

## ABSTRACT

Poor Relief and Charity: a Study in Social Ideas and Practices

in Post–Emancipation Jamaica

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In the absence of legislated social welfare reform, the changing dimensions of charity represent contemporary society's responses to the problem of poverty. This monograph examines two of several co-existing forms of charity: parish poor relief, the oldest expression of government's welfare obligations, and the innovative formation of co-operative benefit societies, popularized in the post–cholera decade. Kingston Public Hospital, managed by the Assembly, is pertinent to developments in parish and social charity.

The operation of parish poor relief is modelled on Kingston, St. Thomas Vale, and St. Catherine, including expenditures, services, and scale of benefits, "class" and individual eligibility. Kingston's "settled" paupers were the largest, best-documented charity class, enabling a pragmatic description of the social characteristics and economic circumstances of pauper subsistence. Parish conventions of "class" are compared to "types" of the poor identified in contemporary literature of churchmen, sanitarians and others. How these "types" corresponded to popular distinctions among the lower social ranks is of considerable interest.

The principal organizers of co-operative charity societies devised different remedies for workingmen and for "unsettled" types. The discussion of working class self-help associations analyzes the meaning of "mutuality" in terms

of purpose, membership, and affordability. Co-operation in institutional charities referred to joint popular and government funding of almshouses, industrial and "ragged" schools. The types accommodated there and the standards of maintenance illustrate the material differences between community and public charity institutions.

### **General Findings**

Government and popular investment in material improvements in the conditions of the poor escalated after 1855. Unequivocal liberal humanitarian advances in public charity were government expenditures on: free medical treatment, up-graded hospitals, decent utilitarian poorhouses and reformatories, free water rations in Kingston. Among the compromised liberal responses to poverty are Kingston's over-crowded pauper rolls and working class charity societies' exclusion of non-religious people despite the secular purposes of these associations.