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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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# *The Winter's Tale: The Seasonal Contours of Pre-industrial Poverty in British North America, 1815-1860*

Because of the seasonal fluctuations in the commercial economy, winter meant entirely different things to the inhabitants of British North America in the pre-industrial period. To the successful merchant and his family winter represented a time of entertainment, sport, cultural activity or, at worst, boredom. To his summer labourer, winter was synonymous with hardship: cold, hunger, and gloomy unemployment or underemployment until the welcome return of summer. In the towns where the extremes of wealth and destitution were most commonly found cheek by jowl, the contrast between the amusements of the well-to-do and the privations of the indigent classes was particularly stark in winter. As a representative of the relatively well-off, the editor of the *Quebec Mercury* considered the Christmas season an appropriate time for calling to the attention of his readers

> the hordes who will be pining in wretchedness and hunger, while we are gathered in social festivity, and happiness, round a well furnished and luxurious board; blest with all that can render life an elysium . . . How gloomy, how dark, how fraught with shuddering sympathy, the reverse of this joyous picture, when we turn to the dwellings of the poor of Quebec, on this anniversary, this day of common and universal jubilee? Round a cold, fireless hearth, the humble child of want sits in moody despair, watching the huddled groups of his famishing family, whose blue, pinched, features, painfully index the weakening inroads of long continued and gnawing hunger; a few worn rags covering their emaciated frames, shiveringly drawn yet closer and closer around them, being their only means of warmth.[1]

Yet both the sufferers and the unaffected shared the common experience of exposure to the impersonal forces of nature – the snow fell alike on the rich and the poor – and no man could be held accountable for the vagaries of the Canadian climate. As the ink froze in her pen, author Anna Jameson recorded that human character and behaviour "depend more on the influence of climate than the pride of civilised humanity would be willing to allow" and went on to pity the poor immigrants who were as "yet

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unprepared against the rigour of the season! "[2] Editor J.H. Crosskill rhetorically reminded his readers, "Is it not true, that our humane feelings are particularly excited by the approach of cold weather! There is not a human being, unless he has the stoney heart of a German fairy tale, but must at this season feel some pity for those who are destitute and comfortless."[3] In his Saint John paper, G.E. Fenety from time to time displayed similar sensibilities:

> Winter is a terrible enemy to the destitute in this most rigorous climate. None but those who experience it, can tell the amount of suffering there is in this City, during five months in the year, among women and children. We see the pauper in the streets, in tattered garb and attenuated form, and he passes by and out of our mind in a moment. Could we follow him to his inhospitable abode, and see his little ones crouching around a single brand of fire, to keep themselves warm, and witness the scanty meal of which they are to partake, we should soon begin to learn something of the dark shades of human life, and incline towards charity.[4]

It seems that the seasonal features of colonial poverty in the nineteenth century did indeed stimulate a degree of expedient humanity towards the poor which, combined with religious motivations, largely counteracted the prevailing influences of conscious *laissez-faire* and unconscious indifference. While it would be simplistic to suggest that winter was the only cause of poverty, it intensified the underemployment of labour, aggravated illness, and attracted the destitute rural poor to the cities where sufficient wealth, self-interest, and jobbery could be found to sustain charitable relief and public asylums. By comparison, whatever poverty existed in the summer months was "more endurable than when the wintry winds howl around the habitations of the poor and painfully reveal to them their penury and their inability to screen themselves from the piercing blast."[5] Moreover, cruel winter plumbed the depths of utter desperation whenever it followed a summer of excessive immigration, raging epidemic, or disastrous crop or fishery failure, or when it coincided with periodic commercial depression or occasional urban conflagration. Since some of these afflictions plagued one or more of the major colonial towns during most winters of the first half of the nineteenth century, the hyperborean climate provides a useful common denominator and point of departure for examining the ramifications of colonial poverty, the characteristics of poor relief, and the attendant attitudes of society in St. John's, Halifax, Saint John, Quebec, Montreal, Kingston, and Toronto. In the pre-industrial period the long Canadian winter both determined the contours of poverty and shaped the response of affluent and poor alike to the latter's plight.

## I

The distress of the 'honest' poor, whether outdoor labourers, wretched immigrants, or the helpless sick, old, young, and female, was exacerbated by

the exigencies of winter in two principal ways: winter deprived the poor of their employment at the same time as it made the necessaries of life prohibitively dear; and it endangered their health by aggravating the plight of the sick and infirm, by creating dietary problems for those at or below the subsistence level, and by causing disablement or death for others through exposure.

By far the greater number of the poor suffered in winter from a paralyzing interruption in their means of earning a living. The seasonal nature of economic activity based on North Atlantic shipping and on harvesting the soil and the sea entailed a total lack of job security for the lower classes. During the months of mercantile activity labourers were normally much in demand in the towns and wages were relatively attractive. This meant that steerage immigrants (usually Irish) arriving in the busy ports of the east coast or the St. Lawrence in summer time were often tempted to take jobs as day labourers since they came badly prepared for 'roughing it in the bush.' In addition to private employment, major public works were generally suited to summer employment and offered the immigrant no more than a few months of continuous employment. The making of roads, for example, could best be pursued in the summer when every kind of employment was operating at full capacity. Unfortunately employers failed to explain the seasonal nature of outdoor labour and the new arrivals, often grossly misinformed about the colonial environment, learned too late that summer employment seldom compensated for winter distress. In November dockwork in the ice-locked ports of the Canadas ground to a complete halt. Even in the ice-free coastal ports, the perils for North Atlantic shipping in the days of the sailing ship and the unsophisticated steamer reduced waterfront activity to a trickle in winter. Urban workers, both immigrant and resident – day labourers, mill hands, truckmen, seamen, carpenters, and other building trades workers – who were thrown out of work in the autumn thereafter encountered severe competition in their quest for the few remaining jobs and for regular or special relief, particularly from those poor agricultural labourers and fishermen able to make their way to the towns to plead for winter subsistence. These intruders must always have included a proportion of immigrants, who had been attracted during the summer to farms as labourers or servants expecting the kind of security provided by annual hirings in England. Such settlers must have found especially disconcerting the tendency of colonial farmers to hire workers by the month and thereby protect themselves against the slack and lean season.[6] At the other extreme, the shore fishermen of Newfoundland accepted regular winter unemployment as the normal state of things and gravitated towards St. John's in search of the equally regular relief to be found there.[7]

As the number of available jobs decreased during November and

December and the labour market in each of the colonial towns became glutted, employed workers found themselves completely at the mercy of employers who took advantage of this surplus, as well as shorter winter hours, to reduce wages for both skilled and unskilled labourers. In Lower Canada labourers and mechanics could expect to earn one-quarter to one-half less in January than in August. House carpenters in Saint John in 1853 received 5s. a day in winter compared to 7s. 6d. to 10s. a day in summer. Not only were labourers paid less per day but they also worked sporadically during the winter months.[8] At the same time, the supply of imported and locally produced goods diminished and the needy had to pay the resulting inflated prices and seldom enjoyed credit facilities beyond those available in the pawn shop. Because of the inability of the poor to buy in quantity during seasons of moderate prices, their regular dependence on the winter markets invariably meant in effect they were paying more than the non-labouring classes. With what were at best subsistence, and often starvation, wages, the underemployed labourer was often forced in winter time to purchase bread, the favoured staple in his diet, at prices inflated by as much as fifty per cent, as well as firewood at exorbitant rates in the larger towns.[9]

The poor man could seldom escape from this vicious situation. Even if he was able to save out of his summer earnings enough to provide for impending winter, he rarely had any place to store substantial quantities of potatoes or firewood or anywhere to bake bread if he managed to lay in a barrel of flour. Accordingly he still had to purchase both "HIS *Fuel* and HIS *Food*, from *hand* to *mouth* at a considerably advanced price."[10] The sufferings of the poor man's family were exceeded only by those of the widowed or helpless woman frequently with a dependent brood of children and with even less chance of finding employment. "Imagine for a moment," the St. John's branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society suggested, "the condition of a poor widow, with a large family, young and helpless, cold and famishing, without fuel or food – without any employment whatever, during the dreary and bitter days of a protracted winter . . ."[11] A protracted winter usually meant that early spring was the season of greatest hardship, "the pinching season" according to the St. John's *Times*, "when every article of provision naturally advances in price and becomes by the poor almost unattainable."[12] In Saint John the situation was compounded for penniless poor tenants who customarily found themselves forced to move house on May day when their quarterly rents became due at the very moment when their means were completely exhausted.[13]

A striking illustration of the predicament of the urban poor in winter is afforded by the difficulties they encountered in obtaining a major necessity of life – fuel. It is singularly ironic that during the decades when the British

American timber trade flourished, the poor suffered severely from a lack of cheap firewood. Whilst insufficient attention to this prosaic matter might lead the twentieth-century Canadian historian to conclude that the poor man simply took his axe and felled a nearby tree, the degree of urbanization by the 1820s precluded this obvious recourse. Admittedly, many of the poor of St. John's and the towns of Upper Canada eked out their winter subsistence by supplying the local wood markets, but even the experienced, small-scale timber cutters depended on persistent winter weather in order to prosecute their activities in the forests.[14]

For the poor of the island and near island towns of Montreal and Halifax, marketable supplies of firewood were essential, because unfenced land had long been denuded of its wood and the standing timber on private property was carefully protected. In Nova Scotia, many outports along the south shore earned a living in winter by supplying the Halifax market with firewood carried to the city by boat, so that in those bitterly cold winters when the outport harbours froze solid, the sufferings of the poor both in town and country greatly increased. Until the railway raised hopes of adequate supply in Montreal in the 1850s, the poor of that city looked for their wood to the small loads brought to town across the ice by the habitants' sleighs. At old Quebec, where the banks of the St. Lawrence were stripped of forests, firewood had to be brought down from the region of the St. Maurice and other tributaries to the north, and similarly at Saint John before rail transportation the markets relied on river traffic. The difficulty was that all these water highways froze in winter.[15]

The residents of towns surrounded by woods rather than by water could in theory supply their own needs, provided the households included healthy adults, storage space, and a sleigh. But even enterprise might be rewarded by practical obstacles. In Quebec and St. John's the local authorities, concerned for the safety of the inhabitants and their livestock, intermittently promoted measures which deprived the poor man of the dogs he needed for hauling wood. As one sympathetic observer in Quebec remarked:

> To many families the dog is almost indispensable, they depend on him for the conveyance of all their fuel, and the interdict against the use of canine carriers is one of the luxuries of the wealthy; who feeling no want of the services of these animals themselves think it quite exemplary to relieve their poorer neighbours of them also, moreover the wealthy because they only use the dog for purposes connected with sport and ostentation, are often too ignorant to think it more cruel to harness a dog than a horse, while in point of fact, man has just as good a right to use the dog for draught, and carriage, as any other beast in creation.[16]

It was an age which saw both great fear of 'hydrophobia' (rabies) and experiments to protect the public health, and the authorities insistently argued that overloading the dog as a beast of burden caused the thirst and fatigue which induced distemper.[17] At the same time, fear of mad dogs and the prevalence of sheep and cattle killing in St. John's led to a regulation which sanctioned the shooting of stray dogs, a move which prompted one irate editior to point out that "The whole dependence of every poor family in the town for fuel is upon the Dog", and that an order to exterminate the dogs was tantamount to an instruction to exterminate the poor.[18]

On the other hand, many who were forced to rely on the town markets for fuel but had no storage space could not buy wood by the cord even if they had the money.

> Is it at all possible [asked one contemporary in Halifax] to crowd so much lumber into a moderate sized room, which is occupied by *five* families, the middle one of which 'takes in *boarders*! ' One half the houses that are occupied by the poor, have no yard room, and few have more than enough to 'swing a cat in;' beside, if there were a yard to hold six cords of wood, owned by three persons, and the house is taken by half a dozen families, three of which are not prudent, is it not likely the latter would be now and then *borrowing* a stick of it while the former were asleep? [19]

Obliged to shop for two or three feet of wood at a time the poor were forced to pay more per cord than if they had been able to purchase it by the full cord from the local depot or direct from the supplier.[20] As small-scale purchasers, the poor were also particularly vulnerable to dishonest practices and forestalling in the winter wood markets, usually perpetrated by people equally impoverished, during decades when the supplies were limited and in the absence of municipal regulations adequate for their protection. 'A Friend to the Poor' in Montreal reported in 1845 that local hucksters were purchasing wood at the wood yard for resale in the market and loading it on their sleighs in one-quarter cords, "and it is so ingeniously piled on them that they bamboozle the poor man into the idea that they have at least a third of a cord on their sleighs."[21]

Contemporaries believed that the outlay for fuel represented a major, if not the greatest, expense borne by the poor city dweller in winter. In 1854 the editor of the *Montreal Gazette* estimated that factory labourers in that city were compelled to devote about 20 per cent of their wages to the purchase of wood, an expenditure which he assumed rendered wages in this northern clime far less attractive than comparable wages in the United States.[22] Indeed, another traveller in the Canadas at mid-century considered the dearness of fuel to be one of the great drawbacks to the progress of

colonial settlement. When the supply of firewood eventually became exhausted as the woods rapidly receded and conservation was neglected, he reckoned that the cost of coal would bear so heavily on the poor that it would "prevent the peopling the country."[23] Although fuel was costly, fire was indispensable in a cold climate in order to preserve life itself. William Kingston, who was intrigued by the logistics of fuel supply and the technology of domestic heating in Quebec during the 1850s, reported that the poor suffered "dreadfully in the winter from want of firing, especially the poor Irish, for the first two or three years after their arrival in the colony . . . Many, after their day's work is over, go to bed directly they reach home, and remain there till it is again time to be off, as the only means they possess to escape being frozen."[24]

As if these obstacles were not enough, in their struggle to obtain the necessaries of life, the poor were remorselessly haunted by the spectre of illness. Instances of malnutrition leading to starvation in winter were not uncommon, and even where relief in the shape of soup or cornmeal was available, it did not necessarily counteract illnesses caused by dietary deficiencies. Many immigrants amongst the poor were so unused to Indian meal – the staple relief provided by government – that the course food caused serious problems for weakened constitutions. Nor was relief provided on a sufficiently regular basis. The visitors of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. John's found that poor fishermen's families frequently went whole days in winter without food, and enumerated some of the results, such as the "miserable and emaciated mother" with nine freezing and starving children who was found nursing her eighteen-month old twins, and on "being asked why she continued to give them the breast so long, she said she had nothing to give them to drink, and that she had no other means of keeping life in them."[25] If the demographic patterns produced by winters in other northern countries apply also to Canada, it is likely that long winters caused the greatest degree of regular seasonal illnesses and considerably increased the rate of mortality, the cumulative effect of dietary deficiencies and poor health being most noticeable in the early spring of especially hard seasons.[26]

While the kinds of illness aggravated by the winter came increasingly to be treated by outdoor relief through the establishment of public visiting dispensaries, the sick poor in winter also required institutional care. The few public institutions which did exist were often unsuitable for the treatment of the sick. This was the period when the town jail or house of correction represented the colonial counterpart to the 'general mixed workhouse' in Britain and was likely to fulfil welfare, protectionist, and correctional functions as well as furnishing a house for inmates of all manner of ages and sexes, mental and physical conditions. Whatever their facilities such

institutions were rarely adequate for the care of the sick, very few being endowed with an infirmary. While the healthy transient poor frequently sought admission to the town jails for shelter in winter, the buildings were seldom adequately supplied with heat. For a chronically sick poor man there was little to choose between the prospect of freezing to death in a garret or outhouse and freezing to death in the local jail. The jurors' verdict on a coroner's inquest on the death of an infirm vagrant in the Quebec house of correction in February 1827 concluded that the deceased man, after having suffered three months' incarceration in a jail lacking three-quarters of its window panes, "died from Misery, Cold, and want of Clothing".[27]

While observers denounced such public squalor as scandalous, the primitive, wretched abodes of the poor were thought to constitute a far more serious, intractable problem. Benevolent citizens called for the provision of specialized refuges from the cold for the destitute and sick poor who, like a Quebec woman removed prostrate from her unheated and unprovisioned garret to the jail to die in 1846, were likely to suffer untold miseries in helpless obscurity.[28] The grand jury of Montreal in February 1847 feared that two recent deaths of children from "hunger cold and misery" represented only the beginning of deaths that winter from exposure amongst the city's "1,100" indigent families, especially when "More than 100 families have nothing but straw for their beds, and to protect them from the attacks of cold, no clothes but those rendered ragged through their poverty."[29] The deaths of helpless poor children from exposure in their ghastly dwellings were graphically described in contemporary accounts. In the severe winter of 1816-17 a jury in Quebec concluded that little Maria Louisa Beleau died of "a violent sore throat, and cold, produced by exposure to the inclemency of the weather." Like so many of the colonial poor, Maria Louisa belonged to a family without a male provider, the type of family most crippled by the lack of employment and regular poor relief. A witness at the inquest claimed that

> The hovel in which the deceased had lived, with her mother, and two sisters, IS NOT FIT FOR A STABLE. It is open in many parts of the roof, and on all sides. There is no other floor than the bare earth. It is a mere wooden shell; it has no window, nor any chimney. In the middle is a shallow hole made in the earth, in which there are marks of a fire having been made; and the smoke escaped through the open parts of the roof and sides. – When I was there on Tuesday last, there was no fire in the hole . . .[30]

As a result of the widely publicized distress of the poor in winter, coupled with such health hazards as epidemics, these years saw the inauspicious beginnings or faltering development of poorhouses and hospitals

in the major urban centres. Nevertheless, facilities for treating the sick remained woefully inadequate. The poorhouses, catering largely to the helpless unemployable, tended to herd promiscuously together the sick and healthy. The hospitals for their part afforded insufficient accommodation, were often discriminatory in their admissions policies, and suffered from financial uncertainty.

While existing institutions might well have been designed to protect the sick poor against the ravages of the cold, they did not always succeed in solving hibernal distress any more than did jails. In 1838 John Kent, a member of the legislature in Newfoundland, claimed that mental patients in St. John's Hospital frequently suffered frostbite in their feet so serious that amputation was required. The inmates of the Kingston House of Industry, a poorhouse, were found to be freezing from want of clothing in 1855. And the frigid, pathetic scenes in the "Camps", the apology for almshouses in St. John's epitomized the very worst in public institutions.[31]

Although the colonial poor have themselves left little first-hand documentary evidence of their sufferings in winter, there is no reason to believe that they passively accepted their fate. The nearest they came to doing so in the popular mind was in the case of the French Canadians, the most traditionally acclimatized residents of towns, who were said to "associate the idea of disgrace with the fact of destitution, and, with few exceptions, proudly conceal any amount of privation with a sort of Indian stoicism."[32] Arguably, this response demonstrates a full adaptation to the unrelenting realities of the climate; but the mid-century marked also the period of substantial French Canadian emigration to the United States. Certainly the most enterprising, effective response to the climate and its rigours, as well as to the lack of jobs in general, was to leave it and migrate either permanently or at least seasonally to more congenial climes. As 'Off-For-Australia' wrote to the *Newfoundland Patriot* in 1839, "in these times of great distress, the only way to relieve one's poverty is to emigrate."[33]

Indeed, as the editor of a Halifax paper observed, the climate contributed to the well-known transiency of the population of colonial towns:

> The exceedingly precarious nature of industrial pursuits with the hopelessness of looking elsewhere within a nearer distance than the American cities for employment, naturally creates a vast amount of poverty in our city . . . So sensible are the poorer classes of this, that few who have undergone the privations incidental to a severe winter, ever risk

> the repetition, but with the close of the year pack up their few little traps and clear out for Boston.[34]

Because of the transiency caused partly by the climate and the seasonal limits it imposed on the pre-industrial economy, the poor were ineffective in organizing protests against the tendency of colonial employers to exploit the situation to their own narrow advantage. The composition of the lower class changed too rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century and its members were too inured to the seasonality of employment for a vigorous campaign of protest to have been successfully launched against the inequities of winter. Admittedly, individual petitioners begged government for relief and jobs. On a larger scale, 'ungrateful' labourers engaged on the roads in St. John's in the early spring of 1849 collectively petitioned against scanty wages of 1s.6d. a day and remuneration in truck rather than in cash. Similarly, desperate Irish labourers on the first winter canal building at Lachine in 1842-3 struck against a seasonal cut in wages which were paid in truck.[35] The aims of these public works labourers were singularly short term and show the kind of "occasional collective outburst" to be expected from men whose sole common denominator was hardship.[36]

Even a mass meeting of 2-3000 unemployed French Canadian shipyard workers in Quebec in November of the severe depression year of 1857 cannot be taken as evidence of an effective show of aggressive solidarity. Hardship was also a part of their experience in an industry that formed an ancillary activity to the primary business of shipping and therefore a winter works programme writ large. Although shipbuilding was run by private enterprise to a greater extent than public works of the period, it remained overwhelmingly a winter activity, employing the labourers and farmers of the Quebec area in very large numbers, and, to the joy of the shipbuilders, at relief level wages. The shipwrights were thus not only semi-skilled, but were ruthlessly exploited and rendered politically impotent as a class by the continuing success of the deception played upon them that their work on ships in winter represented a charitable favour and not a right. Consequently, during the chronic depressions which necessarily interrupted the export-based, winter shipbuilding industry, the Quebec workers did not riot but publicly demanded alternative forms of winter relief.[37] In the depths of winter they constituted no more of a threat to social order than did the pathetic unemployed fishermen of St. John's. Nonetheless, the so-called benevolence of employers in winter had begun by mid-century to encourage the articulation of working-class resentment. The remarks of a Halifax carpenter in 1852 were probably typical. "He asks if it be fair, that for five months in the year able and willing mechanics, are compelled to accept the alternative of walking the streets or working for wages which do not afford ample

remuneration for the labour performed." Then, "after submitting to all this, with apparent resignation – after enriching their employers by the sweat of their brow, on terms which barely keep the thread of life from snapping – they are told with barefaced effrontery that they were employed in charity." The solution, according to the carpenter, lay in the organization of a trade union as a means of self-defence.[38]

As for more primitive forms of protest, observers occasionally feared or at least noted with surprise the absence of mass demonstrations and violent crimes amongst the poor during the winters of greatest suffering, but did not draw the probable conclusion that the poor had to preserve what little energy they possessed in order to sustain life itself.[39] While the anticipation of winter hardship occasionally turned starving populations into lawless banditti who threatened or raided stores or perpetrated gang robberies, winter itself was a hopeless season for protest.[40] Admittedly, poor individuals might commit misdemeanours in order to gain admission to the local jail for the coldest months.[41] But the poor were far more likely to show their spirit during the season of employment after they had "thawed out" and as their expectations rose. When railway labourers in Saint John struck for higher wages and shorter hours in March 1858 despite the employment provided for them during January and February by "benevolent" contractors, the editor of the *Morning News* complained: "Do as much as you may for them in their adversity, as soon as they get upon their feet and feel that they have strength and got you in their power, they will turn upon you and wring the last copper from your pockets."[42] Town labourers and mechanics were notorious for demanding high wages in season. Who could blame them when summer employment might represent the sum total of their year's labour? To the immigrant – the uninitiated – the demand for high wages accorded with a high level of expectation produced by emigration propaganda, but to the experienced colonial labourer it reflected a primitive determination to enjoy to the full a season of plenty.[43] This disposition amongst fishermen in Newfoundland caused one newspaper editor to draw a comparison with the habits of the British sailor who "will earn his money like a horse and spend it like an ass".[44] Enjoyment invariably led to excess – a tendency to feast and be merry for four or five months of the year than to live frugally for twelve. Reformers also believed that a tradition of winter relief encouraged indolence and fretted that persons in Newfoundland "have been known to bask in the noon-day's sun during the very height of the fishery! "[45] Indeed, the rhythm of seasonal employment was complemented by the rhythm of seasonal relief. The seasonal labourer could not be abandoned to the savagery of winter. If no shipbuilding or stone breaking was available, the poor man, whether considered deserving or not, could usually obtain a donation of welfare provisions, a temporary refuge in an asylum, or a share of the alms doled out

by private citizens and religious institutions. Such relief was never lavish or particularly attractive, but then neither were the rewards of providence and frugality.

While the poor therefore suffered through most winters with resignation, confining their protests largely to displays of summer intransigence and perennial improvidence, they did exhibit an inward-looking response to their seasonal predicament by cooperating amongst themselves. Extended families and individuals united by a common experience or nationality drew together and pooled their resources against the vicissitudes of winter. This reaction is reflected in comments by observers who often noted that the poor comprised the most charitable segment of the colonial population and that it was the poor who supported the poor.[46] Certainly this is how the Irish population, which comprised the majority of the urban poor, initially managed to survive through the long winters at a time when their numbers, their national characteristics, and their penury did little to endear them to established residents.

## II

For their part, the well-to-do, surveying the plight of their unfortunate compatriots from the vantage point of warm houses and comfortable affluence, responded with good advice and practical proposals as well as hibernal sentimentality. Except in Upper Canada, which was not sufficiently urbanized until the 1830s, winter poverty as a public issue came to the fore in the older colonial towns during the depression following the Napoleonic Wars. The ensuing, periodic debates proceeded within the context of various practices of public welfare in the colonies which were themselves much influenced by the climate.[47] In the seascoast towns voluntary assistance supplemented government aid; in the river and lake ports the reverse was the case. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick both enjoyed statutory adaptations of the English poor law, including poor-rates and poorhouses in Halifax and Saint John, while the inhabitants of Newfoundland, who hovered on the brink of pauperization throughout the five decades considered here, were relieved out of colonial revenues. A system of weekly licensed begging, combined with congregational and monastic alms-giving, sustained the poor of Quebec and Montreal until the intensifying social problems of urbanization led Protestants and more especially the Catholic majority to establish separate institutions for various categories of poor, though the well respected Hôtels Dieu (hospitals) and Hôpitaux Généraux (poorhouses) dated from the French colonial period. In Upper Canada district funds were initially used for piecemeal poor relief, but in the 1820s and 1830s, welfare measures in the municipalities of Kingston and Toronto had become largely voluntary. Although the establishment of asylums in Upper Canada, beginning in the late

1830s, aimed to relieve the distress of the generality of the poor, the trend towards the polarization of Protestant and Catholic institutions soon emerged. Since the measures in all the towns rapidly came to depend on some financial aid from the legislatures and from the community at large, the period was marked by lengthy public disagreements over the categories of poverty and the methods, amounts, and responsibilities for providing relief -- issues which constitute a topic in itself.

In spite of divergent political, religious, and philosophical views on poverty, the actual cause of winter distress provoked little difference of opinion. Contemporaries blamed unemployment, which the solicitor general of Newfoundland in 1855 trenchantly attributed to the seasonality and underdevelopment of the colonial economy. Poverty in Newfoundland, he explained, is caused by "the absence of employment for the labouring classes during a particular period of the year, when the prosecution of the fishery ceases; and from the fact that the fishery itself was not sufficiently fostered to enable those who prosecuted it to derive their full sustenance from it."[48] But in the absence of a transformation in their economy, townspeople and other commentators suggested one of two approaches to the problem: remove the poor from the cities or provide facilities on the spot for their relief.

Those who advocated removal were motivated either by a refusal to accept responsibility for the care of the transient poor or by an Arcadian vision of the agricultural future of the colonies. Removal sometimes meant re-emigration, especially in Newfoundland where this recourse remained a favoured panacea for distress. Similarly in Halifax, the proposed remedy for releasing the blacks of the town's rural ghettos from their regular winter distress was to induce them "to migrate to a climate and soil better adapted to their constitution and habits."[49] In Saint John and other colonial towns, the anticipation of a winter of hardship in 1847-8 prompted the authorities to try to persuade Irish immigrants to return to their native country.[50] In some instances removal simply amounted to a matter of passing the burden from one town to another, as in the severe winter of 1817-18 when shiploads of poor Newfoundlanders were sent from St. John's to Halifax.[51] More often these proposals involved the transfer of the poor from urban to rural areas. In Saint John this kind of resettlement was seen as a way of alleviating the poor-rate of some of its ever-increasing winter burden.[52] In Quebec, the prospect of a winter of severe unemployment prompted the editor of the *Quebec Mercury* to encourage labourers in 1855 to move westward beyond Toronto in search of harvest work, which would not only secure their short-term livelihood, but carry them so far from Quebec that its citizens would be relieved of a proportion of winter street beggars.[53] It was also the official policy of the government emigrant agent at Quebec to encourage new

arrivals to remain in the towns as briefly as possible and to proceed to agricultural districts where they would "more easily procure the necessaries of life and avoid the hardships and distress which are experienced by a large portion of the poor inhabitants in the large cities, during the winter season."[54] And then there were the agrarian idealists who argued that the future independence and security of the present colonial poor could be achieved only by their settlement on the land. Farming represented the one means of attaining not only the salvation and prosperity of the country, but also the permanent cure of seasonal distress, even if agriculture could be pursued only as an ancillary activity.[55] Since farming in the British North American climate was suspended for five months of the year and confined to river valleys and other enclaves of fertile land, the successful pursuit of small-scale subsistence agriculture remained no more than a fanciful idea and evidence of an unrealistic primitivism. In actual fact removal in any shape or form represented a negative response to the rigours of seasonal poverty.

On the other hand, neither idealism nor indifference animated those who were willing to accept winter poverty as an urban responsibility. Some regarded the centralization of relief measures in the towns as an administrative necessity. The poorhouses in Halifax and St. John's (1861) were partly intended to serve the transient poor of their respective provinces. Similarly, the managers of the conventual institutions in Montreal believed they were not fulfilling their expected function unless they attracted the infirm and needy from the surrounding countryside. Other townsmen were keen to retain the poor in the cities out of sheer self-interest. As the major employers of seasonal labourers, merchants involved in the import-export trades wanted to maintain throughout the winter the level of labour in the peak summer season in order to facilitate the ready resumption of commercial activity in the spring.[56] They did not want to see surplus town labourers dispersed to the farmlands, returned to Europe, or enticed to the United States. The fishing merchants of St. John's, for example, wanted to have a large selection of "dealers" on hand from which to choose.[57] As a correspondent to the Halifax *Acadian Recorder* explained in 1816: "In a climate like ours a very considerable number of labouring men in town, must be without employment, the greater part of the winter; otherwise the community must be very deficient of the quantity of labour required in summer."[58] For this reason the names of prominent merchants were sure to head the subscription lists of charitable societies and predominate in reports of public meetings. Michael Tobin, a merchant of Halifax, openly admitted that the merchants, governed as they were by the vagaries of the market economy, did not pay their labourers sufficient wages to see them through the winter and that the deficiency had therefore to be supplied by other means.[59] The merchants of St. John's were notorious for cutting off the

accustomed 'store pay' to their "slave labour" as soon as the commercial season ended and for sending the unemployed fishermen to the government for relief.[60]

In their attempt to find an urban solution for winter destitution, colonial employers, moralists, educators, and editors maintained that the most efficacious remedy lay in the promotion of individual self-reliance. Given the seasonal nature of employment, however, they could not appropriately encourage the poor to help themselves and overcome their distress by working harder: the development of a work ethic surely depended on the availability of year-round labour. Nor did common-school education as a panacea for poverty gain wide public acceptance until about the middle of the century and even then its success in instilling the rising generation with the notions of self-help and social responsibility remained prospective rather than immediate.[61] In this period, therefore, believers in the value of self-help placed the major emphasis on encouraging the poor to "weather the winter" by making what scanty resources they had go further towards supplying the necessaries of life.[62] The advocacy of rigid economy included suggestions for making do with cheaper provisions. In 1849 the editor of the *Public Ledger* advised the St. John's poor to eat cods' heads in winter, "the most nutritious part of the fish, but which has hitherto been thrown out as manure."[63] Unsolicited good advice extended in full measure to the drinking habits of the poor. If the poor drank heavily, it was sometimes part of an attempt to keep warm. Rum was often used as a cheaper substitute for firewood, and the warm public house seemed more attractive than the cold and cheerless home. But to the classes who were called upon to provide relief for the poor in winter, the latter's avid consumption of rum seemed a particularly spendthrift habit. Temperance advocates therefore exhorted the poor to save for a wintry day the summer earnings which they wasted on grog, a thrifty habit which might both discourage the reliance on winter relief and thereby diminish the regrettable dependence on the tavern as a warming house.[64]

The failure of town labourers to economize in the summer in order to subsist independently through the long winters was frequently bemoaned by their self-appointed counsellors. While the more cynical observers attributed to ingrained improvidence the inability of the labourer to amass savings while in full employment, they nonetheless admitted that the poor had to have a secure place in which to lodge their meagre savings. Horrific tales circulated describing what happened to poor men who put their faith in seemingly honest friends or prosperous merchants as bankers.[65] Consequently, beginning in the 1820s and 1830s, the two modes urged by political economists for stretching the wages of the poor to cover winter exigencies caused by unemployment and by sickness were, respectively, savings banks

and friendly or mutual benefit societies. To many observers high summer wages and winter unemployment made savings banks particularly desirable institutions for colonial communities. Although the labouring poor could not be forced to deposit their earnings, the habit might be actively encouraged.[66] Not only might the poor thus be enabled to buy provisions in winter, but the most desirable virtues would be cultivated amongst the banks' customers.

> The depositor, in order to place himself in a way to be benefited, will soon discover that he must substitute thoughtfulness for carelessness, sobriety for intemperance, thriftiness for prodigality, a manly desire of independence for a degrading and paralyzing reliance on the benevolence of others . . .[67]

At the same time the charitable segment of the community which included the merchant-bankers would thereby be relieved of calls on its benevolence, and "habits of economy among the labouring classes" would eventually lead to a new accumulation of capital which would contribute to the progress of the colonies, or so the familiar story went.[68]

While savings banks, appealing to the individual, went gloriously forward with increasing numbers of small depositors, friendly and benefit societies materialized more slowly. Their upper-class promoters feared that organized cooperation amongst the labouring classes might concentrate power in the wrong hands, while the labouring classes themselves, at least until the 1850s, remained too mobile to sustain such organizations. The favoured mode by which the better-off might retain control of a benefit society was to combine it with a savings bank and dispense annuities or sick pay instead of interest.[69] National societies honouring St. George, St. Andrew, and St. Patrick, besides bestowing charity, sometimes claimed that they created an opportunity for both rich and poor to cooperate through mutual assistance, but it is doubtful that they included many members of the working class.[70] Those friendly societies which did attract labourers seem to have concentrated in this period on providing sick pay and meeting funeral expenses. Nonetheless these associations became the fledgling unions of colonial towns when they began to be organized by the workers themselves on the basis of particular trades and labouring activities, such as the longshoremen's societies formed in Saint John in 1849 and Quebec in 1857.[71]

While self-help could in time conceivably rescue some summer labourers from an undue reliance on winter relief, it represented too much of a long-term solution to obviate the need for immediate palliative measures. Faced with the foreboding prospect of winter distress, the citizenry of towns undertook to relieve the poor through special schemes of employment or

charitable aid. Those who discerned winter unemployment as the crux of the problem were increasingly prone to argue that urban society would benefit from systematic employment relief – a far more radical approach than that of those with otherworldly, charitable aims who continued to grapple with winter poverty as an unexpected disaster wrought by providence. Whatever the attitude, however, labour schemes were preferred by all elements in society, because they both distinguished between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor and benefited society at large. The work had of course to be sufficiently unattractive to discourage the regularly employed labourers in the towns and surrounding countryside from opting for subsidized winter employment. Employment was therefore always provided at a 'less eligible' rate of wages than could be obtained elsewhere, earning for its beneficiaries such token payments as 1s.6d. to 2s. per day for stone breaking in Halifax in 1832. The wages paid to winter labourers in Saint John ten years later of 1s.3d. to 2s. per day, depending on the size of family, were said to be "sufficient to keep them off the parish."[72]

Not only were the wages 'less eligible', but the jobs themselves were unattractively menial. Since most of the labourers in colonial towns were considered unskilled, hand labour with pick and shovel was promoted as the most suitable form of activity. Preference was most commonly given to those public works which could be pursued through most of the winter such as stone breaking for macadamizing the roads, canal building, snow removal, well digging, and laying water pipes. The success of shipbuilding as a form of winter relief in Quebec inspired Newfoundlanders to demand the establishment of that industry for the same purpose.[73] By the 1850s railroad construction in the immediate neighbourhood of the towns also afforded winter jobs.[74] In order to sustain a continuity in the programmes of winter relief, the editor of the *New Brunswick Courier* asserted that the extensive preparation of materials always required for summer road building could all be done in the winter. Such public works would provide a way "in which the necessities of the labouring poor could be made to dovetail with the general interest of the whole community, so that they might be benefited by receiving work, while those who pay for it might be equally benefited by having it done."[75] Similarly, the editor of the *Quebec Gazette* suggested that for every dollar invested by the citizens in the employment of winter workers, "at least 75 per cent of it becomes permanently, and perhaps profitably, invested for public good."[76]

Outdoor winter works, however, did not readily lend themselves to an extensive system of relief. Large-scale operations such as road and canal building were normally halted by the onset of bad weather in the autumn. In Newfoundland, for example, road building was finished by the end of

October and therefore afforded only two months' relief after the fishery ended.[77] Nor could such schemes involving heavy labour benefit women, the group that comprised the greatest proportion of unemployed colonial poor. In comparison with men, "To find suitable employment for females, is more difficult, but not by any means less requisite, as they abound far more than the poor of the other sex."[78] On grounds both moral and humane contemporaries thought that women as well as children had to be engaged indoors, and one of the earliest projects in the colonies was that organized in Halifax in the early 1820s whereby women and girls were employed in knitting and spinning in one of the town's free schools.[79]

The search for more economical and utilitarian methods of relief for able-bodied women and children helped to produce frequent, and sometimes successful, demands for the establishment of houses of industry in the colonial towns. While the influence of the new English poor law and fashionable ideas on social order and social control tended to predominate in discussions concerning the reform of poor relief, townsmen also specifically advocated houses of industry as a means of providing steady employment for the poor in winter.[80] Even in Halifax, where a permanent poorhouse and a number of voluntary and denominational charities existed, the poor were often reduced to beggary in winter, and social reformers believed that although a house of industry "should not diminish the poor rate one single farthing, or lessen the demand for private charity, still we contend, that it is infinitely better for us to maintain the healthy and able-bodied poor in humble industry, although comparatively unproductive, than in entire sloth and inactivity."[81] A desire to diminish both street begging by the seasonally unemployed and the necessity for the poor to seek winter refuge in the house of correction where they were exposed to the nefarious influence of "criminals and hardened felons", inspired a group of citizens in Quebec to favour the establishment of a house of industry.[82] The grand jury of Montreal also based its demand for such an institution in 1847 on the need to abolish street begging caused by the severity of the winter and the practice of committing "petty thefts in order to obtain admission in the prison, so as to find a refuge from the severity of the winter."[83]

Not surprisingly, therefore, whether houses of industry enjoyed a very short, sporadic, or permanent existence, they usually began as seasonal institutions. A house of industry was established in Quebec in the winter of 1836-7.[84] One opened the same winter in Montreal as a seasonal institution which, while designed to force professional mendicants off the streets, was found in practice to attract mainly the seasonally unemployed.[85] A similar institution in Kingston which opened in the winter of 1847, closed in the summer.[86] The Toronto House of Industry was founded in 1837 because of

the distress of the poor in previous winters and the prospect of misery during the approaching winter, and though continued on a regular basis as a year-round establishment, it was busiest by far in winter when the number of applicants for relief, particularly outdoor pensioners, significantly multiplied.[87] The privately organized and short-lived female house of industry in Saint John, designed to train domestic servants, also aimed to "afford a shelter, food and clothing to the inmates during the rigorous season of winter."[88] It would thus be misleading to assume that the existence of houses of industry fulfilled the expectations of their founders. Indeed the term remained a misnomer since these institutions were no more concerned with industry than were the public poorhouses of Halifax and Saint John; they resembled refuges from winter more than anything else.[89]

One apparent exception in the colonial period to the general pattern of institutions ostensibly designed to provide indoor winter work was the St. John's factory. Here was an establishment which supplied nothing but work and which made a real attempt to "dovetail" with the interests of the community, because it eventually concentrated on making and mending fish nets, an ancillary to the fishery and one which facilitated the employment of women and children.[90] Founded in the winter of 1832-3 through the efforts of public-spirited females, it undertook "to find employment for the destitute, and to stimulate the poorer classes to independence, by shewing them the means of earning their own livelihood."[91] While the major function remained that of providing winter work for women and children, the local demand for its manufactures and the solicitations of the workers had produced a year-round institution by 1837.[92] Many of the women and children employed by the factory were the only breadwinners in their families and came to depend on the work as the sole means of support, a development which made it increasingly difficult for the committee "to curtail (as much as possible) the amount of employment during the summer months, with a view to the accumulation of means by which to deal it out more extensively in winter".[93] At the same time the factory tried to provide additional jobs in particularly bad years. During the severe winter of 1847-8, for example, between 100 and 150 extra labourers were employed daily in making and repairing nets.[94] Eventually in the 1850s the local St. Vincent de Paul Society, which concentrated a portion of its efforts on the provision of winter work for the poor, adopted the upper floor of the factory as its own site for additional employment in net making and mending and in textile handicrafts.[95] Even in these circumstances, however, the society prided itself on being able to provide a warm, comfortable workroom for its employees, in place of "exposure to cold and hardship".[96] The attraction of a glowing stove should not be underestimated. Indeed, when the factory came to be

controlled completely by the Catholic society in the 1860s, it reverted to its winter status of thirty years before.[97]

The relief of the poor through charity formed the alternative and supplement to employment schemes. Easier to organize and sustain, voluntary acts of benevolence by individuals or associations were particularly designed to ameliorate the distress of new immigrants and the resident disabled poor – the old and infirm, helpless women and children. While not all charitable aid was confined to the winter months and indeed immigrant societies were specifically summer-oriented, contemporaries believed that the resources for alleviating the condition of the poor in hard times should be carefully husbanded for use in winter when "real poverty is most severely felt". Relief should be applied as "the antidote at the time when the disease is most apparent".[98] Moreover, city residents were prone to warm to "thrilling and eloquent" descriptions of the poor in winter.[99] But as a result of their emphasis on winter activities, charitable organizations were likely to find themselves extending help to the seasonal poor (comprised of labouring or casual poor) as well as to the unemployable. In these circumstances voluntary agencies, whether public, national, or denominational, began to worry about the moral implications of gratuitous relief. They not only reserved unconditional aid for cases of dire emergency but also with varying degrees of assiduity substituted scientific for casual charity by investigating their clients' situations through domicillary visits, by furnishing employment on the basis of piece-work, or by serving as informal labour exchanges.[100] Although their most active motivation remained that of christian stewardship, the concern to obtain a *quid pro quo* in terms of labour, sobriety, or conformity to accepted norms brought the charitable elements in society close in their objectives to the political economists of the day. It was not therefore the methods for aiding the poor, nor the aims in view, that characterized the most single-minded charity workers; it was their attitude towards the role of free enterprise in social welfare. Since many charity workers were steadfast voluntarists or Catholics, they objected to government interference and compulsion in the relief of the poor as unwarranted infringement on the duties of churches and the rights of the individual and tended therefore to oppose proposals for legalized, permanent schemes of relief. While the income of private or sectarian agencies might well include grants from the legislatures and municipalities, they valued independence of state control as their source of greatest strength.[101]

Dependent primarily, though seldom exclusively, on voluntary contributions for their income, benevolent societies, churches, and *ad hoc* citizens' committees, frequently in conjunction with the obliging military, variously raised charitable funds for winter relief by means of charity

sermons, benefit performances at the theatre, charity balls and concerts, public subscription campaigns launched at public meetings and completed by door-to-door canvassing, and charitable bazaars. With the funds so raised, which were appropriated by visiting committees, the poor were provided gratuitously, at cost, or conditionally, with clothing, places of refuge, food, and of course fuel.

In response to the insuperable difficulties which the poor encountered in obtaining firewood, many of the voluntary urban relief schemes concentrated on supplying the indigent with fuel. The Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, for example, preoccupied itself in 1824-5 with securing firewood for distribution to the poor.[102] In the winter of 1828-9, the citizens of Saint John, aware of the distress suffered by a large number of newcomers and the high cost of firewood, organized a "Fuel Day" for the poor. Owners of land in the outlying districts contributed stands of 'soft' timber, voluntary axemen offered their services, and the carmen of the city donated a day of work to carting the wood to a fuel yard established for the purpose. A committee then distributed the wood to the most necessitous of the poor.[103] A joint fuel committee on cooperative principles organized by the national societies or a fuel assistance society which aimed at reducing the cost of wood to the poor were schemes advocated in Montreal in the mid-1830s without success.[104] More tangible results were produced in Quebec where an association known as the Young Men's Charitable Firewood Society existed for several years. Founded in 1842, its object was to collect enough subscriptions to enable it to retail firewood to the poor at about half the regular market price. In the winter of 1843-4 the society delivered free of charge and distributed at half price or less 327¼ cords of wood to 314 families.[105] Most of these enterprises were, however, small-scale, ephemeral, and usually allied to other forms of eleemosynary relief.

Undoubtedly the most popular mode of economical, short-term relief came to be the ubiquitous winter soup kitchens, "those friendly resorts of famishing multitudes."[106] Not only were they promoted by doctors for the nourishment they afforded, but this form of relief was the least open to objection. As the soup kitchen committee in Montreal argued in 1841, soup represented "the better way of supplying the destitute with food, and decidedly the cheapest mode [by which] the city can support the poor, and there is no risk of the recipient making a bad use of it, as is too often the case in giving money indiscriminately, or even clothes, that find the way in many cases to the Tavern or Pawnbroker".[107] There need be no fear of debased, profligate parents selling "the bread and meat given for the support of their children, to low groggeries for whiskey; whereas the soup cannot be thus bartered. It is eaten in the kitchen, or taken away in cans and kettles, and

being of a highly nutritious nature and well seasoned, it is most wholesome and agreeable".[108]

This priority given to winter relief by charitable citizens meant that voluntary associations, visiting societies, and private institutions, like the erstwhile houses of industry, were often set on foot at the onset of a cold winter in towns suffering also from economic depression or a surfeit of destitute immigrants, only to die a natural death each year in April, sometimes to be revived the following December or January if the need recurred. A failure on the part of historians to perceive the seasonal nature of the activities in this period of such institutions as the Quebec Sick and Destitute Strangers Society, the Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, the Quebec Mendicity Society, the Kingston Female Benevolent Society, les Dames de la Charité of Montreal, the Montreal Strangers' United Friend Society, the Wesleyan Dorcas Society of Toronto, and the St. Vincent de Paul Societies, might lead to unnecessary speculation about their ephemeral careers or characteristic inefficiency.[109] The societies themselves, though wary of giving undue encouragement to the poor, regretted the interruption of their operations in summer, particularly the consequent inability to economize by purchasing supplies in the season of plenty. Their chequered careers depended on the seasons. For it was not normally until the howling blast of winter winds and the anguished countenances of freezing, famished children actually focused local attention on the perils of winter that sufficient interest was aroused amongst the better-off to promote and organize relief and send the subscription papers round the town.[110]

Winter, then, provided the common bond which united the well-to-do in charitable undertakings, a collective pastime to supplement sleighing, theatricals, assemblies, and parties. Winter afforded colonial employers with the convenient *raison d'être* to lay off operatives, cut wages, and acclimatize the poor to regular hardship. Winter transformed the labouring poor into a seasonally exploited class, dependent on relief and demoralized by the insecurity, distress, and drinking habits of the pre-industrial economy. Winter reduced the helpless poor to unbearable, heart-rending privations. In winter British North America most emphatically was not a 'poor man's country' and, furthermore, if the cold climate produced the nineteenth-century myth of ruggedness, independence, and self-reliance, it was a myth in which the urban poor played no part and from which they drew no inspiration.

## NOTES

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25 Reports of Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Newfoundlander*, 1 Aug. 1853, 31 July 1854.

26 Evidence of Dr. Shea, Secretary of Poor Commissioners, *Newfoundland Express*, 18 Mar. 1852. G. Utterström, 'Some Population Problems in Pre-Industrial Sweden', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, II, 1954, p.120.

27 *Quebec Mercury*, 20 Feb. 1827; *Montreal Gazette*, 10 Dec. 1835; Report of Special Committee appointed to enquire into the circumstances which preceded and accompanied the death of John Collins, who died in the Common Gaol of the District of Montreal, *Journal of the Legislative Assembly*, Lower Canada, 1835-6, App. W.W.; Presentment of Grand Jury, *Quebec Gazette*, 20 Jan. 1836; 'Sociétés de bienfaisence', *La Minerve*, 19 Feb. 1846; F.H. Armstrong, 'Toronto in Transition: The Emergence of a City 1828-1838', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1965), pp.296-7.

28 Letter from One of the Jury, *Quebec Mercury*, 6 Mar. 1847; *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 24 Feb. 1841.

29 Presentment of Grand Jury, *Montreal Gazette*, 19 Feb. 1847.

30 Letter from H, *Quebec Mercury*, 3 Dec. 1816. Another case of a child's death from exposure occurred in Kingston in 1837 when an infant living in "a perfect barn" had its extremities frozen. *Montreal Gazette*, 2 Feb. 1837.

31 Speech by Kent, Assembly Debate, 1 Aug. 1838, *Newfoundland Patriot*, 11

Aug. 1838; 'The Camps - State of the Poor! ', *Times*, 11 Jan. 1851; 'The House of Industry', *Weekly British Whig* (Kingston), 7 Dec. 1855.

32 *Quebec Mercury*, 1 Feb. 1855.

33 *Newfoundland Patriot*, 23 Mar. 1839; Government Emigration Officer Perley to Provincial Secretary Saunders, 26 Dec. 1845, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, REX/PA, Immigration 1; *Newfoundlander*, 22 Sept. 1853; Report of Special Committee on Emigration, *JLA*, Canada, 1857, App. No. 47; Letter from Justice, *Quebec Mercury*, 16 Jan. 1858.

34 'The Weather and the Water', *Times and Courier* (Halifax), 22 Mar. 1849. On seasonal transiency in St. John's, see J. McGregor, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Maritime Colonies of British America*, (London, 1828), p.237. The grand jury of Saint John in 1844 referred to "the fluctuating and ever changing population of large seaport towns". Presentment, Dec. 1844, PANB, RMU, Csj, 1/11; *Morning News*, 31 Jan. 1853.

35 Speech by O'Brien, Assembly Debate, 2 Apr. 1849, *Newfoundlander*, 3 May 1849; *Montreal Gazette*, 25 & 28 Mar. 1843; Pentland, 'The Lachine Strike of 1843', *CHR*, XXIX, 1948, pp. 255-77.

36 G.S. Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*, (Oxford, 1971), pp.340-4.

37 'Shipbuilding', *Quebec Gazette*, 27 Aug. 1834; *ibid.*, 18 Jan. 1837; 'Distressed State of the Working-Classes', *Quebec Mercury*, 27 Dec. 1842; *Morning News*, 5 Apr. 1847; *Quebec Gazette*, 25 Oct. 1847; Letter from Solicitus, *Quebec Mercury*, 27 Jan. 1848; 'Mass meeting of the Unemployed', *ibid.*, 17 Nov. 1857; 'More Mob Demonstrations', *ibid.*, 2 Dec. 1858; 'Ship-Building in Quebec', *New Brunswick Courier*, 4 Apr. 1863; Report of A.C. Buchanan, Chief Emigration Agent, for 1860, *JLA*, Canada, 1861, Sessional Papers, vol.3, No.14; A. Faucher, 'The Decline of Shipbuilding at Quebec in the Nineteenth Century', *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXIII (1957), pp.211-12; F. Ouellet, *Histoire économique et sociale du Québec 1760-1850*, (Montreal, 1966), pp.500-5.

38 *Halifax Daily Sun*, 4 Mar. 1852. And indeed it is no coincidence that prominent amongst the first groups of urban workers to organize were the victims of winter unemployment.

39 Carroll to Jeffery, 20 June 1827, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, RG 1, vol.309, doc.116; *Quebec Mercury*, 10 Dec. 1842; Charge of Mr. Justice Power to Grand Jury, *Quebec Gazette*, 7 Apr. 1852; 'Material and Moral Conditions', *Newfoundlander*, 20 Mar. 1854; *Times*, 12 Apr. 1854; Presentment of Grand Jury, *Quebec Mercury*, 1 Feb. 1859.

40 L.A. Anspach, *A History of the Island of Newfoundland*, (London, 1819), p.266; C. Lyell, *Travels in North America, Canada, and Nova Scotia*, (London, 2nd.ed., 1855), vol.2, p.118; 'Dangerous State of the City', *Quebec Mercury*, 28 Nov. 1858.

41 'Christmas Night', *British Colonist* (Toronto), 28 Dec. 1849; Police Office, *Morning News*, 12 Jan. 1857.

42 'The "Poor People"', *Morning News*, 8 Mar. 1858; 'Strikes and Starvation', *Daily Leader* (Toronto), 8 May 1855.

43 'Standing out for Wages - A Hint to the Common Council', *Morning News*, 26 Apr. 1843; Letter from A Merchant, *ibid.*, 28 Apr. 1843; *Examiner* (Toronto), 11 Aug. 1847; P. Morris, *A Short Review of the History, Government, Constitution, Fishery and Agriculture, of Newfoundland*, (St. John's, 1847), p.108; 'A Strike', *Morning News* 17 May 1854; 'The Weather vs House Building', *Morning Journal*, 12 Dec. 1859.

44 Investigator No. 1, *Times*, 21 Oct. 1854.

45 *Times*, 29 Sept. 1847, 29 July 1848; *Quebec Gazette*, 27 Oct. 1845.

[46] Speech by Nugent, Assembly Debate, 16 Jan. 1840, *Newfoundland Patriot* 15 Feb. 1840; *Public Ledger*, 22 Sept. 1840; Report of Charitable Committee of St. Andrew's Society, *Montreal Gazette*, 15 Nov. 1848.

[47] For example three times as much indoor and outdoor relief was reported to be given by the overseers of the poor in Saint John in winter as in summer. Letter from An Old Tax Payer, 'Poor House', *Morning News*, 16 Mar. 1842. In the Halifax poorhouse the total number of inmates in January/February (the only monthly totals available) was always 15-20% higher than the average total for the year. See Record Books of Commissioners of the Poor, 1829-60, PANS, RG 25, Series C, vol.4A; *JLA*, Nova Scotia, 1858, App. No. 31. The following table indicates that the expenditure on the casual poor in St. John's fluctuated according to the seasons.

Public Expenditure for the Relief of the Poor in St. John's District in 1861 (to the nearest £)

| | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Permanent Poor | 121 | 124 | 124 | 124 | 122 | 117 | 110 | 111 | 110 | 113 | 115 | 115 |
| Casual Poor | 308 | 554 | 655 | 691 | 486 | 214 | 181 | 133 | 125 | 158 | 273 | 610 |
| Poor in Sheds | 99 | 94 | 95 | 92 | 91 | 83 | 85 | 84 | 85 | 105 | 121 | 131 |

(Source: *JLA*, Newfoundland, 1862, App., pp.118-19)

[48] Speech by Solicitor General, Legislative Council Debate, 2 June 1855, *Newfoundland Express*, 11 July 1855; St. John's Poor Relief Association, *Newfoundlander*, 10 May 1867.

[49] W. Moorson, *Letters from Nova Scotia; Comprising Sketches of a Young Country*, (London, 1830), p.127.

[50] Resolution of Common Council, 10 Nov. 1847, PANB, MSJ, Saint John Common Clerk; 'Employment for the Poor', *Morning News*, 1 Dec. 1847.
'Employment for the Poor', *Morning News*, 1 Dec. 1847.

[51] *New Brunswick Courier*, 15 Nov. 1817; Hatton & Harvey, *Newfoundland*, p.80.

[52] 'Provisions for the Poor', *New Brunswick Courier*, 30 Oct. 1841; 'Charity in the City and Labor in the Country', *Daily Leader*, 2 Feb. 1855.

[53] 'Prospects of the Labouring Classes', *Quebec Mercury*, 11 Aug. 1855.

[54] Instructions of Mr. Buchanan, Emigrant Agent at Quebec, to settlers, in J.S. Hogan, *Canada: An Essay*, (Montreal & London, 1855), p.75n.

[55] *Free Press*, 11 Feb. 1817; General Meeting of Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, *Novascotian*, 18 Feb. 1826; Letter from Publico, *Star* (Quebec), 22 Apr. 1829; Report of Benevolent Irish Society, *Newfoundland Patriot*, 20 Feb. 1841; Morris, *A Short Review*, p.108; J. Homer, *A Brief Sketch of the Present State of the Province of Nova-Scotia*, (Halifax, 1834), p.30.

[56] 'Employment for the Poor', *Morning News*, 29 Jan. 1858.

[57] S. March, *The Present Condition of Newfoundland, with Suggestions for Improving its Industrial and Commercial Resources*, (St. John's 1854), p.8.

[58] Letter from Beneficus, *Acadian Recorder*, 21 Dec. 1816; Proceedings of Corporation of Montreal: Council Meeting, *Montreal Gazette* 21 Dec. 1841.

59 General Meeting of Poor Man's Friend Society, *Novascotian*, 2 Feb. 1825.

60 Speech by Hogsett, Assembly Debate, 3 Apr. 1854, *Newfoundland Express*, 11 Apr. 1854; 'Our Trade System', *Newfoundlander*, 1 Feb. 1855. Even in Montreal which was rapidly industrializing by the 1860s and beginning for the first time to offer opportunities for regular year-round employment to the poor, the pre-industrial tradition of winter wage cuts, which had characterized seasonal poverty, persisted into the late nineteenth century. Maguire, *The Irish in America*, p.99; see Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor in Canada, *Evidence - Quebec* (Ottawa, 1889), pp.86, 313, 680.

61 J. Fingard, 'Attitudes towards the Education of the Poor in Colonial Halifax', *Acadiensis*, II, Spring 1973, pp.32-33.

62 'The Potato Taint Again', *Times*, 23 Oct. 1847; 'Business and Prospects', *Morning News*, 29 Sept. 1858.

63 *Public Ledger*, 3 July 1849.

64 Second Report of Committee for establishing a Poor House or House of Industry in Montreal, *Montreal Transcript*, 3 Oct. 1837; *Novascotian*, 11 Dec. 1843; 'Houses for the Working Classes', *Montreal Witness*, 20 July 1846; 'State of the Poor - Its Causes', *Newfoundlander*, 10 Oct. 1853; *Newfoundland Express*, 25 Oct. 1853.

65 *Kingston Chronicle*, 22 Mar. 1822; Letter from Malthus, Poor Man's Friend Society No.1, 'On its Disadvantages', *Novascotian*, 12 Jan. 1825; Remarks by Charles R. Fairbanks, General Meeting of Poor Man's Friend Society, *ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1825; An Essay upon Savings Banks, Nos.4,5, *ibid.*, 15 & 22 June 1826; 'Seasonable Benevolence', *Globe*, 26 Dec. 1859.

66 For example, 'Bazaar', *Acadian Recorder*, 3 Oct. 1829. On savings banks for the working classes, see Letter from Franklin, *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 Nov. 1829; *Montreal Gazette*, 5 Oct. 1841; *Kingston Herald*, 8 Feb. 1842; 'Bank for Small Savings', *Newfoundlander*, 2 Mar. 1854; Letter from The Poor Man's Friend, *Times* 1 Nov. 1854; *Newfoundlander*, 8 Nov. 1855.

67 Letter from Cato, 'Quebec Savings Bank', *Quebec Mercury*, 3 Apr. 1821; Letter from Charity, 'Bazaars - Fuel &c', *Acadian Recorder*, 10 Aug. 1833; *Public Ledger*, 25 Apr. 1834.

68 An Essay upon Savings Banks, No.5, *Novascotian*, 22 June 1826.

69 Letter from A Patriot, *Free Press*, 4 Nov. 1817; *ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1825; Association of Newfoundland Fishermen and Shoremen, *Newfoundlander*, 19 Feb. 1829.

70 Letter from An Englishman, *Quebec Mercury*, 16 Jan. 1849; Letter from A Member of St. George's Society, *ibid.*, 3 Feb. 1849.

71 J.R. Rice, 'A History of Organized Labour in Saint John, New Brunswick 1813-1890', (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1968), pp.20-28; J.I. Cooper, 'The Quebec Ship Labourers' Benevolent Society', *CHR*, XXX, 1949, pp.339-40.

72 Letter from An Inhabitant of Halifax, *Acadian Recorder*, 14 Dec. 1816; *Weekly Observer*, 3 Jan. 1832; Matthew, Overseer of Poor, to Mayor Black, 3 Jan. 1842, PANB, RLE/842/22/2. A maximum of 1s.8d. per day was paid in Quebec in 1842-3. 'Relief of the Distressed Working Classes', *Quebec Mercury*, 31 Dec. 1842. For a discussion of cost of living and inadequacy of winter wages for family men, see Pentland, 'The Lachine Strike of 1843', *CHR*, XXIX, 1948, pp.268-9.

73 Speech by March, Assembly Debate, 3 Feb. 1853, *Patriot* (St. John's), 12 Feb. 1853; March, *The Present Condition of Newfoundland*, pp.19-20.

74 'Winter Work for the Industrious', *Morning Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1855; 'Ship Building and Saw Mills about St. John – Hard Times – The way to relieve distress',

*Morning News*, 10 Dec. 1858.

75 'Winter Employment for Outdoor Labourers', *New Brunswick Courier*, 30 Jan. 1858; see also *Times*, 9 Oct. 1847; 'The Poor', *Globe*, 17 Dec. 1858.

76 'The Present Destitution', *Quebec Gazette*, 1 Feb. 1855.

77 Speech by Surveyor General, Assembly Debate, 10 Mar. 1858, *Newfoundlander*, 18 Mar. 1858. Similarly in the Kingston area, *Upper Canada Herald*, 27 June 1837.

78 Letter from Homo, 'Employment of the Poor', *New Brunswick Courier*, 14 Jan. 1832.

79 Letter from Agenoria, *Acadian Recorder*, 29 Nov. 1823; J. Fingard, 'English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind: Walter Bromley in Nova Scotia, 1813-25', *CHR*, LIV, 1973, pp.133-4.

80 'New House of Industry', *Montreal Gazette*, 3 Nov. 1828; Letter from C, *ibid.*, 8 Jan. 1829; Presentment of Grand Jury, *ibid.*, 14 Mar. 1837; Letter from H.A. Gladwin, *Novascotian*, 1 Jan. 1835.

81 'House of Industry', *Guardian*, 20 Mar. 1839.

82 'House of Industry', *Quebec Mercury*, 31 Dec. 1832.

83 Presentment of Grand Jury, *Montreal Gazette*, 20 Jan. & 19 Feb. 1847. The jail was still a winter refuge in 1859. 'House of Industry', *Montreal Weekly Gazette*, 8 Jan. 1859.

84 Letter from Philanthropist, *Quebec Gazette*, 28 Oct. 1836; Report of Public Meeting, *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1836; 'House of Industry', *ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1836; *Quebec Mercury*, 20 Dec. 1836. The house burned down in March 1837. 'Calamitous Fire', *Quebec Gazette*, 6 Mar. 1837.

85 Second Report of Committee for establishing a Poor House or House of Industry in Montreal, *Montreal Transcript*, 3 Oct. 1837. It failed to reopen the next winter because the old jail in which it was housed was required to accommodate rebels. Until January 1843, when it reopened for four months, the committee provided soup, wood, and small-scale employment in winter. *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1837; *Montreal Herald*, 23 Apr. 1840; *Montreal Gazette*, 21 Jan. 14 Feb., & 12 May 1843.

86 'House of Industry', *Kingston Herald*, 24 Nov. 1847; Letter from a Pastor, 'House of Industry', *Chronicle and News* (Kingston), 12 Apr. 1848; *ibid.*, 22 July 1848.

87 Report of Committee for the Relief of the Poor and Destitute of the City of Toronto, *Christian Guardian*, 15 Feb. 1837; *Patriot* (Toronto), 13 Oct. 1837; 'Toronto House of Industry', *Daily Leader*, 4 May 1855.

88 Petition of Managing Committee of the Female House of Industry, 2 Feb. 1835, PANB, RLE/835/pe/4, No.82.

89 'House of Industry', *Examiner*, 27 Nov. 1844; 'House of Industry', *British Colonist* (Toronto), 13 Jan. & 5 Dec. 1846.

90 Report of Factory Committee, *Newfoundlander*, 3 Aug. 1837.

91 Report of St. John's Factory, *Public Ledger*, 16 Aug. 1836.

92 *Newfoundlander*, 15 June 1837; Report of St. John's Factory, *Times*, 3 Aug. 1842; 'The Factory', *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1846; Bonnycastle, *Newfoundland in 1842*, vol.2, p.232.

93 Report of Committee of St. John's Factory, *Public Ledger*, 30 July 1841; *Times*, 23 Mar. 1849; Speeches by Warren and Shea, Assembly Debate, 8 Apr. 1853, *Newfoundland Express*, 28 Apr. 1853.

94 Report of St. John's Factory Committee, *Public Ledger*, 27 July 1838; Report of St. John's Factory, *Newfoundlander*, 10 Aug. 1848.

95 Reports of Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Newfoundland Express*, 16 Dec. 1857, 11 Dec. 1858, 10 Dec. 1861; Notice: Employment to the Poor, *ibid.*, 24 Feb. 1858.

96 *Newfoundlander*, 2 Apr. 1857.

97 Reports of Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Newfoundlander*, 7 Dec. 1865, 10 Dec. 1866, 20 Dec. 1867, 22 Dec. 1868, 4 Jan. & 30 Dec. 1870.

98 *Newfoundlander*, 27 Nov. 1838; 'The Season', *Halifax Morning Post*, 4 Dec. 1844; 'Benevolence', *ibid.*, 16 Dec. 1844.

99 Letter from Humanitas, *Quebec Mercury*, 21 Dec. 1847; Letter from A Native, *ibid.*, 11 Jan. 1848.

100 Ladies charitable societies often gave winter employment in needlework to women and children. Statement of Ladies Bazaar, *Novascotian*, 17 July 1833; Female Benevolent Society, *Chronicle and Gazette*, 7 Dec. 1839; St. Matthew's Church District Society, *Guardian*, 15 Nov. 1850.

101 *La Minerve*, 1 June 1829; 'Charity on Crutches', *Daily Leader*, 17 Jan. 1855; 'The Poor', *True Witness* (Montreal), 23 Dec. 1859.

102 *Acadian Recorder*, 12 Feb. 1825; General Meeting of Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, *Novascotian*, 18 Feb. 1826.

103 'Charity! or a Day for the Poor', *New Brunswick Courier*, 3 Jan. 1829; *ibid.*, 10 Jan. 1829; 'Fuel for the Poor', *Weekly Observer*, 3 Feb. 1829; Letter from D, *British Colonist* (Saint John), 13 Feb. 1829; Remarks by Equity on Charity, *ibid.*, 13 Mar. 1829.

104 *Montreal Herald Abstract*, 17 Mar. 1835; *Montreal Gazette*, 16 Apr. 1836.

105 *Quebec Mercury*, 19 July 1842; Second Annual Report of Quebec Young Men's Charitable Fire Wood Society, *ibid.*, 4 May 1844; Report of Quebec Charitable Firewood Society, *ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1845; for the demise of the society, see Letter from One of the Four, *ibid.*, 30 Apr. 1846. A similar subscription society was formed in Toronto in the winter of 1853-4. 'Fuel for the Poor', *Daily Leader*, 10 Dec. 1835, 14 Jan. 1854. For other schemes see Letter from Trim, *Acadian Recorder*, 22 Feb. 1817; Letter from Beneficus, *ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1817; 'A Friend to the Poor', *Montreal Herald*, 4 Apr. 1840; *ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1840; 'More Fuel', *Monteal Gazette*, 11 Feb. 1855.

106 Letter from Solicitus, *Quebec Mercury*, 18 Jan. 1849; 'The Soup Kitchen', *ibid.*, 31 Dec. 1860; Letter from Benevolens, *Acadian Recorder*, 12 Feb. 1820; *ibid.*, 19 Feb. 1820; 'Soup House', *ibid.*, 28 Mar. 1835; *Montreal Gazette*, 11 Feb. 1828; 'The Poor', *ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1844; *New Brunswick Courier*, 7 Jan. & 4 Feb. 1832, 1 & 8 Nov. 1834; Letter from Medicus, *ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1834; Report of Benevolent Irish Society, *Public Ledger*, 28 Feb. 1834; 'Soup House', *Morning News*, 14 Dec. 1842; Letter from A.C.D., Quebec Gazette, 16 Dec. 1842; House of Industry Report, *Globe*, 14 Jan. 1859. For an anti-soup kitchen article, see 'Public Soup Kitchens', *Quebec Gazette*, 27 Jan. 1855.

107 Report of Committee of Soup Kitchen of Montreal for 1839-40, *Montreal Herald*, 4 Jan. 1841; 'A Charitable Suggestion', *Halifax Morning Post*, 8 Jan. 1846.

108 City Council, *True Witness*, 23 Feb. 1855.

109 *Quebec Mercury*, 23 Mar. 1819; Minutes, 18 Jan. 1822, Proceedings of the Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, 1820-6, PANS, MG 20, No. 180:2; Annual Meeting of Poor Man's Friend Society, *Acadian Recorder*, 8 Feb. 1823; *Free Press*, 1 Feb. 1825; Poor Man's Friend Society: To the Public, *Novascotian*, 9 Feb. 1825; Letter from Malthus, Poor Man's Friend Society No.5, 'Answer to my Opponents', *ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1825; Petition of Committee of Poor Man's Friend Society, 4 Mar. 1825, PANS, RG 5, Series P, vol.80; 'Quebec Charitable Institution', *Quebec Mercury*, 2 June 1829; *Montreal Gazette*, 27 Nov. 1828; *Star*, 29 Nov. 1828; *La Minerve*, 29 Oct. 1832; Annual Report of Female Benevolent Society, *Kingston Chronicle*, 14 Jan. 1825; Annual Meeting of Female Benevolent Society, *ibid.*, 4 May 1827; Letter from Humanity, *Upper Canada Herald*, 31 Aug. 1831; *ibid.*, 9 May 1832; Letter from Charitas, *Chronicle and*

*Gazette,* 5 Oct. 1833; Report of Female Benevolent Society, *Kingston Herald*, 24 May 1842; Ladies Benevolent Society, *Chronicle and Gazette,* 8 May 1844; Report of Female Benevolent Society, *Argus* (Kingston), 7 July 1846; M. Angus, *Kingston General Hospital A Social and Institutional History* (Montreal, 1973), pp.1-26 *passim*; Report of Strangers United Friend Society, *Montreal Gazette*, 20 Feb. 1846; *Christian Guardian*, 24 Nov. 1852, 26 Oct. 1853; 'The Society of St. Vincent de Paul', *True Witness*, 23 Feb. 1855; Report of receipts and expenditure of Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Newfoundlander,* 29 Nov. 1855; Maguire, *The Irish in America*, p.15.

Number of persons relieved by Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, 1820-4 (Population of Halifax, c.10,000)

| | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1820 | – | 680 | 1279 | 483 | 192 | 56 | 70 | 60 | 46 | 84 | 153 | 486 |
| 1821 | 1228 | 1304 | 1122 | 382 | 81 | 80 | 49 | 38 | 21 | 30 | 25 | 129 |
| 1822 | 1350 | 1540 | 1140 | 79 | | | | | | | | |
| 1823 | | ‹-----1430-----› | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1824 | | ‹-----1326-----› | | | | | | | | | | |

(Source: *Acadian Recorder,* 30 Dec. 1820; Second to Fifth *Annual Reports* of the Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society)

110 See 'The Season and the Poor', *Globe*, 6 Dec. 1858; Letter from H. Hope, 'Relief of the Poor', *ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1860.