

# “You will hardly believe I turned out so well”: Parole, Surveillance, Masculinity, and the Victoria Industrial School, 1896–1935

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*Parole was a critical and precarious phase for boys released from the Victoria Industrial School (VIS) in southern Ontario. Former inmates' conduct during the period immediately following their release revealed to school officials whether the boys had reformed and were prepared to conform to societal standards of manly conduct. However, before 1900 the VIS had no formal mechanism to ensure parolees did not regress into a life of crime. Moreover, without a systematic parole programme that would allow staff to oversee former inmates' behaviour in the community, VIS officials had no way of determining whether the school's reform strategy was ultimately successful. The school's unique approach to supervising former inmates included a system of correspondence and reports that attempted to monitor and influence the boys' behaviour. School officials' conception of a masculine ideal for working-class boys guided both the school's image of a successful inmate and the rationale for revoking parole.*

*La liberté conditionnelle était une phase cruciale et précaire que traversaient les garçons libérés de la Victoria Industrial School (VIS), dans le Sud de l'Ontario. Les représentants de l'école voyaient dans la conduite des anciens détenus lors de la période suivant immédiatement leur libération s'ils s'étaient réformés et s'ils étaient prêts à se conformer aux normes sociales de conduite courageuse. Mais avant 1900, la VIS n'avait pas de mécanisme officiel pour voir à ce que les libérés conditionnels ne retombent pas dans la criminalité. Qui plus est, en l'absence d'un programme de mise en liberté systématique qui aurait permis au personnel de surveiller le comportement des anciens détenus au sein de la communauté, les responsables de la VIS n'avaient aucun moyen de déterminer en bout de ligne si la stratégie de réforme de l'école avait réussi. La méthode unique qu'employait l'école pour superviser les anciens détenus comprenait un système de correspondance et de rapports, qui se voulait un moyen de suivre les garçons et de les influencer dans leur comportement. L'idée que se faisaient les représentants de l'école de l'idéal mascu-*

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*lin du garçon de la classe ouvrière guidait tant l'image qu'elle d'un bon ancien détenu que le bien-fondé de révoquer la libération conditionnelle.*

### **Masculinity and Surveillance**

SURVEILLANCE and control of paroled former inmates was an ongoing concern for the Victoria Industrial School (VIS), a training facility for delinquent boys located a short distance east of Toronto. Institutional officials considered parole to be the most critical phase in boys' involvement with the school.<sup>1</sup> It was also the most precarious. Released on the assumption that they had reformed their deviant ways, inmates were given an opportunity to demonstrate that they could successfully adhere to normative standards of masculine conduct for working-class boys. However, a quarter of inmates released did not successfully negotiate their way back into conforming society and were subsequently returned to the institution for further training.

VIS officials employed a number of techniques designed to govern paroled boys "at a distance" from the school. For example, shortly after Tom M. was discharged, Superintendent Chester Ferrier was informed by a placement supervisor that Tom was wasting his money on cigarettes. Incensed, Ferrier sent a biting letter to Tom censuring him for foolishly spending hard-earned wages on tobacco:

There is one habit which you have very badly and which will be against you so long as you indulge in it, and that is the use of tobacco. In a statement that Mr. U furnished some months ago as to the money he had spent for you, there was an item of \$4.50 for tobacco. That seems such an extraordinary thing that I could scarcely credit it. To think that so young a boy as you would spend almost \$5.00 in tobacco ... did it ever occur to you that it is because of your tobacco habit that you are so small? It has stunted your growth and you will never become a man of much physical growth as long as you indulge this habit.<sup>2</sup>

Two key issues are illustrated in this example. First, this case draws attention to how surveillance and governance over boys' conduct was exercised at a distance from their physical location. The expense report allowed Ferrier to examine Tom's spending habits without being physically present. Through techniques such as letter writing, VIS officials extended their influence beyond the institution's walls and ensured parolees were upholding their duties as respectable men.

The theme of governing at a distance appears frequently in work that employs Michel Foucault's theoretical treatment of surveillance and control.

1 Ruth Alexander makes a similar point about paroled girls at Bedford Academy in New York in *The Girl Problem: Female Sexuality Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 123–125.

2 Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Industrial Schools Association of Toronto [hereafter ISAT], Record Group 8–51–8, Victoria Industrial School, Case Files, Ferrier to Tom M., July 7, 1922.

Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, for example, not only draw on Foucault's analysis of government, but combine it with Bruno Latour's understanding of "action at a distance" to highlight the unique character of regulation evident in liberal societies.<sup>3</sup> For his part, Foucault explored the mechanics of power beyond a zero sum confrontation between governor and governed and understood it to be omnipresent and relational. That is, he did not consider power to be a commodity that is possessed, but rather an ongoing set of attempts (in the case of the VIS, through letters and expense reports) to contour the conduct of (theoretically) free subjects who are capable of choice among a range of behaviours.<sup>4</sup> Under this configuration of power, the object of governance is to shape choice, often in very modest ways, toward a specified end desired by the governor. In Tom's case, Ferrier, among other VIS officials, took smoking as evidence that Tom lacked self-control and was thus flouting norms of conduct for working-class boys. To control Tom's conduct and shape it in a more acceptable direction, Ferrier refused to credit this expense, shamed him, and called his masculinity into question.

Compelling conforming conduct from paroled boys was one of the fundamental challenges VIS officials faced. Toward governing former inmates in the community the school required that parents write monthly letters detailing their sons' behaviour, employed "home agents" to visit paroled boys, and encouraged boys to sign contracts that promised conforming behaviour. These practices enabled VIS staff to assemble a somewhat imperfect portrait of a former resident's conduct and to build a bridge between the institution and the community. The school thus overcame the problem of distance and monitored youths' conduct once they were released from the institution.

Nevertheless, I do not suggest that the VIS system of surveillance even remotely approaches today's sophisticated technological shadowing of the population or Orwell's dystopic vision.<sup>5</sup> Until 1900 VIS officials did not take the regulation of former inmates in the community seriously, a state of affairs that began to change in 1896 when Chester Ferrier was appointed superintendent. Prior to Ferrier's tenure the surveillance of paroled inmates was *ad hoc* and capricious at best. Hearing of boys' misdeeds in local newspapers was one of the few ways school officials became privy to former inmates' behaviour. Immediately following his appointment, Ferrier set in motion his plan

3 K. Gavin, "Governing at a Distance", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 32 (1997), pp. 223–235; Bruno Latour, "The Powers of Association", in J. Law, ed., *Power, Belief and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), and "Drawing Things Together", in M. Lynch and S. Woolgar, eds., *Representation in Scientific Practice* (London: MIT Press, 1990); Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, "Governing Economic Life", *Economy and Society*, vol. 19 (1990), pp. 1–31.

4 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

5 For a discussion, see K. Haggerty and R. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage", *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 51 (2000), pp. 605–623; D. Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); M. Poster, *The Mode of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

for instituting a more systematic parole programme by pushing the Industrial Schools Association of Toronto (ISAT), which oversaw the operation of the VIS, for the necessary funding to conduct surveillance of paroled boys in the community and by pressuring the government for legislation that would enable school officials to revoke boys' parole until they turned 18. In addition, Ferrier rearranged the responsibilities of the printing instructor (Mr. Black) to allow him to devote a portion of his paid time to the duties of parole officer. Despite the best efforts of officials, many former inmates had little difficulty escaping the school's panoptic eye.

A second issue demonstrated in Ferrier's letter to Tom M. is masculinity. VIS officials such as Ferrier wanted to ensure that paroled boys adhered to the vision of respectable working-class masculinity espoused and taught by the school. But what did masculinity mean in this context? R. W. Connell argues that masculinity as a configuration of gender practice is socially constituted in the structures of society and individual interactions. It is evident in bodies, in culture, in language, in symbol systems, and in almost every element of social life. Thus he maintains that masculinity is intertwined within institutions, such as an army or a school, that regulate interactions between and "among masculinities in the gender order of society".<sup>6</sup> These forms of governance effectively reproduce existing gender relations on an ongoing basis. My work follows from this argument in that I explore the shifting set of attributes that elites and institutional officials attempted to instil and affirm in the working-class boys under their care. However, their actions were not structured by a solitary conception of masculinity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, elite governors' understanding of appropriate conduct for working-class boys differed significantly from what they expected of their own sons. Reform initiatives (such as the VIS) were never intended to raise the working class to the level of the middle classes, but were created to maintain existing class and gender relations. Working-class boys were not to emerge from reform institutions as doctors, lawyers, or even tradesmen for that matter. Instead, the training they received in menial and farm labour encouraged inmates to adhere to normative working-class standards of conduct (obedience to authority, Christian morality, self-control, and hard work) and take their place as productive labourers.

The gendered dimension of parole has been largely neglected or assumed to be self-evident. Part of the reason for this condition is that prison histories have traditionally been written by men, are about men's institutions, and make very little effort to highlight how gender was imbricated in reform programmes and parole strategies. For example, in his richly theoretical examination of the origins and proliferation of parole in the United States, Jonathan Simon overlooks how parole was gendered. Although he explores

6 R. W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 29–30. See also R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

how work was and is a fundamental part of punishment and parole, he does not deconstruct the feminine and masculine qualities inherent in this category.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, David Rothman has highlighted the operational niche in which parole was inserted without documenting how parole upheld traditional gender boundaries. While Rothman explains that revocation of parole was often an *ad hoc* and unscientific decision, he does not explore the violation of gender scripts that provoked inmates' return to prison.<sup>8</sup> Absent from these accounts is how normative standards of masculine conduct for working-class boys guided both officials' image of a successful inmate and the rationale for revoking parole. Former inmates who lacked industrial habits, failed to fulfil breadwinner obligations, shirked school responsibilities, demonstrated a lack of self-control, or failed to respect authority — in short, who failed as respectable, working-class men — were returned to the institution for further training.

Feminist scholars such as Nicole Hahn Rafter argue that, by glossing over the variable of gender, prison historians have ignored “an important influence on the nature and development of penal institutions”.<sup>9</sup> In recent years feminist authors have demonstrated how gender conditioned parental and juvenile court responses to female waywardness. Recent studies by Ruth Alexander, Joan Sangster, Tamara Myers, Mary Odem, and Franca Iacovetta have highlighted how parents of young working-class girls were only too anxious to draw upon the newly formed youth justice system as a tool to manage their “out-of-control” daughters.<sup>10</sup> While feminist scholars have drawn attention to the importance of gender for girls, scholars have tended to treat boys as if they were ungendered subjects.

Concern raised about inadequate attention paid to the gendering of males has been part of the challenge taken on energetically in recent years by scholars of “masculinity”. Since the early 1990s a number of edited collections and individually authored books have been published on the subject of

7 Jonathan Simon, *Poor Discipline: Parole and Social Control of the Underclass, 1890–1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

8 David Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in the Progressive Era* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980).

9 Nicole Hahn Rafter, “Gender, Prisons and Prison History”, *Social Science History*, vol. 9 (1985), pp. 233–247.

10 Tamara Myers, “The Voluntary Delinquent: Parents, Daughters and the Montreal Juvenile Delinquent’s Court in 1918”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 80 (1999), pp. 242–268, and “Qui t’debauchée? Family Adolescent Sexuality and the Juvenile Delinquent’s Court in Early Twentieth Century Montreal”, in Lori Chambers and E. Montigny, eds., *Family Matters* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 1998); Joan Sangster, “Girls in Conflict with the Law: Exploring the Construction of ‘Female Delinquency’ in Ontario, 1940–60”, *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 12 (2000), pp. 1–31; Franca Iacovetta, “Parents, Daughters, and Family Court Intrusions into Working Class Life”, in Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

masculinities and crime.<sup>11</sup> Historians such as Michael Roper, John Tosh, Judith Allen, Heather Shore, Linda Mahood, and Barbara Littlewood have drawn on this scholarship to highlight the ties between the views of philanthropists, reformers, and police regarding wayward masculinity and the gendered character of its regulation.<sup>12</sup> In Canada, a number of historians have applied insight derived from masculinity scholarship to their studies of labour, sport, sexuality, and conduct.<sup>13</sup> That said, even though male working-class troublemakers were omnipresent on city streets, had more opportunities to find trouble, and committed the vast majority of deviant acts, little consideration has been given to the gendered character of disciplinary programmes and categories that targeted their conduct.<sup>14</sup>

Further to the two themes explored here (surveillance and masculinity) and evident in the case of Tom M. is the “fatherly scolding” and paternalism of VIS officials. Boys paroled from the VIS were encouraged to write to Ferrier and let him know about their troubles and successes while in the community. This correspondence evokes the image of a father raising his child to adhere to the values of respectable working-class society. The superintendent’s letter to Tom smacks of a disapproving parent scolding his son for undesirable conduct. Ferrier’s paternalistic tone is intriguing given his institutional position and his desire to exercise surveillance over Tom’s conduct. The conduits of information were intended to teach and control, to father and surveil, to personalize the institution and its influence into the community.<sup>15</sup>

11 R. Collier, *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology: Men, Heterosexuality and the Criminal(ised) Other* (London: Sage, 1998); J. Messerschmidt, *Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body and Violence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000); T. Newburn and E. Stanko, eds., *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinities and Crime* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

12 Judith Allen, “‘Mundane’ Men: Historians, Masculinity and Masculinism”, *Historical Studies*, vol. 22 (1989), p. 628; Linda Mahood and Barbara Littlewood, “The ‘Vicious’ Girl and the ‘Street-Corner’ Boy: Sexuality and the Gendered Delinquent in the Scottish Child-Saving Movement, 1850–1940”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 4 (1994), pp. 549–578; Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991); Heather Shore, “The Trouble with Boys: Gender and the Invention of the Juvenile Offender in 19th Century Britain”, in M. Arnot and C. Osborne, eds., *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

13 K. Dubinsky and A. Givertz, “‘It was only a matter of passion’: Masculinity and Sexual Danger”, in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999); Colin Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Franca Iacovetta, “Defending Honour, Demanding Respect: Manly Discourse and Gendered Practice in Two Construction Strikes, Toronto, 1960–61”, in McPherson *et al.*, eds., *Gendered Pasts*; S. Maynard, “Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working Class History”, *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 23 (1989), pp. 159–169.

14 One notable exception is H. Pang, “Making Men: Reform Schools and the Shaping of Masculinity” (PhD dissertation, University of California, 2000).

15 For a discussion of how institutions for women extended maternal influences into the community, see Kelly Hannah-Moffat, *Punishment in Disguise: Penal Governance and Federal Imprisonment of Women in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Carolyn Strange, “The Velvet Glove: Maternalist Reform at the Andrew Mercer Reformatory, 1872–1927” (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1983).

VIS case files, case books, annual reports, and administrative correspondence reveal how gender and surveillance were intertwined in the regulation of former inmates. Although early case files hold little more than commitment papers and an occasional piece of correspondence, later dossiers contain, among other documents, censored letters from parents and sons, correspondence from parents to the superintendent, communication from lawyers, trial transcripts, and observations by VIS parole officers.<sup>16</sup> Depending on case records for primary evidence can prove problematic, as Kyle Ciani attests, since they require historians to filter the institutionally contoured opinions of social workers, probation officers, institutional superintendents, and medical professionals.<sup>17</sup> As Ruth Alexander and Regina Kunzel suggest, however, supporting these documents with parents' letters helps flesh out a richer picture of the inmates' familial, social, and institutional context.<sup>18</sup> Letters and other correspondence contained in case files must be carefully scrutinized.<sup>19</sup> Many parents undoubtedly disguised their true sentiments and feelings, knowing full well that institution censors would be reading their correspondence. Although, as Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson suggest, case files can be used to uncover historical domains that have heretofore remained obscured, caution should be exercised in claiming too much for, or about, historical actors.<sup>20</sup>

### History of the VIS: Gender, Class, and Governance

In 1866 an anonymous politician observed, “[F]or the last four years we find the number of children in our jail steadily increasing, but with little change in the city population.” He wondered, “[I]s such a state of things without remedy?”<sup>21</sup> For their part, prominent members of Toronto's Anglo-Celtic elite were certain that the European Industrial School programme was the panacea to this burgeoning problem. Toward establishing schools of this type, ISAT lobbied the Ontario government in 1868 for enabling legislation and necessary funding. At this time, however, the provincial government was

16 The Archives of Ontario holds nearly 400 case files for youths who were detained at the VIS between 1887 and 1929. For the purposes of this study, I reviewed every third file. Except where boys' names appeared in the newspapers or other public fora, I have changed all names to protect their identities. In recent years case record research has received considerable attention. See, for example, Iacovetta and Mitchinson, eds., *On the Case*. This book also stimulated a roundtable discussion in the *Canadian Historical Review*: “On the Case: A Roundtable Discussion”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 81 (2000), pp. 266–292. See also the infamous Scott/Gordon debate that occurred in *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1990), pp. 848–860.

17 Kyle Ciani, “‘Problem Girls’: Gendering Criminal Acts and Delinquent Behaviour”, *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 9 (1997), pp. 203–213.

18 Alexander, *The Girl Problem*; Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

19 Alexander, *The Girl Problem*.

20 Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, “Introduction”, in Iacovetta and Mitchinson, eds., *On the Case*.

21 “Vagrant Children in our Streets”, *Journal of Education for Upper Canada*, vol. 19 (1866), p. 4.

grappling with seemingly more pressing issues (such as the sluggish economy), and for the moment industrial schooling would remain unrealized.

In 1871 legislation required to establish industrial schools in Ontario was passed (*The Industrial Schools Act*). Since it assigned responsibility for establishing industrial schools to school boards, the act received only a tepid reception and no institutions were created.<sup>22</sup> In response, the Ontario government amended the original legislation in 1874 to give school boards the authority to delegate powers to industrial school associations incorporated under the *Benevolent Societies Act*.<sup>23</sup> Former mayor W. H. Howland and other influential members of Toronto's elite promptly organized under the banner of ISAT for this purpose. Toward establishing one of the first industrial schools in the Dominion, Howland made a case to the provincial government and the citizens of Toronto that the problem of delinquent working-class boys was quickly spiraling out of control. Given the success of similar institutions in Europe, he argued, industrial schools were worth the investment. Despite Howland's efforts, however, sufficient funding remained elusive.

After an exhaustive campaign, which included appearances before the provincial government and newspaper pleas to Toronto's citizens, ISAT finally accumulated the necessary resources to build an industrial school in Mimico, Ontario. In June 1887 the VIS opened its doors to the province's bad boys. It promised to recreate wayward youth into men who found employment in the country, attended church, and resisted temptations, as well as respecting and obeying their parents. To this end, the VIS boasted a five-pronged attack on juvenile deviance that included instruction in drill, industrial training, farming, education, religion, and athletics.<sup>24</sup>

Through their disciplinary agenda, VIS officials attempted to create boys in the image of a nineteenth-century masculine ideal. Religious instruction taught self-control; sports instilled in them ways to temper their aggression with restraint; industrial training created breadwinners; and drill encouraged the militaristic values of obedience, respect, and self-discipline. By contrast, female inmates at institutions like the Mercer Reformatory in Toronto or the New York State Reformatory for Girls at Bedford Hills were instructed in domesticity, piety, and morality, being taught not self-control but lessons in motherly virtue, especially dependence and submission.<sup>25</sup> The VIS brand of training, officials were certain, would prepare boys to be heads of working-class families and for respectable life in the community or (preferably) on farms.

Qualities considered as the masculine ideal for boys were not fixed or sta-

22 C. Neff, "The Ontario Industrial Schools Act of 1874", *Canadian Journal of Family Law*, vol. 12 (1999), pp. 171–189.

23 *Benevolent Societies Act, Statutes of Ontario*, 1882–3, chapter 29.

24 Bryan Hogeveen, " 'Can't You Be a Man?' Rebuilding Wayward Masculinities and Regulating Juvenile Deviance in Ontario, 1860–1930" (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003).

25 Hannah-Moffat, *Punishment in Disguise*, pp. 57–60; Alexander, *The Girl Problem*, pp. 36–66.

ble throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but were dynamic and shifted along with changes to the city, new institutional programmes, and new actors involved in juvenile justice. The ideal emerging in the early twentieth century, while it still included such qualities as self-control, respect, and obedience, was more urban and less militaristic. Whereas the nineteenth-century Anglo-Celtic elite who established the VIS considered obedience, respect for authority, Christian morality, self-control, discipline, and wholesome work in the country to be qualities of ideal manliness, the university-trained experts, juvenile court officials, and social workers of the early twentieth century held a reconstituted view that was fundamentally shaped by their experiences with modern metropolitan life. With the turn of the century and the arrival of consumer culture, further growth of the city, and the expansion of white-collar work, Canadians, like their American counterparts, grew increasingly concerned about what constituted proper manliness.<sup>26</sup> Older observations of the rural countryside as a golden domain of masculinity seemed obsolete in developing industrial cities. Reform strategies instituted by juvenile court officials in the 1910s revealed their preference that working-class boys find work not in rural communities, but in the city. These agents clearly did not retreat from urban life in their reform efforts among bad boys, as did cynical VIS officials. Urban juvenile justice officials instead backed an increasingly active and assertive ethos of masculinity that was celebrated in new cultural forms.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, VIS inmates were disciplined to eschew the contemporary masculine script in favour of an antiquated notion of rational self-control. Inmates were thus located in a contradictory conceptual space in which the standards of behaviour emphasized and promoted by the school were at odds with those demanded by society. They were asked to conduct themselves as men, but were denied the opportunity to act in accordance with contemporary urban standards.

Despite structural shifts in conceptions of normative working-class masculinity, the VIS did not radically alter its reform programme to coincide with these alterations. Rather, the instruction boys received throughout the school's tenure prepared them for work required by the province's farmers. Through the school's various departments, boys were taught to enjoy hard labour, to obey and respect authority, and to use farm tools and implements. Despite the massive growth of light industry occurring in Ontario's cities, there were three main reasons VIS officials preferred to release boys to the countryside. First, farmers were experiencing labour shortages created by mass migration of their sons and daughters to the city. Jobs were thus plentiful, and boys could easily find (at the very least) seasonal employment. Secondly, the VIS's Anglo-Celtic board members were deeply suspicious of the evils lurking in the city. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the farm was

<sup>26</sup> Pang, "Making Men".

<sup>27</sup> G. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

considered the natural domain for inculcating manhood and the masculine ideal through open air and physical labour. In the country boys could find good, wholesome, hardy work in the fields. Work on farms was abundant, it ensured boys would be separated from the social evils of the city, and it provided a space where the masculine ideal for boys at the time — hard work, respect, obedience, self-discipline, and Christian morality — could be practised, ingrained, and supported. Farms and rural communities became the dumping ground for boys paroled from the VIS.

Certainly, the VIS was not the only strategy for governing bad boys in the budding city of Toronto. Rather, the industrial school was part of a larger social welfare movement that presided over Toronto's working class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most notably, as a means of regulating deviance, turn-of-the-century elite and mental health experts promoted boys' formal and informal participation in school and church clubs, athletic teams, Big Brothers, the YMCA, and Sunday school. Boy Scouts, for example, inculcated what one headline called "the true spirit of manliness".<sup>28</sup> According to Jeffrey Hantover, the rapid acceptance of Boy Scouts in many Western nations reflected turn-of-the-century concern over the perpetuation and validation of masculinity.<sup>29</sup> Boy Scouts gave boys an opportunity to be socialized according to the traditional masculine script of rugged outdoorsmanship that many early-twentieth-century citizens felt had been eroded by city life. According to a 1913 *Toronto Daily Star* article, leading financial institutions were having trouble finding "real" men to lead their companies. Prominent Toronto citizen Sir Edmond Osler felt Scouts held out the promise of teaching "boys manliness. [E]very boy who receives the Scout's training [would] make a better business man for it."<sup>30</sup> The main differences between programmes such as that offered by the Boy Scouts and that imposed by the VIS lie in the fact that participation in the former was not forced, and the greatest proportion of the boys involved were from the middle classes. In a similar vein, Mark Moss suggests that the Cadets were inaugurated at the turn of the century to recapture and instil in boys a nostalgic image of ideal manhood.<sup>31</sup> The boys in my study arrived in institutions of control and subjection for refusing to obey their parents, to attend school, to work, or otherwise to remain lawful. Unlike many of the subjects in Moss's study, they were from marginalized groups.

28 "Scouts are Inculcating the True Spirit of Manliness", *Toronto Daily Star*, April 5, 1913.

29 Jeffrey Hantover, "The Boys Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity", *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 34 (1978), p. 184. See also R. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); D. McLeod, "Act Your Age: Boyhood, Adolescence and the Rise of the Boy Scouts of America", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 16 (1982), pp. 3–20; S. Price, "The Popularity of Nationalism in the Early British Boy Scout Movement", *Social History*, vol. 23 (1998), pp. 309–323.

30 "Scouts are Inculcating the True Spirit of Manliness", *Toronto Daily Star*, April 5, 1913.

31 Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The reconfiguration of delinquency and its regulation that occurred during the late nineteenth century was reflected in massive expansion in the structures designed to govern Toronto's working class. Youth of the labouring classes were subjected to intrusive modes of punishment, not only because these young people defied the law, but because bourgeois governors considered them threatening to the existing class structure.<sup>32</sup> These individuals flouted norms of hegemonic masculine respectability by eschewing the discipline, deferred gratification, and habits of industry that were the assumed prerequisites for achieving economic security in capitalist society.<sup>33</sup> Maintaining the status quo and protecting the capitalist mode of production warranted intrusive interventions into working-class life.<sup>34</sup> Biases endemic to state-sponsored criminalization and management tactics have continually reproduced systemic inequality and created a situation in which working-class young people are over-represented at every level of the youth justice process.<sup>35</sup>

Industrial schooling, among other forms of welfare-based social control, was not simply imposed upon working-class families, however. Rather, many parents of this class actively sought out state- and elite-sponsored regulatory strategies to allay frustration caused by their sons. While upper-middle-class parents could pay for private psychiatric treatment, financial adversity meant that the majority of labouring parents could not meet the expense of less intrusive and less stigmatizing modes of control. Although strategies for the regulation of juvenile offenders emerged as a result of bourgeois efforts to stem the tide of a burgeoning delinquency problem located in the working classes, these modes of governance became tools for parents of this class to control rebellious sons.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Mentality of Parole**

On what basis was parole granted to VIS inmates? Boys who had been in residence for one year, excelled in educational pursuits or sports, and had been taught self-control — in short, displayed evidence they would conform

32 Bryan Palmer, *Working-class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Joan Sangster, "Creating Social and Moral Citizens: Defining and Treating Delinquent Boys and Girls in English Canada, 1920–1965", in R. Adamoski, D. Chunn, and R. Menzies, eds., *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002).

33 Dorothy Chunn and Robert Menzies, "Gender, Madness and Crime: The Reproduction of Patriarchal and Class Relations in a Psychiatric Court Clinic", *Journal of Human Justice*, vol. 1 (1990), pp. 33–54.

34 Mariana Valverde, *In the Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).

35 Bryan Hogeveen, " 'The evils with which we are called to grapple': Élite Reformers, Eugenicists, Environmental Psychologists, and the Construction of Toronto's Working-class Boy Problem, 1860–1930", *Labour/ Le Travail* (forthcoming).

36 Hogeveen, " 'Can't You be a Man?' "

to standards of law-abiding masculinity set out by the school — were considered the most deserving. Alternatively, boys like James M., who was a constant nuisance to VIS staff, were routinely turned down. After James had spent a year within the institution, his father inquired as to why his son had not been paroled. Ferrier responded that James had “been a continuous trouble ... ever since he came here with his frequent attempts at escape”.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Ferrier explained to Mr. M. that, as soon as James “gives me some reasonable assurance that he will prove honest and trustworthy”, the superintendent would have no reservation about bringing his case before the Merit Board.<sup>38</sup> Evidently, parole was appropriate only for inmates who had earned the privilege through demonstrated contrition for past conduct and conformity with normative standards of behaviour prescribed by the school.

Tough decisions regarding which inmates had earned their freedom fell to the VIS Merit Board. During the board’s monthly sitting, eligible inmates were brought before it with their commitment papers, records of conduct, and details about their home surroundings. Accompanying each boy was a card that listed his name, age, address, date and cause of admittance, previous work, home conditions, and superintendent’s recommendations. In addition, the home inspector, parents, and other interested parties could speak on behalf of boys up for parole. Not all evidence provided to the Merit Board was in support of an inmate’s release. Given their previous destructive and unsettling behaviour, some boys were not welcome back in their hometowns. From time to time town officials appeared before the Merit Board to argue that former residents should be released to other jurisdictions — or not at all. The number and variety of appeals to the board made the task of permitting or denying parole difficult. Beverly Jones, however, felt the Merit Board was quite successful. He thought that the “Ontario Parole Board or any other Board could do no better if they could do as well”.<sup>39</sup>

While the Merit Board preferred to release inmates to rural placements, parole to family homes in the city was not out of the realm of possibility. Nevertheless, before releasing an inmate to his parents’ care, officials had to be certain that the home was suitable for a boy at a critical and precarious period in his life. Ferrier explained, “Before the parole board will consider any application for his parole, it will be necessary for you, if you wish to give him a home, to furnish me with sufficient evidence that you have a proper home in which to take him, and that he will receive such care and training as he may require.”<sup>40</sup> To be certain, there was an intrinsic class bias to the process of determining a residence’s appropriateness. To support themselves and their children, many turn-of-the-century working-class families were forced to

37 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Ferrier to Mr. M., April 10, 1919.

38 *Ibid.*, Ferrier to Mr. M, June 20, 1919.

39 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-5, Miscellaneous Files, B. Jones, “Parole from Industrial Schools” (unpublished paper, 1921).

40 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-5, Miscellaneous Files, Ferrier to Mrs. L., January 22, 1919.

have both parents in the paid labour force.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, to offset the costs of raising a family, these parents often sent their children to work in factories, as newsboys, as messengers, in pool rooms, and as pin-setters.<sup>42</sup> VIS home inspectors, who were invariably from Toronto's Anglo-Celtic middle class, did not look favourably on homes in which both parents worked and abhorred families in which parents encouraged their children to forsake their education in favour of supplementing the family wage. Clearly, the difficult economic context of many working-class families in Toronto was a detriment to sons being paroled to their familial homes.

To ensure that a residence was suitable for paroled boys, a VIS representative would inspect the condition, location, and "appropriateness" of the residence. The outcome of this investigation determined whether an inmate would be paroled to his familial home or, if it was deemed unsuitable, to a farm placement. On a visit to determine the suitability of paroling John P. to his familial residence, a school official reported to Ferrier and the Merit Board that the "parents live in a one-roomed shack on the outskirts of town" that, although well kept, was incompatible with a paroled inmate's needs.<sup>43</sup> Even though John's teachers reported he was "getting along nicely in his school work", his shop instructor awarded him top marks, and his parents were eager to receive him, John would ultimately be paroled to a farm situation unless his family's economic situation changed drastically.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to Mr. P. detailing why John was not coming home, Ferrier explained that VIS officials did not "feel inclined to grant the parole of the boy under these home conditions".<sup>45</sup> No matter how successful working-class boys like John became in school or how closely they modelled the approved standards of conduct endorsed by the VIS, the working-class home environment often precluded their return to their families. Intrinsic biases built into the VIS parole system ensured that countless working-class families were torn apart and, in the process, reproduced systemic inequality.

Although farms were the preferred destination for paroled boys, given that farms presented an opportunity for boys to avoid the temptations endemic to city life and continue their development into proper men, the distance between the school and the countryside was a barrier to effective surveillance and control over boys' conduct. Nonetheless, VIS officials established the technical means to observe former inmates' conduct in the community.

41 Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hard Working People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

42 AO, ISAT, RG 8–51–7, Case Books. The problems and pitfalls encountered by many immigrant families have been well documented in Canadian historiography. See, for example, A. Brouwer, *Immigrants Need Not Apply* (Ottawa: Carleton Institute of Social Policy, 1999); H. Ganzevoort, *A Bitter Sweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890–1980* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988).

43 AO, ISAT, RG 8–51–8, Case Files, Gordon to Ferrier, February 21, 1919.

44 *Ibid.*

45 AO, ISAT, RG 8–51–8, Case Files, Ferrier to Mr. P., February 28, 1919.

**“A great incentive for boys to do their best”:****Ferrier’s Vision for a VIS Parole System**

How can information be gathered to allow for systematic observation and regulatory control over the conduct of paroled inmates who are scattered throughout the province of Ontario?<sup>46</sup> This was a question that Ferrier considered fundamental to the school’s success when he took over the helm of the VIS on June 19, 1896. At this time, two fundamental problems marred the institutional programme from becoming, to his mind, successful. First, no steady agent or agency was employed to conduct surveillance and govern inmates once they were released from the institution. Secondly, without threat of being returned to the institution, boys had little incentive to conform to VIS standards. The short arm of the VIS meant that until the turn of the century paroled inmates were at relative liberty to move about the province, commit crime, avoid breadwinner or school obligations, and torment their parents without fear that a VIS official would revoke their parole. A means of observing boys’ behaviour without the luxury of close physical proximity was required.

The blindness of institutional officials was lifted when Chester Ferrier was transferred from Huron Street School in Toronto to take the reins of the VIS. Before his arrival Ferrier had been aware of the troubles the school had experienced since several cases of former inmates wreaking havoc in Toronto’s streets had received considerable media attention. On more than one occasion Ferrier’s interest was piqued by newspaper reports describing how former inmates were faring relatively poorly in the community. If the newspaper accounts were accurate, then the VIS was not being successful in reforming boys.

In Ferrier’s estimation, the school’s greatest deficiency was that it did not possess a mechanism through which to ascertain the validity of these reports.<sup>47</sup> Almost immediately Ferrier employed the school’s secretary to visit the homes of inmates who had been released to neighbouring communities and the city of Toronto. In contrast to media accounts of the school’s failures, the superintendent was greeted by reports that, of the 55 boys released the previous year, the majority were faring very well. Ferrier’s informant uncovered only one incident in which a boy was “doing badly”. Despite the promising outcome of his informal inquiry, Ferrier was not satisfied. The superintendent was convinced that the lack of systematic parole supervision was one of the greatest weaknesses in the management of the school and the governance of former inmates.<sup>48</sup>

Ferrier’s objection to the VIS’s *ad hoc* system of parole highlights a central contradiction he considered endemic to the school’s disciplinary programme. Boys drawn from criminogenic environments were detained at the school,

46 See Latour, “Drawing Things Together”, p. 56.

47 AO, ISAT, Miscellaneous Files, RG 8–51–5 Series B, #8, June 15, 1897.

48 *Ibid.*

where they were exposed to fundamental lessons in respectable working-class masculinity, then released back into the environment from which they had originated without a sufficient level of supervision. The superintendent remained certain that an industrial school that would parole boys to these deleterious conditions was maintaining an insincere effort. In 1896 he stated that “to turn a boy a drift in the city without anyone to look after him, to counsel, help and control him is simply to undo all that the school has endeavoured to do for him”. In opposition to the influences of deviant peers, parents, and idleness, Ferrier reasoned that paroled boys required “wise sympathetic, friends” — preferably those who lived on farms.<sup>49</sup>

With great enthusiasm, Ferrier boasted in his annual report for 1897 that preparations for intensive surveillance of paroled inmates were underway. To create an effective system of parole, he argued, the VIS should employ an officer whose duties were almost wholly devoted to the work of inspection and supervision over all former inmates until they reached the age of 18. Toward this end, Ferrier rearranged the duties of Mr. Black, the printing instructor, so that he could devote a significant amount of his paid time to parole supervision. The addition of Mr. Black to the otherwise paltry parole programme meant that inspections of former inmates expanded beyond the geographical limits of Toronto.<sup>50</sup> Mr. Black’s tasks as “home inspector”, as VIS parole officers were called, included finding suitable home situations and placements for boys who were about to be released from the institution. In addition, he inspected the homes of potential placements (whether a foster or a familial home) for their suitability to house former inmates. A home located too close to the centres of population — or the evils of the city — was rejected, as were homes in which one or both parental figures had “an eye for the drink”.<sup>51</sup>

Another perhaps bigger deficiency in Ferrier’s efforts to create a systematic parole programme was the inability of the school to bring back older former inmates who had regressed. Before legislative amendments in 1900, the *Industrial Schools Act* did not authorize the Merit Board to revoke boys’ parole once they had passed the time of commitment, which was then age 16. While Mr. Black was empowered to inspect the behaviour of boys in the community, if they were beyond the age of 16 and habitually criminal he was authorized to do very little with the exception of sternly lecturing the offender on the manly virtues of self-discipline. In his work as superintendent, Ferrier had been informed by such boys that they did not have to do as he instructed since they were beyond the school’s reach. For example, Ferrier paraphrased obstinate former inmates who had brazenly informed him, “You have now no longer control over me, I shall do as I like.”<sup>52</sup> To make

49 AO, ISAT, Miscellaneous Files, RG 8–51–5, Series B, #8, September 26, 1896.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 15.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

52 *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Neglected Children* (1899), Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, p. 104.

matters worse, he continued, without any system of surveillance or threat to revoke their parole, many boys practically did as they pleased.

Ferrier realized that paroled boys' continued deviance and resistance to the lessons imparted by institutional officials could not be explained solely as resentment to the VIS or its staff. Instead, the superintendent recognized that 16 was a tumultuous period in a young boy's life, "a very critical age".<sup>53</sup> At this age youths were neither men nor boys, but were stuck in an abyss where they were anxious to find their calling in life and resented any infringement on their autonomy. Ferrier argued, however, that this was the exact point at which adult guidance became indispensable. Boys between the ages of 16 and 18 required, the superintendent reasoned, "more than any other, good counsel and firm control".<sup>54</sup> Without adequate provisions for parole and surveillance, Ferrier was convinced, the VIS was failing deviant boys at the most critical phase of their lives.

Shortly after Ferrier sounded his complaints, the provincial government announced plans to amend the *Industrial Schools Act*. Although Ferrier was justifiably excited that the reformed act would take his concerns about the school's deficiencies seriously, he was still cautious. In his monthly report for June 1897 the superintendent speculated on what exact meaning and powers the proposed amendments would provide toward his quest to shore up holes in the VIS's parole programme. He eagerly inquired, "Can we detain them in the school until they are eighteen years of age, or having discharged them, can we bring them back?"<sup>55</sup>

This quotation yields insight into what Ferrier regarded as a more successful mode of granting parole and governing former inmates. Boys made aware that they could be returned to the VIS for a further period of detention were less likely to re-offend and more likely to continue on the course the VIS had set out for them. If such parole provisions were made in the amended legislation, Ferrier was convinced these would prove to be "a great incentive for boys to do their best after they were discharged".<sup>56</sup> That is, paroled boys would be more prone to find and continue work, attend school, avoid crime, and exercise self-control: to conduct their lives as respectable, young working-class men. However, if for some reason the Ontario government did not see fit to amend the existing legislation in a manner Ferrier considered favourable to VIS goals, he was convinced the entire effort was "practically futile".<sup>57</sup>

For all of his effort and concern, Ferrier was disappointed to learn that his recommendations for an improved act were not to be realized in 1897. Nevertheless, his discontent with the inaction of the provincial government and

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 AO, ISAT, Miscellaneous Files, RG 8-51-5 Series B, #8, June 15, 1897.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

concern about the broad lacunae in the school's disciplinary programme did not last long. In 1900 revised legislation was implemented that would give much-anticipated teeth to the school's ailing parole system and raise the age at which former inmates could be returned to the institution. The revised legislation read:

Every child who has heretofore been or who shall heretofore be committed to an Industrial School under any Act of this Legislature shall remain under the guardianship of the Board or other body having the management of such school and such Board or other body shall possess and exercise all the rights and powers of the parents in regard to such child until such child shall attain the age of eighteen years.<sup>58</sup>

### **Letter Writing:**

#### **Surveillance and Governance in the Community**

At long last Ferrier possessed the legislative authority and practical means to govern former inmates in the community and return those who flouted norms of working-class masculine respectability to the school until they reached 18. The predicament Ferrier and his staff had to overcome was how to exert constant and unobtrusive surveillance and governance over paroled boys. Letter writing was a fundamental technique VIS officials employed toward this end. This seemingly innocuous strategy provided Ferrier with an opportunity to remind former inmates to abide by societal rules, respect authority, and find meaningful employment once he was no longer physically present in their lives. From his perch within the VIS, Ferrier attempted to play puppet master and direct the conduct of former inmates through intimate warnings disseminated through the medium of letters. For example, when George D. was paroled to a farm situation in 1920, all outward appearances indicated that he was excelling in this placement. However, when freed from the farmer's watchful eye, George took liberty to lounge around and put aside the work at hand. At the end of his rope and discontented with George's efforts, the farmer brought his complaints to Ferrier's attention. In response, the superintendent wrote an admonishing letter to George that did little to belie his obvious disappointment:

Now these are bad habits for any boy to get into. You have to make your own way in the world, why not do the best you can? It should not be necessary for any other person to be with you. If you know what work is to be done, why not do it and do the very best you can. This is the only way to get along in the world. Why not always tell the truth when asked about a thing? Falsehoods will never get you anywhere but trouble.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *An Act Respecting Industrial Schools, Statutes of Ontario* (1900), chapter 56, p. 190.

<sup>59</sup> AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Ferrier to George D., April 26, 1920.

In response, George assured the superintendent that he had every intention of doing his best work for the farmer.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, Ferrier's attempt to manage George's behaviour from a distance proved ultimately unsuccessful. George was subsequently returned to the institution for his continued failure to adhere to the manly value of hard work. He remained in the school a further 12 months when he, along with several other inmates, escaped by taking advantage of the veil offered by darkness. The final entry in George's case file indicates he was serving in the United States Army.

This particular case is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the attempt by Ferrier to regulate George through the technique of letter writing. But another, perhaps more important, issue is worth highlighting. While Peter Oliver argues that correspondence between paroled Mercer Reformatory inmates and Superintendent O'Sullivan was evidence of the institution's maternal success, Carolyn Strange is convinced that maternalism had direct regulatory effects.<sup>61</sup> Kelly Hannah-Moffat argues that, "by gaining the confidence of inmates, O'Sullivan was able to use her maternal position to offer advice and encourage future moral behaviour".<sup>62</sup> Diligent correspondence with inmates encouraged them to reveal information to which Superintendent O'Sullivan would not otherwise be privy. In a similar but paternalistic vein, Ferrier's letters to paroled boys read like those of a father concerned with his son's whereabouts, conduct, and present state of life. Joe B.'s reply to Ferrier's note is exemplary: "Your letter to me reads just like the letter of a father who is trying to show his boy the best way out of bad predicament."<sup>63</sup> Correspondence extended Ferrier's paternalistic reach beyond institutional walls.

The superintendent's fatherly letters contained warnings to boys, but others were full of encouragement, while still others were designed to probe paroled boys about their current situation. However, some boys wrote unsolicited letters to Ferrier to bring him up to date and perhaps boast about their accomplishments. All served to provide the superintendent with insight that he would not otherwise have acquired into former inmates' conduct. Reggie K. was a small boy who often got into fist fights with older boys during his time in the institution. One year after his release, Reggie enthusiastically wrote a letter to Ferrier in almost illegible script about his current situation:

It is a lovely farm. Mr. [D] has nineteen sheep, two old sows and twenty-two little ones and five horses and some calves [*sic*] and cows and some hens and forty other hens the first thing that I did was to pitch minower [*sic*] around the

60 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, George D. to Ferrier, May 8, 1920.

61 Strange, "The Velvet Glove"; Peter Oliver, "To Govern by Kindness: The First Two Decades of the Mercer Reformatory for Women", in J. Phillips, T. Loo and S. Lewthwaite, eds., *Essays in the History of Canadian Law: Crime and Criminal Justice* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 1994).

62 Hannah-Moffat, *Punishment in Disguise*, pp. 58-60.

63 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Joe B. to Ferrier, February 23, 1927.

trees and the second to git [*sic*] in the chicken eggs there was a good lot of chickens I got forty eggs and to feed the calfs. They have t[w]o dogs and about six or seven cats. Mr. [D] has got one hundred and fifty acres.<sup>64</sup>

Ferrier, however, did not share Reggie's enthusiasm. In his sober reply to the former inmate's descriptive letter, Ferrier took the opportunity to warn Reggie about proper manly behaviour. The superintendent wrote, "You must try to please Mr. and Mrs. Dixon and do as you are told in everything. Be strictly honest and truthful, and then you will be trusted."<sup>65</sup> As long as Reggie respected authority and controlled his conduct, Ferrier was sure that he would be well treated.

This case demonstrates how such an innocuous technique as letter writing was employed to manage paroled youth in accordance with certain normative standards. While the letters are not dripping with bitterness or coercion, we would be inattentive if we failed to acknowledge how such a seemingly benevolent strategy was being used to regulate boys' behaviour.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, these letters evoke images of a father socializing his child to adhere to the acceptable masculine standards of working-class society.

Nevertheless, former inmates were not merely the recipients of counsel offered by the paternalistic Ferrier nor the objects of the VIS's system of surveillance and control, but were implicated in their own governance. By frankly replying to Ferrier's queries, former inmates unwittingly informed school officials about their current situation and, at times, their misdeeds. Lindsay's reply to a Christmas card, for example, allowed Ferrier a line of sight into some of the most intimate features of his life. The former inmate informed Ferrier, "I don't like [the work] but still I have to put up with lots I don't like to support my mother."<sup>67</sup> Presuming that Lindsay was telling the truth, the superintendent could assume that the former inmate was adhering to the manly values of hard work and had taken on a masculine breadwinner role. Although there is no certainty that boys like Lindsay were always frank in their replies, their responses allowed for a thinly veiled surveillance of their conduct.

In addition to letter writing, contracts signed between Ferrier and inmates who agreed not to engage in deviant behaviour of any kind comprised another method the wily superintendent employed to govern boys' conduct outside institutional walls. For example, he attempted to secure Brad S.'s law-abiding and conforming behaviour through a written pact. Brad was committed to the school in 1917 for stealing a bike wheel and, with the exception of one escape attempt, his stay at the VIS was relatively uneventful. However, once released

64 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Reggie K. to Ferrier, n.d.

65 *Ibid.*, Ferrier to Reggie K., May 15, 1921.

66 On this point, see also Hannah-Moffat, *Punishment in Disguise*, p. 59.

67 AO, Industrial Schools Association of Toronto, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Ferrier to Reggie K., May 15, 1921.

from the VIS's immediate watchful eye, Brad again found himself in trouble. After only three months, Brad's mother complained to Toronto's Juvenile Court Judge Edward W. Boyd that her son had not been reformed and had recently pilfered her watch, filched the last \$30 from her purse, and clearly had not benefited from his stay at the VIS. He was subsequently returned to the VIS for a further period of training.<sup>68</sup>

School officials once again released Brad to his mother's care after a further year and a half of detention. Ferrier was more weary. Before discharging Brad to his mother, the superintendent encouraged the boy to sign the following contract: "I hereby promise and pledge that I will not yield to the temptation to steal, nor do any wrong which will get me into trouble and that I will obey my father and mother's wishes to keep away from bad companions and report to them every night at a reasonable hour."<sup>69</sup> Although Brad signed the document, the contract had little impact on his temptation to steal. Two weeks after his release, Ferrier received a report from Brad's employer explaining that the former inmate had taken \$70 from the fish business's till and used his windfall to live a "fast" lifestyle. After Brad had spent every last dime and returned from his binge, his mother was waiting at the door to take him back to the VIS.<sup>70</sup>

### **Parents and Placements: Supplementing the Institutional Gaze**

The conduits of information from Ferrier to inmates (or vice versa) served several functions. Most notably, however, letters attempted to ensure that inmates released from the institution continued to act in accordance with the normative values espoused by the school. Along with contracts signed by inmates, letters endeavoured to make certain boys did not fall back into their former way of life. In this way, the technique served as a channel of knowledge that aimed to educate and govern, father and supervise, and extend the institution's influence deep into the community.

There was no guarantee that Ferrier's letters were having the intended effect or even that they were received. Nevertheless, parents and employers conducted a more regular and exact surveillance of boys under their care. When boys were released directly to their familial homes, institutional policy required parents to provide Ferrier and VIS staff with monthly (or quarterly after one year) updates detailing their son's conduct during the period. Under the conditions of the Terms of Agreement, parents promised to:

... undertake with the ISAT to assume the duties of parents towards a boy named \_\_\_\_\_ on the following terms 1. to provide him with board, lodging,

68 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Brad S. Case File, 1920.

69 *Ibid.*, signed on official VIS stationery by Brad S., 1921.

70 *Ibid.*, Deputy Superintendent William Pettinger to J. J. Kelso, July 10, 1923.

washing &c. 2. to see that he attends school, or that suitable employment is secured for him and that he continues as such employment regularly 3. to furnish the Superintendent of the VIS a report of his conduct and progress every three months and once a month for the first 12 months 4. should the boy leave my home, or refuse to keep steadily at the employment provided for him, or should he associate with bad companions, or otherwise prove unsatisfactory or beyond control, I undertake to notify the Superintendent of the VIS at Mimico, and if possible return the boy to the school 5. to receive the visiting agent, or other officers of the school, at such times as may be deemed expedient by the school, and to give the school such information as may be desired, as to the progress and conduct of the boy.<sup>71</sup>

When anomalies or regression in boys' behaviour became evident, parents were thus contractually obligated to inform the VIS. Like the boys who wrote letters to Ferrier detailing all of their misdeeds, parents were caught up in their son's governance. The contract aligned parents with the school's regulatory goals. They were inextricably bound by the terms of this indenture to extend the school's work into the community. Although existing records do not provide a precise depiction of exactly how many parents snatched on their sons, my reading of the VIS case files suggests that they only grudgingly turned them over to school officials.

Despite their initial desire to have their sons home, parents did not always submit positive reviews of their boys' progress on parole. James E., for example, was admitted to the VIS in April 1913 for stealing a watch and a pocket knife from a store in his hometown of London, Ontario. James was well known to police in the city for the mayhem that tended to follow him. William B., the Children's Aid Society agent for his region, stated at James's trial that over the past three years the boy had been reported to police on more than one occasion for liberating items of value from local businesses.<sup>72</sup> Since VIS officials and police were certain that Mr. and Mrs. E. had little control over James's behaviour, the magistrate who presided over the case sentenced him to the VIS. Throughout his incarceration James had received the dubious honour of being the "worst boy" in the institution and had put very little effort toward altering his behaviour.<sup>73</sup> Understandably, James was incarcerated without parole for close to the maximum period allowed under the *Industrial Schools Act*. Finally, in 1916 James was released to the custody of his waiting mother. Soon, however, she became fully aware that James had clearly not benefited from his time at the VIS and, if possible, the period of incarceration had exacerbated his initial problems. In her monthly report Mrs. E. informed school officials that she dared not leave any money

71 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-3, Administrative Correspondence, Terms of Agreement.

72 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, 1912, court transcript for William B., April 29, 1913.

73 *Ibid.*, Home Inspector A. J. Parker to Mrs. E., January 7, 1916.

or anything of value lying around the house since James would inevitably put the items in his pocket. On one occasion she returned from a trip to the post office to find her home ransacked and full of drunken boys. In an effort to punish James, Mrs. E. attempted to grab her son, but he was much too quick and managed to strike his elderly mother and push her over.<sup>74</sup>

After this incident, having exhausted all her parental resources, Mrs. E. appealed to the coercive powers of the VIS for assistance. She reminded the home inspector that “his [James’s] time [was] not up at your school until the 29th of April and as he has not been here long enough for the authorities to take it up I thought I would just ask your advice, he says if I send him back there he will jump the train, I think he should be put in somewhere until he is 21, as I can’t manage him.”<sup>75</sup> Parker replied to Mrs. E. in a rather condescending tone that, although he regretted very much to hear she was having so much trouble with her son, he had fully anticipated this outcome.<sup>76</sup> A week after she wrote to inform Parker of James’s behaviour, Mrs. E. returned her son to the VIS where he served out the remainder of his sentence before being paroled to the Working Boys’ Home. While the contract was intended to ensure parents continued the institution’s work, it also provided distraught and frustrated parents a means through which to ameliorate their distress.

Tucked in the back of James’s file is a letter addressed to Mr. Ferrier from a contrite and repentant James:

I am a married man now with a home of my own which cost me \$2,700 I also have the sweetest little baby girl that ever lived, she certainly is a sweet little thing. I know you will hardly believe that I turned out so good but a man will do anything for the one he loves.... I wish you would kindly tell the boys about me when you speak to them on Sunday and please tell them from me that I never pay to lead the kind of a life I led while under your control. I though[t] at the time that I was smart and taught but I see different now when I lead a good decent life I can look any man in the eye and fear nothing for I know that God is watching me ... I cannot tell you how happy I’ve been since I accepted the Lord.<sup>77</sup>

There was no telling what influenced boys to alter their behaviour in accordance with the manly values endorsed by the VIS. Clearly, a Christian life and the responsibility associated with supporting a family was fundamental to James’s ultimate reformation.

Although parents eagerly anticipated their son’s arrival in the family home, they were also anxious about how to respond when their son’s actions were seemingly out of line with those of a reformed boy. To this end, some parents

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Mrs. E. to A. J. Parker, n.d.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Mrs. E. to A. J. Parker, n.d.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Parker to Mrs. E., January 7, 1916.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, James E. to Ferrier, 1924.

requested Ferrier's expertise. Laverne S., for example, was paroled to his family's home after serving his mandatory one-year term. His parents lived on a 100-acre farm that home inspector Parker considered ideally suited to the needs of a paroled boy. In accordance with the Terms of Agreement, Mrs. S. sent in her regular updates and on June 18, 1913, she informed Ferrier that her son seemed "to be doing alright at present [and] is working for one of our neighbors, he gets lonely for the boys".<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, Mrs. S. was growing concerned about Laverne's burning interest in going to town to watch moving pictures. For four full months Mrs. S. had been successful in keeping him around the home by distracting him with such manly activities as fishing and hunting. Not sure whether allowing her 15-year-old boy to trek the five miles to town was advisable, she eagerly sought out Ferrier's advice.

Providing counsel to parents about how to discipline their paroled boys was a further means through which VIS officials projected their understanding of proper conduct and extended institutional control into the community. In his reply to Mrs. S.'s query about allowing Laverne to venture to town unescorted, Ferrier demonstrated his anxiety when he wrote: "If you live 5 miles from the town I do not think it wise to allow him to go too often, either to shows or anything else. You may rest assured that if he does you will have trouble that may [result in] his return to the School."<sup>79</sup> Against the backdrop of Laverne's return to the VIS, Ferrier told her to be wary of the evil influences that lurked in the town. By providing advice, Ferrier and his staff attempted to produce working-class parents who supported the lessons imparted inside the VIS.

**"Just a lazy, idle, good for nothing":  
Creating Problems for Parents and Placements**

Providing counselling for confused or distraught parents helped expand institutional governance beyond the walls of the VIS. These "indirect" mechanisms of governance were fundamental to the school's system of control as they exerted influence at a distance. Regulating former inmates was inextricably tied to and made possible by the activities of parents, home inspectors, and a plethora of additional agents aligned with VIS goals. Governance of paroled boys, then, was exercised in a myriad of locales where institutional and, more often, non-institutional agents not only exercised authority over former inmates, but armed VIS authorities with knowledge. These groups possessed greater power than the ability to snitch on wayward boys. Indeed, if parolees were flouting normative standards of conduct espoused by the school, institutional agents and parents wielded the authority to revoke the recalcitrant boys' parole and return them for a period of additional training and confinement.

<sup>78</sup> AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Mrs. S. to Ferrier, June 18, 1913.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, Ferrier to Mrs. S., July 7, 1913.

While parole provided boys with an opportunity to demonstrate they had internalized the lessons they had learned inside the school, deviation from behavioural guidelines meant that any one of a number of people could withdraw their freedom. From my sample drawn from the VIS case books, a full 25 per cent of boys released from the institution were returned at least once. Included among the rationales given for withdrawing boys' freedom was such wayward conduct as being truant, leading an idle life, escaping from placements (lacking self-control), engaging in vicious and harmful conduct, disrespecting parents, and further involvement in crime.<sup>80</sup>

William G. was paroled from the VIS in time to enjoy Christmas dinner with his family, who were then struggling to eke out a comfortable existence in Toronto. Home Inspector Gordon's initial investigation described Mrs. G's residence as "clean, tidy and well ordered" and reported that Mr. G. held a steady job at Toronto Hydro. Gordon concluded his initial survey with his assurance that the home conditions were amenable to support the transformations William had undergone inside the institution. However, Gordon's report several months later was not nearly as optimistic. William, he stated, "never amounted to anything". In conclusion, Gordon reported that William was "just a lazy, idle, good for nothing". In the final analysis Gordon maintained, "William is just a bum!"<sup>81</sup>

Many paroled boys like William were returned for such subversive masculine conduct as idleness, while others had their parole revoked for unlawful behaviour. Committing offences while on parole was the grounds for detaining 27 per cent of the boys returned to the institution. The crimes for which boys were arrested were most often of a minor nature, with theft being the crime on record almost 90 per cent of the time.<sup>82</sup> For example, after 14 months spent learning and training at the VIS, Wylie was paroled to a foster home where he found employment as a delivery clerk. However, after only eight months, he was returned to the institution for stealing \$500 from his employer. Perhaps more disturbing was Wylie's predilection for lying. On one occasion when Gordon asked how he was doing, Wylie reported he was doing exceedingly well and had put together a dance band that allowed him to supplement his meagre income. Upon closer inspection, Gordon found this story, among others Wylie told, full of lies. The home inspector reported on July 8, 1930, "[T]his boy has lived a life of lies, [he] never sold a sheet of music to anyone." To sum up the whole matter, Gordon simply wrote: "Lies, Lies." Wylie was returned to the VIS where he was detained for a further period of two years and three months.<sup>83</sup>

Training inmates to respect authority was a central element of the VIS programme and was conferred through almost all of the school's branches.

80 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-7, Case Books.

81 *Ibid.*, Gordon to Ferrier, June 1921.

82 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-7, Case Books.

83 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Gordon to Ferrier, July 8, 1930.

Despite repeated lessons in respect through instruction in drill, for example, not all paroled inmates were prepared to revere their parents or employers. Moreover, those who agreed to open their homes and places of work to former inmates could never be certain that paroled boys had internalized the VIS's lessons of manliness and respectability. Of those boys returned to the institution for further training, approximately 21 per cent had their parole revoked as a result of parental complaint.<sup>84</sup> For example, after 25 months of the VIS's brand of discipline, Morris Q. was paroled to his awaiting parents. However, once back in the familial home, Morris became "disruptive" and seemed to have picked up additional undesirable qualities. Clearly, Morris's parents reasoned, the institution had not fulfilled its promise to change their boy, and after only six months they returned their son to the VIS for further training.<sup>85</sup> Families who received paroled inmates fully expected the boys to demonstrate reverence, contrition, and obedience.

When boys were released to the care of farmers, there was no guarantee they had seen the last of the industrial school. Farmers returned boys to the VIS under their charge for such despicable qualities as idleness and lacking a fondness for hard labour. In my sample almost one-fifth of paroled boys were returned to the school by farmers who claimed the boys they had hired were for one reason or another "unsatisfactory".<sup>86</sup> For example, Thomas R.'s parole was revoked after only three weeks when the supervising farmer complained to Ferrier that "he was not much of a worker" and was "being lazy".<sup>87</sup> Clearly, not all paroled boys were prepared to conform to the VIS's masculine standards of conduct that stressed the importance of a fondness for work and a penchant for hard labour.

The VIS gave no assurances to farmers that the boys they took into their homes would not seriously disrupt their families. James D., for example, was committed to the industrial school for incorrigibility by Child Saver J. J. Kelso in February 1914. Institutional officials characterized James as "feeble-minded", as having difficulty conforming to VIS rules, and as being a constant disruptive force. Since his conduct never merited release, James spent the full three years allowable under law ensconced within the VIS. It was an unfortunate Mr. R. who received James into his home.<sup>88</sup>

A year after James was paroled to Mr. R., Ferrier received an indignant letter from the farmer stating that a horrible crime had occurred in his home. It seems that James had tried (unsuccessfully) to sexually assault the farmer's younger daughters. After the alleged attack the farmer was justifiably anxious to be rid of James. Mr. R. explained to Ferrier that his girls were "anything but safe with [James] here".<sup>89</sup> However, before Ferrier could send one of his

<sup>84</sup> AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-7, Case Books.

<sup>85</sup> AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Mr. Q. to Ferrier, n.d.

<sup>86</sup> AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-7, Case Books.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, James D., 1914.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Mr. R. to Ferrier, April 20, 1918.

staff to retrieve James, the farmer had called the police to lock James up in the local gaol. He was taking no more chances with the parolee. Ferrier later learned from a conversation with Mr. R. that this incident was the last in a long string of mischief the farmer had endured at the hands of the former inmate.

Many of the boys paroled to farm and family situations disrupted the normalcy family members had come to expect. Jim B. had been born in Belfast, Ireland, and at 11 was sentenced by a magistrate to the VIS. After Jim had served the majority of the three-year maximum sentence, a foster family willing to supervise his parole was secured. Shortly after Jim was released from the institution, Mr. K. (Jim's foster father) informed Ferrier that Jim seemed to be under "great temptation to take things which do not belong to him". Mr. K. reported that one of Jim's greatest faults was "stealing and one still greater [was] the lies he tells to keep you from proving that he was the guilty party". Despite Mr. K.'s infliction of "whippings", Jim's habits of lying and stealing continued to cause his foster family a great deal of suffering and anxiety. To intensify matters, Jim rejected regular school attendance and refused to apply himself properly to his work.<sup>90</sup>

Armed with negative reports, Ferrier wrote to Jim in an effort to deter him from bringing further hardship on his foster family. The superintendent informed Jim that he was "disappointed to get this report and [was] writing advising [him] to do better". The superintendent then suggested, "[W]hy not jump right into your work and show [Mr. K.] that you have his best interests at heart."<sup>91</sup> This letter and warning did little to amend Jim's habits. A few months later Ferrier received further correspondence from Mr. K. explaining that Jim was now stealing from the farmer's young son.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, some former VIS inmates created extensive problems for the families that took them in.

### Conclusion

Industrial school officials employed diverse agents and sources of knowledge to render paroled boys visible and amenable to corrective intervention. Boys at a distance from the VIS were governed through such strategies as letter writing, contracts, and expense reports, as well as the actions of home agents, placement supervisors, and parents. Knowledge transferred to VIS officials by these groups closed the distance between paroled boys and the institution and thus made some level of direct supervision possible. This process, however, was curtailed by a lack of resources and insufficient numbers of home inspectors. Moreover, the reliance institutional officials placed upon parents, who were emotionally connected to their sons and reluctant to run to

90 AO, ISAT, RG 8-51-8, Case Files, Mr. K. to Ferrier, n.d.

91 *Ibid.*, Ferrier to Jim B., February 14, 1922.

92 *Ibid.*, Mr. K. to Ferrier, October 5, 1922.

VIS officials at the first sign of trouble, was perhaps more problematic. Indeed, there is no doubt that the relay of information from parents to Ferrier was a fragile link in which parents utilized the school predominantly to serve their own ends.

Ferrier took the opportunity in his letters to scold former inmates and bring their conduct into line with endorsed standards of masculine working-class behaviour. Letters were thus intended to extend the school's influence and authority into the community. Ferrier's inclination to check up on and maintain contact with former inmates long after they had left the institution expands the image of a father advising his son to encompass the idea that children, because of their age and state of development, warranted omnipresent control, surveillance, and assistance.<sup>93</sup>

93 Hannah-Moffat, *Punishment in Disguise*, pp. 59–60.