, improvidence, intemperance, instability, and so on — which middle class reformers discerned at the root of the crisis in the social order. Social control over the urban masses demanded suppression of the tramp and all he stood for.

These various interpretations of the tramp symbol are not necessarily contradictory. Some historians see the tramp as an emblem of the negation of civilization, as an outlaw waging a guerilla war against society. Other historians prefer class terminology in which case the tramp becomes an enemy of the bourgeois class and an ally of the working class. Finally, historians sometimes speak of "social control" without referring overtly to class differences. Whichever conceptual framework is adopted, the tramp remains at odds with the dominant ethos of the society.

In Toronto in the 1880s and 1890s, the alarmist concern about the tramp menace was just as intense as it was in contemporary American cities. The Associated Charities, the Toronto version of the charity organization society, was preoccupied with the problem and experimented with various methods of solving it. The Associated Charities, founded in 1880, consisted of representatives from the House of Industry, the Ladies' Relief Society, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the St. George's Society, the St. Andrew's Society, and the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society, as well as citizens who were actively interested in questions related to poor relief. In other words, the Associated Charities fairly represented middle class philanthropy in Toronto.

The aversion to the tramp extended beyond the community of philanthropists. The *Globe* charged that tramps were "dissipated, shiftless, and it is to be feared vicious."[16] The *World* demanded that they be expelled from the city: "They loaf and drink and beg and steal, and in the low dens and dives have a real

14. Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 122, 144.
15. Harring, "Suppression of Tramps in Buffalo", p. 879.
16. *Globe*, 22 March 1887.

good time. Work is their aversion."[17] The *Star* recommended the lash for "foul-mouthed tramps, who will not work, but are ever-ready to abuse, berate, swear at and threaten those who decline to give them food."[18]

The almost hysterical tone of the attack seems incongruous unless one appreciates the symbolic significance of the tramp as an affront to middle class morality. Even when tramps were not breaking the law or harming anybody, they were regarded as a blot on the decent appearance of the community:

> Pedestrians whose business calls them down Simcoe Street or along Front Street in the evening are much annoyed by the crowd of loafers who infest the corner of the two streets. Many of them are men seeking employment and hoping to get it through the agency near there, and congregate round that corner long after the office is closed making night hideous with their songs and performing dances to the music of a tin whistle or other cheap instrument. . . . A little judicious interference from the police department would doubtless soon cause the nuisance to be abated.[19]

There was little understanding for the man who preferred loafing to low-paid drudgery. The *Globe* printed a story about a farm labourer who left his job because he was tired of the monotonous diet of pork and potatoes: "Men who refuse to do farm work at thirty dollars per month because they are not furnished all the delicacies of the season should be put to hard labour when they are sent to the gaol as vagrants."[20] Tramps were not simply lazy and lackadaisical. They terrorized neighborhoods, intimidated defenceless women, and committed "murders, burglaries, incendiaries, and highway robberies."[21]

This account of the uniform loathing of the tramp must, however, be qualified. Some observers made allowances for the effects of unemployment on normally industrious workmen. The 1891 Report of the Royal Commission on the Prison and Reformatory System of Ontario drew distinctions among three different types of tramps: "those who are willing to work, who go from place to place honestly looking for work and who are unable to find steady employment", "those who are willing to work and who do work hard occasionally, but who are dissolute and improvident, indulging in what they call sprees whenever they earn a few dollars, and finding themselves without money or resources of any kind at the beginning of winter", and "the professional tramps who dislike and avoid work who roam over the country in summer, working only when they cannot procure food by begging or stealing, and then only doing the lightest kind of work and as little of it as possible and who flock to Toronto and other cities and towns in winter to take up residence in the gaols or houses of industry. . . ."[22]

17. *World*, 31 January 1890.
18. *Star*, 12 March 1895.
19. *Globe*, 30 August 1884.
20. *Ibid.*, 9 May 1884.
21. *World*, 31 January 1890; *Globe*, 5 July 1881, 8 November 1894.
22. Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, 1891, no. 18.

The commissioners acknowledged that some tramps at least were unemployed labourers on the move in search of work. It was also understood that in certain circumstances an honest tramp could degenerate into a professional tramp. This happened to the tramp who told his life history to a *Globe* reporter in 1881:

> His clothes were in the last stages of dilapidation, greasy and tattered and the effect was heightened by the incongruity of the outfit. The pants were of the coarsest shoddy material, while the coat though now ripped up the back and out at elbows was a stylish garment of fine broadcloth and still had an air of faded gentility about it in no way characteristic of the owner's personality. His feet were encased in a pair of old rubbers and his headgear consisted of a battered straw hat.[23]

Six years before, the tramp had been working in a Pennsylvania iron foundry earning twenty dollars a week. When the foundry closed down, he and many of his co-workers had taken to the road. A stint on a Minnesota farm convinced him that he was not suited for farm labour: "I . . . got my back all blistered in the sun an' my hands full of thistles. I was to get a dollar a day an' my board. The board was poor enough, nothing but fat pork from one day to another and when I left the old thief wouldn't pay me a cent. He said I wasn't worth my grub."[24] For six years the tramp had wandered aimlessly from place to place. He doubted whether, after what he had been through, he could tolerate living in one place and holding down a steady job.

During the summer he enjoyed the open country. Tramping was safer in Canada than in the United States: "There's no shooting or anything of that kind."[25] One could sleep outdoors in good weather and in barns or vacant houses on wet nights. The farmer who did not want his apples, corn, or chickens stolen took care to give the tramp something to eat. The night before he had camped outside of Toronto:

> Last night I slept out in a ravine behind Rosedale, me and another man lookin' for work. He had a chicken which a storekeeper had given him — so he said — an' I got half a loaf at a house near by an' we built a roaring fire an' were as jolly as sandboys.[26]

It was impossible to continue this idyllic existence in the winter. To avoid freezing or starving, the tramp headed for the city where he could hang about the soup kitchens or pick up the odd job. He was committed to an idle existence, though in the beginning he had been a steady worker. The dislocation of unemployment had disrupted his regular routine and changed his way of life.

John Pell, who was secretary of both the St. George's Society and the Associated Charities of Toronto, agreed that most tramps had started their wanderings as honest workmen, but later fell into evil ways. Pell conjectured that the

23. *Globe*, 4 June 1881.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*

transformation came about because tramps found it all too easy to live by begging. An unemployed labourer drifted into Toronto. He stayed for the maximum of three nights in the casual ward of the House of Industry and then made his way to one of the police stations where he was given a place to sleep without being arrested. He met others like himself who rapidly initiated him into the "mysteries of trampdom". He learned he could survive by begging a couple of hours each day and by stealing occasionally.[27] Pell deplored the conditions, especially the indiscriminate charity, that allowed tramps to thrive. He feared that poor immigrants who were reduced to begging would not become self-supporting and self-respecting citizens.[28]

The statistical evidence pertaining to tramps is scanty, but that which does exist indicates that unemployment, more than wilful idleness, created the tramp problem. The Toronto *World* published a list of the occupations of the inmates of the House of Industry casual ward on a night in March 1889. The tramps made up a broad cross-section of the working class including both skilled and unskilled workers: twenty labourers and one of each of the following: clerk, combmaker, stonemason, baker, fuller, gardener, biscuitmaker, sailor, bricklayer, teamster, and engineer.[29] A description of the tramps who slept at the Agnes Street Police Station during the month of January 1881 points to the same conclusion. Among the one hundred men were fifty-three labourers, as well as grocers, clerks, painters, carpenters, printers, and servants.[30] The constables at the police stations remarked that many of their overnight guests were respectable and genuinely interested in finding work.[31] Some were railway construction workers, farm labourers, or sailors who were laid off for the winter and gravitated to the nearest big city. They lodged at the police stations for a while until the officers, tired of the sight of them, brought charges of vagrancy against them. The "punishment" was often a two or three month jail sentence.[32]

Despite the glimmerings of an awareness that involuntary unemployment had something to do with tramping, the prevailing notion was that tramps were "work-shy". This conclusion can be substantiated by examining the involvement of the Associated Charities in the tramp question. Their interest focused on two issues: the lack of appropriate accommodation for tramps in Toronto and the pauperizing tendency of providing food and lodging without requiring a return in labour.

The casual ward of the House of Industry was the main facility for tramps. An observer in 1880 described the serving of the noon-day meal:

> Twenty-two basins of soup are placed on the boards fixed along the walls and on barrel tops. At a signal there is a rush down the stair and here again the younger fellows have the advantage. They come rattling down the stairs like

27. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1883.
28. *Ibid.*, 13 March 1888, 28 September 1885, 10 January 1888.
29. *World*, 12 March 1889.
30. *Globe*, 29 January 1881.
31. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1883.
32. *Ibid.*, 14 April 1884.

> schoolboys and in less than half a minute every place is filled. The soup is all in position and now the serving men go round giving each man a chunk of bread, exactly one fourth of a two lb. loaf . . . this operation is repeated until four gangs are served with a healthy, substantial meal.[33]

The men waiting their turn to be fed congregated on the sidewalk and in the street in front of the entrance to the House of Industry. In 1884 the lines were so long that tramps were waiting for their dinner until late in the afternoon, and the police had to be summoned to preserve order in the queue.[34]

The House of Industry lacked space for the crowds of casuals clamouring for relief. At night from 130 to 150 men had to be packed into a room scarcely large enough for one-third that number. They slept on the bare floor because beds could not be kept clean and because straw mattresses were a fire hazard. The mayor of Toronto, inspecting the institution, commented on the "sickening smell". The *Globe* likened the casual ward, when occupied, to "a carload of hogs in transit."[35]

The regulations prohibited tramps from staying at the House of Industry more than three consecutive nights.[36] Those who outstayed their welcome and those who could not get into the House because of overcrowding resorted to the police stations. The chief of police complained that the homeless poor were arriving at the police stations in such numbers that it was impossible to conduct properly the business of law enforcement. Shelter was provided for 879 waifs in 1882, 2,016 waifs in 1883, and 4,045 waifs in 1884. The stations were made filthy, the rooms infested with vermin, and one officer contracted typhoid fever because of the unwholesome atmosphere.[37]

The strain on the facilities for tramps was only part of the problem. The tramps themselves were becoming disorderly and demanding better treatment. Many of them were young, healthy, and obstreperous. When the superintendent of the House of Industry gave them a collection of religious periodicals to read on Sunday, they set them on fire. A drunken tramp, denied admittance, assaulted the superintendent and punched him several times in the face. When asked to shovel the snow off the sidewalk in front of the House of Industry, the "lazy rascals" refused. The managers authorized the superintendent to call in the police in the event of a disturbance. The police force itself was concerned about the unruliness of the tramp population. In his annual report for 1884, the chief of police alleged that the "large floating population of idlers" in the city was responsible for the increase in theft and pilfering.[38]

33. *Ibid.*, 14 February 1880.
34. *Ibid.*, 26 May 1884.
35. *Ibid.*, 6 April, 17 May 1883, 14 February 1881.
36. *Ibid.*, 26 January 1884. The maximum length of stay was later extended to five nights (House of Industry board minutes, 17 February 1885).
37. *Toronto Council Minutes*, Chief of Police Annual Reports, 1882-1884; *Week*, 13 March 1884.
38. *Globe*, 14 February 1880, 18 February 1885, 27 December 1880, 20 January 1881; House of Industry board minutes, 17 February 1885; *Toronto Council Minutes*, Chief of Police Annual Report, 1884.

In January 1881, the Associated Charities formally proposed a solution for the tramp problem. A resolution was passed requesting the city to set up "a special receptacle, with a strict rule of treatment, for tramps."[39] Goldwin Smith, the president of the Associated Charities, offered to donate five hundred dollars to help meet the expenses.

The "strict treatment" the Associated Charities had in mind was the labour test. John Pell, the secretary, maintained that the fall of the honest labourer from respectability could be prevented by the imposition of a labour test. If an individual worked for his bread, he would retain his pride and sense of self-worth.[40] The labour test was the antidote to pauperism. Pell cited the experience of Providence, Rhode Island. One year after a labour test was introduced, the number of tramps fell from 1,143 to 643, and the cost of maintaining them declined from $7,353 to $4,736.[41] Evidently tramps gave Providence a wide berth after they learned that they would have to work for their livelihood.

The first initiative of the Associated Charities to urge the city to institute the labour test fell flat. The city council dismissed the resolution of January 1881 "in a desultory kind of way."[42] In the fall of that year, when the army of tramps began to pour into Toronto, the Associated Charities again raised the issue. At a meeting of the association, punitive measures were proposed: "I can feed a tramp on a dollar a week so that he'll want to leave right off, and that's the object we have in view. We don't want to feed them so well that they'll stay all winter, and I'll make them work for what they do get."[43] The meeting decided in favour of a milder solution. Taking advantage of Goldwin Smith's donation, the Associated Charities established a "refuge for tramps where the labour test will be strictly enforced as a prerequisite to gaining relief.[44]

John Pell, who was put in charge, investigated the possibility of refitting the old jail for the purpose, but that proved too expensive. Instead, a vacant lot was rented and equipped with five hundred dollars worth of stone donated by the City. Tramps would be expected to break a quantity of stone before they received charity.[45] Some notion of what stonebreaking was like may be gained from an incident related by a city alderman in 1881. The alderman visited England and then reported back to council what he had learned from his trip. It occurred to an English magistrate to find out for himself how hard tramps had to work on the stonepile. He took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and set about smashing the heap of stones a tramp was expected to dispose of in a day:

39. *Toronto Council Minutes*, 31 January 1881.
40. *Globe*, 22 May 1883.
41. *Ibid.*, 30 March, 13 May 1881.
42. *World*, 18 February 1881.
43. *Ibid.*, 29 October 1881.
44. *Ibid.*
45. John Pell to Goldwin Smith, 28 November 1881, Cornell University Library, Goldwin Smith Papers.

> He toiled away for a considerable time; and ultimately finshed the lot; but he was so 'used up', his hands were so blistered, the muscles of his arms so strained, that he vowed this was far too severe a test for, at any rate, unprofessional tramps; that not a few of the unfortunate 'casual' class, whose hands were not hardened to this sort of work, should have a less quantity of stones to break, or work of some other kind provided.[46]

The Associated Charities stoneyard worked well enough, for it to be renewed for the winters of 1882 and 1883. The *Globe* pronounced it an "inestimable blessing". No longer could the idle lamely excuse themselves by claiming that there was no work for them to do. The managers of the House of Industry and the managers of the St. Andrew's Society congratulated the Associated Charities for effecting a marked abatement of the tramp nuisance.[47]

There were problems, however. The city council could not be relied upon to supply a sufficient quantity of stone. The Associated Charities in October 1882 applied for sixty toise (one toise equals 1.949 metres) of stone, but received only thirty-three. There was a delay in the delivery which meant that the stoneyard started its operations late in the season. When the supply of stone was exhausted at the beginning of March 1883, the yard was shut down. Only thirty-seven men altogether were given work.[48] The stonebreaking scheme had another flaw. Not all tramps were physically capable of performing the labour test. "After breaking a stone or two or perhaps only the handle of a hammer, they would leave the yard."[49]

During the winter of 1883-84, the Associated Charities permitted tramps to cut wood as an alternative to stonebreaking. The pay for sawing a quarter-cord of wood, splitting it into kindling, and tying it in bundles was seventy-five cents. Since the job took two and a half days, a man could earn about $1.50 a week. Judging from the number of men who availed themselves of the opportunity to cut wood, this form of labour test was more attractive than stonebreaking. Within a two and a half week period in the winter of 1885, 114 men toiled in the woodyard.[50]

The Associated Charities made an effort to secure permanent employment for casuals. A labour bureau was opened at St. Lawrence Hall in March 1884. The exchange handled 830 applications in the following eleven weeks, and found jobs for 240 men. The success rate was assisted by the break in the weather and the new job openings in the spring.[51]

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46. *Toronto Council Minutes*, 1881, Appendix 151.
47. *Globe*, 12 December 1882, 22 February 1884, 9 February 1883; *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1882; *St. Andrews Society Annual Report*, 1883.
48. *Globe*, 15 April 1882, 17 April 1883.
49. *Ibid.*, 17 April 1883.
50 *Ibid.*, 31 December 1884; *World*, 17 January 1885; *Globe*, 28 November, 20 December 1884, 1 and 23 January 1885.
51. *Globe*, 18 June 1884.

Overall, however, the Associated Charities did not achieve its objectives. The drawbacks to stonebreaking have been mentioned. Woodcutting also posed problems. Towards the end of the 1885 season, sixty thousand out of eighty thousand bundles of kindling still remained unsold.[52] But the deeper reason for the failure of the labour test was that tramps coming to Toronto were not obliged to submit to it. A tramp could shun the stoneyard and the woodyard, and present himself at the casual ward of the House of Industry where the charity was unconditional.

To implement the labour test effectively, it would be necessary to have the cooperation of the House of Industry. Since managers from the House attended the meetings of the Associated Charities, one would have thought that a satisfactory arrangement could easily have been worked out. A deputation from the Associated Charities waited on the board of the House of Industry in November 1881 and invited the board members to join in the establishing of a proper tramp refuge. The secretary of the House of Industry stiffly replied that its premises were unsuited for the purpose. The Associated Charities, meanwhile, passed a resolution calling for closer collaboration with the House of Industry and more involvement on the part of the House representatives in the affairs of the Associated Charities.[53] After two years of futile effort, the Associated Charities despaired of persuading the officials of the House of Industry to introduce the labour test in the casual ward. In the 1883 annual report, the charity organization society urged the city to take control. The municipal authorities could use the police if necessary to impose a rigid discipline on the tramps.[54]

The resistance of the House of Industry board to the idea of a labour test is best attributed to sheer inertia. Certainly the managers of the institution had no wish to cater to tramps. The 1880 annual report expressed concern about the growing numbers of habitual tramps and hinted vaguely that a labour test might be in order:

> . . . it may also be observed that of some 5000 individuals who last year were furnished with temporary board and lodging, there were scarcely 100 new faces, the great majority being old customers who disappear every spring to reappear the following winter. As a check to this abuse, the Managers contemplate the introduction of some kind of manual labour, making it a condition that every applicant shall do a certain amount of work before receiving relief.[55]

Nothing was done until 1885 when "at the suggestion of many influential citizens" the board instituted a woodcutting test. The test was continued in 1886, but then abandoned.[56] The 1887 annual report denied any connection between the increasingly bothersome tramp problem and the absence of a labour test: "The large number of tramps is not to be traced to the absence of any regulation

52. *Ibid.*, 27 March 1885.
53. *Ibid.*, 17 November 1881; W.J. Macdonell to John Pell, 15 November 1881, City of Toronto Archives, House of Industry letterbook; *Globe*, 29 October, 1881.
54. *Globe*, 17 April 1883.
55. *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1880.
56. *Ibid.*, 1885, 1886.

made in their regard, but rather to the fact that we have experienced a long and exceptionally bitter season."[57]

Some of the managers of the House of Industry lacked enthusiasm for the labour test because it was linked to improved and enlarged facilities for tramps. If labour was to be demanded, then decent accommodation and nourishing food would have to be provided. These managers assumed a kind of Parkinson's law for tramps. The more space there was, the more tramps there would be to fill it. Other officials of the House of Industry thought that subsidized tramp labour would compete unfairly in the labour market, depriving the local working poor of their daily bread. Finally, there were practical obstacles. The short-lived experiment with the woodyard had been terminated partly because of the lack of a market for the wood. It was suggested, perhaps facetiously, that the only feasible work test would be a treadmill.[58]

In 1888, however, the board of the House of Industry reversed its stand and decided in favour of a labour test. The entreaties of the Toronto Christian Temperance Mission and the Law and Order League, in conjunction with the continued pressure from the Associated Charities, had their effect. The city council, prodded by Goldwin Smith, also played a part. The mayor's relief assistant, Edward Taylor, was commissioned to visit various American cities and report on how they dealt with tramps. The executive committee of the House of Industry appointed their chairman, the Reverend A.J. Broughall, to accompany Taylor. The ensuing report lauded the casual relief system found in Boston and Philadelphia where tramps sawed a fixed quantity of wood in return for a clean bed and a nutritious meal. The wayfarers' lodges were equipped with facilities for bathing the tramps and fumigating their clothes. Both the city council and the House of Industry board approved the Taylor-Broughall report, and the city made a grant of $12,000 to enable the House to "cleanse and classify" the casual poor.[59]

The new regime for casuals came into operation in 1889. Tramps were admitted until ten o'clock in the evening. They had a hot bath and soaked their heads in a tank containing a liquid solution that killed all vermin. They handed in their clothes to be fumigated and donned a clean nightshirt. The beds were periodically steamed to rid them of bedbugs, and the sleeping chambers were purified by burning sulphur.[60] The men were awakened at half past six in the morning and given a breakfast consisting of tea and six ounces of bread with a slice of butter on Sundays. Pell criticized the House for its meagre fare. He accused the treasurer of padding the accounts by claiming that the meals cost ten cents each,

57. *Ibid.*, 1887.
58. *Globe* 11 and 18 June 1884, 17 May 1888; *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1878; *Globe*, 20 May 1885.
59. *Globe*, 17 May, 11 April 1888; House of Industry Executive Committee, minutes, 3 July 1888; *Toronto Council Minutes*, 1888, Appendix 302; *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1889.
60. *World*, 21 February 1894; *Mail*, 20 April 1889; House of Industry Executive Committee, minutes, October 17, 1893; *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1894.

whereas in fact they were worth only two cents. The managers of the House of Industry loftily replied that it was not their duty to supply the unemployed with "sumptuous fare".[61]

At about eight o'clock, the tramps began their work for the day. The average time required to saw one quarter-cord of wood was between two and three and a quarter hours, but the feebler workers spent the whole day at it. Cold weather made the job more arduous. At one point, the board considered purchasing mittens to loan to the men on the woodpile, but the idea was dropped. After the quarter-cord had been sawed, the tramp was entitled to a bowl of soup (reputed to be watery) and another six ounces of bread. If a man refused to perform the labour test, he was not readmitted to the House.[62]

The tramps apparently had a jaundiced opinion of the "improvements" to the casual ward. One of them grumbled that Toronto "used to be pretty good one time but since they started the fiddle racket (sawing wood) the boys don't like it worth a cent."[63] The baths were considered a hazard to health: "I've heard of a good many who have caught bad colds through it. . . . A man might get consumption."[64] Since the casuals' clothes were taken from them, it was harder to smuggle tobacco into the dormitories. An old man was discovered with a pipe and a plug of tobacco concealed in his flowing beard. Another cause for complaint among the tramps was the rule that anyone who left the premises on Sunday could not be readmitted on Sunday evening. The visiting missionary enjoyed a captive audience: "They seem to enjoy the service and join heartily in singing, but most of them don't appear to realize the importance and urgency of things eternal. Many of them seem to think that everyone is against them."[65]

Although the tramps had reason to dislike the new system, the officials of the House of Industry were pleased with it. Prior to the opening of the baths, manager John Baillie had exulted: "We'll wash and bathe them, we'll cut their hair and comb them, we'll teach them what honest labour means and make something of them."[66] These goals had, according to the 1889 annual report, been achieved. A sense of personal freedom and a certain amount of self-respect had been restored to the casuals.[67] The most gratifying result of the labour test was the reduction in the number of applications for casual relief. The average number of casuals staying overnight fell from 118 in 1887 to 86 in 1889 to 75 in 1890 (see Table 1). The casual poor committee of the House of Industry maintained that, were it not for the labour test, applications would be triple what they were.[68] The pressure of homeless poor wishing to spend the night in police stations also eased.

61. *Globe*, 24 January 1891; *World*, 14 and 28 January, 19 March 1890.
62. *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1889; *Globe*, 24 January 1891; *Mail*, 20 December 1893; *Globe*, 14 February 1880.
63. *Mail*, 20 April 1889.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Toronto City Mission Annual Report*, 1897.
66. *World*, 15 January 1889.
67. *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1889.
68. *Ibid.*, 1892.

Table 1. *Casuals at the House of Industry 1876-1899*

	Total*	Average per Night		Total	Average per Night
1876	345	25	1888	...	...
1877	327	30	1889	548	86
1878	435	28	1890	1481***	75
1879	423	28	1891	1701	82
1880	395	28	1892	1050	63
1881	335	28	1893	996	65
1882	352	18	1894	1201	62
1883	385	27	1895	1531	...
1884	390	26	1896	1398	...
1885	375	73**	1897	1535	100
1886	730	71	1898	1392	40
1887	679	118	1899	1269	44

Source: Annual Reports of the House of Industry.

*The total refers to the number of individuals who stayed in the casual ward for at least one night. Most of them lodged at the House for a longer period.

**In 1884 the House undertook repairs and an enlargement of the building.

***The sudden increase is attributable to the fact that in 1890 the casual ward was open for the summer as well as the winter months.

In 1887 the stations gave shelter to 1,350 people, in 1888 to 994, and in 1889 to 539.[69]

While there was no question that the labour test had, at least in the minds of the administrators of the House of Industry, mitigated the tramp evil, the problem did not altogether disappear. The Reverend A.H. Baldwin, a trustee of the House of Industry, testified before the 1891 Ontario Prison Commission about the annoying presence of tramps in Toronto. He claimed that cities in the United States with three times the population had only one-tenth of the number of vagrants to deal with.[70] In 1891, 454 casuals spent one night at the House of Industry, 832 stayed for two or three nights, and 415 for more than three nights. Of the latter, twenty-four slept in the casual ward at least one hundred nights.[71] Baldwin asserted that the House should not allow such extended sojourns. He wryly observed that it was bound to injure a man's health to be tubbed 198 nights in succession. Edward Taylor, the city relief officer, agreed with Baldwin. The

69. *Toronto Council Minutes*, Chief of Police Annual Reports, 1887-1889.
70. Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, 1891, no. 18, pp. 682-3.
71. *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1891.

hospitality of the House of Industry nurtured pauperism.[72] Part of the explanation for lengthy stays in the casual ward lay in the overcrowding of the quarters for the aged and infirm poor. The overflow was moved into the accommodation intended for tramps. But the policy of the House of Industry with respect to tramps was also to blame. The managers did not feel justified in turning a tramp away as long as he complied with the labour test. If that happened, citizens might consider themselves obligated to give money to beggars, because the charitable would not know for certain whether the supplicant was undeserving or willing to work.[73]

During the early 1890s, a time of depression and high unemployment, the House of Industry toughened its policy towards tramps. In 1895, casuals were divided into two classes: the homeless poor of Toronto and those from other places. Tramps in the latter category made up approximately 70 per cent of the total.[74] They were limited to three consecutive nights in the casual ward, unless the fourth night fell on a Sunday, in which case they could stay an extra night. Residents from Toronto were entitled to stays of indeterminate length as long as they continued to perform the work test.[75]

Another innovation of the 1890s was the substitution of stonebreaking for woodcutting as the work test. Table 1 illustrates the impact of the introduction of stonebreaking in 1896. The total number of casuals declined from 1,531 in 1895 to 1,398 in 1896. Perhaps because the board failed in 1897 to obtain enough stone to administer the test properly, the number of casuals again rose. Stone was in abundant supply in 1898, and the number of casuals sheltered at the House decreased from 1,535 to 1,392.[76] When the casuals were required to saw wood for their food and lodging, relatively few refused the labour test. In 1895, for example, the men did the work asked of them 8,367 times, and refused 181 times. The following year, after stonebreaking replaced woodcutting, the proportions were reversed. The work was done 792 times, and refused 1,202 times (see Table 2).

The labour test was not the final solution to the tramp problem. It did not eliminate flagrant pauperism. Idle vagrants still managed to beg enough change to pay for a bed in a squalid ten cent or fifteen cent lodging house.[77] The casual poor committee of the House of Industry admitted that the complete reformation of the tramp was not possible through the labour test alone: "Hitherto we have brought the tramp up to a certain stage in recovering industrious inclinations, but we have allowed him to slip from our hands before these inclinations have been formed into habits of industry."[78] Able-bodied and chronic mendicants had to be

72. *Ibid.*, 1895.
73. *Ibid.*, 1895, 1893, 1894.
74. *Ibid.*, 1896, 1897, 1899. Persons from outside Toronto made up 68 per cent of casuals in 1896, 71 per cent in 1897, 73 per cent in 1898, and 74 per cent in 1899.
75. *Ibid.*, 1895; *Star*, 17 April 1895.
76. *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1896, 1897, 1899.
77. *Globe*, 2 January 1891.
78. *House of Industry Annual Report*, 1894.

Table 2. ***Results of the House of Industry Labour Test***

	Worked	Refused	Incapable	Allowed to Leave Without Working	Sundays, Holidays Wet Days
1891	5979	59	292	808	2191
1892	5288	51	241	446	1209
1893	4679	34	268	571	775
1894	5345	107	461	726	898
1895	8367	181	708	1029	290
1896	792	1202	72	0	614

Source: Annual Reports of the House of Industry.

isolated from temptation, their bodies cleansed of tobacco and alcohol, and their minds habituated to the rhythm of regular labour. The committee recommended that constitutionally lazy tramps should be sentenced for an indeterminate length of time to labour colonies where they would receive industrial training. They would not be released until they had been transformed from parasites into producers. "The effect of the labour test will be necessarily incomplete till this labour colony or farm is added to the woodyard."[79] This conclusion was similar to the one reached by the Ontario Prison Commission in 1891. It suggested that inveterate vagrants be sentenced to hard labour at the Central Prison.[80] Since these drastic proposals were not implemented, their efficacy went untested.

The imposition of the labour test, while not a panacea, had borne tangible results. Most observers agreed that it had curbed what was regarded as a vicious form of pauperism. The credit for instigating and promoting the campaign for the labour test for tramps belonged to the Associated Charities. Goldwin Smith in his *Reminiscences* specifically mentioned the labour test as being one of the more significant and worthwhile accomplishments of his career in philanthropy.[81] The drive to rid the city of tramps conformed to the essential purpose and deepest motives of the charity organization movement. When the Associated Charities began to agitate for the labour test in 1881, the aim was to check the pauperizing tendency of charity. To the extent that the labour test was implemented, first in the Associated Charities' own stoneyard and woodyard, and later in the House of Industry casual ward, the Associated Charities had dealt a blow to pauperism, its foremost enemy.

79. *Ibid.*
80. Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, 1891, no. 18, pp. 114, 219.
81. Goldwin Smith, *Reminiscences*, Arnold Haultain, ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 453.

The unrelenting theme of the anti-tramp crusade in Toronto was the inviolability of the work ethic. No one should have the illusion that he could live except by the sweat of his own brow. The presence of tramps in the city suggested to those who operated the charities, businessmen and professional men and their wives, that not everyone accepted this fundamental law. The labour test was implemented as a test of character. The unemployed who had the proper attitude to work performed the menial and physically demanding stonebreaking or woodcutting. Those who refused the labour test were denied charity. They had to suffer the consequences of their sloth and serve as an example for those tempted to follow the same route. The labour test was a means of social control, a way of enforcing the law of work on a deviating, floating population. It was also an insidious way of denying the reality of unemployment because the authors of the labour test assumed that the character defects of the poor, not the unavailability of work, was the central issue.

The nine hour movement of the 1870s, the rise of the Knights of Labour in the 1880s, and the protests of the unemployed in the 1890s were all signs of the advances being made by the labour movement. The anti-tramp campaign sponsored by middle class philanthropists was a kind of counter-offensive. The tramp symbol provided the opportunity for a denial of the gravity of involuntary unemployment. The stonepile became an emblem for the work ethic.