77. Roderic P. Beaujot and Kevin McQuillan, "The Social Effects of Demographic Change: Canada, 1851–1981," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21:1 (Spring 1986): 59.
78. *Catherine Bell Van Norman: Her Diary*, 23.
79. Typed Draft of Biography, Chapter XIII "Margaret Proctor," Nathanael Burwash Papers Box 28:634, UCA.
80. I thank Clifford G. Hospital for this observation. Sermon "The Wesleyan Heritage," delivered at St. George's Cathedral, 3 March 1991.
81. For an example of a daughter converted at a mother's deathbed, see obituary Miss Hannah Walker, *Christian Guardian*, 12 January 1870; of parents hopefully converted by a dying daughter, obituary Margaret Ann Morris, Ibid. An especially detailed account of female influence at deathbed can be found in "Memoir of Miss Brown," *BNA Wesleyan* (July 1846): 41–52.
82. See for example "The Late Mrs. Smart," *Record* (January 1856): 39.
83. Typescript Family History and Testimony of Mrs. Henry Hammond.
84. "Woman's Sphere," *Record* (March 1856): 38.

"Femmes Fortes" and the Montreal Poor in the Early Nineteenth Century

JAN NOEL

A recent travelling exhibition of Lower Canadian portraits from the first half of the nineteenth century elicited comments from gallerygoers about how stern the women looked. As early as the 1840s though, advice columnists in Canadian newspapers had encouraged their middle class readers to lighten up. Women were told to dress nicely, stop nagging, and smile:

> Woman does not truly appreciate her mission in domestic life . . . weighted down by cares — as a wife she is different from what she was as mistress. She is employed in drudgery for her children and her household. She neglects her dress — she forgets her manners. Her husband sees the change . . . He flies to the tavern, the billiard table![1]
>
> How simple is the secret of feminine beauty. Let a country girl have a face rough enough to grate nutmegs on. Yet how the wraiths of sunshine dance around her once she illuminates it with a *smile*! — Let the fair sex take heed.[2]

Men, on the other hand, were saddled with the whole burden of seriousness. An artist even repainted the early nineteenth century family portrait of wealthy fur trader William McGillivray a few decades later to meet more exacting standards of manliness. The original sweet paterfamilias presenting his wife with fruit was replaced by a more aggressive father, standing guard over his family with a rifle. More indicative of an earlier sensibility is William Berczy's 1809 portrait of the Woolseys, a Quebec mercantile family. Male and female figures vie with each other in gorgeous display of bows and trimmings, rich fabrics and golden buttons. The two boys are pretty in bright green with big ruffled

SOURCE: Jan Noel, "'Femmes Fortes' and the Montreal Poor," in L. Muir and M. Whiteley, eds., *Changing Roles of Women in the Christian Church* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). Reprinted by permission of University of Toronto Press Incorporated.

collars. The classically robed daughter with a doll is no more frivolous than her uncle lounging in the window with a flute. Though paterfamilias does tower over the family, he is quite dapper, and perhaps vies with his seated old mother for authority. She is a purposeful figure, so closely associated with work that she poses with her sewing basket and scissors. Her son in his gold vest with his hand resting in his pocket has perhaps delegated protection of the family to the one truly *macho* figure in the portrait, the sinewy brown Labrador straining at his leash.

One grows more appreciative of Lower Canada's unsmiling matrons, with their work spread out before them, when one understands how busy they were. Not just at home, either. Women in the first decades of the nineteenth century were leading the response to a pressing urban problem, the surge of British immigrants into Lower Canadian ports after the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815. Montreal, for example, which had only about nine thousand people then, saw its summer population swell by several thousand more. For four decades the flow would continue, flooding the town with many who were homeless, orphaned, or ill. In those days when people of the comfortable classes still lived downtown, begging streetpeople came right up to their doors and knocked.

After they heard enough of the knocking,[3] a number of energetic women decided to create a better system. Some worked to enlarge existing institutions while others established new social welfare services. A number of the hospitals, hostels and childcare agencies they established between 1800 and 1832 were so useful that they continue to exist, in altered form, even today. It will be shown in this essay that women provided most of the organised social welfare in Montreal and its environs in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. They were still initiating major projects as late as 1832 when cholera created an emergency in the town. Women drawn from both major language groups founded and operated organised help for people unable to provide their own food, clothing, fuel, childcare, housing or health care. French Canadians even have a term for these administrators in skirts: *femmes fortes*. *Femmes fortes* became more rare after 1840 as public enterprise by bourgeoise women would begin to seem crude, and to face the handicap of increasing legal constraints. After the early nineteenth century decades under review here, projects were increasingly initiated by male clergy, laymen or government officials. Women would continue to supply much of the labour but were less apt to supply the direction.

Appreciation of this leadership of early efforts contributes to an understanding of the stages of the history of women — a history that has not always been progressive. Indeed, there seems to have been more independent action at the beginning of the nineteenth century than in subsequent decades. This was to some extent a post-Conquest carryover from the days of New France in which gender roles had been rather loosely defined.[4] Then, women not only bore children and kept house but often provided much of the family's livelihood; they also played an

important part in shaping public endeavour, particularly in the welfare field.

As their unsmiling early nineteenth century portraits suggest, these women did not believe their primary role was to please. Nor did they sally forth onto the streets primarily to show off their hats. Indeed, the oft-repeated notion that women joined organisations due to idleness or boredom rings particularly false for this period. Society still had many aspects of the *ancien régime*, which saw both women and men producing and exchanging commodities. Farms could not function without women's dairying, poultrykeeping and gardening. Households required the textiles manufactured by Lower Canada's thirteen thousand weavers, mostly female,[5] as well as the soap and candles they made. Since few ready-made clothes were imported, women's dressmaking was equally essential. Shops and workshops were often a family enterprise in a way later waged work was not. Montreal historians have confirmed that the female proportion of the labour force (27%) was larger in 1825 than it was at the end of the nineteenth century.[6]

Not only were female workers more numerous, they also had a surprisingly wide range of occupations. Women still had the skills, for example, to make the clothing and household items which fetched £700 at an 1831 charity bazaar in Montreal. To these events women also brought retailing experience, not a hobby but a livelihood for the thirteen female "traders," twelve grocers or drygoods dealers, seven tavernkeepers and one auctioneer listed among about 1500 occupations in the 1819 Montreal directory.[7] Throughout the century, women would work as grocers and tavernkeepers, boardinghouse keepers, dressmakers and teachers; but the traders and a few skilled female artisans such as the tinplate manufacturer and tallow chandler hint at an earlier and wider pre-industrial range. So do the female blacksmiths, coachmakers, gardeners, innkeepers, mercers and farmers identified in Jacques Viger's 1825 census. Nuns who ran the hospital, assisted by the elderly women living there, made clothes and ornaments the North West Company traded to the Indians; they also printed and bound books and worked in the fields of their seigneurie. The frequent use of women's own last names rather than that of their husbands during this period also suggests a certain independence,[8] an independence that must have owed something to the wives' extensive and varied economic production.

Certainly in comparison to the later nineteenth century, this society placed more weight on social class and less on gender. Few men enjoyed a marked educational advantage over women. In government and the professions, career training was still somewhat rudimentary. Manners, names and family ties opened doors. Social contacts were essential, and gentlewomen played a large part in cultivating them.[9] Until 1849,[10] female property owners had the right to vote, and French civil law in the early nineteenth century entitled wives and widows to a more secure portion of family property than existed under British law.[11] Domestic service

in 1820 also tended to be more a function of class than of gender;[12] it was with the subsequent identification of woman and home that the manservant would fall out of fashion. Childrearing, too, was still an avocation rather than a destiny. Children were often raised by others: the Upper Canadian Governor's wife, Elizabeth Simcoe, left four young daughters in England while she came to Canada for five years, and Canadian families of various classes sent young children away from home to schools or apprenticeships. Although British and American conduct literature was already preaching "separate spheres" to the elite by the late eighteenth century, the idea was still somewhat novel among the Canadian middle classes until the 1840s; then prosperity, the rapid growth of towns, occupational diversification, public schools and better communications (which carried a rash of family newspapers and advice literature) would all work together to deal a decisive blow to the old family economy.[13] In the early nineteenth century, women tended to be somewhat at home in the public domain. They did not step into the street as timid amateurs when they undertook public relief work. Also, because of the less discriminatory property and civil laws, they probably enjoyed more discretionary spending power and more authority than would their daughters and granddaughters later in the century. In many ways early nineteenth century women were less constrained than later Victorian Canadians who had gender distinctions drummed into them and fortified by an array of gender-based regulations and institutions. These more fluid circumstances help explain women's energetic public welfare activity.

Most of women's social welfare work in this period was religiously motivated or church-related. Yet often such work crossed denominational lines. The well-worn Protestant/Catholic dichotomy does not explain this early nineteenth century period as well as another which distinguishes between more wealthy Established church "insiders" and less wealthy, more reform-minded Evangelical church "outsiders." "Establishment" work emanated from the three churches established in Canada in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Churches of Rome, England and Scotland, all receiving state support for some or all of the period under review. By 1800 all three of these denominations were firmly rooted in Canadian soil and had experience with its multicultural, multidenominational reality. Fittingly, they shared church buildings: the Anglicans worshipped for some time at the Catholic Récollet Church, later sharing a building with the Scots. They had also learned to live not only with the religious beliefs of others but also with their moral failings. The St. Gabriel Street Presbyterian Church, for example, tolerated the indiscretions of a minister who drank too much, and quietly baptized fur magnates' children conceived in various beds.[14] Similarly the Catholics took in foundlings without asking about their origins, one Mother Superior noting that "prudence and delicacy forbids us to put any question on that score."[15] "Established" efforts tended to draw on the resources

of Montreal's elite: private bequests, fundraising efforts such as bazaars, church or neighbourhood collections, and government subsidies. In contrast to American evangelical denominations, these churches derived from countries with fairly rigid class systems, pre-Revolutionary France and anti-Revolutionary Britain (with an added conservative injection of American Loyalists). Lower Canada's elite generally belonged to these churches, as did the majority of its poor.

The Established tradition produced most of the recorded female benevolence in this early period. This is seen both in the work of the Catholic nuns and the primarily Protestant Female Benevolent Society. Springing from the traditional order, these groups embodied classic Canadian virtues of conciliation and compromise. They had learned to cooperate with various denominational and ethnic groups. Their ability to work with powerful men was also important to their success. If these virtues had a corresponding vice, it was perhaps a proclivity to bend too much to the prevailing winds, be they the windy advice of ambitious clergymen, or the tendency to place increasing burdens of self-sacrifice on overworked members when a change of system might have better served both donors and recipients of aid.

I. Establishment Social Welfare: The Nuns

Catholic nuns continued to carry the major burden of social welfare in Montreal for at least a half-century after the British Conquest of 1760. From the seventeenth century, Congregational nuns had provided free schooling to working class children; they added two new Montreal locations to their Notre Dame motherhouse in the early 1830s.[16] Other groups of nuns had cared for the orphaned, indigent, aged and ill. Beginning as a dedicated group of missionaries funded by government, private donors, and their own lands and labours, the nuns had long provided services that had compared favourably with hospital care and female education in France.[17] After the Conquest, despite financial difficulties, their role was enhanced. Having cared for British as well as French cases during and after the Seven Years' War (a blend of charity and *politique*), the nuns were permitted to remain and to recruit in Canada at a time when the Jesuit and Récollet orders were forbidden to do so and vocations to the parish priesthood were not keeping pace with population growth. By 1825 nuns outnumbered clergymen in Montreal by four to one. Moreover, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the government was regularly funding their work in Lower Canada's three urban centres. The sum of £17,103 was awarded to Montreal nunneries between 1800 and 1823 to help pay for the care of growing numbers of sick and homeless in the expanding town.

One of the recipients was the Hôtel Dieu, located on the bustling business street of St. Paul. This thirty bed hospital consisted of two

wards until its late-1820s expansion. The Hôtel Dieu benefited from the volunteer ward visiting by Dr. William Selby, while the nuns carried on the day-to-day work as administrators, apothecaries, ward supervisors, and (combining pre-industrial doctoring with practical caretaking) sisters who might best be described as "nurse-practitioners."

The Hôpital Général, run by Madame Youville's Grey Nuns since 1737, was a larger establishment with about eighty sickbeds. Unlike the Hôtel Dieu (which turned away children, maternity cases, communicable diseases and several other categories), the Hôpital had an open door. It nursed a number of indigent invalids along with wealthier pensioners. By sheltering a number of Irish orphans and other victims of a typhus outbreak in 1822–23, the Hôpital received Legislative commendation for preserving the town's "uncommon degree of health at that time." In 1823 it treated 485 Protestant and 367 Catholic patients, of whom apparently only 41 died.[18]

This large and useful establishment owed its prosperous condition to capable superiors such as Thérèse-Geneviève Coutlée, its director from 1792 to 1821. The daughter of a day labourer, Coutlée had entered the convent in 1762, and was early singled out for her intelligence and judgement. When appointed superior, Coutlée had wept at the responsibility. However, she soon displayed the business acumen not unusual in eighteenth century women. The Hôpital was in financial difficulty due to the French government's failure to pay certain annuities. Coutlée did her best to restore sound footing: she rented out part of the land, and developed workshops where the nuns made candles and vestments, embroidered cloth, and bound books, exercising a range of craft skills typical of the *ancien régime*. For part of Thérèse-Geneviève Coutlée's regime the sisters also still toiled in the fields to feed their community; but the premature death of several nuns apparently persuaded the superior their overtaxed energies were better used indoors. Doctors, legislative councillors and all parties involved in the 1824 Enquiry spoke with respect of the dedication of the religious women and their "great and unremitting exertion" to feed, clothe and care for all those in their charge.

The Hôpital Général's Foundling Street Location bespoke its other major function, to receive abandoned infants. The nuns sent these out to wetnurses, paying the nurses, providing them with baby clothes and visiting to check up on their small charges. At age two the babies were brought back to the Grey Nuns and sent out for adoption or contractual placement with "respectable families."

This infant care, which might have been one of the nuns' more cheerful tasks, was in fact the grimmest. As Montreal developed into a major port, military centre and reception point for immigrants and displaced habitants, increasing numbers of children were abandoned. The nuns received seventeen infants in 1760, thirty-nine in 1800, and eighty-six in 1823.[19] Many arrived at the Grey Nuns' door nearly dead, some brought in carts from considerable distances. Between 1800 and 1823,

more than three-quarters of the foundlings received by the nuns — 841 of 1207 — died after being sent out to nurse, most of them in the first month of life. This contrasted with a 25% infant mortality rate in Montreal generally. Questioned about this by the Legislative Council Committee in 1824, the Grey Nuns' Superior, Marguerite Lemaire St. Germain (who succeeded Coutlée in 1822), attributed it to "the bad state in which we receive them, which proceeds from that shame which induces the mothers to resort to the utmost means of concealing the offspring of their crime from the eyes of the world."[20]

Concerned by the deathrate and also by the expense of caring for the growing numbers of foundlings, the government Committee expressed the opinion that the system itself was defective. Their research indicated that high mortality rates characterised foundling hospitals everywhere. They felt that the moral effect of these institutions was pernicious: giving unwed mothers a place to send their infants was "calculated to weaken that mainspring of a healthy population, matrimony, and to blunt or destroy . . . parental affection by encouraging mothers to abandon their offspring." Besides being an "incitement to vice and licentiousness," foundling hospitals swallowed up public money. As a result the 1824 Committee recommended phasing out the system as soon as possible. The gulf between their scientific aspirations and Mother St. Germain's charitable realism appears in the proceedings:

> Query: What is the System in respect to them?
> Answer: Not understanding completely the object of the query I am not able to answer it in a satisfactory manner: all that I have the honor to say to you, is, that we attend to all the details, and we bestow all the care that forsaken, unsupported and unprotected children can inspire.

Despite the Council's laudable concern for systemic change, Mother St. Germain may have understood the situation better: given Montreal's large military and transient population, closing the foundling hospital would probably have increased infanticide rather than lowering illegitimacy.[21] Indeed the Committee had no alternative forms of prevention or care to suggest, and the foundling work would continue for decades to come. Yet laywomen soon began to take steps to help women in childbirth, relieving at least some of the desperation that led to abandonment of infants.

At the same time that the numbers of foundlings increased, the Grey Nuns also accepted the burden of housing insane patients. The situation was Dickensian. The afflicted lived in six-by-eight foot cells with grated windows. The nuns eschewed corporal punishment and, according to their physician, fed the patients "if anything too well." Although the sisters cleaned and cleaned, a noxious smell arose from the cells. The building's riverside location added winter damp to the pungent atmosphere. There was no exercise yard and no room for one. The situation, the Hôpital's physician asserted, was "more likely to . . . increase insanity than to cure it."[22] Remarkably, forty-nine of the eighty-four mental cases the nuns received between 1800 and 1823 had been discharged as "cured or relieved." Here too was a system recognized as obsolete; but in this case the Legislative Council was able to propose an alternative, a government asylum based on the famous mental asylum in Glasgow with facilities for classification, treatment and exercise. Such an institution would eventually be built at Beauport in 1845. In the meantime, however, the nuns cared for up to eight patients, while that many again overflowed into the town jail. In 1818 the Grey Nuns made an unwonted refusal of a £2000 government grant allocated for building more cells for the insane, "as it would increase what is in itself bad and inadequate to the object" of helping the mental cases.

The nuns had successfully made the transition to a new regime by diplomacy with their British rulers and by the continuing tradition of dedicated care, broadened now to include non-Catholics. Above all, they survived and grew because they filled a vital need, to which the large grant from a parsimonious government stands testimony. There were no other hospitals available until 1816 and no sizeable Protestant institution until 1822, despite the preponderance of Protestant patients. Both the Hôpital Général and the Hôtel Dieu continued to provide services for decades, the latter functioning to this day as a teaching hospital in connection with the Université de Montréal. One cannot contemplate with satisfaction the primitive treatment the nuns' charges received and the seemingly calm acceptance of appalling conditions. Without the nuns, however, such cases would have marched more surely and swiftly to the alternate destinations of jailhouse and grave.

II. Establishment Social Welfare: Laywomen

So important was the nuns' contribution to early nineteenth century welfare that Protestant benevolence to some extent simply picked up the pieces that fell outside the nuns' wide net. The founders of the Female Benevolent Society were struck by the plight of immigrants arriving in 1815. The Benevolent Society's approach to poverty displayed much of the same religious tolerance and female initiative seen in the work of the nuns. Apparently the first permanent English-language voluntary relief association in Montreal, it filled a major gap in the town's welfare services.[23] Like the convents, it looked to the powers of the land for support, and worked within the established order. The women who were most active in initiating the Benevolent Society, Eleanor Gibb, H.W. Barrett and the widow Janet Finlay Aird, worshipped at the St. Gabriel Street Church connected with the Church of Scotland.[24] Mrs. Gibb, from a tailoring family, might be suspected of an interest in fashion; but in fact she spent many of her waking hours among those in rags.

This trio and a handful of their friends placed a notice in Montreal newspapers and bookstores shortly before Christmas in 1815 that "a

number of Ladies, deeply impressed with the destitute situation of the poor, wish to form a society to relieve indigent women and small children, the sick, the aged and the infirm poor of the city."[25] To achieve their aim they fashioned a structure that involved a directress and a board of twelve managers. To support their work they persuaded the Reverend Robert Easton, pastor of the St. Peter Street Scottish Secession congregation, to preach a charity sermon, which he did on a Sunday night in September, 1816.

The sermon was no revolutionary manifesto. Easton accepted the class system; he counselled his hearers to be prudent in their giving, retaining whatever was necessary for the support of their "rank and credit in the world." Yet he acknowledged the common humanity of the poor: "Whoever wears the human form challenges our respect, and, being found in a state of wretchedness, is entitled to relief."[26] Most notable is what the sermon did *not* do. Scarcely any mention was made of benevolent activity as a womanly or motherly endeavour. Easton dwelt instead on compassion as "one of our natural endowments . . . a sentiment of nature . . . a maxim of true religion." He appears to have been aware of the upsurge of such benevolence in Britain and the United States, and towards the end of his sermon he did mention this work as highly becoming to members of the female sex and a good example to their daughters. In contrast to later nineteenth century ministerial counsels, however, there was a refreshing emphasis on the common humanity of givers and recipients of aid. Charitable workers were generic good samaritans, rather than gendered nurturers.

In the Society's first year the members used their £190 treasury to give food, firewood, clothes, and medicine to about sixty adults and forty-five children, mostly drawn from the several thousand immigrants who began annually to inundate a town then numbering about nine thousand. Some of this group were unfit to go on to the usual immigrant destination of Upper Canada, so Benevolent Society members rented a small house in the Récollet suburb which they named the House of Recovery. They hired several housekeepers, while the twelve managers took turns supplying and visiting the house. By 1817–18 the Society was helping some 370 people a year including twenty "permanent charges" and the annual treasury had grown to £1200. Supplementing their efforts from 1818 was another voluntary society for the Relief of Emigrants, which included Catholic, Presbyterian and Anglican ministers, formed to arrange westward passage for destitute but ablebodied immigrants. By 1820 the Benevolent Society was sending five hundred people a year by this agency, agreeing in return to open a soup kitchen for hungry immigrants in one of its houses.[27]

Alongside this immigrant work, the Society cared for a number of women in childbirth as well as some forty invalids unable to gain admission to the Hôtel Dieu. Securing discarded bedding from the military barracks, they moved their sick patients into a larger house on Craig

Street which had three wards and could hold twenty-four patients. When this experiment proved viable, doctors and businessmen such as John Richardson and William McGillivray began plans to give the city a permanent General Hospital. The Benevolent Society's historian later recorded that "the large Craig Street house to which the patients from the House of Recovery were moved was the first General Hospital, the direct result of the efforts of the Ladies' Benevolent Society on behalf of the sick poor."[28] Doige's *Montreal Directory* of 1819 corroborates the claim:

> the bright example of superior benevolence evinced by the female sex in this institution has at length aroused the energies of the gentlemen, who have lately caused a public dispensary to be established, which . . . the increase of the population and the difficulties of the times . . . has made necessary.

With the hospital passing into the hands of a male committee and the clergy beginning to address itself to immigrant aid, the women expanded another arm of their work. Increasingly the Benevolent Society turned to helping children, "the prospect of training a rising generation to industry and sobriety being so much more promising than that of reforming those whose habits have become fixed."[29] Several committee members worked to establish a National School while others formed a committee of the Society for Promoting Education and Industry.[30] In 1822 they opened the Protestant Orphan Asylum, directed by Janet Aird with H.W. Barrett as secretary. Many of its twelve managers had previously served as managers of the benevolent society.

The charity flourished, growing in numbers and prestige. The seventy-three members of 1816 increased to eighty-one by 1819. It appears to have been an upwardly mobile group. The founders were of the middle class; besides Eleanor Gibb, who belonged to a family of merchant-tailors who outfitted Montreal's elites, Janet Aird and H.W. Barrett were also from mercantile families. By 1817, though, Mrs. Ogden, wife of the Chief Justice, was the Society's second directress. In 1819 there was an influx of "several ladies of the first respectability . . . who had not before honoured the meetings."[31] The move towards exclusive work with children fit genteel conceptions of feminine duty better than did work with adult street people. A new sensibility is suggested, too, by the gradual replacement of the earthy "Female" in the Society's name with the more refined term "Ladies," made official in the society's reconstituted charter in 1832.

Ladies or not, the membership remained capable of taking to the streets in a crisis. A cholera epidemic reached the town with the arrival of the ship *Carricks* from Dublin on 8 June 1832. Within a week 261 people died in Montreal; 632 died the following week and 166 the next; that year the city saw 2500 cholera-related fatalities. Many Montrealers fled to the country in terror, and refugees huddled in the barns and granaries on the outskirts of town. The members of the Ladies' Be-

nevolent Society went out in pairs to canvass the town streets for donations to help the victims. They collected £500, to which was added £100 collected by a male citizens' committee. Again the Society established a soup kitchen to feed the hungry, along with a house to receive destitute widows and children, and an employment office for domestics. With medical services volunteered by Dr. John Stephenson, the women also ran a house for the homeless and for invalids released from the General Hospital but still convalescing.

By 1833 the Society had effectively demonstrated its usefulness. At its public general meeting a resolution was unanimously passed that the members had "as far as funds had permitted . . . fulfilled their pledge to the public to relieve all those who were in real want and distress from the ravages of the cholera" and further resolved that the Society should be permanent. The Montreal Sanitary Committee transferred its £50 balance to the Ladies' Benevolent Society, and Stephenson offered his services and supplies for an indefinite period. Two prospective teachers for the orphanage were sent for training in the Lancastrian and Infant School methods. The financial future looked promising: along with £228 raised at a Government House Bazaar, the group also received £100 from the government, the first of a long series of such grants for the orphanage.[32]

The Ladies' Benevolent Society was an effective organisation — so much so that it is still functioning in Montreal as a childcare organisation after amalgamating with several other groups. Its longevity can be attributed to several factors. First, its members were dedicated: the same names recurred on the membership and managerial rolls year after year, with some families serving for generations. Secondly, its ecumenical membership made it acceptable in Montreal's multicultural setting. Thirdly, the society showed a tendency to order and system as opposed to trends and enthusiasms. Early in its history, clear lines of responsibility and an endowment fund were both in place. This soundness, along with the status of its members, helped ensure success in securing government support as well as free care from physicians, charity sermons from clergy, and other important donations of goods and services. That in turn made possible the hiring of a small paid staff. A pioneering Protestant orphanage, it led the way for a number of such institutions founded in other colonial towns after 1850[33] in addressing problems endemic to volunteer organisations.

The most notable aspect of Montreal Benevolent Society welfare is the centrality of the work of women. They did not operate peripherally but initiated the response to a pressing public need, and sustained it. The Society's 1920 historian wrote that "the authority of older histories and statistics [established] the fact that this Society was the pioneer philanthropy of British Montreal, and that its work led directly to the founding of the Montreal General Hospital and the Protestant Orphan Asylum and to an organised assistance for that vast throng of immigrants continually progressing towards Upper Canada."[34] As late as 1820 other groups were still so ephemeral that the Ladies' Benevolent Society was the only Protestant charity mentioned in the *Montreal Directory* of that year. A workhouse had a brief career from 1819 until it folded four years later.[35] Apart from that, there appears to have been little besides a bread line at the Récollet Church to supplement the organised relief work of the nuns and laywomen. Until the opening of the commodious Montreal General Hospital in 1822, the institutions for the ill in Montreal were also founded and administered by women.

The 1820s and 1830s would see an increase in benevolent activities. Catholic laywomen, for example, began the Dames de Charité in 1827 to provide housing, education and employment to needy women and children. The hope was expressed in Doige's 1819 *Directory* that men would soon follow women's lead in the benevolent field. By 1839 this too had come to pass; a directory writer then boasted of Montreal's vigorous charitable activity relative to its size and wealth, with a plethora of societies devoted to relief, reform, and immigrant aid.[36] By that time men's groups were directing many of the projects. Although they were no longer alone in the field, women did continue to direct several major efforts, as seen in the Benevolent Society's vigorous response to the cholera epidemic. There were also several emanations from the Dames de Charité — a Catholic orphanage erected in 1832 and the hostels of Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin, which grew into the extensive work of today's Sisters of Providence.[37]

In the 1830s these lay groups continued the ecumenical tradition established by the nuns. Some women joined both Catholic and Protestant groups. Marie C-J. LeMoyne, owner of the seigneurie of Longueuil and widow of Captain David Grant, served as the first president of the Catholic Orphanage and second president of the Protestant one.[38] In 1831 Catholic and Protestant women co-sponsored a notable bazaar that netted £710, which appears to have been divided with the best of will on all sides:

One-third to the Ladies of the R.C. Church	237
Montreal General Hospital	175
Orphan Asylum	108
National School	40
Br. and Canadian School	40
Infant School	30
8 Protestant Clergy for the poor, 10 each	80

The Catholic women saluted their colleagues by promptly returning £50 of their own grant to the Protestant Montreal General Hospital.[39]

III. Evangelical Innovations

In contrast with these societies which were rooted in the established churches, the evangelicals were more disruptive. In the period under

review they were only beginning the social crusading that became their trademark. In Montreal they were drawn from various denominations outside the three established churches, such as Methodists, Congregationalists and the group of American Presbyterians who had broken away from the Church of Scotland group in Montreal; later recruits came from the Free Kirk. A number of the evangelicals, including some "American" Presbyterians, hailed from the British Isles; but more significant were the roots many others had in the "Burnt Over Districts" of New York and New England, centres of the Second Great Awakening (a revival largely financed and attended by women).

The evangelicals' root conviction was that all human beings must subscribe to a pure biblical faith and a single standard of morality. Moreover, this daunting goal had an imminent deadline. Montreal evangelicals shared the widespread millennial expectations of Awakened America and post-Wesleyan Britain. Tending to discern the Second Coming of Christ in passing stormclouds, they hastened to save the world before it was too late. They saw the Antichrist in churches accommodating double or multiple standards, or corrupted by accretions of non-biblical ritual or dogma. To their credit the evangelicals — often craftspeople or shopkeepers who were not uninterested in upward mobility — were brave about attacking harmful customs, no matter how long established or well entrenched. They were ready to bear rebuff or ridicule for what they thought right; this remained true even of many of them who ascended to Montreal's higher social circles (surprising the Governor, for example, by lecturing him on teetotalism at his own banquet).[40]

What is more, dedicated evangelicals believed that the most lowly scrap of humanity deserved sustained attention (though not all the lowly welcomed the zealot's penetrating gaze). They accepted the need to feed and clothe beggars to put them in suitable state to hear the Word of God. They also went deeper, recognizing the more lasting effect of touching hearts and changing minds. Their belief in the redeemability of the inner person caused them to protest a whole range of brutal practices that ignored the existence of conscience by assuming desirable conduct must be forced rather than taught or inspired. Evangelicals fought slavery, and the use of the lash on sailors and soldiers and on the young. They believed that the consciences of children and others must be awakened and trained to do what was right so that external constraints could be removed. To the extent that society made immoral demands on its weaker members, society itself must be changed.[41]

In the early nineteenth century, the evangelical sense of urgency and its mission to teach opened a door for female endeavour. Indeed, it is among the evangelicals that one catches flickers of rebellion against the established order that seem altogether lacking in established churchwomen with their cordial relationship with the powers of the land. At a time when Sunday schools were often the only access to literacy available to working class children, Lucy Hedge established one in Montreal;

founded in 1817, it was claimed to be the first such institution in the city. Hedge, one of the founding members of Montreal's American Presbyterian congregation, had been educated in Litchfield, Connecticut; her pastor there had been the renowned American evangelist and reformer Lyman Beecher. Apparently the school she founded ossified and fell into other hands. This elicited a seeming *coup d'état* meeting held at Hedge's house in 1826 in which she, her sister and fifteen other women and men signed a manifesto declaring the school's constitution totally inadequate and insisting on a new one directed to the religious and moral improvement of the young of all classes without distinction. The staff, they demanded, was to consist of "persons of both sexes, all of whom shall be actively employed in the school."[42] This work soon led to outreach to children in other parts of the city. Hedge worked with a committee to form the British and Canadian School for educating children of the labouring classes which opened in 1821 in the Craig Street house where the Benevolent Society had earlier operated the General Hospital.[43] In the 1830s the church [American Presbyterian] itself had five hundred children enrolled in several Sunday schools as well as a large Free School.[44] It was by that date considered sufficiently useful to warrant government support.[45]

Most of the evangelical women's public activity, however, was in more controversial realms than teaching the poor the three R's. Women in Laprairie encountered priestly opposition to their distribution of French language Bibles, which was underway by 1826. Evangelical women in Montreal followed suit, and were in possession of sufficient funds to hire a city missionary in 1830.[46] These women were more interested in spreading the gospel than in doing social welfare work. This caused a reaction in the Catholic community, with the priests forbidding their parishioners to accept the Bibles or attend the Sunday schools.

Equally unpopular, but of much greater significance for social welfare, was temperance work. Well into the 1840s in Canada some zealous temperance advocates suffered dismissal from jobs and regiments, and censure by church congregations for "speaking out too frankly on certain points." Nevertheless, temperance work in that hard-drinking society was, as scholars have begun to recognize, a humanitarian endeavour. Historians of women have long treated temperance with respect, as a politicizing agent in the suffrage campaigns. Partly because of the excesses of the post-1850 prohibition movement, even those who appreciate this benefit have tended to analyse the attack on alcohol as melodrama, as middle class status-seeking, or as social control: in all events a distraction from the deeper problems that drove people to drink. The movement did contain all these elements; but recent research tends to confirm early temperance workers' claims that heavy drinking was a severe social problem in its own right, causing or exacerbating violence, family abuse or neglect, accidents and many alcohol-related health problems.[47]

Evangelical women in the Canadas supported this important reform from its inception. Indeed their participation predates the years of 1826 to 1828 that historians have identified as its start.[48] G.W. Perkins, a Presbyterian missionary who later served as pastor of Montreal's American Presbyterian church, wrote in 1822 of an earlier society. The family of Mrs. John Forbes ran the local store in the little logging settlement of Russelltown, about forty kilometres south of Montreal. Energetic and resourceful, Mrs. Forbes was concerned about conditions in her neighbourhood, which had no minister and was by several accounts "fearfully intemperate."[49] American-born, she may have been influenced by the Second Great Awakening and the temperance work accompanying religious revivals in the States after 1815. She undertook to have a church built by raising subscriptions on both sides of the border and organising a local dressmaking operation to bring in additional funds. Perhaps in reaction to the succession of dissolute doctors, teachers and even preachers who passed through the village, Forbes also

> commenced . . . the formation of a temperance society. . . . The proposal at first met with universal neglect and even derision. Still she persisted; through private conversation, and the distribution of tracts and papers, she endeavoured to disarm prejudice. Her efforts were so far successful that she ventured at length to request a meeting of a few of the neighbours at her own house for the purpose of forming a temperance society. . . . She conversed with them individually, and a society was formed.[50]

Evangelical women in the Montreal Temperance Society would continue this tradition in 1840 by sending the first of a series of temperance circuit riders out to preach the cause across the Canadas in 1840, a crusade that would soon be expanded by the wealthy businessmen of that Society. Thus, beginning in 1822, temperance leadership by evangelical women appeared in Canada a half-century earlier than is generally recognised. As outsiders, the evangelicals were willing to attack a social custom entrenched at all levels of society — in a way that nuns and other "established" churchwomen with their gentlemen supporters and government funds were not likely to venture.

Female activists were overshadowed during the 1840s. Montreal's merchant princes would then begin to incorporate zealous reformers in their ranks, born-again, evangelical businessmen, ardent Presbyterians such as John Redpath with his sugar empire, the Lyman pharmaceutical magnates and the Mackay brothers who made a fortune in drygoods. These men turned the women's wooden hospices and rented houses into the great pillared and iron-railed institutions of Victorian Canada. While philanthropic laymen replaced the hard-living fur traders at Montreal's social summit, the powerful Bishop Bourget created and controlled a new network of Catholic welfare institutions, and the paeans praising woman's place in the home grew deafening. Thereafter men would tend to supply the direction to major welfare efforts while women continued to supply much of the labour.

At the beginning of the century, things had been different. The field was dominated by women. In the first decade the nuns worked virtually alone in social welfare. In the second and third decades, a number of laywomen, mostly in connection with the established Churches, took charge of social cases falling outside the nuns' network. The older benevolence associated with the established Churches acted to relieve the growing numbers of urban poor. It did so without enquiring too closely into either the lifestyle of those who begged or the shortcomings of society. Yet these churchwomen alleviated human suffering in a time when little other relief was available; they left a legacy of interdenominational co-operation rather than bitterness. Clearly the work was solid, for the nuns and the Ladies' Benevolent Society built institutions which continued to evolve, and endure to this day.

The evangelicals, beginning as outsiders because of American origins or lower status, dispensed a critique along with their charity. Their dogmatism and proselytisation fostered decades of ill will. Yet in refusing to accept the maxim "the poor we have always with us" and preferring to "go teach all nations," they determined to go beyond relieving distress to root it out. In so doing they initiated in Canada one of the nineteenth century's most important reforms, the temperance movement which addressed a serious problem for society in general and women in particular, and eventually mobilized the latter to reclaim their basic civil rights.

Together, established and evangelical forms of Christianity produced notable female activism in the Montreal vicinity in the early nineteenth century. The period instructs us in feminine service that was not subservient. A former Londoner then living in Montreal compared this activity favourably to that of British women, saying that "Montreal, though not equal to London in the number of its females, far surpasses that metropolis in the activity, capability and independence of the female mind and spirit."[51] With their hospitals, asylums and dispensaries, Mother Coutlée, Eleanor Gibb, Madame Grant and their associates shaped the first response to the problems of immigrants arriving in the port city in desperate need of help, and of the growing numbers of indigenous poor. Evangelical women began to address underlying ills of addiction, brutality and ignorance. Many of these endeavours won the co-operation of clergymen, physicians and politicians. The initiative, however, arose from the "capability and independence of the female mind and spirit." A smile might have added to their beauty. It could scarcely have added to their worth.

NOTES

1. *Stanstead Journal*, Nov. 16, 1848.
2. *Stanstead Journal*, July 19, 1847.
3. Hungry beggars going door to door occasioned the founding, for example, of the Montreal Dames de Charité in 1827, who recorded "on prit en considération l'extrême misère que souffre par le manque de nourriture, un très grand nombre de pauvres de cette paroisse de Montréal, et on

résolut alors de soulager et d'apporter un remède plus efficace à leurs infortunes, que celui qui résulte des aumônes qu'ils reçoivent journellement, dans les quêtes qu'ils fond [*sic*] de porte en porte. . . ." Cited in M-C. Daveluy, *L'Orphelinat catholique de Montréal (1832-1932)*, Montréal, 1933, 290.

4. Jan Noel, "New France: Les femmes favorisées," *Atlantis* 6, 2 (Spring 1981), 81–82. For a fascinating discussion of changing attitudes in subsequent decades see Allan Greer, "La république des hommes: les Patriotes de 1837 face aux femmes," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* (hereafter *RHAF*) 44, 4 (printemps 1991).
5. Isidore Lebrun, *Tableau statistique et politique des Deux Canadas* (Paris, Londres: Treutel et Würtz, 1833), 389–90.
6. J-P. Bernard *et al*, "La Structure Professionnelle de Montréal en 1825," *RHAF* 30, 3 (déc 1976), 397–99.
7. Thomas Doige, *An Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Traders and Housekeepers Residing in Montreal* (Montreal: Lane, 1819), 48–183.
8. See for example the St. Paul's Church, Montreal, baptismal records, where until the 1840s the child's parents are usually recorded as "John Brown and his wife Mary Jones." This usage was also found in the French Canadian community.
9. For a detailed study of this phenomenon see Katherine McKenna, "The Life of Anne Murray Powell, 1755–1849: A Case Study of the Position of Women in Early Upper Canada" (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1987), 28.
10. Women were also briefly deprived of the right to vote by the Lower Canadian Assembly in 1834, but this law did not survive the Rebellion period.
11. Clio Collective, *Histoire des femmes au Québec* (Montréal: Quinze, 1982), 82–85, 150–52. The choices available to women under Lower Canadian marriage laws, and some of their implications — and the rudimentary state of our knowledge about the implications are discussed in B. Bradbury *et al*, "Property and Marriage: The Law and the Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Montreal," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 26, 51 (mai-May 1993), 9–39.
12. Claudette Lacelle, *Urban Domestic Servants in 19th Century Canada* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1987), 31–32.
13. Jan Noel, "Dry Millennium: Temperance and a New Social Order in Mid-19th Century Canada and Red River" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1987), 116–33.
14. Robert Campbell, *History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church, St. Gabriel Street, Montreal* (Montreal: Drysdale, 1887), 52, 262–63. Jennifer Brown, "Children of the Early Fur Trades," in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 52–53.
15. Legislative Council of Lower Canada, *Journal*, 1824, Appendix 1, "Report from the Special Committee . . . upon the Establishments in this Province, for the reception and cure of the Insane, for the reception and support of Foundlings, and for the . . . sick and infirm Poor . . ." (hereafter JLCLC 1824 appx. 1).
16. Doige, 17, *Annuaire de Ville-Marie*, Première Année, 1863: Origines, Utilité et Progrès des Institutions Catholiques de Montréal (Montréal: Senécal, 1864), 144–45.
17. F. Rousseau, "Hôpital et société en Nouvelle-France: l'Hôtel Dieu de Quebec à la fin du XVIIe siècle," *RHAF* 31 (juin 1977), 47. Noel, "Femmes favorisées," 87–88. While Canadian female literacy was not particularly high, the gap between the sexes was smaller than that existing in contemporary France, England and New England. Allan Greer, "The Pattern of Literacy in Quebec, 1745–1899," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 11, 22 (nov-Nov. 1978), 332.
18. JLCLC 1824 appx. 1; *Annuaire*, 1864, 70.
19. JLCLC 1824 appx. 1.
20. This was asserted for a later time, in the 1860s. *Annuaire*, 1864, 63. By that time babies were also sent by train, often in carpetbags, from as far away as Quebec City and Upper Canada. J-C. Robert, "The City of Wealth and Death, 1821–71," in *Essays in the History of Canadian Medicine*, eds. W. Mitchinson and J. Dickin McGinnis (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 31, and Peter Gossage, "Les enfants abandonnés à Montréal au 19e siècle: la crêche d'Youville des Soeurs Grises, 1820–1871," *RHAF* 40, 4 (printemps 1987), 537–59.
21. Despite changing judicial responses, the leading causes of infanticide remained the same in Quebec for three centuries: desperation of young unwed mothers with no resources to raise a child and fearful of disgrace, family disapproval or dismissal from employment. Marie-Aimée Cliche, "L'Infanticide dans la région de Québec (1660–1964)," *RHAF* 44, 1 (été 1990), 31–59.
22. JLCLC 1824 appx. 1.
23. "Until the founding of this society, the only sources of relief for the poor were the Hôtel Dieu, the convents and the bread line." PAC, MG 28, I388, Vol. I, 1933 typewritten history, Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society.
24. Campbell, 114, 143.
25. Mrs. C.A. Pearce, *A History of the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society* (Montreal: Lovell, 1920), 9.
26. Robert Easton, *A Sermon Delivered before the Members of the Female Benevolent Society in Montreal, Sept. 18, 1816* (Montreal: N. Mower, 1816), 4.
27. Alfred Sandham, *Ville-Marie* (Montreal: G. Bishop, 1870), 289; Pearce, 14–15.
28. Pearce, 18; Sandham, 290.
29. Pearce, 14.
30. *Montreal Almanack of Lower Canada Register for 1831* (Montreal: Rbt. Armour, 1831), 144–46.
31. Pearce, 15.
32. *Historical Sketch of the Montreal Protestant Orphan Asylum* (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1860), 10.
33. Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell, "The Rise and Decline of British North American Protestant Orphans' Homes as Woman's Domain, 1850–1930," *Atlantis* 7, 2 (Spring 1982), 22, situate the beginning of most Protestant orphanages after 1850. For the elaborate set of rules developed over time see Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society, *Rules . . . Confirmed at the Extraordinary General Meeting . . . April 1874* (Montreal, 1874).
34. Pearce, 7.
35. Fecteau, 193–94.
36. N. Bosworth, ed., *Hochelaga Depicta* (Montreal: Wm. Grieg, 1839), 1880–93, 205, 210–11.
37. D. Robillard, *Emilie-Tavernier-Gamelin* (Montréal: Éditions du Méridien, 1988); Daveluy, *L'Orphelinat catholique*, 295ff; H. Lapointe-Roy, *La Charité bien ordonnée* (Montréal: Boréal, 1987), 82–83; *Annuaire*, 1864, 77–78; *Dictionary of Canadian Bibliography* (hereafter, DCB) IV 178, VII 301.
38. She was also sister-in-law to the president of the Ladies' Benevolent Society, Mrs. John Richards.
39. Figures have been rounded. Source: Lady Aylmer, *Recollections*, typescript, 73; also Daveluy, 305.
40. Rev. J. Wood, *Memoir of Henry Wilkes* (Montréal: Grafton, 1887), 134.
41. For a Foucault-inspired interpretation of this internalisation as a stage in state formation, see Jean-Marie Fecteau, *Un nouvel ordre des choses: la pauvreté, le crime, l'Etat au Québec de la fin du XIXe siècle à 1840* (Outremont: VLB, 1989).
42. American Presbyterian Church (Montreal), Sunday School Records, United Church Archives, Lennoxville, Quebec.
43. *Montreal Almanack* 1831, 145; Sandham, 104.
44. *Hochelaga Depicta*, 114; American Presbyterian Church Records, A 523, 2 and 3, United Church Archives, Lennoxville, Quebec.
45. In Montreal's hinterland, evangelicals also organised to address poverty and illiteracy. A Baptist revival in Potton Township, Brome County, for example, led to the formation of a Female Benevolent Society in 1826. About fifty members made and sold cloth to help poorer neighbours in various ways, which included the purchasing of books for a Sabbath school. Rev. Ernest Taylor, *History of Brome County* (Montreal: Lovell, 1908 and 1937), vol. 1, 230–33; vol. 2, 112.
46. American Home Missionary Society Correspondence 1826–30, United Church Archives, Toronto, esp. Rev. I. Purkis to Absolom Peters, May 1826, and S. Marsh to A. Peters, Oct. 1830; see also *Montreal Almanack*, 1831, which records a Montreal Ladies' Bible Association and a (female) Montreal Domestic Missionary Society.
47. See for example Ian Tyrell, *Sobering Up* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979), and Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance* (Philadelphia: Temple U., 1981) on the American movement; my own *Dry Millennium* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) on Canadian temperance shares this basically favourable assessment, particularly of the early temperance movement.
48. The movement has been dated from the appearance of a group in Gloucester, New Brunswick, in 1826, and in Montreal, Brockville, Leeds County, the Niagara peninsula, and Beaver River, Nova Scotia, in 1827–28. Ruth Spence, *Prohibition in Canada* (Toronto: Dominion Alliance, 1919), 38–39; R.D. Wadsworth, *Temperance Manual* (Montreal, 1847), 4–5; F.L. Barron, "The Genesis of Temperance in Ontario, 1828–50" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Guelph, 1976), 36–37.
49. G.W. Perkins to Absolom Peters, American Home Missionary Society Correspondence, United Church Archives, Toronto; Robert Sellars, *History of the County Huntingdon and the Seigniories of Chateauguay and Beauharnois from the First Settlement to the Year 1838* (Huntingdon: Gleaner, 1888), 29, 462–71.
50. Perkins to Peters, AHMS correspondence, July 1822. The date on the inside of the letter is simply July '22 which leaves some ambiguity about whether 22 refers to the day or the year; but on the outside of the letter is written "will Mr. Judd take this to New York 1822." While Perkins does not name the woman in question, her identity is supplied by E. McDougall in "The Presbyterian Church in Western Lower Canada" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1969), 271. See also Sellars, 472.
51. Pearce, 23.