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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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The Velvet Glove: Maternalistic Reform
at the
Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females
1874-1927

by
Carolyn Strange

Thesis presented to the School of
Graduate Studies and Research of the
University of Ottawa in partial fulfil-
ment of the requirements of the M.A.
degree in History.

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To Inmates #2757-5927

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INTRODUCTION

The following study will investigate one women's prison, the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females in Toronto. The time period, 1874 to 1927, encompasses the crest of the separate prisons for women movement in North America.¹ In the mid-1870s, legislators agreed that Ontario required a separate institution for the incarceration of female lawbreakers. The end of the period corresponds to the retirement of Emma O'Sullivan, the woman who headed Mercer from 1901 to 1927. During her superintendency, a time of great change in the Ontario criminal justice system, she tried to implement maternalistic reform at the institution with varying degrees of success. Mercer, like all rescue homes and women's prisons, was designed and administered to impose middle-class conceptions of femininity on working-class women.² The ideology informing that effort was maternalism, a conviction that women were endowed with a motherly ability to uplift and reform the fallen. Maternalistic reform as implemented in prisons was a relatively benevolent method of institutional control yet it was inadequate for developing prisoners' ability to cope with the outside world where mother did not reign supreme. Various changes in the Ontario criminal justice system between 1913 and 1918 actually gave legislative sanction to the philosophy and techniques of maternal control in the Reformatory. By the mid-1920s, however, a bureaucratic system subsumed both

the prisoners and the prison itself under a series of impersonal, institutional controls.

The records I was able to use permit a greater emphasis than one usually finds in prison studies on the prisoners themselves.³ While most historians have had access only to official published records⁴, I was fortunate to view a series of restricted documents from the files of the Mercer Reformatory. Among them was the Reformatory Register, a remarkably complete record of every inmate who passed through Mercer. For each woman, the Register indicates her date of reception, date of release, offence, number of previous offences, sentence, age, marital status, occupation, religion, place of birth, literacy, health, gratuities earned and mode of discharge. To select a sample from the Register that would help compile a portrait of the Reformatory population, I chose every tenth inmate⁵ beginning with number 2,757, the first woman during O'Sullivan's superintendency, and ending with number 5,927, the last woman of O'Sullivan's final year at Mercer. The total sample size from the Register, then, was 316 subjects.

Other internal sources include the Rule Book and the Inmates' Offence Book. These two documents outline the behaviour expected of prisoners as well as the measures taken to punish infractions of established rules. The richest internal sources, however, were the Inmates Case Files. Before the turn of the century they contained little more than prisoners' transfer warrants; after 1900, however, the files

tended to be sufficiently detailed to permit an inside view of the Reformatory during O'Sullivan's superintendency. In each prisoner's file, a transfer warrant from the convicting authority continued to appear, but some also included letters, reports, and other miscellaneous material. Whether a Superintendent's report of an inmate's conduct, a mother's inquiry about her daughter's well-being, or a prisoner's suicide note, the information uncovered in these files revealed a great many facets of daily life and personal dynamics in the Reformatory. To develop the most detailed picture possible, I reviewed every Case File from 1901 to 1927, a total of over three thousand prisoners' records. I was thus able to complement the quantitative and qualitative records: the Register sample provides a frozen picture of the Reformatory population; the Case Files bring it alive.⁶

External records augment the study of Mercer. They consist primarily of official reports and legislative acts. Every year, the Reformatory Superintendent and the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities wrote a Report in which they assessed progress and problems and offered recommendations for future years. The York County Grand Jury periodically investigated Mercer and reported its findings to the Chief Magistrate. Finally, legislative acts respecting and affecting the Reformatory permit an understanding of the legal structures binding it.

A study of this nature demands a variety of research methods and an interdisciplinary approach. The Reformatory

Register sample, the source used to describe the inmate population as a group, was subjected to statistical study, from simple descriptive statistics to non-parametric and linear regression analyses. These studies helped establish trends in the inmate profile. Additionally, I scanned the case files for prison documents, letters and reports. The records were biased toward the staff's point of view but since case files were never intended for public scrutiny they were very revealing. It was possible then to relate internal trends at Mercer to change in the criminal justice system and the social climate. For this information, I looked at secondary studies of social and economic conditions as well as ideological currents prevalent in turn-of-the-century Ontario. My theoretical perspective derives from many sources, including criminology, sociology, social history and feminist theory. All of these disciplines have informed the discussion that follows.

Throughout this thesis, three themes are interwoven: the development of the Reformatory within its changing legal and social context; the maternalistic theory of reform and its implementation at Mercer; and finally, the story of the inmates themselves, who they were and why they ended up behind bars. The study has a chronological format within which certain of these themes will be emphasized. In the first chapter, I trace the campaign leading to the construction of Mercer in 1880, focussing particularly on the founding philosophy of maternalistic reform. This chapter

examines the early history of the Reformatory within the context of the developing social welfare system in Ontario. The second chapter concerns the first phase of Emma O'Sullivan's superintendency and studies her thwarted efforts to apply maternalistic modes of reform and control. The third chapter focuses on the social and legal changes taking place during the 1910s, a time of social purity campaigns and advocacy of penal reform. These ideological movements and structural changes helped determine the nature of O'Sullivan's later years at Mercer. The final chapter thus studies the impact of these external developments on the style of reform at Mercer from 1914 to 1927. In this period, a measure of support for maternalistic reform developed but only at the price of greater bureaucratization and impersonal controls.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. For an excellent study of the women's prison movement in America, see Estelle B. Freedman, Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981. She has termed the period studied in this thesis the Progressive Era of penology, a period of great innovation in prison practice.
2. Besides Freedman, the only other historical prison study that discusses gender control in the larger framework of social control is Patricia O'Brien, The Promise of Punishment: Prisons in Nineteenth Century France. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. I have found no historical studies of women prisoners in Canada.
3. I am indebted to Richard Ramsey, government records archivist at the Archives of Ontario, for drawing my attention to the records and helping me gain access to them. I would also like to thank officials from the Ontario Department of Correctional Services for allowing me to use these records.
4. For the best, recent historical prison studies, see Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Origins of the Prison, Alan Sheridan, trans. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977; Michael Ignatieff, A Just Measure of Pain: the Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850, New York: Columbia University Press, 1978; and David J. Rothman, Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.
5. Although not technically a random sample, this group is representative of the entire population. See Charles M. Dollar and Richard J. Jensen, Historians' Guide to Statistics, Quantitative Analysis, and Historical Research, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971. On sampling techniques, the guide indicates the following: "Technically the only perfect random sample comes from numbering each unit of a population and then drawing a specified set of different numbers from a table of random numbers. Unfortunately this procedure usually is too expensive and time-consuming for practical purposes. It can be approximated by systematically taking, say, every tenth name in a list of names -- for example, a directory or a census manuscript." p. 12.

6. O'Brien has argued that historians of prisons have to revise their perspective and not assume that prison policies and administrators' views completely shaped inmate life. She reminds historians that "[s]ociologists have studied contemporary prison communities in order to improve our knowledge of the dynamics of prison communities... We must take a step toward 'putting faces' on the prison population...", p. 53.

CHAPTER I

The Founding and Floundering of an Institution: Mercer, 1874-1901

Canada's first women's reformatory began as little more than the pet project of Ontario's Prison Inspector, J. W. Langmuir. His was a one-man lobby for legislative approval and public funds to establish the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females in 1880, a prison that would complete the recently established system of penal institutions in Ontario. He intended Mercer to be administered by a staff of women, the appropriate sex for persuading Ontario's female lawbreakers to reform. Langmuir hoped that the special, maternalistic qualities of the staff would work wonders in this unique, all-female institution. The Reformatory soon floundered, however, since it lacked a broad base of social and legislative support. A Royal Commission conducted in 1890 exposed some of the weaknesses hampering the fulfillment of the Reformatory's goals: "hardened" criminals unresponsive to reformative efforts, magistrates' tendency to give short sentences, and the difficulty of separating older lawbreakers from less experienced women were problems the staff could not overcome. Changes recommended by the Commissioners were not implemented and the Superintendent was left to run Mercer as she saw fit. By the end of its second decade, the Mercer Reformatory had clearly become an institution where work and privation prevailed over the original goal of reformation.

Policing the streets became a major concern in late-nineteenth century cities in North America. Most towns, particularly the newly industrializing ones, were full of unkempt characters who frequently roamed along muddy sidewalks and congregated in and around taverns. Unable or unwilling to work, they wandered from place to place straining the tolerance of city fathers.¹ As their numbers swelled, they also strained the capacity of city jails. In 1867, the Police Chief of Hamilton described the problems this disreputable group caused:

They are a hardened and degraded class of persons who frequently commit trivial offences for the sole purpose of being sent to gaol... [that] being preferable to the exposure to hunger and cold, which is their inevitable lot, consequent upon their degraded state: 2

Vagrancy and urban disorder were familiar problems, but it seemed as if something more alarming was happening in the late 1870s: the female crime rate was on the rise. Inspector Langmuir wrote in his Report of 1879 that the number of males sent to prison in 1878 fell to 10,017 from 11,595 the previous year; for females, the case was different: in 1878, 2013 women were incarcerated while only 1,886 had gone to prison the year before. The evidence was indisputable, thought Langmuir, when he wrote: "[t]his state of affairs affords additional proof of the great necessity which exists for an Industrial Prison for Females."³

When Langmuir wrote his recommendations for a women's reformatory in 1879, there was no such institution in Canada.

If females were sentenced to prison terms, they usually spent their time behind bars, along with their male counterparts, at the local gaol or lock-up. These were unpleasant places, often crammed with every sort of criminal, from the drunk to the murderer. In the larger prisons, like the Toronto Gaol, a few cells were sometimes reserved for women but these were frequently over-crowded.⁴ In the common jails of smaller cities and towns, keepers had to lock females into the same cells as males.⁵ Langmuir characterized such places as "neither more nor less than organized training schools in vice and crime."⁶ Prisoners spent months and sometimes years in idleness, though the women were sometimes made to perform a variety of domestic tasks in the prisons. In these mixed prisons, the all-male staff and administration neither knew of nor implemented the philosophy of reform. Their prisoners were to be punished, not reformed.

Langmuir thought differently. In 1874, he began to speak out for a women's reformatory, based on notions of retraining and moral reform rather than punishment. He believed that the "increasing number of female criminals" would continue to grow unless the Province built a prison for women where they might receive "the great moral benefits of the separate principle."⁷ These "great benefits" had been stated three years earlier at the first annual meeting of the National Congress on Penitentiary and Reformatory Discipline in Cincinnati, Ohio, where delegates endorsed the

principle of separate women's prisons, administered by female staffs. "That the principle is a correct one and founded upon the teachings of common sense and sound observation," declared Langmuir, "no one at all conversant with the working of correctional institutions will deny."⁸

It is unclear whether Langmuir attended the Congress, but as a prominent figure in social welfare circles, he was well aware of recommendations made by the "very highest authorities"⁹ in his field.

Drawing on prison experts' advice to convince legislators that Ontario required a separate women's prison demanded shrewd and energetic lobbying skills. Langmuir had to persuade the government that a reformatory for females would alleviate the problems of female crime in Ontario. He argued that such an institution would be a relatively inexpensive means to expand the impressive prison system he had helped develop. To arouse support for the daring notion of an all-female staff, he turned to popular notions of women's special abilities to reform the fallen. Ultimately Langmuir's personal efforts rather than any broad-based movement for a women's prison, accounted for the establishment of Mercer.

Inspector Langmuir began his lobbying by relating American reformers' campaigns to establish separate prisons for women. In 1873, the first reformatory for females was built in Indianapolis, Indiana. Four years later, the Massachusetts Reformatory Prison for Women at Framingham

began to receive inmates. Agitation for improved conditions for female prisoners had begun half a century earlier, when news of Elizabeth Fry's work in English prisons drifted to North America. In ladies' auxiliaries of prison associations, female moral reform societies and mission organizations, women began to speak out on behalf of their fallen sisters.¹⁰ In the post-Civil War decade their isolated protests began to form a single voice calling for the incarceration of female lawbreakers in separate reformatories run by virtuous women. The tireless efforts of both male and female reform groups and prison societies awakened legislative interest and eventually support in the two States for the notion of separate prisons.

Langmuir urged Ontario legislators to keep pace with this latest innovation in social welfare. He argued that they include a women's reformatory in the nascent penal system of Ontario. Since his appointment in 1868, he had worked diligently to construct a comprehensive charity and penal system, one all Ontarians could be proud of.¹¹ He had overseen the development of a variety of penal institutions designed for different incarceration purposes. By 1878, this system included common and county jails, the Central Prison (a large institution built in Toronto in 1873 for more serious offenders), the Provincial Reformatory for Boys in Penetanguishene and the Federal Penitentiary for men and women in Kingston. The separation of various types

of offenders was considered crucial. As Langmuir stressed in his Report of 1878,

it is of paramount importance, both in the interests of justice and of the prisoners themselves, that they should be classified and confined in separate prisons, so that the evils of contamination...may be avoided.¹²

It seemed only logical, then, to complete this chain with the final link, a reformatory for females.

Such an institution, Langmuir argued, would also have practical advantages. It would be relatively cheap. Since female criminals were not, as a rule, as dangerous as males, security provisions would not need to be extensive; in fact, the prison for females would be "entirely different and of a far less costly character than for males."¹³ Inmates' labour could in fact off-set the costs of their incarceration. Langmuir frequently referred to the proposed institution as an Industrial Prison, a house of detention where a variety of services and manufacturing might be performed. Accordingly, he recommended that the reformatory be built in a major city "in order that the various industrial operations might be carried on advantageously." Operating at full working capacity, the reformatory could even become self-sufficient. The Province could also expect to save money on the salaries demanded by an all-female staff. Langmuir thus hoped to strike a responsive cord in Oliver Mowat's government.¹⁴

The final task in Langmuir's campaign was to convince legislators that an all-female staff could best control

and reform prisoners. To allay fears that women could not maintain order and discipline among criminals, he reminded observers of the American women's prisons. At neither the Indiana nor the Massachusetts Reformatory had any riot or scandal occurred, suggesting that women's sympathetic qualities did not weaken their ability to discipline troublesome inmates. It was in fact this very combination of kindness and strictness that rendered women particularly suitable for uplifting their fallen sister. In a host of temperance societies and moral reform groups, women across the continent had already organized to ameliorate society. In Canada, middle-class women had argued that their special, maternal qualities fit them for their mission to oversee the moral health of the young nation. Through their ties to domestic values and their commitment to active Christianity, they undertook the care of the sick, the young, and the aged, extending their domestic roles into the domain of social welfare. In the United States, some of these women had enlarged their roles as moral guardians to the care of female prisoners, unfortunates requiring the strength, guidance and gentle encouragement only women could provide. Langmuir saw no reason why Canadian women could not fulfill the same functions in his proposed separate women's prison. He envisioned the reformatory as an excellent opportunity for concerned, respectable women to exercise their considerable talents for reform. He looked forward to the time when women would work in the prison: "Then, and only then

will women be fully able to exercise and wield their great power and influence towards reclaiming the criminal and fallen of their sex."¹⁵

The 1870s proved a favourable decade to campaign for a women's reformatory in Ontario. In 1872 Oliver Mowat headed a ministry noted for its commitment to the expansion and improvement of social services. Langmuir capitalized on Mowat's interest in social reform and on his tendency to boast about the Province's "bountiful revenues."¹⁶ Langmuir boosted his lobbying efforts even more, however, when the sizable estate of Andrew Mercer came into the Provincial treasury. Mercer, a wealthy financier and generous philanthropist who had donated money to a variety of religious, charitable and educational causes, had died intestate in 1871 and no legitimate heirs had been discovered.¹⁷ When the Province received more than \$100,000 from his estate, Langmuir eagerly lobbied to have the funds earmarked for a women's reformatory. Mowat was persuaded. His government allocated \$90,000 for the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females, the first separate women's prison in Canada.

The origins of the reformatory were thus not rooted in a popular movement of protest or reform as was the case in the United States. Had Langmuir not used his influence it is doubtful that a separate prison would have been built. This one man, attuned to prison reform movements in Britain and the United States, managed to convince a sympathetic government to devote a private citizen's funds to this public

institution. Neither legislators, officials in the criminal justice system, nor the public felt any great commitment to the prison itself. This hollow base proved to be a source of weakness in the management of the Reformatory. Langmuir's enthusiasm and the windfall of the Mercers estate were not enough to maintain the prison's mission--to reform the female offender.

Once legislators received funds for the Reformatory, Langmuir proposed plans for its architecture, and administration. For inspiration, he turned to the Massachusetts Reformatory Prison for Females, the newer of the two separate prisons in the U.S., and one which had received much attention in charities and corrections circles. Langmuir visited the prison to study how it had been constructed and maintained. The Reformatory was a massive stone structure build in the congregate style¹⁸: one large building with "scattered and disconnected" wings projecting from the central corridor housed the inmates' cells, their washrooms, the administrative offices and the staff's quarters.¹⁹ Langmuir believed that the wings militated against efficient maintenance. Since they extended far from the corridor they permitted the separation of different inmate groups but hampered surveillance. Such architectural imperfections meant the sacrifice of

constant and continued supervision over all inmates, which, above all things, are [sic] of vital importance in a Reformatory of any kind, but more particularly in one for females, where influence and example are most powerful factors in the reclamation of inmates. 20

Plans for Mercer were to be an improvement on the reformatory: maternal control was to be imbedded in the very architecture.

The architecture and location of the future Mercer Reformatory were thus Langmuir's first concerns. He wanted the external features of the building to reflect its special purpose. Unlike the imposing Central Prison, built to convey a sense of severe, unsparing justice, Mercer was to be a structure "... as free as possible from prison appearance, while possessing the solidity necessary to it."²¹ Ornamental towers and a well-raised basement were supposed to achieved this though they could hardly off-set the effect of the imposing façade. Nonetheless, Langmuir hoped that the architecture of the Mercer Reformatory would encourage inmates to think of it as a house of reformation rather than of punishment.

Langmuir proposed that the building be constructed in the congregate style but arranged more compactly than the Massachusetts Prison. It was to be built on the south side of King Street near Dufferin, close to the Grey and Bruce Railway as well as the recently completed Central Prison.²² The Mercer Reformatory was to have a large, central structure with a workshop in a rear extension and two wings projecting from the sides near the front of the building.²³ These wings, unlike the structures at the Massachusetts Reformatory, did not extend far beyond the main building and the watchful eye of the keepers. The central structure was to include

the main entrance, the office and official departments as well as quarters for the Superintendent and her staff. In the rear of the main building and in the wings, prisoners' cells were located on three floors. Each cell was to hold one prisoner and the architecture of the cell corridors reflected the concern about separating inmates. Against a central dividing wall, the back of each cell was placed, while a locked iron gate covered the front. In the East Wing, cells were eight feet deep, four feet, nine inches wide, and eight feet high; the dimensions in the West Wing were somewhat larger: ten, by seven, by eight feet.

Two final corridors in the rear of the main building completed the accommodation for four grades of prisoners. The dimensions of these cells were to be five and six feet wide and eight feet deep. The purpose behind the different sized cells was to encourage inmates' desire to reform; compliant inmates could be rewarded by the grant of a less austere cell. Incoming inmates, according to Langmuir's plans, would be placed in the East Wing where the surroundings were "most prison-like." They would perform the most menial tasks, like hand washing prison uniforms or scrubbing latrines. "Continued good conduct and strict amenableness to discipline" would then be rewarded by transfer to the larger cells in other corridors. There inmates would work communally at tasks such as sewing or box making. Langmuir thus attempted to establish a system serving two goals: to encourage all inmates to reform, and to separate those

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hardened in sin and crime from their more innocent, younger counterparts.²⁴

Internal management was naturally crucial to Mercer's success. "From first to last," Langmuir underlined, "the disciplinary regulations will be of a reformatory character and the reclamation from evil courses of the women committed to the Reformatory will be kept steadily in view as the great object to be reached."²⁵ He left to the first Superintendent the task of defining what form the discipline would take.

In both the architecture and the style of discipline, Langmuir wanted Mercer to combine the uplifting features of a home with the strictness of a prison. In his survey of prisons and institutions for women in 1878, he had visited the Ingleside Home in Buffalo for the reformation of petty offenders, "primarily fallen women", who had been admitted either voluntarily or compulsorily. The superintendent had informed Langmuir, however, that as a mere "Home" "it had almost entirely failed in its object owing to the absence of the structural means of enforcing proper and effective disciplinary and custodial regulations."²⁶ There already existed in Ontario a Magdalene Asylum for the "sheltering and reclaiming of abandoned women"²⁷ but this institution was handicapped by the same deficiencies as the Ingleside Home. The Mercer Reformatory was to add a greater element of coercion so that inmates might be compelled to improve. The staff was thus assigned the difficult task of combining

severity with feminine tenderness. Langmuir outlined the objective:

While it will be necessary, having regard to the former lives of the inmates to at first enforce strict and even rigid discipline, it will have to be administered with the greatest firmness and impartiality, and while the disciplinary treatment of the inmates must be characterized by kindness and forbearance and encouragement, it must be completely freed from all that mawkish sentimentality which only encourages dissimulation and hypocrisy. 28

Significantly, he added that the Reformatory, properly managed, would resemble "an ordinary, well-conducted household." It followed that the "mistress", would have to be a respectable woman of irreproachable character if the Mercer Reformatory were to achieve its goals.

Langmuir's emphasis on Mercer's home-like atmosphere and the virtues of feminine discipline marked him as a maternalist, one who believed that women's special motherly qualities were well suited to reform work. He therefore knew exactly what he wanted in the Superintendent of the new Reformatory. She was to act like most women involved in reform work in the mid-nineteenth century. In orphan asylums, magdalen homes and missions, maternalistic women had already begun to apply their special qualities.²⁹ The earliest prison superintendents had also adopted the same ideology and similar tactics in their work with "fallen women." As "mistresses", they "assumed the roles of loving but demanding mothers who forgave past errors but insisted on obedience."³⁰ Indeed, they transferred the central link of the female world³¹--the mother-daughter bond--to their

reform work in the public sphere. Langmuir hoped that in an institutional setting, the mother's love and power could become the superintendent's model of reform and control. He thus assumed that a respectable woman possessing motherly virtues could easily assume the superintendency of the Mercer Reformatory and fulfill its purpose: "to reclaim the criminal and fallen."

The character of Mercer's prospective inmates was almost as important to Langmuir as the qualifications of the keeper. To complement a motherly superintendent, he hoped that Mercer would receive daughterly subjects. He assumed that sentencing authorities would select "the most suitable persons for reformatory discipline and treatment."³² These were women retaining the shreds of self-respect, unfortunates still able to appreciate and desire a better life. Clearly, not every female incarcerated in Ontario's common jails and lock-ups was an appropriate subject for reform; those unwilling or unable to respond to "kind but unyielding discipline" had no place at Mercer. The Reformatory, after all, was a unique institution, specially constructed and administered to reform only those women deemed capable of improvement.

The government's appointee matched Langmuir's expectations of a respectable, motherly woman. Mrs. James O'Reilly, a middle-aged widow from Kingston, became the first Superintendent of the Mercer Reformatory in 1880.³³ Her training consisted of visits to the only other reform-

atories for women in Massachusetts and Indiana. There, she and her assistant, Mrs. Coad "gained a practical insight into the everyday working and routine of the two best-managed institutions of their class in the United States." Langmuir believed that "they were thereby enabled to enter upon their duties with the confidence which can only be gained from practical knowledge."³⁴ O'Reilly's responsibilities were considerable. The "Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females", 1879, described the Superintendent's powers and duties. Under the direction of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities, she acted as the institution's chief executive officer, responsible for its "entire execution, control and management." She thus had to supervise a staff of eighteen, including a bursar, a prison physician, as well as various officers and servants.³⁵ She was to reside on the premises in an apartment on the second floor of the main building. From there she could maintain constant control over the Reformatory. With these vague recommendations concerning the maintenance of the institution and a Superintendent trained through two brief visits to similar reformatory prisons, Langmuir believed Mercer could undertake its mission.

The completion of the Mercer Reformatory in 1880 capped Langmuir's career. In the same year, he attended the National Conference on Charities and Corrections in Cleveland and delivered an address on the Provincial social welfare system. He declared confidently that he had established "one of the most complete charitable and correctional systems on the

continent."³⁶ Everything suggested that the Reformatory had been built in a context conducive to its success. Indeed, Oliver Mowat enjoyed inviting comparisons between Ontario's public welfare system and that of any other city, state or country.³⁷

Despite Mowat's pride and Langmuir's confidence, the Reformatory was soon beset with difficulties. Three major problems--the character of the inmates, the inadequacies of separate confinement facilities, and the tendency for magistrates to impose short sentences--became apparent immediately. O'Reilly's maternalistic efforts alone could not fulfill the goals Langmuir boldly set out. The Reformatory did operate efficiently and without scandals but floundered in terms of its loftier purpose of reforming women.

The first prisoner walked through the stone archway and into the reception hall on 28 August 1880. She and the twenty-nine women who followed her that year had been transferred from Common Jails around the Province. Most came from the Toronto and Hamilton Jails where they had been incarcerated for petty offences, such as drunkenness or disorderliness. In summarizing the characteristics of the first group of inmates, Langmuir stated they were habitual offenders, very few of whom had led respectable lives as wives and mothers; rather, their experiences had been of "continued debauchery". It would take some time to reform them. According to Langmuir, anyone "having the most

superficial knowledge of the phase of human nature exemplified in this class of women" would understand that short sentences were "utterly futile". Unless Judges gave out longer sentences, he concluded, one could never hope to draw these women from their "criminal courses".³⁸ From the first months of its operation, then, the difficulties posed by unsuitable prisoners serving too short sentences disheartened officials at Mercer.

Their misgivings lay largely in the process whereby Magistrates sentenced and selected certain of the province's female offenders and sent them to Mercer. Following a pattern established for the Central Prison, Magistrates could sentence offenders directly to the Reformatory or indirectly after a period of confinement in a common jail. If their behaviour at Mercer suggested they were impervious to reforming efforts, inmates could be returned to the common jail to serve the unexpired portion of their sentences.³⁹ In fact, this threat was carried out under only the most extreme circumstances; the Superintendent was obliged to admit and keep any woman, no matter how difficult.⁴⁰ It seemed, moreover, that sentencing authorities selected prospective inmates for the Reformatory indiscriminately, desirous only of relieving overcrowded conditions in local jails. Without the co-operation of the Courts in the severity of sentences and the selection of "proper" inmates, Mercer was hampered from the beginning.

During the 1880s, these problems and others connected with the treatment of lawbreakers in the Province's lock-ups

and prisons began to arouse public concern. The decade was a turbulent one when social critics began seriously to investigate the sources of crime and unrest. A purportedly comprehensive social welfare system did not seem to have solved the crime problem; moreover, Langmuir's retirement in 1882 removed his firm "leadership from the office of the inspector of prisons, asylums and public charities and ... encouraged leadership to emerge from other quarters."⁴¹ Prison reform groups, such as the Prisoners' Aid Society, became more vocal in this era, attracting the attention of the Provincial government. So great indeed was the clamour, that legislators established a Royal Commission in 1890 to investigate Ontario's prisons and reformatories and appointed Langmuir to head it. As the man largely responsible for establishing the ambitious prison system, he seemed the most appropriate person to determine why it had faltered. Among the institutions being investigated was the Mercer Reformatory.

According to Annual Reports, the Reformatory had operated quietly for ten years without the kinds of public scandals and enquiries that had plagued the Central Prison and the Reformatory for Boys.⁴² Both the prison Inspector and the Mercer Superintendent indicated that most inmates submitted to the Reformatory discipline though some had to experience the dungeon before they chose to obey. The inmates worked hard earning the Province thousands of dollars each year by their laundering, sewing, and knitting duties. They worked on contracts from the outside, including the laundry order for the

C.P.R. Superintendent O'Reilly and Prison Inspector Christie both proclaimed that domestic labour and religious instruction were the keys to reformation. Only those "too weak or depraved" would likely fall back into lives of vice after their release, according to Christie.⁴³ All external indications suggested then that the Mercer Reformatory met the standards of an efficient, well-managed prison.

The Royal Commissioners, however, took a closer look. They interviewed the senior staff at Mercer and extracted from O'Reilly and her aides the revelation that few of Langmuir's aims had been carried out. The staff admitted that Mercer had failed in its mission to reclaim Ontario's criminal and fallen women, though individual staff members disagreed on their assessment of that failure. Superintendent O'Reilly believed that the Reformatory's greatest weaknesses were structural. The compact, congregate design Langmuir had introduced proved too inflexible to isolate different types of offenders. It was difficult, O'Reilly claimed, to keep certain groups of inmates away from others when they had to work, take meals and exercise together. Complete isolation was impossible without constructing separate kitchens and workrooms for each corridor, something unfeasible in terms of money and management. Unruly and "lewd" women sometimes mixed with prisoners who had not yet "fallen" because the refractory corridors could hold only twenty-four inmates. Since the laundry was the most lucrative sector of the prison, most able-bodied women had to work there commun-

ally. Unless the congregate building were replaced by a system of "cottages",⁴⁴ O'Reilly could not see how one could prevent "contamination" of the less hardened criminals. When asked whether she had reclaimed any of her charges she replied, "there are very many who do well for a few months after their release . But afterward, a good few of them fall away."⁴⁵ To the structural problem, she added that of short sentences to explain her failures; she did not, however, criticize the management of the institution.

Assistant Superintendent Lucy Coad and Bursar Robert Laird suggested that structural limitations were only part of the problem. They both believed the Reformatory could be more effectively managed with clear lines of authority and firm rules. Lucy Coad's evidence was particularly damning. She and O'Reilly shared the Reformatory's top administrative position on a weekly basis, though the Superintendent remained the nominal head. Since O'Reilly preferred to govern the inmates with her "own law", Coad found it difficult to maintain order during her weeks as Chief Matron: neither she nor the inmates knew the standards of conduct. When Commissioners asked her if there were any problems in exacting obedience from prisoners she answered,

Oh, yes. The way the institution is now they have too much liberty, I think, and that makes it very hard to keep them in order...In some cases they are very wild when they come in, they dance all around and do all sorts of things. 46

Commissioner Charles Drury was astounded that something as simple as a body of rules had not yet been established, even

after Lucy Coad had complained to the Inspector. Visitors to the Massachusetts Reformatory, a prison with written rules, claimed that the standard of discipline there far exceeded that at Mercer. Drury summarized the issue of authority in a question addressed to Coad:

So then we have a public institution erected and maintained for reformatory purposes, and it is not doing any good at all; but you find another institution on the same line, that is carrying on the work elsewhere that ours ought to do here. You see wherein the weakness of our institution lies, but you are not allowed to do anything to improve it? 47

Coad assented.

Robert Laird, Mercer's Bursar, was also convinced the Reformatory was a failure. He agreed with Coad that discipline was too lax, but added that "the staff ha[d] not been appointed with respect to fitness for the positions they occupy."⁴⁸ Laird believed the ineffective management was compounded not only by inmates' short sentences, but also by the types of women Mercer received:

There are few magistrates who seem to appreciate the fact that the institution is a reformatory. I think if they were informed as to what the nature of the place is, many would have a better notion of people they ought to send there. 49

In case there remained any doubt that Mercer had failed as a reformatory, Lucy Coad must have made it clear. When asked if the institution had actually reformed female offenders, she replied, "No. It is simply a place of detention."⁵⁰

The Commissioners' recommendations pinpointed three objectives: inmate classification, diversified labour, and

inducements to reform. Well behaved inmates, the Commission urged, should be separated from incorrigibles but the Report offered no practical suggestions as to how this might be achieved within a congregate prison. Since prison labour was a lucrative business for the Province, the Commissioners proposed enlarging the activities from the major one of laundry work. If Mercer inmates made and repaired the under-clothing and bed-clothes required in various public institutions they might save the Province money and off-set the cost of their incarceration. Such additional work would better enable the women to "support themselves by honest labour when restored to liberty".⁵¹ As for inmate reformation, Commissioners turned to that constant source of inspiration, the Massachusetts Reformatory. There, the best-behaved inmates were rewarded with the fanciest uniforms and delicate china. Commissioners admired the structural scheme of privileges and punishments, especially the provision allowing prisoners to accumulate "marks for feminine deportment and obedience" toward a rebate of their sentences.⁵² The Commissioners assumed Mercer could fulfill the goals it was intended to achieve if these suggestions were implemented. They offered the staff no solution, however, to the continuing problems of hardened inmates selected by uninformed Magistrates.

After the initial enthusiasm generated by the Royal Commission, interest in the aims of reform once again waned. None of the recommendations was implemented, except for the expansion of inmates' labour.⁵³ Since the Commissioners could

do nothing to solve the fundamental problems of short sentences, "unsuitable" offenders, structural limitations and inefficient management, their inquiry did little but expose the internal weaknesses and antagonisms at the Reformatory. Mercer was left once again to drift without substantial public or legislative support.

Recommendations of the Commissioners did little to alter O'Reilly's approach to her work. Like any mistress in her household, O'Reilly felt her maternal authority and example of respectability were more effective than any written rules. As she reflected in her Annual Report of 1896, "[w]e have always striven to make this Reformatory a home rather than a prison, where inmates would acquire habits of industry, order, and cleanliness."⁵⁴ Indeed she had striven to make Mercer into a typical rescue home, but one with bars. She cast each inmate's success or failure in moralistic terms: drink and debauchery led to a woman's fall and only purity and temperance could lead her back to true womanhood. O'Reilly interviewed her charges and reported that nearly all admitted that drink was the principal cause of their continuance in a degraded and indolent life."⁵⁵ Strict adherence to Christian virtue, she determined, was the key to improvement: "[w]e realize more and more that religion alone will produce a true reformation of character..."⁵⁶ She observed that many did well under her motherly supervision, but on regaining their liberty were "unable to resist the temptation...ready to meet them on their discharge."⁵⁷

To sustain the lessons in morality and the domestic labour imposed on inmates in the Reformatory, O'Reilly tried to secure domestic situations for all released prisoners; thereby they would live in "respectable" Christian homes rather than "the same environment that caused their downfall." If she failed to reform inmates after all her efforts, she considered it the "result of their voluntary and perverse determination."⁵⁸ For O'Reilly, her work at the Mercer Reformatory was clearly a moral battle where she held the banner of purity, temperance and domesticity for her charges to follow.

O'Reilly was a typical female reformer of the late nineteenth century. Her preoccupation with morality was similar to that of temperance societies and social reform groups of all varieties. Like her unpaid counterparts attempting to improve society beyond the Reformatory walls, she adapted the talents and qualities ascribed to all mothers for social goals. O'Reilly was also characteristic of a new variety of female reformer emerging in the late nineteenth century -- the female prison superintendent. As one of this pioneering generation, she was expected to combine "the sympathy and domesticity of feminine reform with traditional penal concerns: discipline, control, and efficient management."⁵⁹ But no matter how strongly these women tried to create homes within Reformatories, the institutions they managed remained essentially prisons, places of hard labour and privation.

O'Reilly retired in 1901 bringing the first era of Mercer's history to a close. In a period when the notion of

separate spheres for men and women found credence, Canada's first separate women's prison had been built. Established on little more than faith in women's talent for maternalistic reform, the Reformatory faltered soon after its founding. Governmental and social support was directed primarily toward finding revenue producing employment for the prisoners, no matter how menial. Inside the Reformatory, the staff complained about unreformable inmates, inadequate classification facilities, and the futility of short sentences. The turn of the century, however, brought the dawning of a new era in penology, and the appointment of a new Superintendent; Mercer was to have a second chance.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. For a discussion of the reaction against urban disorder in mid and late-nineteenth century Ontario, see Susan Houston, "The Impetus to Reform: Urban Crime, Poverty, and Ignorance in Ontario, 1850-1875," Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1974. For two interesting studies of American cities, see Eric Monkkonen, The Dangerous Class: Crime and Poverty in Columbus, Ohio, 1860-1885, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973, and John C. Schneider, Detroit and the Problem of Order, 1830-1880: A Geography of Crime, Riot and Policing, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.
2. Quoted in Katz et al., The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 201.
3. "Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities," of 1878 published in Ontario Sessional Papers, 1879, p. 5. (hereafter cited as A.R.I. in O.S.P.).
4. See Constance Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," Unpublished paper, October, 1982, pp. 93 to 107 for a description of women in the Toronto Gaol.
5. For a discussion of the many problems, including sexual assaults and staff-arranged prostitution schemes, in mixed prisons, see Freedman, Their Sisters..., chapter one.
6. A.R.I. of 1878 in O.S.P. 1879, p. 105. Langmuir was too prudish to suggest that sexual molestation occurred in these prisons but there is no reason to doubt that young women, incarcerated with frequently drunken and often violent men, would have been subject to assaults.
7. A.R.I. of 1873 in O.S.P. 1874, p. 3.
8. Ibid., p. 2.
9. Ibid.
10. Freedman, "Their Sisters' Keeper: The Origins of Female Corrections in America," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976, pp. 55-58.

11. Richard Splane, Social Welfare in Ontario, 1791 to 1893: A Study of Public Welfare Administration, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963. Splane notes that "Langmuir's capacity for strong administrative leadership may ... be identified as the key to the vigorous pace of social welfare development in the early post-Confederation era." p. 50.
12. A.R.I. of 1878 in O.S.P. 1879, p. 5.
13. A.R.I. of 1873 in O.S.P. 1874, p. 2.
14. Public expenditures were kept to a minimum in all areas except social welfare. Splane attributes this anomaly to Langmuir's "skilful advocacy of vigorous advance" in such concerns as "prisons, asylums, and charitable institutions." Splane, p. 50.
15. A.R.I. of 1873 in O.S.P. 1874, p. 2.
16. The Dominion assumption of Canada West's debt and the federal per capita grant helped put Ontario on stable fiscal ground. The sale of Crown Lands helped increase Provincial revenues. Additionally, municipalities were willing in the 1870s to pay for local services. Splane, pp. 9-10.
17. See G.P. de T. Glazebrook, The Story of Toronto, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971, p. 149 for further details of Mercer's life. A former housemaid who had apparently had a son by Mercer attempted unsuccessfully to acquire her former employer's estate.
18. Many sociologists contend that a society's attitudes toward crime and punishment are reflected in the changing design of penal institutions. Michael Ignatieff argues this as well in his study of prisons in the early industrial era. Bentham's Panopticon, an imposing "total institution" was "the most haunting symbol of the disciplinary enthusiasms of the age...", A Just Measure, p. 109.
19. A.R.I. of 1878 in O.S.P. 1879, p. 108. See Freedman, "Their Sisters' Keepers: The Origins of Female Corrections in America," p. 152 for an architectural plan of the first story.
20. A.R.I. of 1878 in O.S.P. 1879, p. 108.
21. Ibid., p. 110.

22. Allegations of cruelty and punishment provoked a Provincial enquiry in 1885. The Central Prison always had the reputation of being one of the harshest prisons within the penal system. See Ontario Commission of Enquiry, Central Prison Investigation Report, 1885, Toronto: Ontario Government, 1885.
23. See exterior shots of Mercer, pictures one and two, Appendix A, p.i. For a shot of a cell corridor, see Picture 3, Appendix A, p.ii.
24. Langmuir's recommendations concerning the architecture of the building appear in his Report of 1879, pp. 109-110.
25. A.R.I. of 1879 in O.S.P. 1880, p. 190.
26. A.R.I. of 1878 in O.S.P. 1879, p. 108. For a detailed study of one woman's account of her reform work in homes, see Kate Waller Barrett, Some Practical Suggestions on the Conduct of a Rescue Home, New York: Arno Press, (1903), 1974. Morality and Christian teaching were the primary concerns of most rescue homes.
27. Quoted in Splane, p. 58. This was the only institution of its type then supported by Provincial grants under the Charity Aid Act. There were a number of private institutions, supported by religious charities, that catered to the same clientele. See Splane, pp. 58-64 for an explanation of Provincial funding and regulations for charitable institutions in the 1870s and '80s.
28. A.R.I. of 1879 in O.S.P. 1880, p. 190.
29. For a sketch of charitable organizations and activities of Canadian women in the late nineteenth century, see National Council of Women of Canada, Women of Canada, Their Life and Work, n.p.: National Council of Women. (1900), 1975, Chapter X, "Church Work," and Chapter XI, "Charities and Reform," pp. 272-382.
30. Freedman, Their Sisters..., p. 95.
31. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," Signs, 1 (Spring 1975), p. 15.
32. A.R.I. of 1879 in O.S.P. 1880, p. 189.

33. It was never made clear how or why Mrs. O'Reilly was appointed. Since the superintendency was not open to public competition, she undoubtedly had informal ties to influential people in the prisons and charities' circle.
34. A.R.I. of 1880 in O.S.P. 1881, p. 174.
35. Ontario, "An Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," Statutes, C. 38, 42 Victoria, 1879, s. 20. The list of Reformatory employees included a school mistress, a male engineer, three individual instructors, five guards, one cook, baker and maid, one night watch and a messenger boy. All of the female staff, except the maid, cook and baker, resided on the premises. A.R.I. of 1879 in O.S.P. 1880, p. 192.
36. A.R.I. of 1880 in O.S.P. 1881, p. 15. By this point, Langmuir had established himself as an international authority on matters of social welfare although he had never received anything but on-the-job training as an administrator. In the United States, formal training had begun to develop at some institutions, the University of Chicago in particular.
37. Splane, p. 13.
38. A.R.I. of 1880 in O.S.P. 1881, pp. 174-175.
39. Ontario, "An Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," Statutes, C. 38, 42 Victoria, 1879, s. 12 and 13. An amendment to the Act in 1887 allowed Police Magistrates to send female offenders to the Mercer Reformatory as well. See "An Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," Revised Statutes, C. 239, 50 Victoria, 1887, s. 13.
40. Ontario, "An Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," Statutes, C. 38, 42 Victoria, 1879, 90-915. Section 17 declared that the Superintendent had to detain prisoners until their terms expired or until they were "otherwise discharged in due course of law."
41. Splane, p. 54.
42. See, for example, Langmuir's Report of 1874 for his condemnation of the Boy's Reformatory. By the time he retired, he felt as if he had measurably improved conditions at this institution. O.S.P. 1875, pp. 59-60.

43. A.R.I. of 1888 in O.S.P. 1889, p. 107.
44. The first women's institution built according to the cottage plan was the Hudson House of Refuge (New York) in 1887. Fifteen years later, the Bedford Hills Reformatory for Women, also in New York, operated on the cottage plan of confinement. Freedman, Their Sisters...., p. 57.
45. Testimony of Mrs. M.J. O'Reilly quoted in Ontario, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Prison and Reformatory System of Ontario, 1890, Toronto: Warwick and Sons, 1891, pp. 730-733.
46. Testimony of Lucy Coad, quoted in ibid., p. 745.
47. Drury in ibid., p. 747.
48. Testimony of Robert Laird in ibid., p. 751.
49. Ibid.
50. Testimony of Lucy Coad, in ibid., p. 745.
51. Ibid., p. 218.
52. Ibid., Appendix A, p. 240-241. Commissioners noted that inmates were distinguished as well by differences in the way they held their hands when walking. Additionally, "[t]he third grade have [sic] no table cloths at meals and use the chipped and broken ware removed from the table of others [sic] grades. Their food is coarser and they are refused many indulgences and privileges accorded the others. The tables of the second class are better furnished. Nothing defective or showing signs of wear is placed on the table of the first class, and the members of this class enjoy much more freedom and greater privileges. The badges when worn, confer special advantages." Ibid., p. 241.
53. By 1891, Mercer inmates did most of the sewing and laundering work for all the prisons and jails in Ontario. In 1890, the laundry alone made a net profit of \$2,868.23. A.R.I. of 1890 in O.S.P. 1891, pp. 97 and 101.
54. "Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," of 1896 published in Ontario Sessional Papers, 1897, p. 76 (hereafter cited as A.R.S. in O.S.P.)

- 55. A.R.S. of 1891 in O.S.P. 1892, p. 108.
- 56. A.R.S. of 1888 in O.S.P. 1889, p. 112.
- 57. A.R.S. of 1890 in O.S.P. 1891, p. 101.
- 58. A.R.I. of 1888 in O.S.P. 1889, p. 107.
- 59. Freedman, "Their Sisters'," p. 76.

CHAPTER 2

The Frustrations of a Maternalist: Emma O'Sullivan's Superintendency, 1901-1913.

Emma O'Sullivan began her twenty-six year tenure as Superintendent of the Mercer Reformatory determined to fulfill the goals of character reformation set out by Langmuir twenty years previously. Although more innovative techniques of prison administration were being attempted elsewhere in North America, O'Sullivan chose to run the Reformatory as a maternalist, stressing, like O'Reilly, the importance of domesticity and deference in inmates' conduct. Her approach to reformation, however, was as successful as her predecessor's. O'Sullivan complained about the magistrates who sent her inmates "unsuitable" for reform with sentences of insufficient length for any reformation. She found that she had to exert more energy in punishing than reforming the unfortunates sent to the prison for the inmates, though not serious criminals, resisted her motherly approach to reform. In the first half of her tenure, O'Sullivan experienced few of the successes but most of the frustrations of a maternalist.

Emma O'Sullivan possessed all the qualities valued in female reformers of the late-nineteenth century. Born in 1861, she was the first child of Henry and Emma Higgins, a prominent Catholic couple in Whitby, Ontario. Her father was the editor of the Whitby Chronicle and he ensured that his daughter received a fitting education for a refined young lady. Emma therefore attended Loretto Academy in Toronto,

graduating at seventeen with the gold medal in language and mathematics. She continued her studies at Whitby Ladies' College where she excelled this time in instrumental music. In 1880, she married Dennis A. O'Sullivan, a promising Irish Catholic barrister and writer. They had four children and spent their leisure time engaging in philanthropic ventures. As one of the Commissioners appointed to the Provincial prison enquiry of 1890, Dennis O'Sullivan worked with the most prominent public and private individuals in the Ontario criminal justice system. His influence extended as well to the Toronto Industrial Refuge, where he was one of the gentlemen who managed this correctional home for penitent prostitutes. In 1892, however, he met an unexpected death and left Emma O'Sullivan a thirty-year-old widow with four children to support. She decided, either through economic necessity or personal ambition, to provide for her family with her own earnings. She put her musical talents to use by working as a church organist and music teacher and supplemented her earnings by founding and editing the Catholic Almanac of Ontario in 1893. Through this journal, she was able to express her strong sense of social responsibility as well as her deep religious conviction. The Almanac allowed her to pursue a public role that was an extension of her private, familial one of moral guardian. Thus, she joined a growing number of "new women" -- middle-class, educated, earning their own income -- who were beginning to gain public recognition for their work.¹

Like many middle-class women of the nineteenth century, Emma O'Sullivan moved into charity and reform work under her husband's shadow.² But also, like a growing number of female teachers, nurses and doctors in the early twentieth century, she became a social welfare professional connected with organizations of trained experts. In many ways, O'Sullivan bridged the two worlds of women in turn-of-the-century North America. On the one hand, she was appointed to head Mercer not because of her training but because of her character and connections; on the other hand, she was a paid employee of the state, charged with administering a major public institution. She brought with her all the notions of evangelical charity -- uplifting unfortunates by saving their souls -- as well as those of maternalistic reform; her job, however, required that she become acquainted with the new currents of scientific penology and the latest theories emerging in the "helping professions." Of these two approaches to reform, O'Sullivan felt more comfortable with the first. She never divorced herself from the familiar world of maternalistic reform, even when frustrated or considered outdated by her less conventional contemporaries. She intended to reclaim Mercer's inmates through maternal uplift: if the institution was to be run as an "ordinary, well conducted household," she would rule it as mother.

Emma O'Sullivan began her superintendency of Mercer on 13 September 1901. Her salary of \$1,000³ included room and board for herself and her children. Since she was to live

on the premises, she moved into a new home as well as a new job. Like any mistress presiding over a new household, she investigated her new domain closely. Once through the formal entrance, one walked into the reception room where inmates like Margaret W.,⁴ a woman about to serve a six-month sentence for drunkenness, received their uniforms and instructions from an attendant. The scent of fresh bread drifted from the rear of the building where inmates placed loaves into large ovens under the supervision of the prison baker. In the main work rooms was the laundry, a large open area filled with huge wooden tubs and rows of drying racks. This was the busiest section of the Reformatory where almost all of the inmates scrubbed, dried and ironed garments from penal and custodial institutions across the Province. In another workroom were smaller groups of women, lacking the physical capacity for laundry work, labouring as diligently as the others on sewing and knitting tasks. Throughout the corridors women performed domestic tasks such as scrubbing floors or white-washing hallways. All of these activities were carefully monitored with bells clanging the precise duration of work, recreation and meal periods; neither idleness nor tardiness was tolerated in this household. In the evenings most prisoners were allowed to read the Bible or another suitable book by the dim gas lights in the hallways. Those who had misbehaved were locked in "A" Corridor, a set of particularly austere cells. To reach these women, one had to walk down to the basement of the East Wing. Women like Mary J., a "naughty girl" placed on bread and water

for "fighting and creating a disturbance",⁵ were locked in these cells. One floor up was the syphilitic ward where four women were under the care of prison physician Dr. King. The Reformatory tour ended in the dungeon, the punishment rooms where the most unruly women were kept. None of these features disturbed O'Sullivan. Indeed, she began her job with energy and optimism, visible in her first Annual Report written one month after her takeover: "[i]t is a matter for congratulation that the environment here is so favourable for the acquirement of habits of order, cleanliness and industry."⁶ O'Sullivan was clearly O'Reilly's successor and Mercer's second mother.

Mercer's "mother" nonetheless required some guidance herself. At the urging of Prison Inspector Nōxon, O'Sullivan visited other prisons for women to observe prison maintenance, discipline and reformation in action. At these institutions, most notably the Massachusetts Reformatory Prison, she witnessed criminal justice systems different from Ontario's. She was struck by the standard of discipline maintained at the Massachusetts Prison where many of the inmates were serving indeterminate sentences, terms which had a fixed minimum and maximum period of incarceration. The length of sentences could vary in between depending on behaviour and attitudes. Prisoners could thereby earn an early discharge if they met their keepers' standards of conduct. Where they fell below those standards, they were required to remain until the expiration of their sentences. O'Sullivan surmised, and most of her contemporaries agreed, that the indeterminate sentence, not yet introduced in

Ontario, might "simplify greatly the government of the institution."⁷ She intended to apply the "object lessons" she learned in American prisons to her work at Mercer.⁸

O'Sullivan's attendance at charity and prison conventions immersed her even more into professional reform circles. In Detroit in 1901, she participated in the National Convention of Charities and Correction, where some of the most prestigious figures in North American reform work assembled. The following year, at the Canadian convention, she took part in a discussion on reformatories. At the National Prison Congress (later the American Prison Association) held in Philadelphia in 1902, she encountered the most prominent and outspoken proponents of the new penology.⁹ At these annual meetings, wardens, superintendents, lawyers, professors, social workers and an array of professionals concerned with prison reform met to discuss such topics as prison labour, outdoor recreation for convicts, parole, probation, indeterminate sentencing, the role of religion in reform and prisoner health. They believed firmly in the possibility of reform and its value for both the criminal and society. Their premise was that wrongdoers had been improperly socialized; their conclusion was to rehabilitate law-breakers through education, training and rewards for socially acceptable behaviour. In these discussions O'Sullivan pondered new conceptions of criminality, ideas tracing the roots of crime to the environment rather than to morality. Thus she received extensive exposure to the latest currents in penology though she had no formal training for her job.

In her visits to American prisons, O'Sullivan was most impressed by one particular keeper. Frances Morton, Superintendent of the Massachusetts Reformatory Prison for Women, was a stern, matronly woman noted for her strictness and preoccupation with order. Although many penologists had begun to agree on the benefits of outdoor recreation as an aid to reformation, Morton abolished the established recreation periods at her prison. For her, the inculcation of womanly virtues and domestic values was crucial to the reclamation of female offenders. She decided, therefore, to substitute "something improving", like "sewing or similar activities" in place of recreation.¹⁰ Idle strolling on prison grounds, she argued, was difficult to supervise and liable to encourage associations between prisoners that would undo her reformatory efforts.¹¹ O'Sullivan agreed and planned to follow her example by doing away with the last daily recreation period at Mercer. "I am postponing the date," she stated in her Annual Report of 1903, "only until I can replace it with some system of relaxation for the women which may be improving."¹² O'Sullivan's choice of example is significant, for Morton did not follow the latest ideas of the new professionals, but remained firmly rooted in the nineteenth-century style of evangelical reform that stressed moral weakness as the cause of crime and salvation as its cure. She believed that anything as frivolous as recreation had no place in a women's prison: what wayward women needed was orderliness and morality, not fun and games.

She summarized her approach in a phrase: "obedience is the first lesson taught each woman."¹³

Morton's strict, moralistic style was not the only approach to reform O'Sullivan encountered. Elsewhere, in recently completed reformatories for women, young professionals were beginning to experiment with new programs in prison management. At the Bedford Hills Reformatory in New York, completed the year O'Sullivan joined the Mercer staff, Katherine Bement Davis was the superintendent. Although O'Sullivan did not visit this institution, she must have known of the publicity it received in criminal justice circles. Davis headed the first major prison in North America to be built according to the cottage plan. This innovative style of incarceration was designed to foster a more home-like atmosphere for the women and facilitate keepers' attempts to classify different types of inmates. Bedford Hills was very much an experiment in prison reform and Davis wanted her prison to be a model of progressive penology.

She was one of the new style of female prison professionals emerging in the United States at the turn of the century.¹⁴ Her training placed her among those penologists who went beyond the traditional methods of charity and correctional practice. Davis had graduated from Vassar College, worked in a Philadelphia settlement house, and earned her doctorate from the University of Chicago where she studied sociology and economics under Thorstein Veblen. In her first years at Bedford Hills, she hired other female graduates from Chicago, primarily social

workers, to help model her reformatory on the theories of scientific penology. She promoted vocational training for women prisoners, arguing that diverse skills would improve their chances for employment and success once out of prison.¹⁵ She criticized the rigid, moralistic style of prison management practised by Morton and advocated instead varied training in both indoor and outdoor work. Too often, she declared, notions of domesticity impeded truly reformatory training. She preferred to put inmates to work clearing land than have them sit inside sewing or performing domestic chores.¹⁶ Inmates at Bedford Hills continued to learn cooking, laundering, and sewing but Davis tried to supplement their traditional training with less conventional tasks:

Classes in hat making and machine knitting began in 1903. In 1904 several inmates took stenography and typing classes, and a few became aids in the institution's hospital and supply room. Over the next years, chair caning, cobbling, bookbinding, painting, and some carpentry filled out the industrial course offered by the reformatory.¹⁷

Davis tried to treat inmates with scientific reform programmes rather than lead her charges to redemption through motherly example. She encouraged inmates to develop a sense of independence and self-direction, psychological survival tools for their lives on the outside.

Davis's and Morton's divergent styles marked the range of approaches to reform work in women's prisons; Emma O'Sullivan clearly felt more comfortable with the latter. Her charges would receive moral and domestic training. Indeed,

the Mercer Reformatory was hardly equipped to provide the facilities for anything but work and detention. Moreover, the Ontario government was not yet ready to experiment with any of the radical schemes practised at Bedford Hills. That hesitancy, coupled with O'Sullivan's own background meant that she would opt for maternalistic reform.

At Mercer, O'Sullivan acted as the mother she felt most inmates should have had. Indeed, since she lived at the Reformatory, she was in her own home and administered it accordingly. She stated just what she expected her home to provide:

The household that is properly regulated must have its discipline. We unconsciously acquire a certain amount of discipline in our own home if it is a good one ... You absorb a certain amount of order and system but the unfortunate woman who comes into the prison usually comes from an unordered home or a broken home or a disorderly home. 18

Given the proper domestic environment, O'Sullivan believed she could reform inmates' characters. She taught her prisoners first to obey, then "not to deceive". The next thing [was] to do away with a bad habit, whatever it might be."¹⁹ She thus tackled the shiftlessness, disorder and idleness that her inmates had learned on the streets; at Mercer they would learn the value of obedience, truthfulness, and conformity. She believed that good girls, raised by virtuous mothers, learned good habits naturally, but that her girls -- the Mercer inmates -- required remedial training in both domestic skills and womanly virtues. She would therefore raise their "senti-

ents of self respect", something clearly linked to their femininity, and they would thereby wish to reform themselves. As she informed incoming inmates,

You are a woman and your own self-respect should teach you to go about in a dignified way from one duty to another. Even though a prisoner you are a woman; do the thing decorously and proper [sic]. 20

To O'Sullivan, her charges were fragile vessels, shattered by the harsh experiences and evildoers of the streets; her maternal concern would restore their "protecting mantle [s] of chastity which should protect women when entering the world."²¹

The rigorous routine of daily life at Mercer matched these middle-class, feminine values which O'Sullivan wished to instill. Inmates woke at 6:30 to the sound of a bell. Their first obligation was morning prayer in their respective chapels, Catholic and Protestant. After a silent half hour over breakfast another bell summoned them to work at 8:00. During the day they were expected to perform their tasks of washing, sewing, ironing, knitting, baking, or cleaning diligently and silently; indolence and idle gossip were unbecoming traits for young ladies. So too were any complaints or lack of politeness at meal times. By 6:30 each evening inmates were locked in their cells for the night but were allowed to read books of suitable character, particularly the Bible. At 8:00, the lights were turned off for the night.²² The Reformatory routine demanded industriousness, orderliness, punctuality, domesticity, and decorum, all virtues valued in the middle class.

O'Sullivan offered her inmates certain limited inducements to encourage decorous behaviour. After one month's incarceration, they could receive visits from relatives once a week for two hours.²³ Once a month they were allowed to write to close relatives but their letters were scrutinized by the staff.²⁴ Every prisoner, except those behaving irreverently was allowed to attend the numerous religious meetings and classes which sometimes included hymn singing.²⁵ Informal organizations such as the "Clean Speech Society", a kind of swearers' anonymous for women with foul mouths, were also designed to encourage women to reform. By treating the simplest amenities and breaks in routine as privileges, O'Sullivan tried to persuade her subjects to comply.

Beyond these structural inducements, O'Sullivan offered her charges motherly guidance and affection. Since there were rarely more than eighty inmates in the Reformatory at any time, she had the opportunity to become acquainted with most of the women. She oversaw their progress, praised them when they did well and scolded them when they slipped. For some of the women, particularly the youngest and least experienced, O'Sullivan's motherly interest was sufficient to lead them to reform. Louisa K., a sixteen-year-old convicted of incorrigibility, wrote O'Sullivan after her release to say she had continued to wear her "Clean Speech" badge to remind herself of the lessons she had learned under O'Sullivan's care.²⁶ Another woman, Mary P., was so improved by her stay in the Reformatory that her mother wrote O'Sullivan, complimenting her on her efforts:

i hope and truss in god that she has lurnt her lesson well i know she has lurned a lot of useful thing and I thank you kindly for your kindness to her as I know she speaks kindly of you and say what a good mother you are to her... [sic]. 27

Among those inmates receptive to her mothering, O'Sullivan succeeded in moulding pious, deferential women out of petty criminals.

However, most of the women at Mercer in O'Sullivan's earlier years were unwilling to be mothered. She had barely begun her work before she confronted openly hostile inmates, impervious to her tactics of control and reformation. Tillie R. was one of these women. She had been in and out of jails for years, behaving always as an "incorrigible, dangerous, and treacherous woman."²⁸ She was one of the many ill-bred, unrefined characters who appeared before the venerable George Denison, Magistrate of the Toronto Police Court.²⁹ In 1902, Denison decided to send Tillie to the Mercer Reformatory rather than the Toronto Jail, her usual place of punishment. He sentenced her to six months at hard labour for disorderliness, hoping, no doubt, that she might finally learn her lesson. But Tillie was the sort of prisoner the Mercer staff had complained about for years, a woman with no patience for reformers. Her term at Mercer was trying for everyone. O'Sullivan wrote Inspector Noxon, to describe Tillie's stay, imploring him never to allow her to return:

[Tillie] was discharged from the institution May 6 1902 being at that time and for many weeks before confined in a corridor apart from the other women. It is impossible to preserve

discipline wherever this woman is. I have no place where I can put her in solitary confinement and there are so many inmates in the house at this writing that it would be impossible to give up a whole corridor to this woman. She is idle and has been marked in our books as incapable and not responsible. 30

Her pleas went unheeded, for three years later Tillie once again appeared at Mercer charged this time with drunkenness. She was thirty-three by this point, but age had not mellowed her; in fact, this was the year she stunned the Reformatory staff by attacking one of the attendants, Mrs. Mick. When Mick appeared in Tillie's cell to wake her one morning, Tillie jumped on her with a pair of scissors in an attempt to "lay her out". John Clark, the Night Watch and one of the few males in the Reformatory, thrust Tillie back into her cell where she screamed her rage at not having killed Mick. The scissors, a piece of looking glass, a table knife and a steel crochet were discovered in Tillie's cell. After the incident, Tillie stubbornly refused to repent and was sent back to the Toronto Jail on an assault charge.³¹

Other inmates, less violent but equally obstreperous, provoked disturbances and minor scuffles. Rosie P., a twenty-nine year old serving a six-month sentence for vagrancy and prostitution was one of the unruly women who frustrated O'Sullivan's early efforts at maternal reform. Rosie alarmed the staff when "in her frenzy" she smashed a heavy chair in a hall. This show of strength and defiance worried O'Sullivan sufficiently to request that able-bodied males be about in

case of emergencies the female staff could not handle.³² Effie L., another trouble-maker O'Sullivan could not reach, also disrupted discipline. The prison physician, Dr. King, reported the extent of this inmate's belligerence:

She refuses to work, refuses to sit at the table and eat with the other inmates, makes herself wilfully troublesome, has the girls in fear, tells lies, is noisy nearly the whole time ... she refuses to be amenable to discipline, curses the officials including the Surgeon, when not present the latter she designates a "son of a bitch" though not to himself [sic].³³

Effie was a thirty-five year-old woman serving a six-month sentence for two counts of theft. Since she had been diagnosed as suffering from venereal disease, she spent part of her sentence in the syphilitic ward. She despised her surroundings where she was isolated from most of her fellow prisoners, and reacted on one occasion by attempting to poison inmates and attendants with "fluid or solid excreted or discharged" from her infected body.³⁴ Clearly, Effie, Rosie, and Tillie were unwilling subjects for maternalistic reform.

The recalcitrance of certain inmates caused O'Sullivan to consider more overt forms of coercion. In 1903, she and Dr. King expressed their regret that there were no longer facilities at the Reformatory to subdue "vicious women". In the earlier days the staff could use certain tactics to force inmates physically into submission. One of these methods consisted of plunging a refractory inmate into a cold bath then briefly strangling her under water until she submitted.³⁵

The "cold water treatment" was another type of punishment and O'Sullivan described it while requesting permission from Inspector Noxon to use it on Tillie:

[the] inmate was placed in the punishment room ... where a cement floor sloping towards the centre with provision for carrying off water lent itself to the application of a cold water treatment. This consisted of playing a medium size hose upon the walls, floor or ceiling of the cell so that the spray struck the woman without injuring her...Dr. King states that this invariably cured vicious women ... It was only used in extreme cases such as [Tillie's]. 36

Noxon refused her requests for both tortures, recommending instead that she rely upon solitary confinement since it was less likely to "excite strong public prejudice".³⁷ In 1908, after Noxon retired and Edwin Rogers became Inspector, O'Sullivan reiterated her request. She believed the "water treatment" could cure Agnes S., a "noisy and rebellious" woman whose "threatening, defiant manner [was] a bad example to the other women and subversive of all discipline".³⁸ Earlier that year, two other recalcitrant women, Violet B. and Edith R., proved equally difficult to control. In all three cases, however, Rogers refused to permit anything more than "a good spanking" as physical punishment.³⁹ O'Sullivan tried to maintain order by relying on solitary confinement as the standard response to recalcitrant behaviour. The "Inmates' Offence Book" indicates that eighty percent of those punished between 1901 and 1913 spent at least one day in solitary confinement; over one fifth of these women endured their isolation in the dungeon.⁴⁰ O'Sullivan complained frequently that the

isolation facilities at Mercer were inadequate and that noisy, defiant women, wherever they were placed, could disturb the other inmates.⁴¹ The one "strong room" she had persuaded Inspector Noxon to sanction building in 1903 in a remote part of the Reformatory was insufficient for the "persistently refractory, noisy" women she expected to have to handle.⁴² O'Sullivan's difficulties with unruly women suggest that she had to devote more time and energy toward punishing the inmates than reforming them.

The general characteristics of the inmates during O'Sullivan's first years at Mercer suggest why so few of them behaved as dutiful daughters. Like Tillie and Effie, most of them were in their thirties and had seen the inside of a jail more than once. Over sixty percent of women serving time at Mercer between 1901 and 1906 were recidivists. O'Sullivan found prison management especially difficult in these first five years, for the older recidivists tended to encourage the younger, supposedly more innocent women, to misbehave. The Superintendent felt she had to compete with the more hardened criminals to influence the few redeemable women under his supervision. When in 1905 the York County Grand Jury inspected the Reformatory, members recommended that "the authorities in charge look into this matter of prisoner classification with a view to so far as possible preventing the younger inmates associating with the older and more hardened inmates."⁴³ When the Grand Jury Report reached the Mail and Empire on 10 November 1905, O'Sullivan

felt she must defend her prison:

I do not like the public to be left under the impression that we allow the young first offender to mingle indiscriminately with the repeaters ... the first offenders wear a different uniform from the others, so that, though they share in the common work-shops and diningroom, their places are separate and they are closely watched by the Attendant in charge. 44

Despite her public statements about Mercer's integrity as a reformatory, she continued to find that older, more experienced lawbreakers thwarted her reform efforts.

Brothel keepers caused similar problems for O'Sullivan. They comprised a small but significant proportion of inmates.⁴⁵ O'Sullivan claimed, perhaps legitimately, that they and the "procuresses" tried to recruit young inmates for their nefarious purposes upon release.⁴⁶ Needless to say "madams" presented the greatest challenge to motherly control for they were women who had also acted as professional mothers in their own line of work.⁴⁷ Brothelkeepers also represented an aggressive female sexuality alien to O'Sullivan's chaste experience. No matter what crime they had committed, though, the majority of inmates in the first years of O'Sullivan's tenure were both street- and jail-wise. Already experienced in the harshness of prison life and familiar with the style of middle-class reform, they thwarted her attempts at maternal control.

O'Sullivan found it difficult to separate prisoners in the Reformatory, but realized it was impossible to erode the ties already established between inmates before their

incarceration at Mercer. This problem was particularly acute in her earliest years. Since the Reformatory was located in Toronto, Ontario's largest city and the Province's crime capital, most of the women had been sent from York County. Sixty percent of prisoners from 1901 to 1906 had been arrested and sentenced in Toronto where many had had the opportunity to meet or work together on the streets, in red-light districts or in jails.⁴⁸ Once they became acquainted, they tended to band together and snub authorities including O'Sullivan. In some years there was virtually a revolving door between Mercer, Toronto streets and the Toronto Jail. As O'Sullivan complained to York County Crown Attorney,

- "a certain number of vicious women are being regularly sent to Mercer and our staff is not sufficiently large to keep these individuals separated from the other inmates ... my complaint is about six vixens who are sent regularly by the magistrate at Toronto to this institution. 49

O'Sullivan attributed their incorrigibility to the wicked temptations awaiting young girls in the Queen City and feared lest her more innocent charges from the country associate with city women. She conceded the following in her Annual Report of 1903:

[A] constant detriment to the effective good results of confinement in the Reformatory for women is to be found in the unavoidable commingling of the old offenders, sent from the city, and the unfortunates (many perhaps first offenders) committed by county magistrates. The bad characters of the city become hardened and incorrigible and are over and over again committed to gaol and Reformatory for a repetition of the same offence. Their bad influence upon newly-sentenced prisoners is productive of the most sorrowful and blighting results. 50

The city-bred sophistication of Toronto women and their supposed tendency to lure innocents astray compounded O'Sullivan's frustrations with maternal reform.

Despite her worry about bad influences, none of O'Sullivan's charges was in fact a hardened criminal. Even the oldest recidivists with the greatest number of previous offences had never served time for anything more serious than petty theft and disorderliness. There were no murderers, arsonists or political prisoners as there were in American reformatories.⁵¹ In fact, almost half the inmates in O'Sullivan's initial five years had been arrested for drunkenness and disorderliness.⁵² Nonetheless they proved difficult to manage, especially on arrival. Some entered the prison after a riotous binge while others came with all the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. The prison physician often reported that he had sedated a woman with delerium tremens. O'Sullivan considered these women poor subjects for character reformation, and recommended that they be sent to homes for inebriates.⁵³

But who were these women arrested and sent to Mercer in the early-twentieth century, and how did they compare with the over-all population? It is hardly surprising that the inmates were poor, often jobless and barely educated. Almost one quarter reported they had no occupation. Of those who did work, over seventy-nine percent declared they worked as domestics, including servants, charwomen, cooks and housekeepers. They were part of a decreasing number of Canadian working class women who relied on domestic work as

a means of survival. Indeed, most of the women at Mercer were unable to participate in the generalized exodus from domestic service. Since sixty-one percent were unmarried, and many more may have been deserted by their husbands, they were forced to seek the sort of work every working class female was expected to be able to do.⁵⁴ More lucrative employment in factories or shops was impossible for twenty-three percent of the inmates who could neither read nor write. In sum, the prisoners at Mercer were among the most marginal women in Ontario.

In other respects too Mercer inmates came from the fringes of society. Thirty-four percent were Catholics, close to three times as many as in Toronto and almost twice as many as in Ontario.⁵⁵ In Toronto, still a staunch Tory town with strong Orange influence,⁵⁶ only twelve percent of the population in 1911 reported being Catholic. Magistrate Denison and other prominent Torontonians had definite notions about the criminality of Catholics, ideas that placed the city's Roman Catholic population under prejudicial police scrutiny.⁵⁷ In a town and a province dominated by Protestantism, Catholics usually lived in the more undesirable areas and were thus more likely to be arrested and sentenced for offences like public drunkenness or coarse language. Violence was a part of everyday life for many of these women. Since forty percent of women at Mercer were not native-born Canadians, one can suppose that their immigrant status increased their vulnerability to unemployment and to police surveillance. In either case, women from ethnic

minorities were likely to be suspicious and uncooperative with correctional authorities.

To the socially marginal women at Mercer were added the physically and mentally handicapped inmates. These were truly society's outcasts for they had nowhere to go but the streets. Unable to hold jobs and often abandoned by their families, they frequently ended up in jail, charged most often with vagrancy, the offense for which twenty-one percent of the Reformatory was serving time between 1901 and 1913. O'Sullivan resented having to deal with these women she judged "incapable of reformation". Almost every year, her Annual Reports contained complaints about "those directly committed ... who [were] physically too weak for hard labour, and also those mentally deranged."⁵⁸ This lack of discrimination on the part of sentencing Magistrates meant the Reformatory was continually plagued with "those who [were] totally unfitted for laborious work".⁵⁹ The care required by these women took away from the attention necessary to reclaim the others. "A moment's thought," O'Sullivan declared in her Annual Report for 1905, "would suggest how subversive of discipline the admittance of such inmates must be..."⁶⁰ O'Sullivan's most ardent plea was that she be sent only those women capable of hard work and likely to reform. The courts did not respond to her requests and she was forced to continue dealing with women she considered unsuitable for a reformatory.

Even the young, first offenders, women considered most likely to respond to maternal care, were incapable of reform.

O'Sullivan described this group in her report of 1910, calling them "the hopeless misfits and failures of the Children's Aid Societies and Industrial Schools".⁶¹ A few, like Laura B. had been Barnardo girls sent from the slums of industrial England.⁶² Whether belligerent recidivists, inebriates, or feeble-minded women, these were not the sorts O'Sullivan could reach with maternalistic reform.

Using the limited options provided for the Superintendent in the Mercer Reformatory Act, O'Sullivan tried to rid herself of the most unsuitable inmates. In letters to public officials, complaints in her Annual Reports, and at prestigious conferences, she criticized the short sentences and the lack of cooperation from sentencing magistrates. She wanted younger, more malleable inmates serving long and/or indeterminate sentences. And in the meantime she arranged to have prisoners removed from the Reformatory even though she was obliged to receive every woman sent by the Courts. If she could demonstrate that an inmate was totally unfit for reformatory discipline, she petitioned her superiors to have the women returned to the jail from which they had been sent.⁶³ O'Sullivan thereby managed to have the most violent women, like Tillie R. and Effie L., returned to the Toronto Jail, primarily because the few male staff members were not always on the premises if trouble broke out. When forty-seven year-old Mary F. came to the Reformatory serving a six-month sentence for drunkenness, O'Sullivan convinced Inspector Morton that as an irredeemable inebriate, Mary should serve her term in jail rather than the

Reformatory.⁶⁴ Alternatively, inmates exhibiting behaviour considered unusual might be sent to an insane asylum. Annie S. was diagnosed an imbecile because she had "queer spells" during her "monthly sickness" when she would jump up and down.⁶⁵ She was sent to the Toronto Hospital for the Insane while others were transferred to a similar institution in Orillia. If foreign-born women posed a problem, they could be deported. Helen S., a black woman from the U.S. was disposed of in this manner. "It would seem to me that this is a case for deportation," O'Sullivan advised Inspector Rogers. "This woman is colored, is twenty-nine years of age and certainly does not seem to me to be a desirable citizen for Canada."⁶⁶ Although she could persuade her superiors to transfer individual women to other institutions or countries, she could do little to transform the entire population into a group receptive to her motherly approach.

What she required was recognition of the Reformatory's purpose as well as judicial and legislative support for her work. In light of the inmates she was expected to reform, it seemed futile for magistrates to hand down short sentences. She claimed they regularly sent her "vicious, hardened" women whom she was expected to reform in as few as three months. The problem, it seemed, was that judges in Ontario towns, and Toronto in particular, regarded Mercer like any other jail -- a place of detention and punishment.⁶⁷ As early as 1881, Langmuir had complained that women convicted of "lewdness and

other serious crimes" required sentences of at least one year if they were to learn habits of industry and order. In 1910, O'Sullivan claimed that most women required the longest possible term, two years less-a-day.⁶⁸ In every Annual Report she regretted the Ontario magistrates' insensitivity to her task of reformation. A sentence of six months had "neither a deterring nor reformative effect" on the inmates passing through Mercer.⁶⁹ She co-operated with the leading experts in social welfare to make her message known. J.J. Kelso, Superintendent and founder of the Neglected and Dependent Children Society of Ontario, persuaded O'Sullivan to speak out at the Canadian Conference of Charities and Correction in October 1909. He suggested she outline the absurdity of short sentences as one of the major impediments to reformative work. "The only way to bring about change," he asserted, "is to keep hammering away at the defects until the public realize that something ought to be done."⁷⁰ Perhaps in the long run, the hammering helped but during O'Sullivan's first years, nothing changed. Indeed, by 1912, some of the inmates' terms were shorter than ever. Exasperated, she commiserated with Inspector Rogers: "It is most discouraging to find this institution so well-adapted to assist in the reformation of young women handicapped by the lack of sympathy and cooperation in the Courts."⁷¹

Emma O'Sullivan's first years at Mercer began brightly but ended in frustration. Her maternal approach had reformed only a few while her efforts to reclaim the criminal and fallen

among Ontario's women met resistance in all quarters. The Provincial government was not yet prepared to experiment with progressive penal reforms; magistrates and the Toronto judiciary in particular were unresponsive to her calls for "ideal inmates" with lengthier sentences; the terms prisoners were serving had actually begun to decrease in the final years of O'Sullivan's first decade; and, finally, the inmates themselves did not respond to her maternalism. It appeared by 1913 that very little had changed from Mercer's earliest days, despite O'Sullivan's efforts to create an ideal reformatory.

NOTES

CHAPTER 2

1. Biographical information on Emma O'Sullivan, P.A.O., R.G.25, Series C-3, "Personnel File of Mrs. Emma O'Sullivan"; H.J. Morgan, Canadian Men and Women of the Times, Toronto: William Briggs, 1912, p. 876; and Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography, Toronto: The Rose Publishing Company, 1886, pp. 592-593.
2. For an interesting, if superficial study of familial connections in male and female reform in America, see John Cumbler, "The Politics of Charity: Gender and Class in Late 19th Century Charity Policy," Journal of Social History, no. 14, (Fall 1980), p. 103. For biographical sketches of women in the National Council of Women of Canada, see Veronica Strong-Boag, The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929, Ottawa: National Museums of Man Mercury Series, History Division, Paper No. 18, 1976.
3. This was a substantial salary for the period, especially for a female. Only the wardens of the Toronto Jail and the Central Prison earned more than O'Sullivan. Her salary was three or four times higher than that earned by most female matrons at that time. Information on O'Sullivan's salary taken from "Personnel File...", supra.
4. P.A.O., R.G. 20, Series D-13, Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females, "Inmate Case Files," Inmate #2763, 21 September 1901. Subsequent references to case file entries will give merely the inmate number and the date of the document cited.
5. Information taken from P.A.O., R.G. 20, Series E-13, Volume 16, 1901-1930, "Inmates' Offence Book", 18 September 1901. In this register appeared the names of inmates charged for infractions of prison discipline. Each entry includes the dates of the offence, the inmates' name, the nature of her offence, her punishment, and any additional remarks from the officer or the Superintendent. For this study, I selected a ten percent sample on the same basis as that pursued with the Reformatory Register. These data were subjected to analyses of aggregate characteristics only.
6. A.R.S. of 1901 in O.S.P. 1902, p. 48.
7. A.R.S. of 1902 in O.S.P. 1903, p. 74.

8. Ibid., p. 79.
9. See Hastings Hart, "The New Penology," American Prison Association Proceedings, (hereafter A.P.A. Proceedings) 1927, pp. 116-131 for a summary of changes in prison management in the Progressive Era in the U.S.
10. Quoted by O'Sullivan in her Annual Report of 1902 in O.S.P 1903, p. 73.
11. For Morton's views on outdoor work and recreation, see her "Methods of Reform in Prisons for Women and Girls," American Prison Association Proceedings, 1905, pp. 90-91.
12. A.R.S. of 1902 in O.S.P. 1903, p. 73. It is unclear from subsequent records whether or not O'Sullivan actually abolished the recreation period. In any case, recreation in her earlier years at the institution consisted simply of walking through the prison corridors or the airing yard.
13. Quoted in Freedman, Their Sisters'..., p. 97. In Freedman's opinion, Morton "openly rejected kindness for authority." Ibid.
14. For the personal and professional backgrounds of women connected with prison reform work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Freedman, Their Sisters'..., Appendix B., pp. 162-175. Of the twenty reformers listed for the twentieth century, eleven held graduate degrees and thirteen had paying jobs, including doctors, social workers, professors, psychologists and lawyers. All were white and over half were Protestant. In Canada, professional women did not begin to study prison conditions until the 1950s. For a discussion of women, crime and criminology in Canada, see Marie-Andrée Bertrand, La Femme et le Crime, Montréal: L'Aurore, 1979.
15. Freedman, Their Sisters'..., pp. 117-121.
16. Davis's ideas were still novel, even among the most progressive of penologists in the period who continued to hold conventional ideas on the training women should receive in prison. She defended her use of inmates in outdoor work at the American Prison Association Conference of 1913: "We do not expect that these girls will go out and carry on farming, industries, building trades, or anything of that sort, but we do believe that in whatever occupation they enter they will have sounder bodies, better morals, their minds will have been better developed as a result of outdoor work. There is a high degree of mental development in working to a plan, whatever the work may be." Davis, "Outside work as a Prevent-

ative Measure and as a Reformatory method," A.P.A. Proceedings, 1913, p. 256.

17. Annual Reports of the Bedford Hills Reformatory for Women, 1902-1905, 1908. Quoted in Freedman, Their Sisters'...., p. 133.
18. Emma O'Sullivan, "Discipline in a Women's Prison," A.P.A. Proceedings, 1912, p. 321.
19. Ibid.
20. Emma O'Sullivan, "Some Difficulties in Reformatory Work Among Women," A.P.A. Proceedings, 1907, p. 238.
21. Emma O'Sullivan, "Discussion on Reformatory Work and Parole," A.P.A. Proceedings, 1910, p. 51.
22. Routine at the prison changed with the seasons. In summer, inmates rose earlier but had longer periods for recreation when they could walk on the grounds. The schedule information comes from P.A.O., R.6.8, I-1-B-1, Box 10, "Rules Governing Inmates of the Mercer Reformatory for the Province of Ontario." Although these rules were only codified in 1916, it is reasonable to assume they were enforced before that time.
23. #3581, O'Sullivan to Mrs. N. concerning visiting privileges, 6 July 1911.
24. #3390, 17 August 1907. Letterhead on prison stationery read, "Your reply to this letter must be written in English and must contain no information but that of personal or family matters. Unless this is done, letters will not be delivered. No food, daily papers, clothing or fruit admitted. Inmates may only write once a month."
25. #3540, 4 November 1908.
26. #3775, 29 July 1912.
27. #3360, 3 March 1909.
28. #2786, 4 August 1902.
29. For a study of Denison's reign in the Police Court of Toronto, see Gene Howard Homel, "Denison's Law: Criminal Justice and the Police Court in Toronto, 1877-1921," Ontario History, 73, no. 1 (March 1981), 171-186. He dispensed justice with capriciousness, arriving at verdicts with amazing speed. For a look

at some of the criminals who appeared in the Toronto Court, see Harry M. Wodson, The Whirlpool, Scenes From Toronto Police Court, Toronto: n.p., 1919.

30. #2786, 4 August 1902.
31. #2786, Attack Report, n.d., 1905.
32. #2837, 21 March 1904.
33. #3771, Dr. King's memo to O'Sullivan, 11 November 1910.
34. Ibid.
35. #2913, 25 April 1903. Tillie's inmate number was higher in this case since inmates were given new numbers on each commitment.
36. Ibid., 14 January 1904.
37. Ibid., 15 January 1904.
38. #3540, 3 December 1908.
39. #3549, 12 February 1908.
40. Tabulation of punishments from Inmates' Offence Book," 1901-1913. My sample of every tenth punishment incident was 179 in this period.
41. A.R.S. of 1909 in O.S.P. 1910, p. 62.
42. A.R.S. of 1903 in O.S.P. 1904, p. 55.
43. York County, "Report of the Grand Jury of York County on the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," P.A.O. R.G. 20, Series E-13, Vol. 35, 11 November 1905.
44. Ibid., O'Sullivan to Grand Jury Foreman Scott, 15 November 1905.
45. Between 1901 and 1913, twenty four percent had been sentenced for theft. The percentage of brothel-keepers was five from 1901-1906 and seventeen between 1907 and 1913.
46. O'Sullivan tried to isolate bawdy house keepers in one corridor but their numbers had grown to unmanageable proportions by 1913 when she said they "embarrassed the Reformatory's equipment for classification," A.R.S. of 1909 in O.S.P. 1910, p. 62, and A.R.S. of 1912 in O.S.P. 1913, p. 60.

47. Ruth Rosen, The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. She draws the parallel between madams and mothers in the following: "It was the madam's responsibility to prevent petty quarrels [...] from interfering with the business of the houses. Quite naturally, she became a confidante and counsellor to her 'girls'. Frequently called 'mother' by her employees, she learned to placate their worries and help them solve their problems." p. 88.
48. The disruptiveness of the Toronto women prompted O'Sullivan to suggest that "habituées alike of the Toronto Gaol and the Mercer Reformatory be a separate class." A.R.S. of 1905 in O.S.P. 1906, p. 58. In 1912, she remarked that many of the women from Toronto had already been incarcerated nine or ten times in the Toronto Jail. A.R.S. of 1911 in O.S.P. 1912, p. 58. They were thus among the most street and jail-wise women in the Reformatory.
49. O'Sullivan to H. Peterson, K.C., in #3411, 31 August 1907.
50. A.R.S. of 1902 in O.S.P. 1903, p. 56.
51. At the Indiana Women's Prison and the Massachusetts Reformatory, women charged with capital and felony offences had always comprised a small but significant sector of the prison population. In Canada, these women (numbering no more than a few per annum) were sent to the Kingston Penitentiary, the only federal detention centre for females.
52. All statistics on Mercer inmates have been determined through analysis of the Reformatory Register data. For a breakdown of offences committed by Mercer inmates, see Table 1, Appendix B, p. i.
53. This was a problem in prisons where large numbers of "vagrants" had been sent. These were usually destitute women who were addicted to alcohol. Once in the prison, they often upset routine sometimes involuntarily. As Mary Bularzik has pointed out, they were women who could not be reached unless detoxified and physically rehabilitated. See her "Sex, Crime and Justice: Women in the Criminal Justice System of Massachusetts, 1900-1950," Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1982.

54. Genevieve Leslie has described prevailing attitudes towards servants in industrializing Canada: "Because domestic skills were believed common to all women, servants were more vulnerable to competition than other workers. Experienced domestics distinguished between themselves and "outsiders" but many people looked upon service as a catch all occupation that could absorb society's misfits." Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," in Janice Acton et al. eds., Women at Work, Ontario 1850-1930, Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974, p. 92. Changing trends in female employment appear in Canada, Sixth Census of Canada, IV, Table VII, "Per Cent Distribution of the Gainfully Employed by Occupational Groups, for Canada, 1881-1921," p. xvi. For a comparison of the percentage of domestics in Canada and at Mercer, see Graph 1, Appendix B, p. ii.
55. For a comparison of the Catholic population in Ontario, Toronto and at Mercer, see Graph 2, Appendix B, p. iii.
56. See Gregory Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class," in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., Essays in Canadian Working Class History, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976, 13-35.
57. Homel, pp. 175-176. Denison had a particular dislike for Irish and Black Torontonians.
58. A.R.S. of 1903 in O.S.P. 1904, p. 54. This complaint had been made by O'Reilly for years but to no avail.
59. Ibid.
60. A.R.S. of 1905 in O.S.P. 1906, p. 58.
61. A.R.S. of 1909 in O.S.P. 1910, p. 62.
62. #3521, 8 November 1909.
63. In 1903, Noxon reviewed this procedure for O'Sullivan: "... if an inmate is mentally defective beyond [sic] disciplinary control, you will report her case and recommend her removal either to the asylum or the city jail. It is not the intention that the Reformatory shall be used for a place in which to harbor those of unsound mind, incapable of reformation or of industrial employment. #2786, 17 June 1903.

64. #2768, 30 October 1901.
65. #3688, 3 November 1910.
66. #4151, 24 June 1913. It is not clear what Helen did to provoke O'Sullivan's displeasure.
67. A.R.S. of 1905 in O.S.P. 1906, p. 58. O'Sullivan noted that women from Toronto and York County tended to receive the lightest sentences of all those sent to the Reformatory.
68. A.R.S. of 1909 in O.S.P. 1910, p. 62.
69. Ibid.
70. Kelso to O'Sullivan, in #3484, 15 September 1909.
71. A.R.S. of 1911 in O.S.P. 1912, p. 57.

CHAPTER III

Legislative and Social Support for Maternalism, 1913-1918

In the 1910s, a wave of reform interest began to sweep through Ontario once again. While concern over the plight of prisoners in the 1880s had resulted in little more than a Royal Commission, agitation for penal reform began to produce concrete results in the mid-1910s. The introduction of indeterminate sentencing in 1913 was the first legalistic change signalling a commitment to modernizing the Ontario criminal justice system. The establishment of a parole board in 1916 and the decision to integrate Mercer into the parole system in 1917 brought both the Province and the Reformatory in step with some of the latest trends in penology. The various legal changes were fuelled in part by popular campaigns to eradicate crime and vice. Canada's participation in the First World War introduced sanctions for maternalists' concerns over moral and physical purity. The initial anxiety over soldiers' fitness spread to an effort among social purity crusaders to stamp out a variety of evils, especially prostitution and venereal disease. Their lobbying inspired the introduction of a law for the prevention of venereal diseases in 1918. This law in turn prompted police and magistrates to focus on a new type of female offender. Both the legislative changes and the social movements of the period provided the structures and sanction necessary to support maternalistic reform at Mercer.

But they also revealed as great an impulse to control as a desire to reform. By 1918, an apparently progressive criminal justice system was in place but so too was an increasingly bureaucratic system that would alter the Reformatory significantly in the later years of O'Sullivan's superintendency.

Just before the First World War public officials and legislators began for the first time to show some confidence in the notion of reform. Punishment fell out of vogue and "resocialization" became the object of prison work. Much of the new interest came from the work of professionals in the new social sciences such as sociology and criminology. Penologists advocated moving beyond the nineteenth century concern for moral reformation to offer criminals the opportunity to readjust to society through scientifically monitored rehabilitation projects.¹ While Christian teaching never disappeared from these reform programmes, there was no longer a strong belief in moral weakness as a source of crime. Like the Social Gospellers, supporters of the new penology adopted a pragmatic, optimistic attitude toward social issues²; they looked at the roots and complexities of crime and suggested that all problems were surmountable if analyzed in their social context. The optimism spread even to governments and Ontario seemed willing to take the first, tentative steps toward reform since its Royal Commission on Prisons and Reformatories twenty years earlier.

The increasing acceptance of the principles of reform was due in part to the efforts of various organizations working on

behalf of prisoners. Chief among these was the Prisoners' Aid Society, the oldest inmate advocacy group in Ontario. The Society launched the campaign for a reformatory for men comparable to Mercer. Since the 1870s, male prisoners had spent their terms either in local jails or in the Central Prison, the institution notorious for its harsh conditions and cruelty to inmates. Since male prisoners were usually violent and difficult to control, legislators had been unwilling to risk anything beyond the standard treatment of hard labour and privation. Members of the Prisoners' Aid Society, the Salvation Army, the Ministerial Visiting Association and other concerned parties argued that prisoners would never improve until given incentives to reform and become useful members of society. In response to their lobbying, the Province established a Legislative Committee on Prison Reform with the result that construction of a men's reformatory began in 1909. By 1916, the Guelph Reformatory for Men replaced the Central Prison and became the principal symbol of penal progress in Ontario.³

Elsewhere in the criminal justice system, the erection of other reformatory facilities signalled a willingness on the part of Ontario legislators to appropriate time and money for necessary improvements to a prison system that had not changed markedly since Langmuir's inspectorship. In the early 1910s, industrial farms for males were built in Fort William, Thornhill and Burwash as well as one for females in Concord. Already in Toronto, three training schools, two for girls and one for boys, had operated for a decade under Provincial auspices.⁴

These institutions had been spawned by popular movements for reform; although Mercer never did have such a popular base at its origin, it too was to feel the effects of popular and legislative concern in the 1910s.

As reformers had long argued, prisoners could be persuaded to mend their ways. One powerful incentive was the possibility of an early release. In Canada, the first steps taken toward an earned release system were taken in 1898 when a Ticket of Leave provision, a restricted form of parole, was adopted. It allowed prisoners at Mercer to leave before their terms expired if the Superintendent considered their behaviour acceptable. O'Reilly and later O'Sullivan petitioned the Federal Minister of Justice to issue a Ticket of Leave, a conditional release form requiring the prisoner's solemn oath to behave in an exemplary fashion on release. The concept of earning "good time" had been introduced as early as 1877 with the Federal "Act for the Improvement of Prison Discipline". This Act, revised a number of times in the 1880s and later in 1906, stipulated that prisoners "exemplary in behaviour, industry, and faithfulness..." could earn up to five day's remission of their sentence each month.⁵ At that time, however, this legislation applied only to inmates serving time at the federal penitentiary in Kingston. In Mercer, and in all Provincial institutions, the more informal style of early release, the Ticket of Leave, was commonly used to reward well-behaved prisoners for socially acceptable conduct.

The logical corollary of an earned release was a sentence of indeterminate length that could be shortened only by an inmate's compliance to rules. O'Sullivan had approved indeterminate sentencing when she first encountered its use at the Massachusetts Reformatory Prison. Indeed, members of the Royal Commission on Prisons and Reformatories in 1891 had recommended "that all who are sent to the Reformatory more than once, or for lewdness or other serious offences should be committed under indeterminate sentence or committed for long terms."⁶ The year O'Sullivan took over at Mercer Inspector Noxon had declared that the adoption of this sentencing provision would be "the most potent reformatory agency" necessary to transform Mercer into a reformatory "in fact as well as in name."⁷ Reformers drew attention to the success of institutions in the north-eastern United States where the indeterminate sentence produced "great benefits" for both the criminal and society.⁸ And of course Emma O'Sullivan reiterated the demand in her annual reports. Finally, in May 1913, Ontario legislators amended the "Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer ... Reformatory" to allow judges to sentence offenders for indeterminate periods of time.

Underlying this apparently progressive amendment was a strong conservative element. If Ontario's prisoners were to have the chance to earn an early release, they had first to serve longer minimum terms in prison. The amended Mercer Reformatory Act allowed magistrates to hand down sentences not only of indeterminate duration but also of indefinite length

(always within the provincial maximum of two years less-a-day).

This meant that all Mercer inmates could serve sentences of up to two years no matter how trivial their offence.⁹

In particular, women charged under section 239 or Part XVI of the Criminal Code would no longer receive their usual maximum sentence of twelve months.¹⁰ These were primarily the vagrants, street walkers and prostitutes, women who would soon begin to dominate the Reformatory population. The indefinite sentencing provision meant that few inmates would serve definite terms of six months and more would serve indefinite sentences of six months to two years. The introduction of indeterminate sentencing in 1913 thus did more than provide an inducement to reform: it allowed wardens and superintendents to keep inmates under their control for longer periods. In short, after 1913, sentences were more flexible yet stiffer at the same time.

For O'Sullivan, of course, the longer the sentence and the more the control, the greater were her chances to reform inmates. Nonetheless she remained cautious. She had spent too many years contending with uninformed or uncooperative Magistrates to believe her problems were solved. She did, however, greet the changes optimistically: "If advantage is taken of the new legislation permitting the sentencing to the Reformatory for an indefinite period then will soon be eliminated from the Annual Reports the record of women serving terms for the seventh, eighth--yes, and for the nineteenth term."¹¹ To O'Sullivan, at least, the new law seemed to herald a new phase of governmental support for her reformatory work. Indeterminate



and indefinite sentences would increase both the time inmates remained under her supervision and their willingness to behave according to her standards in order to earn an early release. As a means of increasing prisoners' docility while augmenting the Superintendent's supervisory powers,¹² the indeterminate sentencing law thus supported maternalistic reform.

Evidence of change soon became apparent in the sentences inmates served. Between 1914 and 1917, the proportion of women given sentences of more than one year jumped from seventeen percent in 1901-1913 to fifty eight percent. Accordingly the average period of confinement rose as well. In the first half of her superintendency, O'Sullivan had, on average, 201 days to reform each inmate, a period she considered woefully inadequate. In the four years following the introduction of indeterminate sentencing, the average period of confinement climbed to 328 days. Now surely her mothering could bear fruit.

With the authority to determine whether inmates deserved an early release, O'Sullivan could now exact certain standards of behaviour from her girls. Those serving indeterminate sentences -- and between 1914 and 1917 over half of them did so -- had to please her. In effect, sentencing officials gave O'Sullivan's charges a structural inducement to reform that would prove compatible with maternal encouragement. Judicial co-operation created a system wherein O'Sullivan received women more eager to obey than her earlier charges had been.

Until 1917, officials could grant deserving Mercer inmates an early release only by the Ticket of Leave system.

If the Justice minister approved, he would recommend clemency and permit an early release. Prisoners had the greatest chance of leaving before their terms expired if a position were available for them. When the servant crisis periodically became acute, O'Sullivan offered her services by arranging, often in as little as one week, the release of a model prisoner to assume a domestic situation. She worked through informal channels including, on occasion, her own family and friends. For example, she persuaded the Minister of Justice to release Mary F., a twenty-nine year-old woman serving a one-year sentence for frequenting a house of ill fame:

[I] have delayed my reply to your enquiry regarding Mary F. until a suitable position presented itself. I can place her in Collingwood with my sister-in-law provided she is released within the next two weeks. 13

In 1914, the Police Magistrate of Gananoque obliged her with the names of two local citizens willing to accept the services of reformed inmates:

Mr. W.J. Gibson, who is mayor of the Town, a prominent manufacturer, would be a most desirable place for one of the girls. The other man, Adam Brown, carries on a Summer Boarding House whose guests are of the respectable class of people. 14

If, as frequently happened, inmates did not behave according to the standards demanded by their new mistresses, O'Sullivan mediated, attempting at once to placate the employer while placing the inmate in a more suitable situation. Without a government agency dictating a standard procedure for the early release of inmates, O'Sullivan was relatively free to determine

which inmates left the Reformatory before their terms expired.

Pressure to develop a standardized system of early release under the auspices of a Provincial Parole Board had been building for over a decade. In particular, the campaign for the Guelph Reformatory for Men focused attention on the place of parole in reform work.¹⁵ While construction of the Reformatory progressed after 1909, a governmental parole agency began to take shape. In 1911, a group of individuals from prisoner advocacy organizations worked on the Ontario Parole Commission.¹⁶ Over a period of five years they reported their findings to the Federal Minister of Justice and helped determine the form of the nascent parole system. A parole board, rather than individual keepers, would decide upon individual inmates' eligibility for release. Parole officers would interview candidates, present their cases, and then maintain post-release contact. Reformers thus hoped to create an agency capable of co-ordinating the reformatory process in Ontario prisons.

Before the Parole Board was officially established, Inspector Rogers had arranged for a "field officer"¹⁷ to work at Mercer until a parole officer could be installed in conjunction with a parole board. The Province appointed Margaret Howe in November 1915 as the first Field Officer in the institution.¹⁸ In her first report, written one year after her appointment, she related the duties she had performed, outlining her two major tasks: "(1) making a social study of those who came into the institution, and (2) looking after and finding employment

for those who leave the institution."¹⁹ Her work entailed visiting the previous homes of inmates where she spoke with spouses or parents to determine whether the "home environment" was suitable for their return. If prisoners' homes were deemed inadequate, or if the women declared their intentions of "making a new life", Howe would speak to potential employers on their behalf. In most cases, this entailed placing them in homes or institutions as domestics. Once they were released, prisoners were expected to report regularly to the field officer for "friendly supervision".²⁰ In effect, the Field Officer acted as a kind of older sister to the wayward girls at the Reformatory. She and O'Sullivan conferred on all cases, though O'Sullivan rendered the final word as the superior officer of the institution.²¹

The long-awaited Board of Parole was finally established in Ontario in 1916 under section 41A of the Amended Prisons and Reformatories Act of Canada. The new law declared that

The Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario may appoint a Board of Parole for the said Province whose duty it shall be to inquire from time to time into the cases of prisoners sentenced to the Ontario Reformatory, the Andrew Mercer Reformatory or any Industrial Farm, and where as a result of such inquiry the Board thinks proper, it may permit prisoners serving indeterminate sentences to be paroled under conditions approved of by the Minister of Justice, and when the terms on which such prisoners have been paroled have been complied with, the Board may recommend for the consideration of the Minister of Justice the final discharge of such prisoners. ²²

Legislators decided as well that prisoners would be given payment or "gratuities" for their labour "when services were

worthy of remuneration and conduct good."²³ These provisions put Ontario in step with reforms already established in the leading centres of progressive penal legislation, most notably Massachusetts and New York.²⁴

Before Mercer inmates could benefit from the new parole legislation, the Reformatory had to be formally declared an "improved prison".²⁵ There was little doubt that O'Sullivan's prison would meet the required standards of management. Inspections of the York County Grand Jury had never uncovered any scandals or imperfections in prison management. On the contrary, reports usually indicated that "the building and its appointments [were] scrupulously clean, and [that] the methods employed in the discipline and attention to the prisoners were admirable..."²⁶ Since it was a Provincial institution, Mercer had always been subject to annual inspections by the Inspector of Prisons who typically had nothing but praise for the management of the Reformatory. According to the Prisons and Reformatories Act of 1906, however, an "improved prison" was one with a recorded set of rules. Mercer had always been run without written rules and both O'Sullivan and O'Reilly before her had prided themselves on their ability to maintain the Reformatory simply by governing inmates with their own law. Nonetheless, O'Sullivan complied with the stipulation and produced a written set of rules for the Parole Board's perusal in 1916.²⁷ On 14 September 1917, the Mercer Reformatory was finally declared an "improved prison".²⁸ It could then profit from the various reforms of the era -- the release system,

gratuities for prison labour, and the Parole Board -- all symbols of the growing support for the principles of reformation over punishment in Ontario. They served the dual purpose of providing incentives to reform while extending the supervisory powers of penal officials. O'Sullivan found these changes compatible with her own motherly approach to reform.

Canada's involvement in the First World War affected the Mercer Reformatory as greatly as did penal reforms. Inmates felt the impact of the War immediately as supply contracts altered the nature of their prison labour. Additionally, the wartime social climate influenced life at the Reformatory, making it more likely for younger, less criminal women to serve long sentences. The war years represented the zenith of the social purity crusade. Purity advocates aimed at a range of targets including dance halls, saloons and massage parlours.²⁹ Some purists acted through temperance societies, others through eugenics groups, and still more through organizations promoting censorship: all agreed, however, that if the nation was to be morally and physically pure, action had to be taken to put an end to vice. Accordingly, many social purity advocates concentrated on stamping out prostitution and its attendant evil, venereal disease. They thus turned to governments willing to undertake drastic measures for the regulation of public morals in the name of purity. The women who began to fill Mercer's cells in O'Sullivan's later years were largely the victims of these campaigns against illicit sex.

The initial impact of the War on the Reformatory was found in the work routine. As lucrative war contracts and decreasing supplies of male labour began to draw free women into new sectors in the labour market, prisoners at Mercer took up new tasks in their work behind bars. For the first time in the Reformatory's history, inmates could participate in assignments that provided alternatives to the drudgery of domestic work. Ontario legislators, spurred on by a great demand for war materials, decided in 1915 to install a factory in the Reformatory.³⁰ "Mercer Industries" was supplied with power sewing machines and other equipment necessary for the speedy production of hospital suits and mattress covers. The factory was to operate under the direction of an appointee of the Department of the Provincial Secretary rather than O'Sullivan. Mercer thus began to follow the trend already established in the Massachusetts Reformatory where Jessie Donaldson Hodder had replaced Francis Morton in 1911 and introduced industrial training to supplement domestic instruction.³¹ Whereas Hodder had introduced these schemes to augment inmates' ability to cope with life on the outside, Ontario expanded prisoners' labour to keep Canadian boys on the front.

The social purity campaign, however, had a more far-reaching effect on life at Mercer than did war contracts. Purity advocates concerned about the moral and physical purity of Canadian soldiers, redoubled their efforts during the war years. Convinced of the link between immorality and physical impurity, they focused their energy first on campaigns to eradicate

prostitution. White slavery, everywhere the most melodramatic aspect of prostitution, inspired the greatest concern among society's pure.³² When the evil was purported to be rampant in Toronto, middle-class women were particularly alarmed. The Toronto Council of Women decided in 1915 to investigate the allegations. They successfully petitioned the City Council to establish a Social Survey Commission to study vice in Toronto. The Commission launched an extensive investigation of Toronto's underworld and explored the circumstances of prostitution in particular. Even though many social scientists and moral reformers were beginning to realize that poverty and not simply licentiousness contributed to the prevalence of crime and vice, the Survey commissioners were more anxious to suppress promiscuity than to tackle such causal factors as the meagre wages and poor living conditions of single, working women.³³ They therefore recommended that the Toronto police stop fining prostitutes and begin imprisoning them at places like the Mercer Reformatory. Reformers were especially concerned that young, casual prostitutes serve sentences for they were the only ones considered capable of reformation. It was this very kind of woman who began to arrive at Mercer during the war years.³⁴

Before such people could be confined, however, existing laws had to be changed. Purity advocates therefore lobbied on both the provincial and federal fronts for stiffer legislation against the presumed source of immorality, the promiscuous woman. The Provincial legislature had control over police regulation of public morals, but most suspected prostitutes were charged

under the Criminal Code of Canada. Growing anxiety over the spread of vice in Canadian cities prompted Federal legislators to amend the Code in 1915 to crack down on prostitution.³⁵

Under the broad category of vagrancy the Code now included the keeping or frequenting of a bawdy house by a customer or inmate. Since vagrancy carried sentences of up to two years less-a-day, the revised law would theoretically keep prostitutes off the streets while incarcerating them for periods sufficiently long to permit reform. This legal revision alone did not eradicate vice as the police remained reluctant to arrest any but the most flagrant prostitutes, and magistrates continued to fine rather than imprison offenders. For social purity advocates this was inadequate; they lobbied Provincial legislators^a to devise laws capable of ridding Ontario of the social evil.

Legislation against the spread of venereal disease had been delayed however by the delicacy of the subject. Before the War, only a handful of medical authorities had openly discussed the problems of disease control. Even the more squeamish purists could no longer ignore the prevalence of the disease after rates of infection for enlisted men came to light.³⁶ To stamp out the disease, one had to seek out its source -- promiscuous women who transferred infections during illicit sexual contact. Leaders of the war against venereal disease commonly assumed that loose women or "camp followers" were responsible for debilitating the physical and moral strength of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Purity reformers began

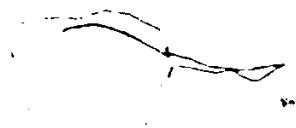
to combat the spread of social diseases by trying to prevent illicit sexual contact. In "watch and ward work", members of the Y.W.C.A. and N.C.W.C. established respectable boarding houses where soldiers might meet the right kind of woman under motherly supervision.³⁷ But the efforts of a few reformers could not combat the growing menace of venereal disease. They therefore turned to the Provincial government to demand a full-scale investigation into the problem. A Royal Commission was the result. Established in 1917 and headed by Justice Frank Hodgins, the Commission was designed to bring the "baneful social effects" of the disease to public attention and to suggest ways to halt its spread. Hodgins found that the "civilian population was the real centre of contamination"; moreover, he emphasized,

if it is to be controlled an effort must be directed primarily to seek out, isolate, and treat those propagating the disease or suffering from its effects, not only in the larger cities and towns, but in the smaller rural communities. ³⁸

Less than a year later, on 26 March 1918, Ontario legislation passed a law incorporating Hodgins' findings. The Act for the Prevention of Venereal Disease³⁹ was a sweeping piece of legislation that provided for the "examination, treatment, and detention of convicts and those charged with offences against public morals and decency".⁴⁰ This "rather drastic influence with individuals", as Hodgins put it, was to be directed particularly at regular and "clandestine" prostitutes, the "most prolific source of the disease".⁴¹ The Act stipulated that the

Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario would designate certain hospitals and public institutions for the treatment of venereal diseases. Mercer, as the only Provincial institution housing an exclusively female population of dubious character, was one of them.

By the end of the First World War, the criminal justice system that would prevail in Ontario for most of the twentieth century was in place. More flexible, yet stiffer sentencing laws allowed magistrates to send even the most petty offenders to the Reformatory for two years. The increased time behind bars allowed criminals a greater chance to reform, and permitted keepers like Emma O'Sullivan to extend their influence over inmates. The indeterminate sentence, in conjunction with parole, meant that prisoners could shorten their sentences only if they met the Parole Board's standards of behaviour as enforced by keepers. As much as legal reforms influenced the Reformatory, the War introduced change at Mercer. The diversification of inmate labour was the first change but gradually the impact of the social purity movement began to be felt as well. Arresting authorities, concerned with suppressing prostitution and the spread of venereal disease, sought out the common link between these twin evils -- the promiscuous woman. As the Province's only adult women's Reformatory, Mercer became a centre for the detention and medical treatment of these young morals offenders. Wartime legal and social developments produced the framework necessary to support Emma O'Sullivan's



reforming efforts. It remained to be seen whether this framework might not hinder as well as help O'Sullivan run Mercer as a maternalist.

NOTES

CHAPTER 3

1. This resocialization theme and social perspective appeared in W.I. Thomas's influential work, The Unadjusted Girl, New York: Harper & Row, 1911. For a critique of Progressive efforts to solve juvenile delinquency, see Anthony M. Platt, The Child Savers. The Invention of Delinquency, second edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.
2. For a comprehensive study of the Social Gospel movement, see Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973. For an example of a Social Gospeller's approach to social problems, see J.S. Woodsworth, My Neighbour. Richard Allen, intro., Toronto, University of Toronto Press, (1911), 1972.
3. For a brief survey of changes in the prison system of Ontario, see Ontario, Royal Commission on the Toronto Jail and Custodial Services, Vol. 2, Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1978, pp. 195-203.
4. Chronology of changes in the criminal justice system from Richard Ramsey, "Inventory -- Correctional Services," (finding aid), Record Group 20, O.A., pp. 1-2 and Ontario, Royal Commission on the Toronto Jail..., pp. 193-195.
5. Canada, "An Act Respecting Prisons and Reformatories," Revised Statutes, 4-5 Ed., C. 148, s. 19. Inmates too ill to work could earn up to two and one half days remission per month.
6. Quoted in A.R.S. of 1904 in O.S.P. 1905, p. 48.
7. A.R.I. of 1901 in O.S.P. 1902, p. 47.
8. The indeterminate sentence was perhaps the most typical legislative change of reform-minded governments. For a good synopsis of other changes introduced in penology in the first two decades of the twentieth century, see Hastings Hart, "The New Penology," A.P.A. Proceedings, 1927, 116-131.
9. Ontario, "An Act Respecting the Andrew Mercer Ontario Reformatory for Females," C. 78, 3-4 Geo V, 1913, s. 9. The amendment stipulated that convicting judges "may sentence offenders to imprisonment for an indefinite period not exceeding two years in the Reformatory instead of the common gaol." Ibid.

10. Section 239 concerned the punishment of those convicted under the law against vagrancy, s. 238. Part XVI of the Criminal Code covered those offences for which magistrates could conduct summary convictions procedures. According to s. 773, this included theft under \$10, attempt to commit theft, wounding, indecent assault of a minor, assault of an officer of the peace, gambling, or keeping or being an inmate of a disorderly house. According to the Criminal Code, those charged under s. 228, "Keeping a Disorderly Houses" could be sentenced to one year's imprisonment, those charged under s. 229, "Being found in any Disorderly House," could be sentenced for terms not exceeding twelve months; those convicted under s. 238, "Vagrancy," could be sentenced for maximum terms of six months. The Amended Act of 1913 thus allowed stiffer sentences to be handed down to promiscuous offenders, despite sentence restrictions in the Criminal Code.
11. A.R.S. of 1913 in O.S.P. 1914, p. 60.
12. David Rothman, leader of the social control theorists, has underlined the darker intentions of wardens who supported indeterminate sentencing in the U.S. He suggests that "reformers delivered into keepers' hands a disciplinary mechanism far more potent than the lash, and not insignificantly, far more legitimate...wardens could now act in forthright fashion and yet be capable of rewarding favorites and punishing recalcitrants. Indeterminacy enhanced their discretion and they rushed to endorse it." Rothman, Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1980, p. 74. More generally, Rothman argues that the "helping professionals", social workers, psychiatrists and the like, built institutions to augment their control over their subjects in a way nineteenth century evangelical reformers never did. For a rebuttal of Rothman's ideas, see William Muraskin, "The Social Control Theory in American History: A Critique," Journal of Social History, (June 1976), 539-569.
13. O'Sullivan to William Archibald, #4036, 23 May 1913.
14. F.B. Carroll to O'Sullivan #4184 and #4185, 13 June 1914.
15. For a review of the role parole played in the development of the Ontario criminal justice system, see A.E. Lavell, The Convicted Criminal and his Re-establishment as a Citizen, Toronto: Ryerson, 1926. Lavell was the first Chief Parole Officer of Ontario. He contended that the spirit of reformation did

not influence Ontario until 1920 when the parole system, the Guelph Reformatory and the industrial farms were operating. All of these advances were responses to the problems of male offenders.

16. Ramsey, p. 2.
17. This position remained until 1921 when the parole officer took over the duties of the field officer.
18. Howe to Rogers in PAO, Ontario Department of Provincial Secretary, "Correspondence of Provincial Secretary McPherson, 1916-1919," R.G. 8, I-1-A-1, Box 69, 1 November 1916. Information on Howe's training and background was not disclosed in any of her reports or letters.
19. In other women's institutions, particularly Bedford Hills in New York, social studies of inmates were undertaken on a massive scale. Katherine Davis had acquired a grant from Rockefeller to locate a Laboratory of Social Hygiene beside the Reformatory. A group of female professional psychologists, doctors, social workers, administered a battery of tests to thousands of inmates. In 1916, a hospital for psychopathic delinquents was opened at the Reformatory, again with the help of Rockefeller's money. Freedman, Their Sisters..., pp. 116-119.
20. Phrases taken from Howe's reports on inmates #4112, 15 February 1916 and #4426, 21 June 1916.
21. Information on Howe's activities compiled from reports appearing in inmate case files.
22. Canada, "An Act to Amend the Prisons and Reformatories Act," Statutes, 6-7 Geo. V., C. 21, s. 41A:
23. A.R.S. of 1917 in O.S.P. 1918, p. 50.
24. In Massachusetts, a form of parole had been in effect since 1879. This was also known as a prisoner indenture system whereby middle-class women would request a domestic and well-behaved inmates who had served almost all their terms were given the choice of working for the women or remaining in the Reformatory until the expiration of their terms. See Freedman, Their Sisters..., p. 94. It is likely that O'Sullivan would have been familiar with this scheme given the close contact established between Mercer and the Massachusetts Reformatory since the 1880s.
25. This was the term used in the Prisons and Reformatories Act of Canada, 1906. It referred to a prison that met the standards of management set by the Governor General in Council.

26. York County, "Report of the Grand Jury..." 10 April 1910.
27. For rules of the Mercer Reformatory, see Appendix C, pp. i-iii.
28. Canada, Gazette, L1, 1917-1918, p. 206.
29. For an interesting selection of contemporary purity reformers' articles, see Ernest A. Bell, Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls, or War on the White Slave Trade, n.p.: L.H. Walter, 1911.
30. A.R.S. of 1915 in O.S.P. 1916, p. 59.
31. Mary Bularzik, "Sex, Crime and Justice: Women in the Criminal Justice System of Massachusetts, 1900-1950," Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1982. Hodder deplored the oppressiveness and "official neglect" during the Morton regime and vowed to transform the institution into an "Industrial Training Institute for Women," p. 192. She believed strongly in the necessity of domestic training, but unlike her predecessors and most of her contemporaries, she understood working class women's preference for factory work. She declared: "Most women hate domestic service. It is a perfectly real hate--not an imaginary one at all. Many women likewise hate housework, with its dreary routine, its expressionless day in, day out; its economic insignificance; and its loneliness. Industry represents social life and contact. Someone's kitchen or one's own may represent lonesome drudgery... Industry offers an opportunity to contribute to the family budget and its offers sociability... giving prisoners a training in industry gives them a tool with which to meet the world." p. 192.
32. For studies of the Social Purity movement in Canada, see Bacchi, chapter seven, "Race Regeneration, Evolution and Social Purity," 104-117; Boag, pp. 409-407, passim; and John C. Weaver, "Tomorrow's Metropolis' Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform in Canada, 1890-1920," in Gilbert Stelter and Alan Artibise, eds. The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History, the Carleton Library No. 109. Toronto: Macmillan, 1966, 393-419. For the best general study of the movement in America, see David J. Pivar, Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and the Social Order, 1868-1900; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973. For a study of the purity movement's attack on prostitution, see Rosen op cit. and Judith R. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

33. Toronto; Social Survey Commission, Report of the Social Survey Commission, Toronto, Presented to the City Council, October Fourth, 1915, Toronto: The Carswell Co., Ltd., 1915, p. 32.
34. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
35. "Act Act to Amend the Criminal Code of Canada," Statutes of Canada, C. 12, s. 7, 5 Geo. V.
36. Suzann Buckley and Janice McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform in Canada," Canadian Historical Review, LXIII, no. 3 (September 1982), p. 338.
37. Ibid., p. 339. These were "hostess houses" established at military camps and chaperoned by older women.
38. Hodgins, Interim Report on Venereal Diseases and Copy of an Act for the Prevention of Venereal Disease," Ontario Sessional Papers, L, (Part IX), no. 74, 1918, p. 3.
39. C. 42, 8 Geo. V, Statutes of Ontario.
40. Excerpt from the Act for the Prevention of Venereal Disease, quoted in Buckley, p. 343.
41. Hodgins, "Interim Report....," pp. 3-4.

CHAPTER 4

Ambiguous Victories: Maternalism
and Bureaucratization, 1914-1927

In the second half of her superintendency, O'Sullivan achieved greater success as a maternalist. Legislative changes and wartime vice campaigns began to alter the types of inmates she received at Mercer. Most were young first offenders, the kind penal authorities considered ideal subjects for reform, and they proved much more receptive to her motherly approach. Their ability to earn "good time" toward an early release and to acquire gratuities for their labour were legal provisions compatible with O'Sullivan's desire to induce them to reform. Yet maternalism was not entirely triumphant in this period. The legislative changes of the war years brought bureaucratic control: O'Sullivan's personal reform techniques were increasingly subsumed into the impersonal controls of experts and agencies.

The prisoners O'Sullivan encountered in the second half of her superintendency, like their predecessors, occupied the lowest rungs in Ontario society; where they differed was in the nature of their marginality. The most striking characteristic separating the second group of prisoners from the first was their youth. The average age fell dramatically, so that almost half were under twenty and two-thirds were less than twenty-five years old. The overwhelming majority, eighty-two percent, were thirty or younger, while in the first half of O'Sullivan's superintendency, only thirty-nine percent of

inmates were under thirty years old.¹ Most had committed no more than one or two crimes before they were sent to Mercer. The recidivism rate in the Reformatory plunged after 1913, when four out of five inmates were first offenders -- young, presumably innocent women considered amenable to reformatory discipline. As O'Sullivan grew older² and more experienced, the inmates as a group became younger and more innocent.³ The gap between keeper and kept helped reinforce O'Sullivan's maternal authority while it enhanced inmates' tendency to respond in a daughterly fashion.

Although she continued to complain about the quality of inmates under her care,⁴ the most unmanageable women in the Ontario prison system were usually sent to local jails rather than to Mercer. O'Sullivan's problems with discipline decreased as the number of intemperate inmates declined. Her earliest years were the worst: between 1901 and 1906, seventy-two percent of Mercer inmates were recorded as intemperate. By the second half of her tenure, only thirty percent were considered alcoholics.⁵ Many of the women in her earlier years had been charged with drunkenness or disorderliness, offences which usually meant unruly prisoners. Between 1914 and 1927, however, only nine percent of the inmates were serving time on a drunk or disorderly charge.⁶ This important change in the offence background of Mercer prisoners meant that fewer women were likely to experience the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal which rendered them unmanageable.

The impact of social purity campaigns became obvious in the type of offenders sent to Mercer. The transfer warrants in inmates' files showed that after 1913 over thirty-six percent were charged with vagrancy. In fact, between 1914 and 1927, more inmates at Mercer served time for vagrancy than any other offence.⁷ This was a convenient, catch-all charge that covered a host of possible offences, including tearing down a sign, singing in a public place, or living in a cart.⁸ It is difficult to ascertain what these women did to break the law since their transfer warrants declared simply that they had been apprehended as "loose, idle, or disorderly persons". Arresting authorities undoubtedly assumed that female vagrants were engaged in casual prostitution or other "immoral" activities, but evidence was rarely produced. In Agnes N.'s case, the evidence of her immorality was extremely tenuous: she had been "found in a restaurant with a Chinaman."⁹ Margaret A., an eighteen-year-old vagrant, had been sentenced to a year at Mercer for "running around beyond her parent's control".¹⁰ Clearly, these were not dangerous women, but the victims of social control campaigns.

The most street-wise and troublesome group of O'Sullivan's early years -- the bawdy-house keepers -- became less numerous after 1914. Although they had never comprised a large proportion of the prison population, they had always proved a constant source of vexation for the staff. By 1914, their numbers began to decline from the nineteen percent they represented between 1907 and 1913. They continued to disrupt prison

routine, however, particularly in light of the youthfulness and innocence of the majority of inmates. In 1915, O'Sullivan wrote that the tendency toward younger inmates with longer sentences was "a combination that would seem to invite the adoption of the best and most approved methods of meeting the problem of reformation."¹¹ Yet there was still the anomaly of the bawdy-house keeper, the inmate she could not reform. She continued her Report, observing that

What may be revealed on closer study of the statistics is the presence under the one roof of twenty-five offenders guilty of keeping houses of ill fame or of procuring which must militate seriously against good results... ¹²

What she aimed for was an institution completely free of such women. In the same Annual Report, she ventured to suggest that Mercer be "devoted solely to those offenders (exclusive of keepers of house of ill-fame) who are sentenced for terms of not less than one year and whose age does not exceed thirty years."¹³ Her ideal was never realized, but the number of keepers did decline, from fourteen percent between 1914 and 1917, to six percent between 1918 and 1927. This decline was due partly to O'Sullivan's ability to persuade Magistrates that Mercer was not the place to send unreformable madams. Through such informal channels she arranged that the assistant crown attorney of York County, J.A. McPadden, would not allow Magistrates to send her madams.¹⁴ O'Sullivan tried to use her personal influence and connections to help her institution operate as a specialized reformatory

and not a "custodial facility for all female prisoners."¹⁵ To a significant degree, she succeeded. By the late 1910s, she worked with a prison population most contemporary matrons would have envied.

The situation encouraged her to develop her motherly role. No longer would she have to devote her energy to discipline rather than reformation. As she grew older, her young charges became, in her eyes, innocent victims in need of professional mothering. Her increasing earnestness was evident in her Annual Report of 1919:

Of the seventy-six admissions, most were very young, with few exceptions, all were sex offenders. The fact that seventy-three were sent to us for the first time increases our responsibility to so train and encourage that a lasting impression for good will be carried by each one from the Reformatory. 16

O'Sullivan's primary object was to lead these wayward women to the true path of respectable womanhood, as defined by her middle-class standards of propriety. She therefore set herself as an example of irreproachable, matronly conduct.

O'Sullivan urged her subjects to reform by rewarding good behaviour. All institutional privileges, such as writing home, attending chapel, or walking in an open yard were thus extended to good girls only. She encouraged decorous behaviour by offering small but significant rewards to deserving inmates. On holidays, good girls were allowed to receive candy and fruit from relatives. In 1914 those who faithfully performed their mattress-making duties were given an apple from a bushel sent

by a "kind lady" from the Red Cross.¹⁷ More significant than "splendid treats" were the infrequent breaks in prison routine. In an environment where the ringing of bells divided every day into segments of dreary work assignments and sleep,¹⁸ the smallest variation was a welcome event. Christmas and Easter were the only two days each year when inmates could expect to enjoy festivities.¹⁹ It was customary for the women to participate in musical pageants before an audience of staff and officials. Special dinners, such as roast turkey for Christmas or baked ham at Easter helped mark these occasions as well. When the weather was favourable, inmates could enjoy outdoor social teas where they would be given the opportunity to mimic aspects of a middle-class lifestyle most would never know on the outside. Throughout the year O'Sullivan began to set aside certain evenings for entertainment of an improving nature. In 1919, benevolent donors gave a gramophone and "different games" for the amusement of Mercer inmates. The possibilities for entertainment expanded the same year when weekly moving pictures were shown to deserving prisoners.²⁰ If suitable films were unavailable, O'Sullivan sometimes chose to treat her charges to a musical evening during which she would lead the women in uplifting song. None of these privileges was granted indiscriminately: inmates quickly learned that any reprieve from the pains of imprisonment had to be earned with compliance.

The most industrious, well-behaved inmates won O'Sullivan's favour. She rewarded them with special assign-

ments in the Reformatory, including the coveted position of maid in her own quarters.²¹ O'Sullivan initiated the practice of designating corridor captains from among the most trustworthy in each cell section. These women were accorded the extra responsibility of organizing their corridor mates as a team pitted against other inmates in competition to be the model group. Approbation and extra free time were their immediate rewards while eventually they could expect to receive a favourable parole recommendation. In the meantime, they served the Reformatory's purposes: the corridor captain system broke down existing inmate ties and created others on the basis of competition for maternal favours. The favours -- kindness, approval and privileges -- were awarded for conformity to middle-class standards of conduct; O'Sullivan demanded that her charges have clean minds, clean bodies, and clean speech. She regarded decorous behaviour, including deference and politeness, as signs of character reformation and rewarded it accordingly. By extending the range of possible privileges in the second half of her tenure, she aroused inmates' willingness to comply.

Records of prisoners' behaviour suggest that the women in O'Sullivan's later years were more eager to meet her approval than her earlier charges had been. The Good Conduct Register, a daily assessment of each inmate's behaviour, reveals that inmates generally complied with Reformatory rules. Attendants observed the women's conduct and gave them marks in respect to their behaviour. Between 1924 and 1927 (the

only years for which a register still exists), almost ninety-four percent of the inmates received perfect marks every day.²² O'Sullivan's Annual Reports also indicate that disciplinary problems were infrequent during the second half of her superintendency. Instead of the repeated complaints about troublesome vixens in her earlier years, her later reports centred on a different type of prisoner, one receptive to motherly supervision and less in need of hard discipline.

Not that problems with inmate behaviour entirely disappeared in her later years. Names of disobedient inmates continued to appear in the Inmates Offence Book but with less frequency than in O'Sullivan's early years: from 1901 to 1913, each prisoner committed an average of 1.2 offences; in the second phase of O'Sullivan's superintendency, only three out of every four inmates committed an institutional offence.²⁴ The single most common offence was refusal to work. Other frequent breaches of prison decorum included laughing in chapel, quarrelling, sulkiness and impure conversation.²⁵ That these infractions were considered sufficiently severe to merit punishment indicates the level of discipline O'Sullivan maintained. Jessie F., a twenty-five year-old serving a two-year sentence for theft received a dis-favourable conduct report for her unacceptable behaviour in 1919:

This inmate [is] ... defiant, showing her disrespect for the rules in small details (but very necessary details) if discipline

is to be maintained such as chewing gum,
dropping scissors etc. [sic] 26

Jessie soon learned her lesson, however, for she went on to become a corridor captain.²⁷ Like most of the others, she did not persist in her disobedience.

When the Reformatory became crowded or when a few particularly unruly inmates were present, O'Sullivan found her control eroded. In 1917, a small coterie of rebellious women defied O'Sullivan and broke prison rules. On a "hot, July day", Jessie W., Lillian E., and Kate W. disrupted routine with "the most boisterous shouting, singing [and] handclapping." The spirited threesome punctuated their "obscene cries" by pounding the tables and chairs in their cells from four o'clock one Sunday afternoon until six the following morning. By the end of their escapade, they had broken "two chairs, one wash stand, besides battering up the utensils in their room."²⁸ O'Sullivan was particularly annoyed because the women had reacted to her motherly rebukes, not with the contrition she had anticipated, but rather with the "vilest most obscene, profane and blasphemous remarks imaginable."²⁹ In 1921, when the Reformatory was extremely crowded, one inmate wrote her mother about disturbances at the Reformatory:

I wish I was home as this is no place for an innocent little girl like me. I have learnt more since I came here than I knew before you should see the fights the girls have some times there was a fight last night and it took 6 girls to hold them apart one of the girls struck an officer and she is in the dungeon, there is fore in there are

there was another fight this morning in the dining room there sertenly was dishes flying for a while. [sic] 30

It seemed that over-crowding, rather than imperfect discipline or particularly unmanageable prisoners was the principal source of disruptions. Moreover, the disturbances in the second half of her superintendency were neither as serious nor as frequent as they had been earlier. Since over-crowding was a problem O'Sullivan could not solve, she wrote to prison Inspector Dunlop for help in the matter:

We have an over-crowded Institution here, the population of which, if normal, can be managed, but a few abnormal inmates make discipline impossible, as there are no means to properly isolate bad actors in the Institution. 31

Angry inmates were more likely to "batter up" furniture or themselves before they would harm anyone else. Significantly, suicidal behaviour became more common in the second half of O'Sullivan's superintendency. As a form of passive resistance, attempted suicide is an extreme reaction to incarceration characteristic of prisoners who feel more defeated than defiant. Five out of six incidences of suicidal behaviour uncovered in the case files occurred between 1914 and 1926. One of these prisoners, seventeen year-old Laura B., disclosed in a suicide note her despair. She addressed it to the Mother Superior of the Good Shepherd Women's Refuge, her last place of detention before being sent to Mercer on a two-year charge for "misbehaving":

I have given up ever thing ... I can easily
See that no one care about me in this world

& why should I care for myself for there
is nothing but deceit ever where ... I am
only expressing the state of my poor wander-
ing mind as I sit in this lonely prison
Sell ... This is my last letter I shall
ever write Mother I mean yes I do I shall
get rid of my Sell this very night ... I
do like you but I hate my self ... [sic] 32

Though Laura did not go through with her plans, others made more serious, albeit unsuccessful attempts at self-destruction. Emily J., another young inmate serving an indefinite sentence on a vagrancy and prostitution charge, tried to strangle herself while confined in an isolation cell in the refractory corridor. O'Sullivan reported the incident to Inspector Rogers, informing him that while the strangulation looked believable, it was merely one in a series of shammed attempts. "She is not actually serious," O'Sullivan judged, "but merely working on the sympathy of those around her."³³ Desperate inmates, like Josephine T., searched for any handy item to do themselves in. The laundry attendant, Marie Meadows, reported to O'Sullivan that Josephine threatened to cut her own throat with a piece of looking glass. When Meadows wrestled it away from her, the prisoner turned to the laundry bleach to "end it all".³⁴ Josephine was stopped before she could complete her task, but May M. was discovered moments after her attempt. She was a sixteen year old, serving a two-year term for vagrancy in 1933. May had tried to strangle herself with a garter and would have succeeded had the Night Watch officer not investigated the "gurgling sound" coming from her cell.³⁵ Another incident of suicidal behaviour

occurred in 1925 when a seventeen year-old inmate refused to eat and work. O'Sullivan could not face the "unpleasant task" of force feeding the woman who had dropped below ninety pounds: "am I to be responsible," she pleaded with prison Inspector Robbins, "for what may happen if she persists in abstaining from food?"³⁶ The inmates who attempted suicide in O'Sullivan's later years at Mercer differed from their fellow prisoners only in their attempt at self-destruction; in other ways, they were typical of the women incarcerated at Mercer after 1913: young, guilty of petty, victimless crimes, and forced to serve long or indeterminate sentences. In short, these women were more intimidated than intimidating.

Because of that, O'Sullivan was able to use subtler forms of control in this period. After 1908, she never repeated her requests for permission to use physical torture on unruly inmates.³⁷ In fact, after 1913, only one incident of corporal punishment took place, but this consisted of a strapping and occurred while O'Sullivan was on leave.³⁸ Instead, she chose to punish recalcitrant inmates by locking them in solitary confinement.³⁹ While approximately the same proportion of punished inmates was sent to solitary as in the first half of O'Sullivan's tenure, fewer spent time in the dungeon cells. By 1914, O'Sullivan began to call them "the dark cells" or "the basement" instead. In her later years, she sent only six percent to the dungeon, whereas she had confined twenty percent there between 1901 and 1913. It

became less common as well for prisoners to spend extended periods in isolation: only two percent of women punished between 1914 and 1927 spent one week or more in solitary confinement, whereas fifteen percent of those punished earlier had been isolated this long. Inmates less openly rebellious could thus be controlled without the violent and overtly coercive methods O'Sullivan had turned to in her earlier years.

Indeed, the prisoners O'Sullivan encountered in her later years were easier to control because they were predisposed to behave as daughters. O'Sullivan made a powerful impression on these women whom she could dominate as a stern mother. Additionally she could offer affectionate encouragement for those who met her standards. Many of the young women felt a genuine desire to please O'Sullivan. The age differences inspired respect while her kind, yet unyielding attitude elicited affectionate responses from the inmates.⁴⁰ Some of the inmates even came to regard the Reformatory -- O'Sullivan's household -- fondly. In a letter written at Christmas, 1918, Emma L. reassured her brother that she was not suffering: "its not so much like jail hear it more like home ... [sic] ." ⁴¹ Prisoners like Mary F. made an extra effort to please the woman she came to regard as mother. Mary wrote O'Sullivan an eligiatic poem proclaiming her resolution to lead a pure life, dedicating it "with love".⁴² Corridor captains, the model prisoners selected by O'Sullivan to impart her philosophy to the inmate population, felt particularly

close to the Superintendent. The captain of J. Corridor, Lucy B., had her hall-mates sign the letter she wrote to the vacationing O'Sullivan: "[w]e all very good girls Mrs. O'Sullivan we all wants you to come home quickly[sic]"⁴³ These inmates found O'Sullivan's motherly approach appealing for they were young, friendless women cut off from familial and maternal bonds.

O'Sullivan's concern for her girls' well-being did not end on their release from the Reformatory. Once she established mother-daughter bonds she was loathe to sever them. Through letters and occasional visits to their homes, she kept in touch with her girls. To a former prostitute, May G., she wrote,

There is nothing of more importance to me than the sorrows and joys of those who have been as children to me in this big Institution, so when you are writing do not hurt me by thinking I have at any time anything more absorbing than your own particular grief or joy as the case may be. 44

O'Sullivan extended her institutional preoccupation with inmates' morality and respectability beyond Mercer's walls. On the inside, she had been the primary force in her girls' lives; on the outside, however, her influence was no longer supported by the power of a coercive institution and its legal buttress. O'Sullivan thus relied solely on the emotional bond that she had developed with her girls. Her letters were full of reminders for the women to look upon their release as a new beginning, a chance at success either as domestics, or as well-behaved daughters, wives or mothers. To

unmarried women, like Carrie L., she wrote: "... you must be careful to be obedient to your mother who stands in my place at the present time."⁴⁵ That mother had, of course, to meet O'Sullivan's standards of respectability. She was not beyond rebuking prisoners' mothers for unseemly conduct. While Laura S. was still in the Reformatory, O'Sullivan scolded her mother for setting a bad example for her daughter. Mrs. S. could hardly expect to have her daughter released until she acted "as a mother should to her daughter".⁴⁶

"When, as in most cases, inmates' "home situation [s]" were unsuitable, the released girls worked as domestics in an employer's home. O'Sullivan felt a special attachment to these young women and was extremely anxious that they do well. She wrote letters of gentle encouragement if a released inmate's spirits flagged. To Lottie K., she wrote,

I realize the many difficulties that are in your way but anything worth having always means effort on our part and it takes courage. Begin again and make a brave fight for the right. You can do it. You know how to work and I do not think you are lazy. Now brace up and write me a sort of letter you know will please me about your work, about your determination to do right, to live right and what promise the future has for you. ⁴⁷

For inmates who regressed after their incarceration at Mercer, O'Sullivan had harsher words. "When I think of the capable woman you might be," she scolded Minnie N., "I lose all patience."⁴⁸ When Hattie F. complained that she was unhappy with her situation in a northern Ontario resort, O'Sullivan told her not to grumble: "I think some of your troubles are

in your imagination." She closed the letter with a few important reminders:

I would prefer that you do not go out alone, especially at night; I shall be very much disappointed in you Hattie if you cannot be happy without the company of strangers. Now be a good little girl Hattie and let me see you improved in every way ... 49

With maternal advice always at the ready, O'Sullivan extended her bonds beyond Mercer.

A number of former inmates seem to have appreciated these ties. Some looked back on their prison terms as the training they had missed on the outside. Minnie P., once a brothel keeper and later a prison evangelist, wrote O'Sullivan to thank her for her "ardent severity" coupled with the "love of God in her soul." "That term of two years and eight weeks was a blessing in disguise," Minnie reflected.⁵⁰

Gertrude F. wrote O'Sullivan a reassuring letter in which she informed her former Superintendent that the "good seed sown" had started to bear fruit:

I know sometimes you get so discouraged I could see it in your face, but everything takes time and sooner or later there is a cure, so cheer up and your Sun will shine, for you are keeping up a good work [sic] . 51

Gertrude signed the letter with "love, from Your Little Noisy Girl." Olive P. was probably the type of woman O'Sullivan regarded as a model Reformatory product. In a letter written in 1919, Olive related her success and happiness since her release:

Well, Mrs. O'Sullivan, I am working at P's Biscuit factory and doing fine. I am in my

home now and it is nice & my plans are to keep living on now as I am and try to raise myself up I will never regret coming to the Reformatory as I can never say enough for it, it has been the means of making me a good woman and of seeing a good many mistakes which I look before I leap. So Mrs. O'Sullivan, With best love and wishes to one and all [sic]. 52

The following year, she received a letter from another affectionate inmate: "[E]xcuse me for calling you mother," wrote Frances T., "as you know I have had no mother you certainly ar a mother for me and to me [sic]." O'Sullivan did not mind; in fact she was touched: "[D]o not forget," she reminded Frances, "that I am a mother to all of the girls at Mercer."⁵³

O'Sullivan could not have succeeded as a maternalist without external support. In her later years, she headed a Reformatory increasingly integrated into the criminal justice system of Ontario. When magistrates began to give younger, female offenders longer sentences her work became easier. But when the government introduced war work, parole, and venereal disease treatment at Mercer, O'Sullivan began to lose control over the Reformatory. These latter three developments ostensibly improved inmates' likelihood for success, yet in practice, they offered little either to the keeper or the kept. The rise of impersonal controls and bureaucratic procedures thus undermined the triumph of maternalistic reform.

O'Sullivan greeted war work with enthusiasm initially. The expansion of employment at the Mercer Reformatory began with voluntary work for the War. Like most English Canadian

women, Emma O'Sullivan rallied 'round the flag when war broke out. Because two of her sons served in the war, she felt a special sense of patriotic sacrifice and she expected her inmates to share it. Within the first year of the war, women at Mercer turned out 550 mattress cases for beds at the Ontario Military Hospital and 1,540 hospital suits for convalescent soldiers. O'Sullivan enthusiastically reported the following in her Annual Report of 1915:

We are all proud to help in the making of woolen socks and other comforts for the soldiers overseas, and the girls have willingly worked in their free time, also, to meet the constant demand for hand-knit socks. This, their bit, is cheerfully contributed, and thousands of pairs of socks stand to their credit. There is scarcely one under the roof who has not some dear one gone or going to the front, and so a deep personal interest in this noble work prevails throughout this institution. 54

It is difficult to imagine how prisoners required to work from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. could have "cheerfully" produced articles in their "spare time". Nevertheless, they continued to fill government war orders in addition to washing, sewing and repairing close to 400,000 articles annually.⁵⁵

Ontario legislators, spurred on by a great demand for war materials, decided to install a factory in the Reformatory. "Mercer Industries" was supplied with power sewing machines and other equipment necessary for the speedy production of suits and mattress covers. O'Sullivan realized that experience in the factory could enhance inmates' chances for lucrative employment on their release, yet she had certain

reservations about the Industries. For one thing, the presence of factory material crowded the Reformatory. O'Sullivan complained in 1917,

Many inconvenient changes have resulted from the crowding of stores for the factory into the Reformatory building. The kitchen and dining-room are widely separated, whilst the facilities in the Superintendent's apartment for preparing and serving meals are exceedingly inadequate. 56

O'Sullivan's annoyance may have been aggravated by her lack of control over the Industries. The Department of the Provincial Secretary appointed a forewoman, Miss Richardson, to be directly responsible to the Department; the Superintendent's duties were limited to supplying the required number of women for particular factory tasks.⁵⁷ In any case, O'Sullivan retained a deep suspicion over training women for occupations where, unlike domestic work, one would not have the "added satisfaction of knowing where they were at night."⁵⁸

The introduction of parole provisions, unlike factory work, bolstered O'Sullivan's personal influence with formal, impersonal controls. The possibility of an earned release and payment for faithfully performed prison work further encouraged inmates to behave obediently. Laura Y., an eighteen year-old vagrant serving an indefinite sentence, was "civil and obedient" but lost a few conduct marks because she "dawdle[d] over her work". Nonetheless, O'Sullivan insured Laura's aunt that her niece would likely improve since the conduct mark system was a "strong incentive for good behaviour."⁵⁹

Only women behaving in an "exemplary fashion" could expect to receive the marks required to earn five day's remission per month. If on even one day an inmate did not receive a perfect score, she could anticipate receiving neither her full quota of remission days nor payment for her work. Some women were never considered sufficiently well behaved to merit these rewards. Between 1917, when the parole system was inaugurated at Mercer, and 1927, fourteen percent of the inmates had no time remitted from ~~their~~ sentences. The remainder who did, however, earned an average remission of thirty-eight days, indicating that they had behaved perfectly for seven months. Since the average period of confinement in this period was approximately eleven months, one can assume that O'Sullivan set extremely high standards of conduct for her charges.

O'Sullivan's favour was the key to an early release for inmates serving indeterminate sentences. She was required to write an assessment of each inmate's eligibility for parole after they served their minimum term. Very rarely, however, did she grant an early release to prisoners who had not spent at least a year at Mercer. She had welcomed the earned release system as an incentive to behave but she was reluctant to allow any inmate to leave before her standards of reformation had been met.⁶⁰ In a typical parole denial, O'Sullivan revealed her belief that women were safest in the Reformatory:

Blanche D. a twenty-four year-old vagrant is in my estimation still in need of not only care in this institution but the discipline and regular hours. Her sentence of six months to one year is none too long to prepare her for life outside the institution. I cannot recommend her release. 61

Parole refusals typically declared that extended sentences would be for the inmates' "own good". Whenever possible, O'Sullivan tried to keep women serving indeterminate sentences until their maximum term expired. She recommended against paroling Jean C., an eighteen year-old woman serving an indefinite term for vagrancy, in Jean's "own interest" and justified her decision by adding, "[i]t takes longer to drive out evil habits and replace [them] with good habits than it does to acquire the evil habits."⁶² She was particularly cautious about releasing young inmates, victims she reasoned, of imperfect mothering. As their new, state-appointed mother, she had to undo years of insidious influence and replace them with a year or two of socially approved character training. Like the magistrates who handed down heavier sentences for petty crimes committed by young, first offenders, O'Sullivan tried to keep her most youthful charges behind bars as long as possible⁶³ because they could benefit most from extended maternal supervision.⁶⁴ She refused to recommend Bertha G.'s parole for this reason:

I cannot recommend parole to any girl of 18 who has spent but six months of an indefinite sentence in a correctional institution. If she had not been living a wrong life for quite some period of time her parents

would not have found it necessary to have her arrested on a vagrancy charge ... [A]t least a year should be served and then strict supervision if released on parole. 65

For most inmates, then, the possibility rather than the probability of parole encouraged their willingness to meet O'Sullivan's standards of behaviour.

For a variety of reasons, few women were able to earn a release on parole. Only eight percent of women were discharged in this manner.⁶⁶ A significantly larger proportion, thirty-six percent, had left under Ticket of Leave restrictions between 1914 and 1917. During this earlier period, O'Sullivan worked closely with Field Officer Howe and together they arranged for well-behaved inmates to assume domestic situations with a minimum of paper work. Once parole regulations were in place, complex, bureaucratic procedures replaced O'Sullivan's and Howe's personal connections with employers. No longer was a friend or relative in need of a maid sufficient reason to allow an inmate's release. After 1922, an assistant parole officer assumed all the responsibilities of assessing inmates' eligibility for early release. Margaret Haskeyne took over the Field Officer position and worked as an employee of the Ontario Board of Parole rather than the Reformatory.⁶⁷ She was even more reluctant than O'Sullivan to give anyone a favourable report because she believed that it was "necessary for the protection of society as a whole that inmates ... not be given liberty too soon."⁶⁸ Discontent with the lack of supervision of loose women outside

the Reformatory, she pondered the possibility of a perpetual watch over society's wayward women. In Jennie C.'s case, she submitted such a solution in 1925 for O'Sullivan's consideration:

I am sure we are agreed as to the need of this girl being given a long sentence for vagrancy but my understanding is that a sentence of more than two years is illegal, so far as the women's Reformatory is concerned... Perhaps the police magistrate Dr. Patterson could give the girl another sentence of two years less one day on some other charge. This is, of course, merely a suggestion. 69

O'Sullivan shared Haskeyne's uneasiness about the inmates' fate on release but she also appreciated the time when she exercised exclusive authority in determining when inmates could leave. Now that parole authorities decided on inmates' eligibility for release, she was no longer able to reward well-behaved inmates with an early discharge. O'Sullivan's mothering was becoming a prerogative of the state.

This process of bureaucratization concerned her. She feared that the special maternal qualities she offered her charges might be superseded by the impersonal, male-dominated parole system. Shortly before her retirement, she wrote a lengthy letter to Dr. Lavell, the chief parole officer of Ontario expressing her preference for the former system of a Field Officer. The Field Officer, she reminded him, reviewed each inmate's history and followed up on the success or failure of all discharged women. In contrast, the parole officer dealt only with those eligible for parole, women

invariably with the greatest promise of success on the outside. This meant that a mere handful of women received the assistance O'Sullivan deemed necessary to complete the reformatory process. She warned that "[t]he months or years spent in the Reformatory can be of but little avail unless the woman when released is fortified by the influence of some one whom she respects and who will have a friendly supervision over her."⁷⁰ O'Sullivan's preference for a Field Officer was also linked to her desire to head a clear chain of command. She observed that as an insider, the Field Officer had

a deeper interest in the success of the Reformatory, in the methods, in its shortcomings, has a background of knowledge of institutions that makes her counsel a great help to the Superintendent. ⁷¹

O'Sullivan added her uneasiness with an all-male Parole Board. She wondered why women, so eminently fitted for the task, were not assigned the cases of potential female parolees.

Women would be more helpful in discussing the cases and would act more wisely in considering what positions the individual might best fill with least exposure of herself to temptation and not a small consideration would be the relief from the embarrassments of hearing the details of a woman's life of sin and immorality. ⁷²

O'Sullivan's continuing faith in her maternal abilities as well as the special qualities of respectable women shaped her assessment of the parole system.

If the parole system undermined O'Sullivan's maternal control, Mercer's designation as a Provincial treatment centre

for venereal disease complicated her administration even further. Very few of the inmates were charged with offences against the Venereal Disease Act per se, but both the prisoners and staff were affected by it nonetheless. When the Lieutenant-Governor named Mercer a treatment centre in 1918, the Reformatory entered a new phase of bureaucratization.

Before 1918, infected women did not comprise a large sector of the inmate population. As early as 1881, a ward for syphilitics had been set aside in the Reformatory.⁷³ During O'Reilly's superintendency and O'Sullivan's earlier years, it was unusual for more than ten inmates to spend time in the syphilitic ward over the course of a year. As treatment, Dr. King gave these women the only known "cure": mercurial preparations.⁷⁴ The side effects of these ointments, pills and injections were considerable and victims sometimes considered the treatment worse than the disease.⁷⁵ When administered orally, mercury tended to destroy tissue in the mouth, stomach, and intestines. It was not until 1910 that an alternative treatment, salvarsan, was developed. This preparation of organic arsenic, known as "Dr. Ehrlich's magic bullet", was the first specific therapy for syphilis.⁷⁶ These preparations were available in Ontario but treatment at Mercer continued to centre on mercurial salves or pills.

Once Ontario legislators passed the Venereal Disease Prevention Act provisions for the treatment of infected women developed rapidly. The first step toward enforcing the law was the routine examination of all incoming inmates irrespect-

ive of their charge. Gonorrhoea was diagnosed simply on the basis of a physical examination as no diagnostic tests had yet been developed. A nurse assisted Dr. Algae, the prison physician who replaced Dr. King in 1915, in taking cervical swabs and blood samples to determine if women showed clinical signs of syphilis. Dr. Algae would have the suspicious blood samples sent to Provincial laboratories where technicians used the Wassermann test to detect the presence of spirochaetes, the microbes visible in victims' blood. If the test results were positive, treatment began immediately, but if they were negative, the doctor often initiated treatment "just to be safe."⁷⁷

Considering the intensity of the campaign against venereal diseases, as well as the presumed disreputable character of Mercer inmates, the medical staff's anxiousness to treat prisoners is not surprising. The Reformatory staff, the sentencing magistrates and the arresting authorities all assumed that inmates had been promiscuous. There is reason to doubt, therefore, that the forty-nine percent of inmates with venereal disease between 1918 and 1927 actually suffered from the affliction. There is little doubt, however, that most of the prisoners at Mercer in this period were subjected to mandatory treatment.

How did the medical staff treat women they determined infected? The "magic bullet" had been hailed as a wonder drug when it was revealed to the medical world and physicians rejoiced

at the news that syphilis might be cured with a single injection of salvarsan.⁷⁸ It was not long, however, before doctors recognized the weakness of the drug against the virulent disease; as many as forty doses of arsenical derivatives administered over a year were required to arrest the infection and prevent relapses. Moreover, the intramuscular injections were very painful and often had to be supplemented with mercury or bismuth ointments and pills. "Discredited as a wonder drug, the arsenicals nevertheless became the standard therapy for syphilis."⁷⁹ At the same time medical authorities at Mercer kept abreast of developments in the continuing war against the disease. They used a variety of recently-developed arsenical treatments yet continued to rely on certain standard procedures, such as douching with certain chemical solutions.⁸⁰ By the 1920s, the number of inmates under treatment grew sufficiently large to require line-ups for the daily douche each morning. Women refusing the treatment could expect to be locked into their cells all day.⁸¹ Physicians supplemented the usual injections of arsenical derivatives with internal and external applications of silver nitrate,⁸² mercury, and potassium iodine. Those diagnosed as victims of gonorrhoea were treated primarily with daily douches and weekly applications of silver nitrate and agyrol to the cervix.⁸³ Wassermann diagnostic tests were repeated every three months until three tests came back with negative results.⁸⁴ Only at this point were inmates considered

"cured". This meant that inmates could be treated after their supposed maximum sentence length had expired.

While the treatment of venereal diseases could thus increase the period of O'Sullivan's supervision over inmates, it also complicated her management of the Reformatory. By January 1920, it seemed to her that Mercer had ceased to function as a correctional facility and had become a curative institution. She complained about this situation to prison Inspector Dunlop:

There are ... but fifty-one adults and one baby in the Reformatory. Of these, twenty-two are under treatment for venereal disease, the baby is syphilitic, and there are three known pregnant cases -- there may be others. You can readily understand the difficulty in supplying a sufficient number of women to the factory... 85

Clearly such a state of affairs impeded her mothering efforts for she had been hired to uplift and reform, not to cure. Dunlop himself had worried shortly after the passage of the Venereal Disease Act that Mercer might become "the general hospital for the treatment of cases of venereal diseases coming before the magistrates..."⁸⁶ O'Sullivan feared that her own reformatory efforts might be eclipsed by the increasing importance placed on Mercer's medical functions.

The appointment of a specialist in the treatment of venereal diseases underlined the shift in emphasis from Mercer's correctional to its curative capacities. In 1921, Dr. Edna Guest became the physician responsible for the physical well-being of the inmates. She had distinguished herself as an

expert in venereal disease treatment in women during her work at the Women's College Hospital in Toronto. Her experience in running a clinic for affected women prepared her for the work she undertook at the Reformatory. Guest was responsible to the Ontario Board of Health rather than to O'Sullivan and thus, like Haskeyne, the parole officer, she was one more external authority with jurisdiction over the discharge of Mercer inmates.

Dr. Guest prided herself on her ability to diagnose and treat venereal disease in women. She gave inmates doses of medicine far in excess of standards revised by the Board of Health in 1920. Officials noted that it was often impossible to obtain a negative Wassermann test and that, as long as inmates had received six salvarsan and six mercury injections, they should not be held beyond their terms since they were not infectious after the primary stage of syphilis.⁸⁷ Despite the acknowledged weaknesses and potential dangers of venereal disease detection and treatment, Guest proceeded undaunted. She gave one inmate twenty-six injections of mercury, twenty-two of salvarsan, and ten of bismuth.⁸⁸ For Ruth R., she prescribed applications of fifty percent silver nitrate, ten times the strength recommended by the Board, because Ruth was in "such a filthy condition". Guest defended her decisions as courageous responses to a formidable problem.⁸⁹ Yet she too realized what Frank Hodgins, the magistrate responsible for drafting the Venereal Disease Act, had observed in 1919: "no legislation can deal adequately with social

conditions...⁹⁰. Guest bluntly stated the dilemma she and other medical agents faced:

We all know medically that one night or even one hour is long enough for [a released prisoner] to be in the company of an infected man for her to become re-infected, and then the disease goes ravaging ahead placing her once again in a very infectious, disgusting condition. 91

Concerned with upholding her reputation, she tried to remove all manifestations of impurity even when this meant risking inmates' health.

Despite revised recommendations from the Board of Health in 1920, inmates found their terms at Mercer extended because of disease. Between 1918 and 1927, more than fifty inmates remained in the Reformatory longer than two years because their Wassermann tests were positive. It was not uncommon for O'Sullivan to receive letters from concerned parties demanding the release of a prisoner. She delicately replied to the lawyer employed by Hazel B.'s father:

Under certain circumstances, all Institutions are obliged to detain for special treatment, any inmates suffering from certain diseases, even tho' their term of imprisonment has expired. I do not think it necessary to explain to Hazel's father what the particular disease is, from which Hazel is suffering: the girl herself does not wish him to know. 92

One mother could not believe O'Sullivan's explanation after she had complained that her daughter, Gladys E., had been imprisoned for more than two years. "She ought to be cured long ago," protested Mrs. E., "[moreover] it should not take two years to cure any disease."⁹³

Infected inmates were ineligible for parole even if they had perfect marks for conduct. O'Sullivan explained the legalities of this ruling to an inmate's mother when she inquired about her daughter's extended incarceration:

The Parole Board will not consider the case of any inmate suffering from infectious disease [s]. Your Daughter Myrtle is still under treatment for Venereal Disease, and cannot come before that Board until there is an improvement in her condition. 94

Only Dr. Guest could determine whether there was an improvement and she rendered the final verdict in all petitions for parole basing her decision on the inmate's physical condition. Delia C., for example, was denied parole for this reason. Guest noted that Delia's "strongly positive" reading on her Wassermann test determined it "not desirable that she ... be paroled according to the Venereal Disease Act."⁹⁵ Guest thus proceeded unmindful of the Board of Health's recommendation that inmates not be detained simply on account of their Wassermann test results. Her authority and the prominence of her work further complicated O'Sullivan's efforts to lead a Reformatory.

In the final years of her superintendency, O'Sullivan witnessed the impact of wartime external changes on the Reformatory. In many ways it did become "a reformatory in fact as well as in name"⁹⁶: O'Sullivan began to receive young women eager to respond favourably to maternal control. Revised sentencing laws, the strictness of parole requirements, and the compulsory treatment for venereal disease spelled longer periods of confinement for most inmates. Moreover the

indeterminate sentencing provision allowed O'Sullivan to exercise her motherly discretion over inmates' eligibility for release. These external controls bolstered her personal authority yet they complicated her administration with bureaucratic procedures. Factory inspectors, field and parole officers, the Parole Board and medical staff began to eclipse O'Sullivan's role as the primary influence in her girls' lives at Mercer. The inmates themselves benefited little from these supposed reforms. As young, relatively innocent women they spent extended periods behind bars enduring painful treatments for venereal disease. Their chances for parole were slim and even after release most could look forward only to domestic work. Ultimately, neither penal progress nor maternalistic reform prepared these women for life on the outside.

NOTES

CHAPTER 4

1. The proportion of youthful inmates (those under 20) jumped significantly. Cramer's $V=0.313$, $p=.000$, $N=316$. For the purposes of this study, a probability value of .005 or less will be considered significant while Phi and Cramer's V values of .3 or higher will be quoted to demonstrate a strong relation between two variables. In this case, the tendency for younger inmates to be sent to Mercer in the second half of O'Sullivan's superintendency was statistically significant. See Table 2, Appendix B, p. iv.
2. By 1914, she was fifty-four years old.
3. See Graph 3, Appendix B, p. v.
4. A.R.S. of 1913, 1916, 1917, 1919, 1922 in O.S.P. 1914, 1917, 1918, 1920, 1923.
5. $\Phi=0.33844$, $p=0.000$, $N=316$. See Graph 4, Appendix B, p. vi for a comparison of intemperates between 1901 to 1913 and 1914 to 1927.
6. In fact, the percentage of women serving time for the broad category of "immorality" charges dropped from 28.42 to 16.5% by 1914 to 1927. See Table 1, for inmates' offences, Appendix B, p. i.
7. From 1914 to 1927, thirty-six percent of inmates had been charged with vagrancy, whereas only twenty-one percent received this charge between 1901 and 1913.
8. Canada, Criminal Code, Part V, s. 238: "Vagrancy."
9. #5327, 8 November 1917.
10. #5283, 3 May 1919.
11. A.R.S. of 1915 in O.S.P. 1916, p. 59.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Evidence of this arrangement appeared in a letter from McFadden. He asked if O'Sullivan would not mind receiving a keeper who seemed capable of reformation. His letter read, "Some time ago I promised you that I would not send any more keepers of bawdy houses to you."

I wish you would ... let me know ... whether it will interfere with the arrangements at your institution if the magistrate should think it fit to commit this girl to the Mercer." #5293, 5 June 1922.

15. Bularzik, p. 187.
16. A.R.S. of 1919 in O.S.P. 1920, p. 48.
17. #4286, 5 December 1914.
18. See 'Daily Movements' in "Rules Governing Inmates," Appendix C, p. iii.
19. In many custodial and penal institutions, Christmas is an occasion for a satirical theatrical. The inmate cast sometimes lampoon officials or, in single-sex institutions, perform burlesque skits. Goffman "... Staff-Inmate Relations," p. 87. It is doubtful O'Sullivan would have permitted anything disrespectful to be performed, but at the Massachusetts Reformatory under Hodder, farcical skits were put on by the inmates. See Freedman, Their Sisters..., photo after p. 118.
20. A.R.S. of 1919 in O.S.P. 1920, p. 49.
21. Although the "Act Respecting the ... Mercer ... Reformatory ..." had stipulated that no officer would "employ any convict in working for him [sic]," inmates had always been used as maids in the officers' quarters. One former inmate wrote O'Sullivan in 1910 to request that she be hired as the Superintendent's maid. She was turned down because discharged inmates were not allowed to maintain contact with convicts. #3703, 21 July 1910.
22. If inmates received three good conduct marks per day, they could earn the full, five-days of remission for each month. If on one day, a prisoner received only two marks, she would lose one day's remission. Good Conduct Register.
23. See Graph 5, Appendix B, p. v. for a comparison between the number of punishments each year and two base figures: the number of inmates received annually and the number of prisoners in the Reformatory on the annual inspection date, 30 October.
24. Based on tabulation of the number of offences, compared with the number of prisoners annually.
25. Terms used in the "Inmates' Offence Book."
26. #4893, 12 August 1919.

27. Ibid.
28. #4694, 30 July 1917.
29. Ibid.
30. #5097, n.d., 1921. Since all outgoing and incoming mail was censored, this inmate's mother never saw her daughter's letter.
31. O'Sullivan to Dunlop in #5381, 10 August 1923.
32. #4275, 20 April 1914.
33. #4552, 3 February 1917.
34. #5355, 22 December 1922.
35. #5365, 16 January 1923.
36. #5261, 22 May 1925.
37. On occasion, O'Sullivan requested unmanageable inmates to be removed to the Orillia Asylum for the Insane. Inspector Dunlop denied one of these requests in a humorous response: "I am sure it would take a lot of persuasion with some Doctors I know, to make them certify that a woman was insane just because she stuck pins into other women. As a matter of fact, the writer thinks the sticking of pins would be more liable to drive the other inmates insane." #5291, 1 December 1922.
38. The request to strap the inmate had first to be granted by officials in the Department of the Provincial Secretary. On 6 April, 1926, Kathleen R. was strapped in the presence of Reformatory medical and Department personnel. She had "defied" Acting Superintendent Scott. #5861, 6 April 1926.
39. Michel Foucault has theorized about the transition from physical punishment to torture of the soul. Solitary confinement, he argues, is a more insidious form of torture than anything causing physical pain. This reorientation of penal practice came about in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe. Theorists like Bentham argued, "[t]he expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations ...". See Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Origins of the Prison, Alan Sheridan, trans., New York: Pantheon Books, 1977. Of course historical studies, Ignatieff's and O'Brien's in particular, have shown that aspects of both modes of punishment exist in different systems, and that the reorientation

of penal philosophy did not change uniformly. Nonetheless, in particular historical circumstances, such as the transitional period of Emma O'Sullivan's superintendency, evidence of this shift can be demonstrated. The larger number of suicidal inmates in the second half of her superintendency suggests that punishment in this phase "bit into the bodiless reality of the soul." Ibid., p. 17.

40. See Madeleine E. Doty, *Society's Misfits*, New York: The Century Company, 1916, for an impression of a matronly superintendent. Doty was a lawyer posing as an inmate for the Prison Reform Commission. She charted the potential of the prison reform movement but attributed its failings to regressive matrons and officials. One matron, however, made a different impression on her: "She treated us like a bunch of children and laid down the 'law' with a mighty hand. But her voice, though dictatorial, was not harsh ... She stopped at my door ... and said if I did not talk and behaved there would be no trouble." p. 42.
41. #4887, 14 December 1918.
42. #4928, circa 1920.
43. #4890, circa 1919.
44. #4619, 26 March 1920. Mary had been sent to Mercer in 1916 and released in 1917.
45. #4025, 25 March 1913.
46. #4535, 2 January 1916.
47. #4479, 14 March 1917.
48. #4137, 5 December 1914.
49. #4112, 23 August 1915.
50. #3842, 19 November 1921. The chronology of letters does not relate to the inmates' numbers since their notes were written after their release.
51. #4865, 29 April 1921. Gertrude was especially appreciative of the lessons she had learned in the Clean Speech Society.
52. #4864, 29 September 1919.
53. #4914, 18 July 1920.
54. A.R.S. of 1915 in O.S.P. 1916, p. 59.

55. Ibid., p. 63.
56. O'Sullivan to Dunlop in "Correspondence of the Provencial Secretary," n.d., 1917.
57. Ibid.
58. Howe to O'Sullivan in "Correspondence of Deputy Provincial Secretary," 14 October, 1916.
59. O'Sullivan to Laura Y.'s Aunt, 16 December 1919, in #5825.
60. The superintendent's attitude toward parole differed from institution to institution. At Bedford Hills in New York, Davis believed parole an opportunity to send inmates back to society as soon as possible. She promoted a policy "to parole inmates as rapidly as they are found to be fitted to go out, and to do this without regard to the period of time spent in the institution." Quoted in Freedman, Their Sisters...., p. 132.
61. #4712, 3 April 1918.
62. #5158, 1 March 1922.
63. Of those serving time for vagrancy, ninety-three percent were under twenty-five. $P=0.000$, Cramer's $V=0.529$, $n=167$. Both younger and older women tended to serve longer sentences after 1913, but younger women tended to serve heavier sentences. From 1914 to 1927, fifty-eight percent of prisoners under twenty-five years old, served maximum sentences of a year or more. Only thirty-eight percent of those over twenty-five served sentences of this duration: $P=0.024$, $\Phi=0.187$, $n=167$. Younger inmates were incarcerated for significantly longer periods, $P=0.000$, $V=-0.259$, $n=314$ than those over twenty-five.
64. Carol Smart has argued how the development of "liberal criminology" and acceptance of the reformatory ethos spelled longer sentences and an increased likelihood of incarceration for women and girls. Their most common "crime", sexual promiscuity, was sanctioned much more severely in the case of females than males. See Smart, Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique, London: Routledge and Regan Paul Ltd., 1976. See Graph 6, Appendix B, p. viii.
65. #4334, 31 December 1918.
66. See Table 3, Appendix B, p. ix. for a tabulation of various modes of discharge between 1901 and 1927.
67. O'Sullivan to Lavell, in #4391, 2 February, 1926.
68. #5765, n.d., June 1925.

69. #5509, 5 August 1925. O'Sullivan did not respond to Haskeyne's suggestion.
70. #5791, 2 February 1926.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. A.R.S. of 1881 in O.S.P. 1882, p. 119. In most prisons, few precautions were taken to isolate infected women. For recollections of deplorably inadequate isolation facilities and medical treatment at an American women's prison, see Kate Richards O'Hare, In Prison, New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1923.
74. Since the fifteenth century, mercury had been used to treat syphilis. It had not been refined significantly until Ricord's work in the mid-nineteenth century made it slightly more effective. See Bacchi, p. 111.
75. For some of the side effects known to contemporary physicians, see Ricord, A Practical Treatise on Venereal Diseases, Fifth Edition, Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1857, p. 256.
76. James Jones, Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, New York: The Free Press, 1981, p. 45.
77. #5108, 28 April 1920.
78. Jones, p. 45.
79. Ibid., p. 46.
80. The solutions most commonly used were iodine, sodium chloride and "hot soapy water."
81. This information was disclosed in a letter O'Sullivan wrote to Pearl H.'s mother. Pearl had been treated in the Reformatory once before but she came back with the same disease. Pearl did not like co-operating with the medical authorities in her treatment. O'Sullivan wrote, "...she seems to have no gratitude for what has been done for her in this line. I have just had her in the office and have rebuked her ... and also told her that she is not co-operating herself if she is too lazy in the morning to be on time for the douches which are to be taken every morning. She has been told by the Assistant Superintendent that if she is not in her line at the proper time to receive her douche, that she will be locked in her room all day..." #5806 18 January 1926. Apparently O'Sullivan did not imagine that Pearl might have found the daily treatments either painful or humiliating.

82. Silver nitrate is a chemical compound used as a general antiseptic.
83. Argyrol is a silver-protein compound used to treat inflamed mucous membranes.
84. #5108, 28 April 1920.
85. #4961, 9 January 1920. ✓
86. Dunlop, in "Correspondence of Provincial Secretary..." 14 August 1918.
87. Quoted by O'Sullivan in #4953, 23 September 1920. The Wassermann test could not detect the stage of the disease. Inmates in the later stages were not contagious but their Wassermann reactions would be positive. As Pusey indicated in a medical text written in 1933, "for public health purposes, the Wassermann is only useful in early cases. Late syphilis, regardless of the Wassermann, is not for public health purposes a matter of concern, because it is not contagious." Pusey, William Allen. The History and Epidemiology of Syphilis, Springfield Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1933.
88. #5566, 10 January 1925.
89. #5804, 14 April 1927.
90. Hodgins, "Report on Venereal Diseases," O.S.P., L1 (Part X) no. 58, (1919), p. 3.
91. #5804, 14 April 1927.
92. #4904, 29 April 1920.
93. #5137, 16 August 1923.
94. #5237, 9 August 1922. ✓
95. #4986, 19 June 1922.
96. A.R.I. of 1900 in O.S.P. 1901, p. 47.

CONCLUSION

In an period when the notion of separate spheres for the two sexes had gained credence, legislation in Ontario sanctioned the building of Canada's first separate prison for women. Inspector Langmuir anticipated that pious, respectable women would uplift their fallen sisters at Mercer with motherly care. Elsewhere, in temperance and moral reform societies, women had already demonstrated their ability and asserted their rights to oversee the moral and physical health of unfortunates. When motherly talents were extended to the supervision of prisoners, however, they proved incapable of making Mercer anything more than a place simply of detention and punishment. Contemporary theories of reformation had not yet found as much acceptance in the Ontario criminal justice system as the belief in punishment; thus Mercer drifted without support for its mission.

When Emma O'Sullivan took over in 1901, she continued to run the Reformatory as a maternalist, choosing motherly care over newer, more daring approaches to women's prison work. She concentrated on the inmates' characters, believing that respectability was the key to reformation. She encouraged her subjects to be obedient, pious, and chaste but found that she had neither the external support nor the inmates' co-operation necessary to make maternalism work. Most prisoners spent too little time at Mercer for O'Sullivan's reforming techniques to succeed; additionally

they were not the kind of women likely to respond to maternalism. As middle-aged, intemperate recidivists, they had little use for motherly supervision or for the middle-class values they were forced to adopt at Mercer. Faced with recalcitrant "daughters" and inadequate legal and judicial support, O'Sullivan ended the first half of her tenure in frustration.

In the 1910s, however, a penal reform movement fuelled by a general concern with social improvement swept across Ontario. For the first time, a significant measure of support for the reformation of criminals developed. As legislators introduced measures for indeterminate sentencing, work release and eventually parole, the legal structures necessary to support maternalistic prison work fell into place. Beyond Mercer's walls, maternal feminists were also gaining acceptance and legislative sanction for their goals of social reform. Leading the campaign for moral and physical purity, they urged legislators to stamp out vice with repressive measures against drinking, gambling and sexual promiscuity. Their efforts inspired campaigns to seek out women still able to benefit from character training and physical cleansing: the young morals offender. The social and legal changes marking the decade thus formed the backdrop to O'Sullivan's later years at Mercer.

As a result, maternalistic reform was more successful in the second half of O'Sullivan's superintendency. With

a new type of inmate serving longer sentences, O'Sullivan encountered less resistance to her motherly approach. These inmates differed from their earlier counterparts in their youth and relative innocence. Moreover, they were predisposed to respond in a daughterly fashion: the parole system and indeterminate sentencing encouraged them to comply although in fact the reforms aided the keeper more than the kept. Inmates were imprisoned longer for pettier crimes and even subjected to painful and humiliating treatment for venereal diseases, all supposedly for their own good. O'Sullivan's maternalism flourished in such a setting but even she could see the signs of an impersonal system that had begun to absorb the role of the individual maternalist into the bureaucratic agencies of the State. Maternalism may have triumphed momentarily but ultimately the state was the victor.

As O'Sullivan's motherly role at Mercer weakened so did her health. In 1927 she retired after years of illness and a number of leaves of absence. She could reflect on her time at Mercer with pride: over three thousand women had passed through the Reformatory during her twenty-six year ~~year~~ superintendency and she could say that for all of them she had set a path for character reformation. She offered her girls everything she felt a mother should: encouragement, tenderness and nurturance as well as reproachment, strictness and punishment. Letitia Scott, a long-time Mercer employee and the woman appointed to take O'Sullivan's

place declared after her retirement that "her wise and gentle administration remains a cherished memory in this institution."¹

O'Sullivan may have succeeded, but how successful was maternalism as a mode of reform? Motherly concern was unquestionably a kinder form of coercion than familiar prison practices of outright neglect or even sexual abuse by male guards and prisoners. Yet the benefits of maternalistic reform were limited from the beginning. As an ideology, maternalism justified and perpetuated fundamental inequalities between classes and genders; indeed, it could do little else since it had grown out of middle class conceptions of the separate spheres.

Like all maternalists, O'Sullivan drew on the model of the hierarchical relationship between the mother and her child. Such a relationship entailed the exertion of power but a power tempered by the mother's role as moral guardian. Example and persuasion were her most appropriate tools of control while overt coercion and violence became choices of last resort. Maternalism, as an expression of this mother-child relation, created "bonds of metaphor",² links between mother and child figures that evoked familiar family images and legitimized the power of one over the other.

But because maternalism is based on the mother-daughter relationship in particular, it can easily become oppressive. Within the "female world" of the nineteenth century, bourgeois mothers often thwarted their daughters' aspirations, compelling them instead to conform to con-

ventional concepts of femininity.³ While daughters could grow up, they did not stop being daughters. A similar phenomenon occurred as maternalism justified the extension of motherly talents from the private to the public sphere. On a social level, the hierarchical relation between mother and daughter took on class dynamics: society's "mothers", usually middle-class moral reformers, took care of society's "children": the poor, the homeless, the fallen. While bourgeois matrons encouraged their daughters to be "true women", maternalists instructed unfortunates to emulate middle-class values of temperance, cleanliness and industriousness.

In Massachusetts, one of the most prominent women's prison superintendents, Jessie Hodder, approached reformatory work in a different way. Separated from middle-class convention as a divorced woman and single parent, she could identify with many of her subjects' plights. Hodder never completely rejected the value of domestic training but neither was she bound by nineteenth-century notions of femininity. As a woman who had moved beyond maternalistic modes of reform, she believed that industrial and academic training, not simply domestic work, were the keys to improvement. Hodder's realistic perception of the inmates' former lives prompted her to emphasize the importance of self-respect over deference. She tried to foster a sense of independence in her charges for she saw herself more as an instructor than a mother.⁴

Yet in institutional settings like the Mercer Reformatory, maternalists gave their subjects class and gender training. For the most part, reformatory instruction consisted of lessons and practice in domestic tasks such as laundry and knitting. But to transform fallen women into true women, O'Sullivan believed inmates had to learn how to achieve a happy home as well as a clean home. For that, character formation was all-important: the quiet, deferential woman was the model inmate and ultimately the model wife. O'Sullivan thus designed rewards and punishments to instill the proper attitudes in her inmates. As a maternalist she could not see beyond nineteenth-century conceptions of femininity nor was she able to shed her middle-class biases to offer her subjects training in anything other than domestic work, the very field most of them had occupied before their imprisonment.

The social climate, however, supported O'Sullivan's approach over Hodder's. Maternalistic reform at Mercer worked best when supported by conservative legal structures. The control of the mother over her charges came to rest on the diffuse coercive powers of agencies and the state. The same held true for maternal feminists whose power rose in accordance with the movement for conservative reforms. At the height of their power, they championed repressive laws against drinking and illicit sexual activity; once their campaigns gained acceptance, however, their roles as individual reformers became obsolete. By the twenties, the State, rather than maternalists, took care of unfortunates.

If the State became parent, then, perhaps it also became mother.⁵ The social acceptability of maternalism became the undoing of maternalists like Emma O'Sullivan.

What did maternalistic reform offer the subjects and why did only certain of them respond to a motherly approach? Since maternalism never challenged and indeed grew out of inequalities dividing genders and classes, motherly care could never allow subjects to rise materially from their situation. Maternal reform may have eased the pains of imprisonment but it did little to improve prisoners' ability to cope with their lives on the outside. The women in O'Sullivan's first years knew this; they realized that a mother's care could do little to solve their problems of alcohol addiction, limited education, poor job prospects and perhaps abusive husbands. That some inmates subsequently responded affectionately is even more pitiable. Young and cast out by their families, they were guilty of victimless crimes and branded as "loose". They actively sought a sense of respectability and legitimacy that O'Sullivan provided as long as they behaved according to her middle-class standard of conduct. They saw in her the status of age, class and refinement they may never have found in their own mothers. Still young enough to respond to a maternal authority figure, they were eager to comply. The tendency for a few to love their keeper and regard the Reformatory as home is a sad statement on the desolation of their former lives.

This study has assessed maternal reform at the Mercer Reformatory and thus makes a contribution to women's history in Canada. Both the prisoners and the Superintendents ended up at the Reformatory because of their presumed female characteristics: the prisoners for their transgressions against conceptions of feminine decorum and chastity; the Superintendents for their conformity to motherly standards of respectability. Day to day activities in this penal institution reveal the relations between the staff and inmates and thus enhance our understanding of how a prison works. By examining an institution within its changing social context, this prison history also adds to the broader field of social history.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

1. A.R.S. of 1927 in O.S.P. 1928, p. 24.
2. Richard Sennet, Authority, New York: Vintage Books, 1980, pp. 70-71.
3. Smith-Rosenberg, p. 15.
4. Bularzik, p. 192.
5. Rothman, David J., "The State as Parent: Social Policy in the Progressive Era," in Willard Gaylin, Ira Glasser, Steven Marcus, and David Rothman. Doing Good. The Limits of Benevolence. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

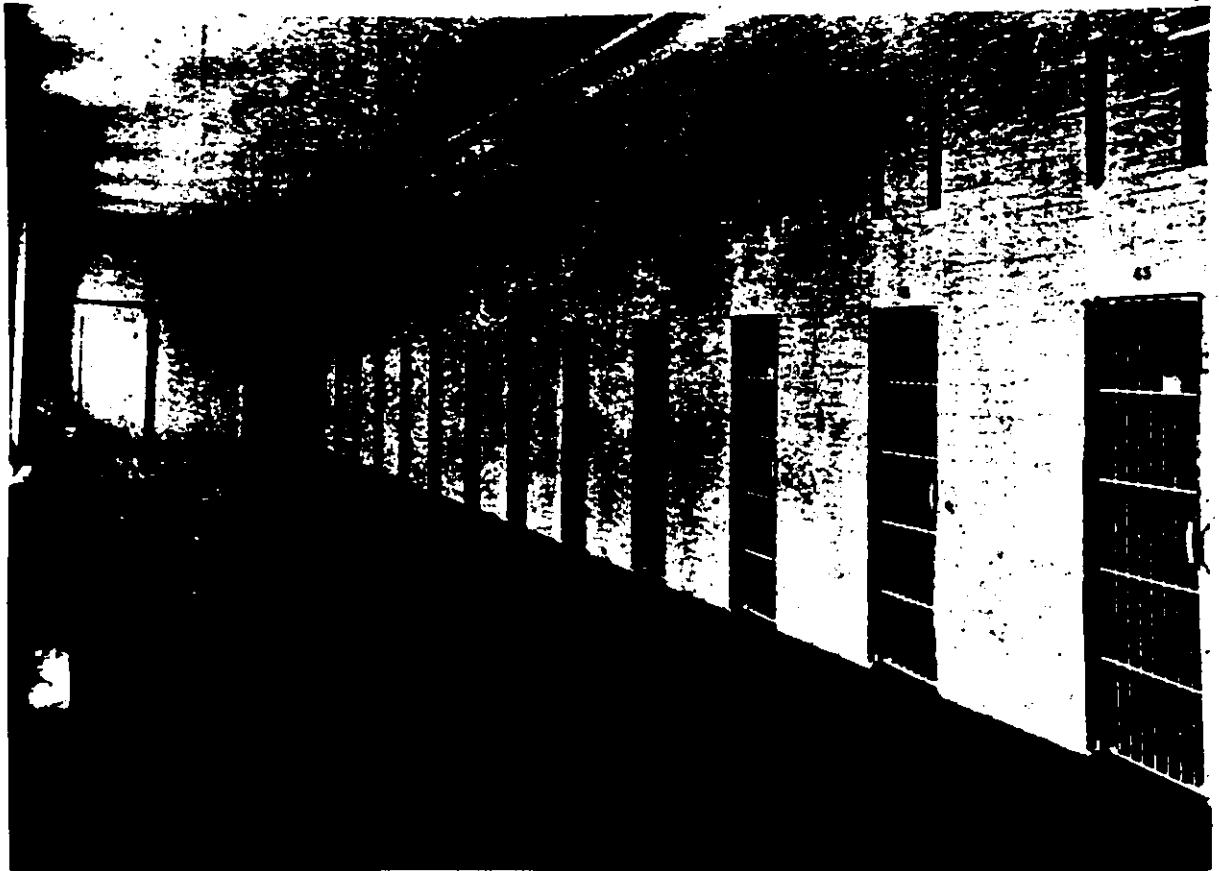
APPENDIX A



View of Mercer from King St. Source: P.A.O.,
RG 20, Series T-1.



Administrative Section Viewed from King
St. Source: P.A.O. RG 20, Series T-1.



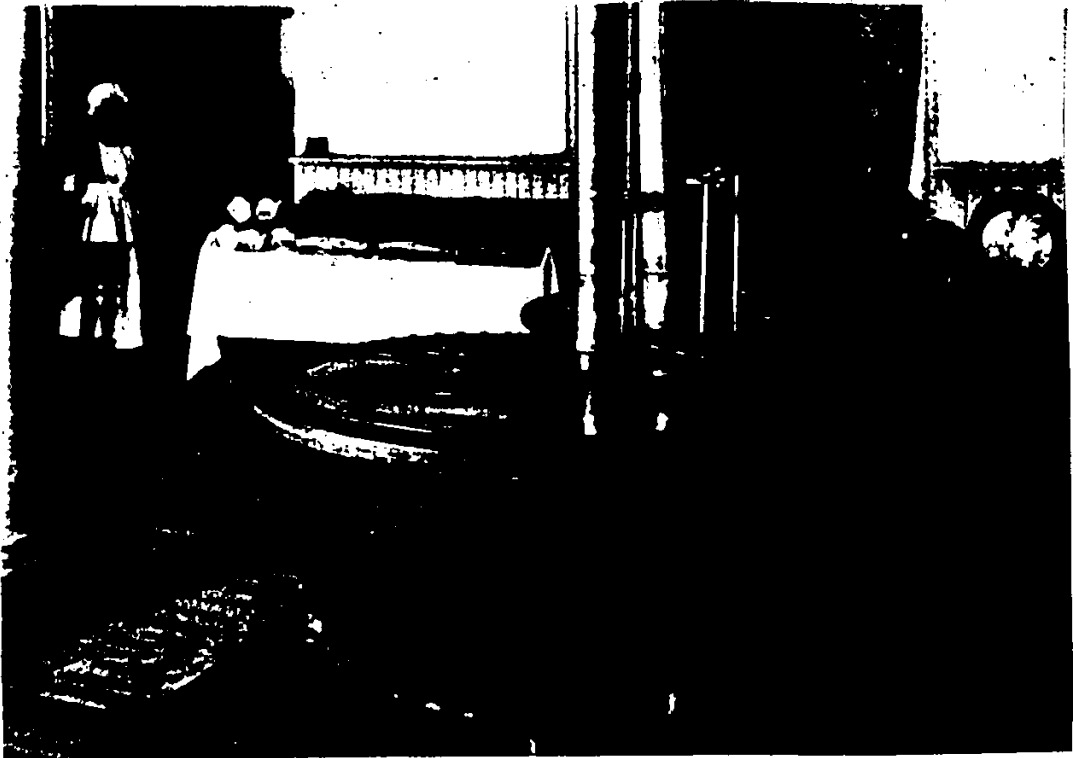
Unspecified cell corridor. Source: O.S.P., 1908, p. 72.



Inmates and attendants in sewing room. Source: O.S.P., 1903, p. 93.



Inmates at Work in Laundry Area. Source: O.S.P., 1903, p. 76.



Inmate in Kitchen. Source: O.S.P., 1903, p. 74.



Inmates and Attendant in dining hall. Source: O.S.P., 1903, p. 91.



Catholic Chapel: Source: O.S.P., 1903, p. 78.



Protestant Chapel. Source: O.S.P., 1903, p. 80.

APPENDIX B

TABLE 1 : Categories of Inmates' Crimes, 1901-1927.

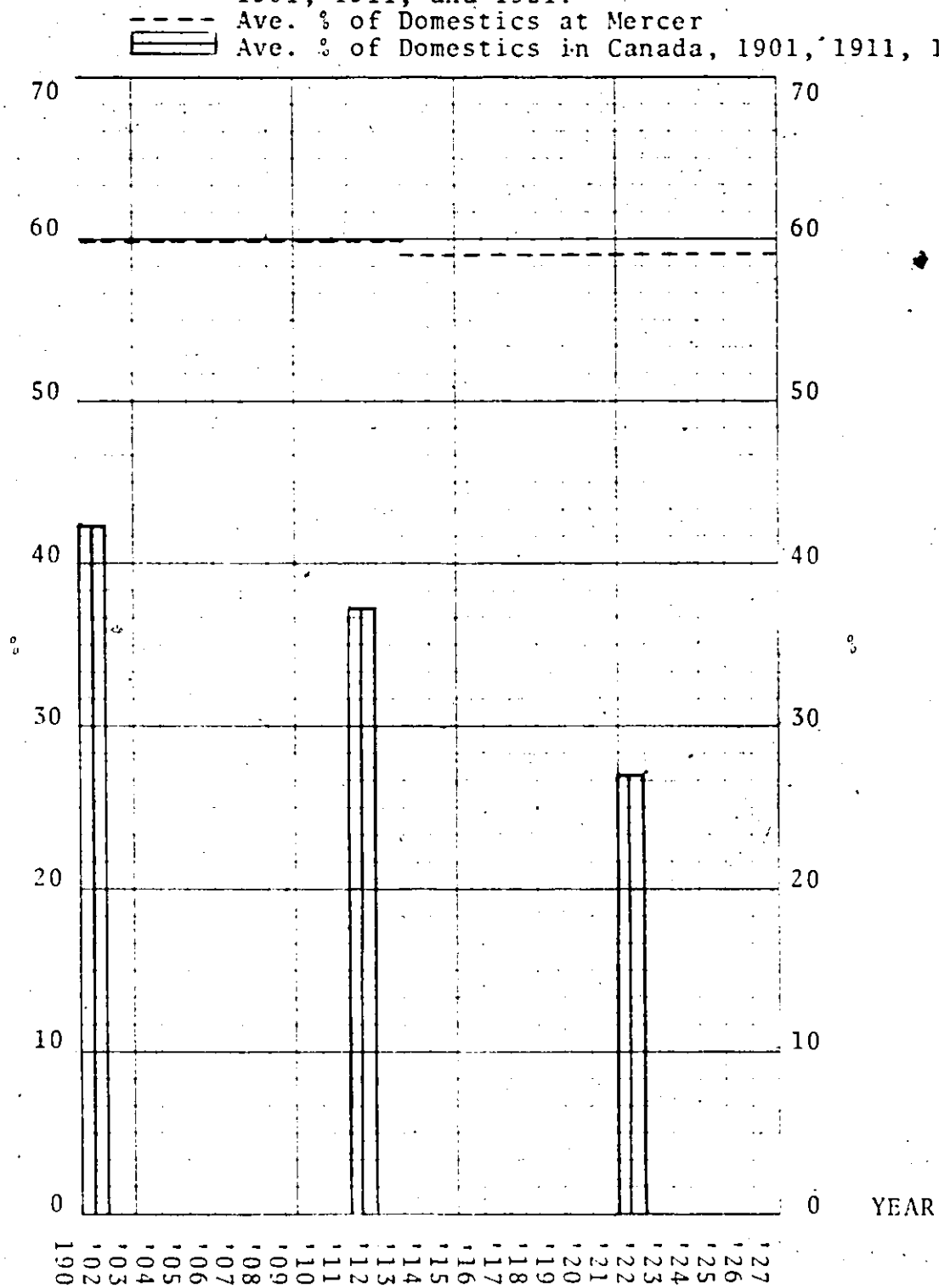
	Vagrancy	Theft	Immorality	Prostitution	Keeper	Total
1901-1906						
N	12	14	26	5	3	60
%	20	23.3	43.3	8.3	5	100
1907-1913						
N	20	22	16	15	16	89
%	22.7	25	18.2	17	18	100
1914-1917						
N	17	7	6	12	7	49
%	34.7	14.3	12.2	24.5	14.3	100
1918-1927						
N	43	19	21	24	7	114
%	37.7	16.7	18.4	21.1	6.1	100

N of cases = 312

Missing Cases = 4

* Crimes against public or private morality, including: drunkenness, drug possession, breach of the Ontario Temperance and/or V.D. Acts, incest, immorality; contributing to the delinquency of a minor, child neglect, incorrigibility, bigamy, concealment of birth, disorderliness.

GRAPH 1 : Percentage of Inmates Reported as Domestic (1901-1927) Compared with Percentage of Female Domestic in Canada, 1901, 1911, and 1921.



*Source: Sixth Census of Canada. IV, Table VII, "Per Cent Distribution of the Gainfully Employed ... by Occupational Group, for Canada, 1881-1921," p. xvi.

GRAPH 2 : Percentage of Catholics at Mercer Compared with Percentage of Catholics in Toronto and Ontario

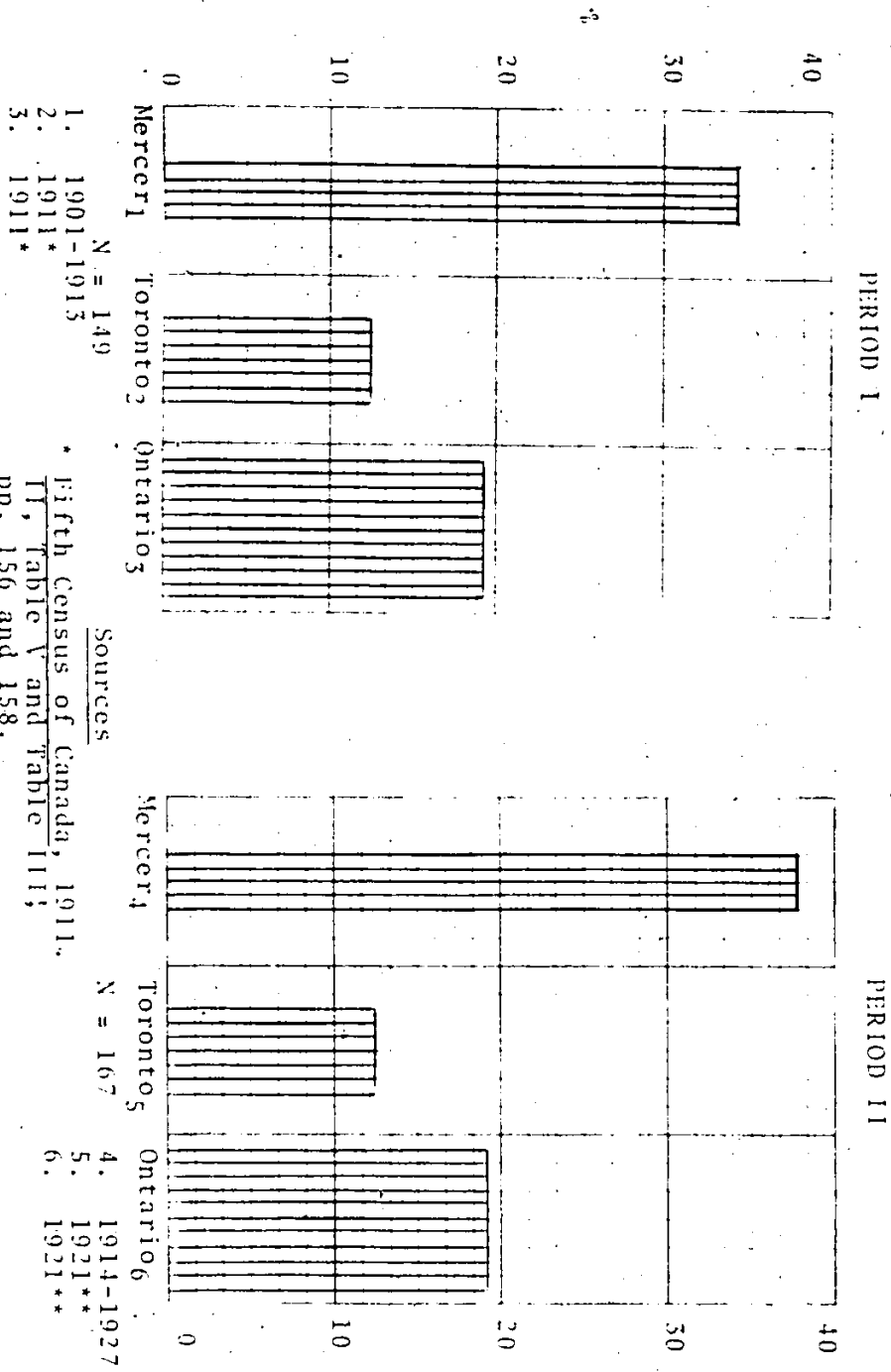
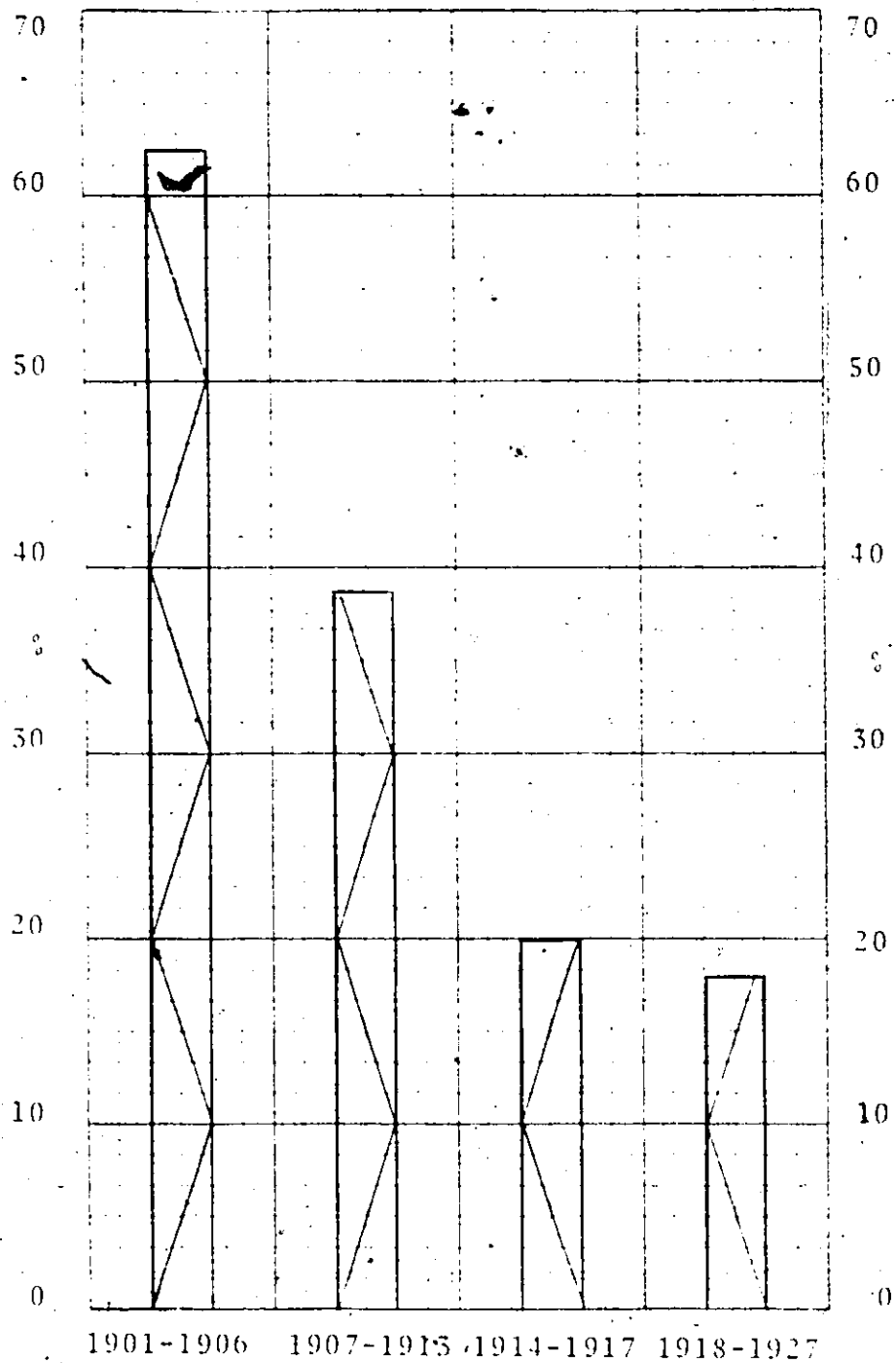


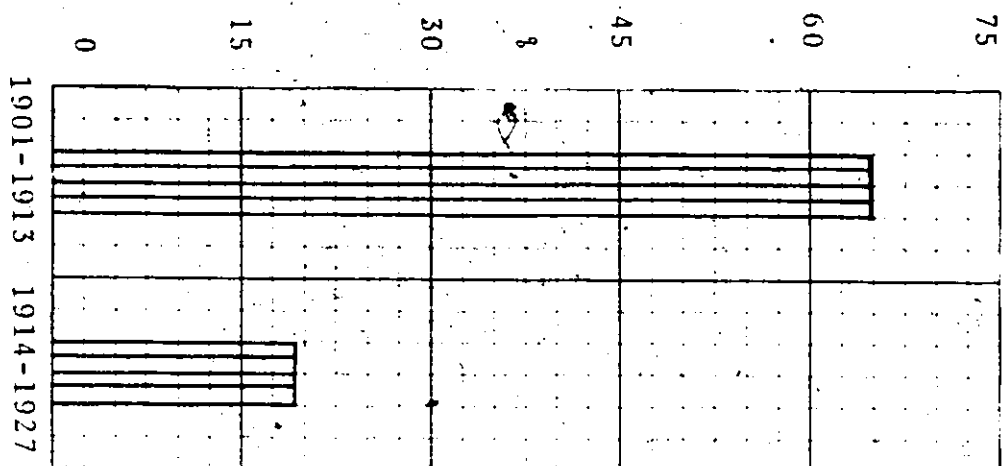
TABLE 2: Percentage of inmates in various age categories, 1901-1913 and 1914-1927

AGE	1901-1913	1914-1927
20	16.8	42.8
20-24	22.6	24.2
25-30	19	15.4
30	41.6	17.6
316	100%	100%

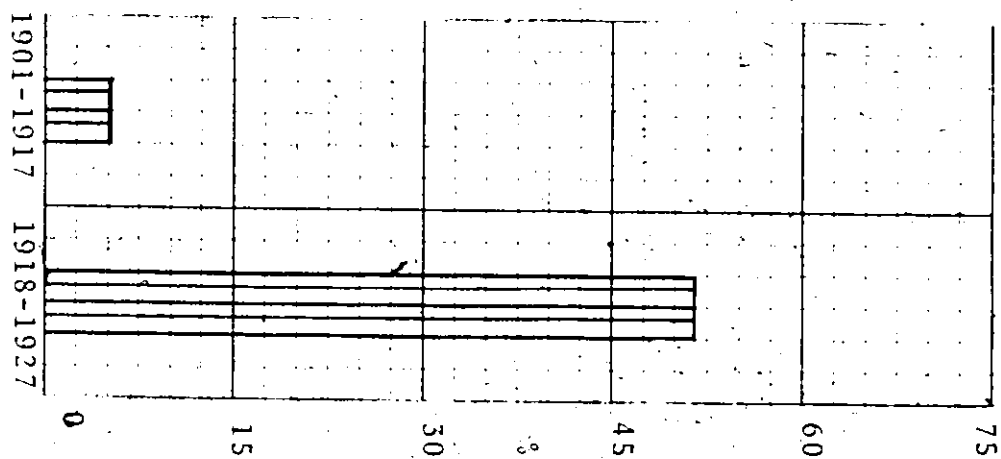
GRAPH 3: Percentage of Recidivists in Inmate Population (1901-1927)



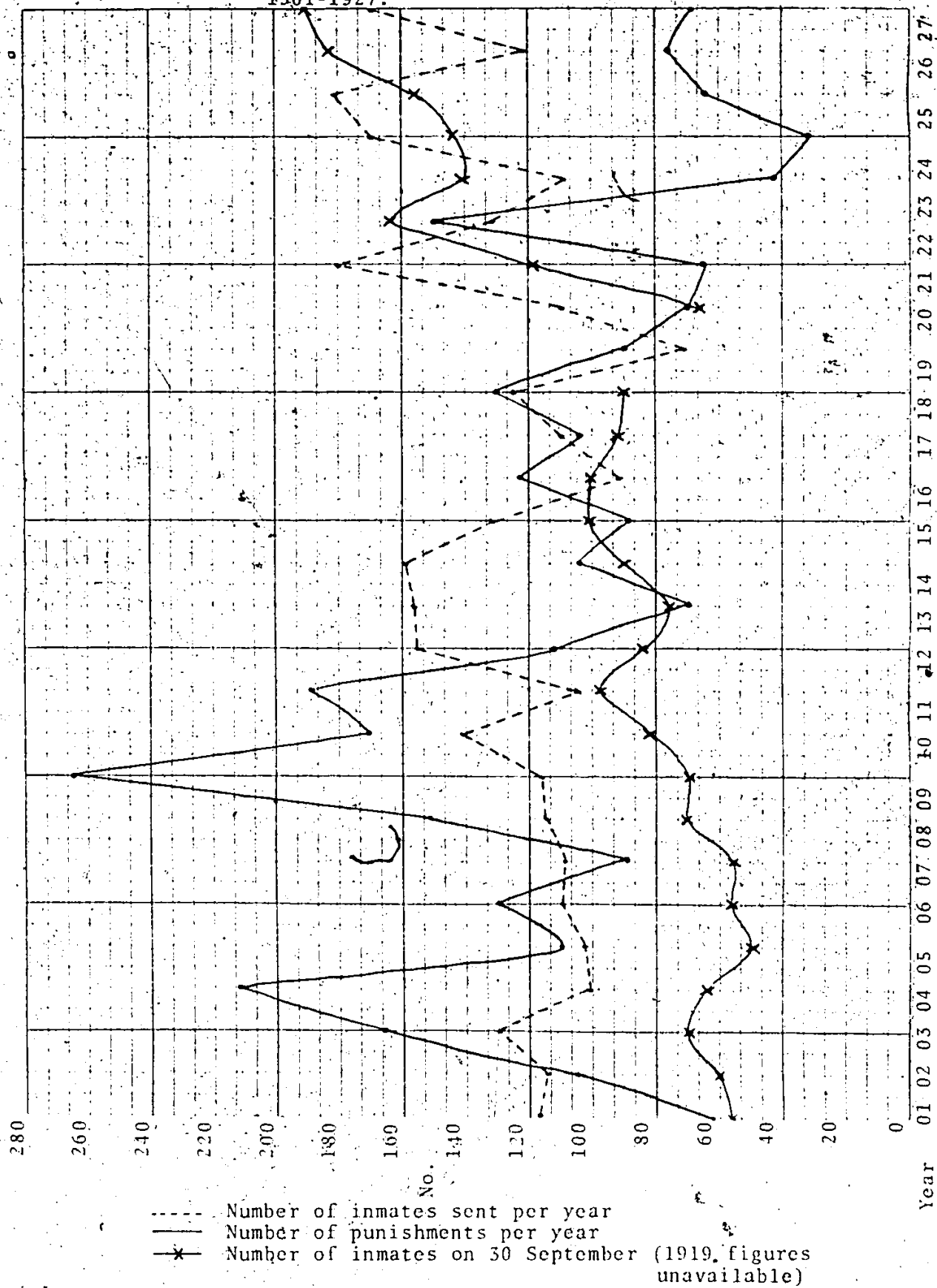
GRAPH 4 : Percentage of inmates Reported as Intemperate (1901-1913 and 1914-1927)



GRAPH 7 : Percentage of Women Reported as Having Venereal Diseases, 1901-1917 and 1918-1927.



GRAPH 5: Punishment Incidents Compared with Inmate Population, 1901-1927.



GRAPH 6: Average Period of Confinement,
in Days

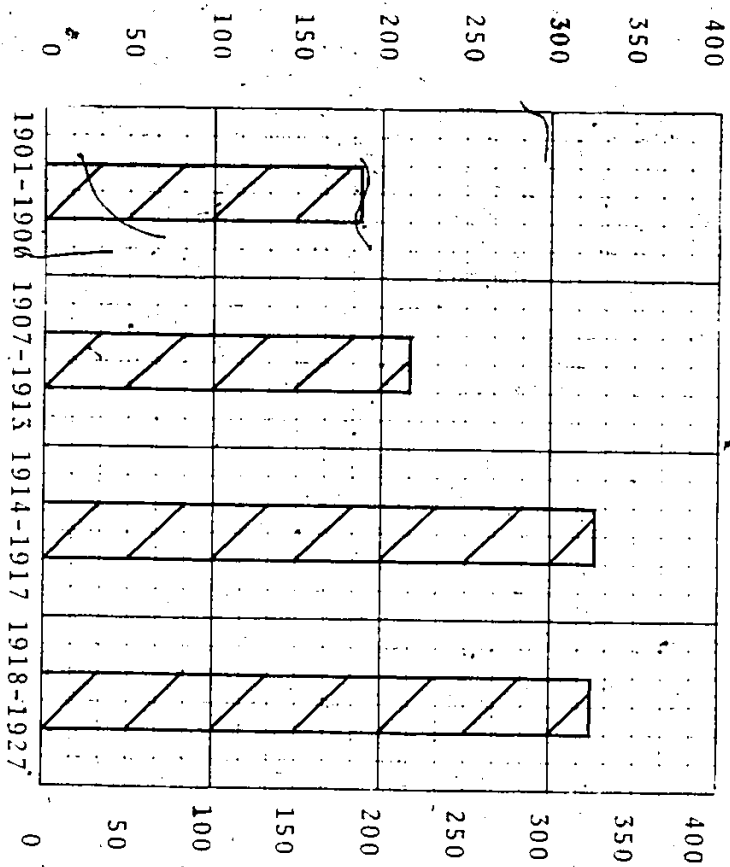


Table 3 : Percent Distribution of Inmates' mode of Discharge in various years between 1901 and 1927.

Year	HOW DISCHARGED					Total
	Expiration of Sentence	Ticket of Leave	Paroled	Transferred*	Payment of Fine	
1901-1906	83	3	0	5	9	100
1907-1913	79	17	0	2	2	100
average 1901-1913	81	10	0	3.5	5.5	100
1914-1917	60	36	0	2	2	100
1918-1927	72	11	8	7	2	100
average 1914-1927	66	23.5	4	4.5	2	100

N = 316

* Transferred to the Orillia Insane Asylum, the Good Shepherd Refuge, the Concord Industrial Farm, the Toronto House of Industry, or returned to a Common Jail.

APPENDIX C

Reformatory Rule Book*

GENERAL RULES.

The clothing you wear when you come in, and all your belongings, including money and jewellery, are to be given to the Receiving Officer, who will enter in the book for that purpose, the name and number of all the articles that are fit for keeping, and will burn such as are unfit. The officer has authority to search your person and belongings for anything contraband.

You will take your bath and will then dress in the uniform of the Reformatory. You will be provided with what is necessary to keep you clean and tidy.

Every inmate must take pains to keep the clothing supplied her in good condition, where possible, mending any article in need of repair before sending to the laundry. No alteration is to be made in the clothing supplied without permission from the matron in charge. Names must not be torn or cut off clothing.

Wilful damage or destruction of clothing will be severely dealt with, and the value of such damage deducted from any gratuity earned by the inmate guilty of such wrongdoing.

When necessary, a bath must be taken as directed.

Silence must be observed when passing through the halls and on the stairs, also in the corridors.

Recreation will be given once every week from seven to eight p.m., to those who have earned it by good conduct.

In the corridors inmates will observe the routine laid down for them, obeying promptly the signals of the matron in charge.

Every inmate must rise when the first or rising bell rings, and be prepared to take her turn in going to the lavatory. If, through sickness or any other cause, unable to rise, she should report to the matron in charge. At the second, or unlocking bell, each inmate must be neatly dressed and ready when the matron unlocks her door, to strip her bed and empty the vessel in her room in the lavatory. At the third, or prayer bell, obey the matron's signal to form in line and proceed to the chapel.

Reverence must be shown during the chapel service. Every inmate shall attend regularly the religious services held by the denomination to which she professes to belong, either Protestant or Roman Catholic.

The doctor visits the Reformatory daily. If sick report to the matron in charge.

To

You have been sentenced to the Mercer Reformatory for the Province of Ontario for a term not exceeding.....

It is within your power to shorten your term of imprisonment by good conduct and industry. The conditions under which such reduction can be made are explained in the rules set forth in these pages. A daily record of your conduct and industry will be kept by the officer under whom you are working. The officer's report will be sent to the Superintendent's office at the close of each day, where it will be entered in the "Good Conduct Register," and you will be judged by the record you make. You are now in a position to help yourself.

While at the Reformatory your conduct will be considered in regard to industry, study, and behaviour. You will be expected to work, you will be given the advantage of school, if you require such, and good deportment will be expected of you at all times.

3

Sunday dresses with collars and cuffs are to be worn in chapel on Sundays, and on such occasions only as the Superintendent may direct. The white aprons provided inmates employed in the dining-rooms, kitchens and offices are not to be worn outside these departments.

Inmates are divided into three classes, and these different classes are not allowed to hold any conversation, one with another.

Pencils and other writing materials will be supplied to you, when necessary, for writing letters home, or making records, as directed by the matron in charge, to whom these materials must be promptly returned.

No inmate is allowed to borrow any article from another inmate, or to exchange any article with her. Neither are gifts allowed from one inmate to another, nor is an inmate allowed to make gifts or presents, however insignificant, to any member of the staff.

Inmates are not allowed to receive fruit, candy, or other eatables, except by special permission of the Superintendent.

Your communication, including letters and all correspondence, with the outside world will be maintained through the Field Officer. On request, your name

6

will be handed her for an interview. She will make such enquiries for you as may be proper concerning your children, other relatives, and your property. Also make such necessary purchases as may be allowed. On expiration of your term, or when you are paroled, she will endeavour to place you in a suitable situation.

Good conduct and industry will count in any consideration of a release on parole, or in allowing the privilege of writing letters or seeing relatives, which privileges will be granted on the recommendation of the Superintendent.

You must approach an officer or forewoman in a respectful manner.

Above all things tell the truth under every circumstance. One Reformatory principle is, that she who tells the truth will always fare the best.

The inmates are not allowed to converse with visitors nor to give or receive anything from visitors without the permission of an officer.

Profanity, vulgarity, and obscene language of every kind are strictly prohibited.

At the proper signal fall into line for marching, give your attention to the officer in charge, and attend to and obey her orders.

7

You are not permitted to sit on your bed nor to lie on it, except when you undress and retire for the night. You must not remove your chair from its proper place nor move any of the furniture in your dormitory.

Personal cleanliness and cleanly habits in the dormitories, cells, and dining-room are to be observed. No marking or scratching of walls or spitting on the floor, or other untidiness will be excused.

On entering your dormitory or cell after supper you will remove your boots and put on your slippers, but under no circumstances must you wear your slippers outside the dormitory or cell on any occasion.

You are not permitted to enter any cell or dormitory except the one to which you are assigned.

DINING-ROOM.

When you have seated yourself in the place assigned you, wait for the signal before speaking or beginning the meal. After the signal is given you are permitted to converse in quiet tones with those near you, but no loud talking will be allowed. Do not complain of the quality or quantity of the food while at

8

You must not leave the line or your place of employment without permission or by order. If unable to work from any cause, make the fact known to the officer in charge and act as she may direct.

You must not carry knives, tools or any material whatever to your dormitory or cell without permission from the Superintendent. Such articles found in your possession will be regarded as proof that you have disobeyed this rule.

Should there come into your possession any article to which you are not properly entitled, you will at once notify an officer.

While in the laundry, work rooms, or other place of employment you are not permitted to cease work before quitting time, even though you have finished your allotted task, unless instructed by the officer in charge, who will advise you as to the exact time and place for washing up.

You must not be wasteful of stock or tools and must be careful to keep the latter in their proper place and in good condition, as you will be held responsible for them and will be required to make good any loss occasioned through wilful damage or carelessness.

8

the table. If you have a complaint to make, make it afterwards to the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent. In helping yourself to bread do not search for a piece to your particular liking, and do not touch food that is to be partaken of by others. Eat and drink cleanly and slowly. Waste of food in any manner will be regarded as a serious violation of the rules and dealt with accordingly.

You are not allowed to carry any food from the dining-room.

PRIVILEGES.

A faithful observance of all the rules of the Reformatory will entitle you to apply to the Parole Commission for parole, and the Commission may recommend that your term be shortened for whatever length of time the Commission may consider you entitled to.

The Superintendent of the Reformatory may take five days from each month off your sentence if she considers that your conduct and industry have earned it. This means one month off six months and two months off twelve months and so forth. A small monthly gratuity will be paid to those deserving

10

It, at the expiration of the sentence. A deduction may be made from this gratuity for any wilful injury or neglect of your clothing or institutional property of any kind whatever.

You will be permitted to write to your parents, brothers and sisters, husband and children one letter every two weeks. In case of sickness or urgent business special letters may be written with the consent of the Superintendent or the Assistant Superintendent. Postage will be furnished by the Reformatory. All correspondence coming to and leaving the Reformatory is read by an official. The Reformatory library will supply books of a good character, and good conduct entitles the inmates to one book per week if they desire it.

You will be permitted a visit once in two weeks from your near relatives.

You may receive newspapers, books, and magazines of a suitable character approved by the Superintendent.

Tooth brushes, tooth paste, combs and hair brushes will be admitted, subject to inspection.

CONDUCT.

Offences for which punishment may be inflicted are:—

Assault or fighting.
Attempt to escape.
Disobedience to orders.
Disrespect manifested toward a superior officer.
Having forbidden articles in your possession.
Stealing.
Licentiousness.
Untruthfulness.
Profane or vulgar language.
Threatening an officer or inmate.
Carrying tales and stirring up strife between inmates.
Refusing to work.
Laziness.

The punishment that may be inflicted for misconduct may consist of the withdrawal of one or more privileges, the loss of good time earned, and in extreme cases solitary confinement.

The Reformatory expects of you:—

Honesty, not dishonesty.
Truthfulness, not untruthfulness.
Proper Language, not profanity or obscenity.
Cleanliness, not uncleanness.
Industry, not laziness.
Goodness in everything, badness in nothing.

DAILY MOVEMENTS.

The gong for rising will sound at 6.30 a.m., the second or unlocking gong at 7.00 and chapel gong at 7.15. At 7.30 the gong will sound for breakfast, when you will form up and march to the dining-room at the signal given by the officer in charge. At 8.00 you will be in your place of work.

At 12 noon you will form up at the signal given by the officer in charge and march to the dining-room, where dinner will be served. You will leave the dining-room at 12.30 for recreation, when the gong sounds at 1.00 o'clock you will be at your place of work. Inmates of the Reformatory will not occupy either cells or dormitories at the noon hour. Work will cease at 5 p.m., when, under the direction of your officer you will march to the dining-room, where supper will be served. At 5.30 the gong will sound for recreation. At 6.30 return to corridors. At 8.00, lights out. These hours will vary at different seasons of the year.

You are expected to do all that lies in your power to make the daily movements of the institution run smoothly, peacefully and successfully.

Read these rules carefully. The excuse "I didn't know," will not be accepted.

You must not write in this book nor alter or erase any figures therein.

Keep this book neat and clean and return to Superintendent's Office at time of your release.

EXAMPLE OF A TYPICAL
PAROLE FORM*

ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY
BOARD OF PAROLE

MONTHLY REPORT

of Inmate's name No. _____

Make out and mail to the Field Officer, Mercer
Reformatory, Toronto, Ontario on first of month

You should answer all questions and have your Employer
sign each report, otherwise they sic will not be accepted.

1. By whom have you been employed this month?
2. At what kind of work?
3. What free time have you had?
4. What has sic been your wages per day or month?
5. How much of your earnings have you expended and
for what?
6. How much is being forwarded to the Field Officer
to be placed to your credit?
7. How much have you on hand or due to you?
On hand _____ Due _____
8. If you have been idle during any portion of the
month state why?
9. Are you satisfied with your present employment?
If not, why not?
10. Do you attend church?
11. Have you used intoxicating liquors?
12. Have you visited places where intoxicating liquors
are sold?
13. State in general your surroundings and prospects.
14. Have you had any trouble or misunderstanding with
anyone? If so, state full particulars.
15. Have you seen or had any communication with any
former inmate of this institution?

Remarks: _____

Dated at _____ day of 7 19 41

Statement of Employer: I have read the above state-
ments of paroled inmate and certify that to the best
of my knowledge they are true.

_____(employer sign here)

* Source: Inmate Case Files.

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