

The Incidence of Crime in Vancouver During the Great Depression*

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"*Crime Wave Sweeps Vancouver*" ran the headline in the *Vancouver Sun* on 7 January 1930.¹ Two days later an editorial followed that claimed most offences were not the work of professional criminals but rather of "men whom hunger and poverty had made desperate."² On 1 November 1930 another editorial linked crime conditions to unemployment and suggested solving both problems by hiring a large squad of extra policemen.³ A more violent crime wave was referred to in March 1932, when it was claimed that 575 major crimes in which revolvers had figured⁴ had occurred in Vancouver since the beginning of that year. Concern was again voiced on 21 July 1932, the headline in the *Sun* proposing another possible solution: "*City May Operate Jobless Shelters to Restrict Crime.*"⁵ Even the *Victoria Colonist*, in the same year, noticed the "*Reign of Crime*" in Vancouver, claiming that the B.C. police were intent on coming to the aid of the local force to "*Clean Up*" crime in the city.⁶

The press was not alone in linking the sudden onslaught of Vancouver's depression in October 1929 to increased criminal activity. The

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¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 7 January 1930, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, 9 January 1930, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 1 November 1930, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 March 1932, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 July 1932, p. 1.

⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, 6 May 1932, p. 1.

police themselves were certain of the connection. As early as 7 November 1929, the Vancouver Police Commission noted a rise in petty thieving and housebreaking.⁷ Although Police Chief W. J. Bingham had initially denied that a crime wave was upon the city, he nevertheless claimed in his *Annual Report* for 1929 that the "unemployment situation results in many destitute men falling into petty crime" and that "clearing camps in the interior would rid the City of a menace difficult to handle. . . ."⁸ In February 1930 Bingham reported to the Vancouver Police Commission that "many of the large numbers of unemployed men in the city were becoming desperate and were committing crimes" and noted an increase in hold-ups and shopbreakings.⁹ On 3 December a special meeting of the Police Commission was convened to discuss the "epidemic of holdups and burglaries."¹⁰ In his *Annual Report* of that year Bingham explained that the increase in stolen property could "be accounted for in part by the state of general depression and mass unemployment."¹¹ Police Chief C. E. Edgett elaborated on this theme in 1932:

With few exceptions, those arrested for Robbery with Violence were found to be local youths and residents of Vancouver, who had been before the Courts for minor offences as Juveniles and otherwise. The present economic situation and its attendant unemployment is no doubt in a large measure contributory to this condition.¹²

The demands of community and business associations likewise provide evidence of a growing concern about rising crime. The Vancouver Central Ratepayers Association passed a resolution early in 1930 suggesting that assistance be requested from the RCMP and, if necessary, the Pro-

⁷ See *City of Vancouver: Board of Police Commission Minutes*, 7 November 1929, p. 178. Vancouver City Archives, 75(A)5. Hereinafter these documents will be referred to as *Van. Police Minutes*. The Vancouver City Archives will be referred to as V.C.A.

⁸ See *Annual Report of the Chief Constable of the City of Vancouver 1929*, p. 31. V.C.A., S.25. Hereinafter these documents will be referred to as *Van. Police Annual Report* with the year cited. For Bingham's denial see the *Vancouver Sun*, 10 January 1930, p. 1 and 1 February 1930, p. 1.

⁹ *Van. Police Minutes*, 4 February 1930, p. 219 and 12 February 1930, p. 222. V.C.A., 75(A)5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 December 1930, p. 52.

¹¹ *Van. Police Annual Report*, 1930, p. 3. V.C.A. S.25.

¹² *Van. Police Annual Report 1932*, p. 2. V.C.A., S.25. Edgett also speculated on another cause of this condition: "The craving for excitement and amusement by present-day youth, and the glorification of crime as exemplified by the modern 'Movies' may possibly have a bearing on it also."

vincial Police to cope with the rise in unlawful activity.¹³ In January 1932 the Grandview Ratepayers Association urged city council to press for an amendment to the Criminal Code forbidding the manufacture, importation and sale of revolvers and other lethal weapons. The preamble to their resolution — unanimously endorsed by city council and adopted in principle by the Vancouver Police Commission — read:

And Whereas the present economic distress is accentuating unemployment and either directly or indirectly driving many of our young men into the ranks of the criminal class, and because of the ease with which such lethal weapons may be procured, rendering such men a serious menace to law-abiding citizens, Be It Resolved. . . .¹⁴

In addition, groups such as the Merchant Tailors Exchange and the Vancouver Real Estate Exchange directed specific complaints to the Vancouver Police Commission. In March 1931 the former wrote to the Commission referring to the recent numerous robberies of tailor shops in town, resulting in “severe losses” to their members, and urged “a special effort on the part of the Police Force.”¹⁵ The latter, in December 1933, complained about the theft of plumbing, lighting and other fixtures from vacant houses and urged a special investigation to cope with this widespread “evil.”¹⁶

Abundant contemporary commentary, then, suggests an association between depressed economic conditions and rising trends in crime. What contemporaries thought, however, and what actually occurred might be two very different things. Did crime, in fact, increase during Vancouver’s Depression? If so, can one specify which types of criminal activity were most sensitive to the downswing in the economy? How do crime levels in the 1930s compare with those prevailing in Vancouver’s earlier history? One of the major aims of this paper is to address these specific questions.

Beyond that, my intentions are wider-ranging. Although in recent years Canadian historians have expressed a burgeoning interest in varying aspects of the law, crime and society, this field has not received nearly the attention that it has in Europe and the United States. In particular, Canadian cities still await the long-term historical consideration of crime,

¹³ This resolution was brought before the Vancouver Police Commission. See *Van. Police Minutes*, 12 February 1930, p. 224. V.C.A., 75(A)5.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 20 January 1932, pp. 178-79. V.C.A., 75(A)6; see also *Police General Files*, 75(C)6, fol. 5.

¹⁵ *Van. Police Minutes*, 16 March 1931, p. 96. V.C.A., 75(A)6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 December 1933, p. 71. See also *Police General Files*, V.C.A., 75(D)2, fol. 7.

police and community accorded to urban centres such as London, New York and Boston.¹⁷ The present article — the basis of a larger study — attempts a beginning.

Finally, Vancouver will be utilized as a test case within the extensive debate on the impact of economic conditions on crime. The literature, both historical and criminological, on this theme is at once voluminous and contradictory, although surprisingly few studies have concentrated specifically on the Depression of the 1930s. Once again, most of the historical work has focused on Europe and the U.S.A. In both earlier and more recent writings two clear categories emerge: those authors who posit, albeit with varying degrees of qualification, a direct relationship between increasing destitution and crime, and those who strongly deny such an association. Classic works by Thomas on nineteenth-century England and Radzinowicz on Poland between 1927 and 1934, for example, found positive correlations between certain types of property crimes and deteriorating economic conditions.¹⁸ These pioneering conclusions are confirmed in more recent works by Short on the 1930s depression in the U.S.A.,¹⁹ Beattie on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

¹⁷ For recent historical work on Canada see D. J. Bercuson and L. A. Knafla, eds., *Law and Society in Canada in Historical Perspective* (University of Calgary, Studies in History, No. 2, 1979) and L. A. Knafla, ed., *Law and Justice in a New Land: Essays in Western Canadian Legal History* (Agincourt, Ontario: Carswell, 1986). Both these collections of articles contain excellent biographies. Unfortunately the latter publication appeared too late to be incorporated in this study. For England see J. S. Cockburn, ed., *Crime in England, 1550-1800* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1977), and in particular the comprehensive bibliography by L. A. Knafla contained therein. For France and Germany see Howard Zehr, *Crime and the Development of Modern Society: Patterns of Criminality in Nineteenth-Century Germany and France* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1976). For the U.S.A. see Eric H. Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Robert M. Fogelson, *Big City Police* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977); David R. Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld: The Impact of Crime on the Development of the American Police 1800-1887* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); and Sidney L. Harring, *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities 1865-1915* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983). For studies specific to major cities see Wilbur R. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies: Police Authority in New York and London 1830-1870* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977); Roger Lane, *Policing the City: Boston 1822-1885* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967).

¹⁸ D. S. Thomas, *Social Aspects of the Business Cycle* (New York: A. Knopf and Co., 1927). L. Radzinowicz, "The Influence of Economic Conditions on Crime," *Sociological Review* XLVIII (September 1942): 188-201. See also Sam Bass Warner, *Crime and Criminal Statistics in Boston*, repr. ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1974), pp. 30-34. Originally published 1934.

¹⁹ See J. F. Short, "An Investigation of the Relationship between Crime and the Business Cycle" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1951).

England,²⁰ Zehr for nineteenth-century France and Germany²¹ and Monkkonen for the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century U.S.A.²² The views of these historians, moreover, are echoed by contemporary criminologists such as Chester, Silberman²³ and R. W. Gillespie, who, for example, concludes that "results of studies relating unemployment to crime show general, if not uniform, support for a positive correlation between these two variables."²⁴

Numerous authors, however, have remained highly suspicious of these suppositions. Sellin's classic study of the Great Depression in the U.S.A. found no direct link between Depression and crime.²⁵ A. M. Carr-Sanders earlier had reached similar conclusions for England.²⁶ More recently, G. B. Vold summed up his comprehensive review of research linking unemployment to crime thus: "The obvious inference is that the general relations of economic conditions and criminality are so indefinite that no clear or definite conclusions can be drawn."²⁷ Ivan Jankovic is even more sceptical:

There is little evidence that poverty, as such, is positively correlated with crime, and no evidence at all that changes in unemployment rates are positively correlated with changes in crime rates.²⁸

The above, of course, is but a brief sampling of the range of conclu-

²⁰ J. M. Beattie, "The Pattern of Crime in England 1660-1800," *Past and Present* 62 (February 1974): 47-95.

²¹ Zehr, *Crime and Modern Society*.

²² Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America*.

²³ Ronald C. Chester, "Perceived Relative Deprivation as a Cause of Property Crime," *Crime and Delinquency* 22 (1) (1976): 17-30. Charles F. Silberman, *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice* (New York: Random House, 1978).

²⁴ R. W. Gillespie, *Economic Factors in Crime and Delinquency: A Critical Review of the Empirical Evidence* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, 1975), p. 4. See also E. H. Sutherland and D. R. Cressey, *Criminology*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1978), pp. 235-36.

²⁵ T. Sellin, *Research Memorandum on Crime in the Depression*, repr. ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1972). Originally published in 1937. Sellin does note, however, the correlation between bad economic conditions and rising burglary in England and Massachusetts (pp. 62 and 63).

²⁶ A. M. Carr-Sanders, "Crime and Unemployment," *Political Quarterly* V (July-September 1934): 395-99.

²⁷ G. B. Vold, *Theoretical Criminology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 181-82.

²⁸ Ivan Jankovic, *Punishment and the Post-Industrial Society: A Study of Employment, Crime and Imprisonment in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1978), p. 117.

sions in the research literature pertaining to Europe and the U.S.A. Work on Canada in the depression is much sparser but likewise suggests somewhat contradictory results. Tepperman's national study, although primarily interested in the punitiveness of the courts, does suggest that criminal activity increased during the Depression and posits a close correspondence between conviction rates and unemployment.²⁹ He cites as well the numerous references in Broadfoot's *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939* to argue for an increase in petty acquisitive crime caused by impoverishment.³⁰ Gallacher, using Supreme Court of B.C. indictments, argues that offences against property increased significantly in Greater Victoria with the advent of the Depression.³¹ A recent study by Watson which explores crime in Calgary between 1924 and 1934, however, argues that "except for a brief increase in property related offences early in the Depression, the city's crime rate was remarkably stable; indeed, in some cases, it declined from pre-Depression levels."³² The following discussion, although specific to Vancouver, will attempt, where possible, a broader comparative perspective and will argue that rising property crime was connected closely to increasing destitution in the Great Depression.

If one goes beyond the literary evidence provided by contemporaries, rich as these materials are, it is necessary to construct a series of crime statistics for Vancouver both during and before the Great Depression. The City of Vancouver possesses an excellent series of Police Court Monthly Reports which span, with surprisingly few gaps, the years 1907

²⁹ Lorne Tepperman, *Crime Control: The Urge Toward Authority* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977), p. 178.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179. Tepperman is correct in stressing Broadfoot's evidence linking poverty and crime. At times, however, Broadfoot's interviewees seem to indicate that so prevalent was economic distress it was futile to steal: "... who would you shoot and take his [*sic*] money, nobody had any money, nothing to make it worth your while." See Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1973), p. 358. See also James H. Gray, *The Winter Years* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), p. 30, where he suggests that unemployment led to property theft.

³¹ D. T. Gallacher, "City in Depression — The Impact of the Years 1929-1939 on Greater Victoria, B.C." (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970), p. 151. The figures upon which he bases this conclusion, however, are very small. Only five indictments for property crime occurred between 1927 and 1929 compared to fifty-three in the period 1930-33 (p. 210). Supreme Court indictments, moreover, represent only a tiny minority of all cases heard in Greater Victoria, and do not provide sufficient support for Gallacher's conclusions.

³² Neil B. Watson, "Calgary: A Study of Crime, Offenders and the Police Court, 1924-1934" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1978), p. 131. This is the only treatment to date of crime in a Canadian city during the Depression. His study mainly concentrates on the period 1929-1934.

to 1937.³³ These reports are accurate summaries taken from the voluminous Police Court Calendars³⁴ and provide for each month and for each specific crime the total number of adults prosecuted before the Police Court magistrates, with a further breakdown of total convictions, total cases dismissed or withdrawn, and total cases committed for trial in higher courts. This information was supplemented where relevant with printed criminal statistics provided by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.³⁵ Computerization of the data generated yearly totals of all prosecutions and convictions for the years 1906-40 occurring in the Vancouver Police Court. Since only a tiny minority of total cases were sent to higher court (at most 2.7 percent), these totals clearly capture the vast majority of criminals convicted.

For the purposes of analysis, particular categories and sub-categories of prosecutions and convictions were selected out from the overall totals.

³³ These reports were headed "STATEMENT OF CASES DISPOSED OF IN THE POLICE COURT FOR THE MONTH ENDING. . . ." with the particular month and year specified. They are in possession of the V.C.A., in the *Police General Files* numbered 75(A)12 through 75(D)4. Reports are missing for April through December 1920, for all of 1921, for January through April 1922, and for May through November 1934. It is estimated that the Police Court tried perhaps nine out of every ten people accused of breaking the law. More serious cases were referred to trial in the County Court after appearing in the Vancouver Police Court. The most serious cases were dealt with in the Supreme Court. Thus, trends revealed through the use of Police Court statistics, especially with respect to prosecutions, clearly will reflect overall patterns of crime in Vancouver. For a brief discussion of the early justice structure in British Columbia see Vincent Moore, *Angelo Branca: "Gladiator of the Courts"* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981), p. 19. For a detailed treatment of the structure, jurisdiction and procedures of adult courts in Canada and the provinces see Stuart Ryan, "The Adult Court," in *Crime and Its Treatment in Canada*, ed. W. T. McGrath (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1965), pp. 136-208.

³⁴ The Police Court Calendars comprise 103 volumes spanning the years 1895 to 1961. See V.C.A. 37(C)5 through 42(B)29. They contain the following information for each individual case appearing before the court: date of appearance, name of presiding magistrate, name, and sex (after 1919) of offender, date of offence, charge, name of complainant, name of prosecuting attorney, plea, name(s) of witness(es), how disposed of, and general observations. It is hoped eventually to obtain the substantial funding that would be necessary to exploit this vast resource. The present study utilizes the summaries contained in the Police Court Monthly Reports. The Court Calendars were utilized briefly, however, for two purposes: (1) certain sample months were used to confirm the accuracy of the Police Court Monthly Reports and (2) vagrancy cases for the years 1907-15 were tabulated to provide data on the specific types of vagrancy not given in the Monthly Reports.

³⁵ These statistics commenced in 1920 and were used mainly to provide total yearly prosecutions and convictions for the years 1920, 1921, 1934, 1938, 1939 and 1940, where data was either incomplete or missing in the Police Court Monthly Reports. See Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Judicial Statistics Branch, *Annual Reports of Criminal Statistics* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1921-41). Data for individual cities are given in the "Police Statistics" section.

This was possible for the years 1907 through 1937, with the exception of 1921, for which no data could be found. The Police Court Monthly Reports, of course, contain a vast array of criminal offences, many of which are not directly relevant to the discussion at hand. These would include a host of municipal By-Law offences (often referred to as “barking dog” violations), as well as traffic infractions, which increased to the point where in 1936 they constituted 28 percent of all cases before the Vancouver Police Court. All prosecutions under the Criminal Code as well as a number of the more serious breaches of federal and provincial acts were chosen for inclusion in this analysis.³⁶ These crimes were further subdivided into three broad categories — crimes against the person, crimes against property and crimes against the peace, the latter including “morality” offences. In addition, the general groupings were broken down into fifteen subcategories.³⁷

The use of judicial material in the form of prosecutions and convictions to determine levels of criminality, of course, is fraught with difficulties long familiar to students of criminal statistics. Such data will obviously not include the “dark figure” of crime — the huge number of violations that go unreported or undetected. Prosecutions and convictions, moreover, depend on a chain of circumstances commencing with the willingness of individuals to report criminal violations, the arrest of the suspect, the laying of the charges, the decision to prosecute and final resolution of the case. All these stages, in addition, are clearly influenced by social attitudes especially in the realm of police activity where various political and community groups often could bring pressure to bear on the propensity to arrest and prosecute. J. M. Beattie conveniently sums up this problem when he states that “modern opinion inclines to the view

³⁶ Thus all traffic offences except those included in the Criminal Code were excluded as well as all municipal bylaws. Breaches of federal and provincial acts included mostly pertain to various Drug and Liquor Acts. Prosecutions under the Indian Act were also included. Fortunately no major revision to the Criminal Code was made during the period under study. For the new code of 1953-54 see J. C. Martin, the *Criminal Code of Canada* (Toronto: Cartwright and Sons, 1955).

³⁷ The categories were as follows: (A) CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON — (1) physical violence causing death (2) physical violence causing bodily injury (3) no physical violence (4) sexual crimes; (B) CRIMES AGAINST PROPERTY — (1) violent crimes against property (2) general theft (3) non-violent crimes against property (4) malicious offences against property; (C) CRIMES AGAINST THE PEACE — (1) offences against the administration of law and justice (2) offences against public order (3) vagrancy (4) liquor related offences (5) gambling (6) drugs (7) prostitution. These categories were adapted from those generally employed by Statistics Canada.

that the most reliable sample of actual crime is that obtained as early in the process as is possible" — i.e., crime "known to the authorities."³⁸

Fortunately, Vancouver does possess this kind of information for years and types of crime crucial to this study. The Police Department in their *Annual Reports* for 1938, 1939 and 1940 presented statistics spanning the years 1929 to 1940 tabulating crimes reported to them, broken down into a number of categories pertaining to property theft.³⁹ Such data, which come closest to measuring the actual incidence of crime, do not exist, however, prior to 1929. Any assessment, therefore, of long-term patterns of crime in Vancouver must rely on the aforementioned court statistics. To be sure, such sources have been used to good effect by a number of historians.⁴⁰ Extreme caution, however, is warranted. One must be sensitive to changes in police efficiency as well as to shifts in policy stimulated by political and public pressure.

The following analysis will focus mainly on the relationship between property crime and poverty with particular emphasis on the 1930s. Ideally, one would like to explore this relationship by relating individual offenders and their social characteristics to shifts in specific types of property crime over time. Vancouver unfortunately lacks the type of source material for such individual-level study. The voluminous Police Court Calendars, which list by name and type of offence every individual appearing before the police magistrates, provide information pertaining to gender but do not specify occupation, age, ethnicity, civil status or residency. Arrest and charge books which often provide such data do not survive. Individual police case files would provide similar material but are not accessible to the researcher. One must rely, therefore, on aggregate-level analysis which explores the relationship between temporal changes in rates of various property crimes and various indicators which represent changing levels of poverty.

Such a methodology, of course, is subject to the "ecological fallacy"; that is, attributing criminal actions to particular subgroups of the popu-

³⁸ Beattie, "Pattern of Crime in England," p. 54. For an excellent discussion of this issue as well as the use of criminal statistics in general see Thorsten Sellin and Marvin E. Wolfgang, *The Measurement of Delinquency* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), pp. 19, 36-40.

³⁹ *Van. Police Annual Reports 1938, 1939 and 1940*, pp. 19, 20 and 18 respectively. V.C.A. S.25.

⁴⁰ Some recent works are Lane, *Policing the City: Boston*; Roger Lane, "Urbanization and Criminal Violence in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Social History* II (December 1968): 156-63; Beattie, "Pattern of Crime in England," and Zehr, *Crime and Modern Society*. For western Canada see Thomas Thorner, "The Incidence of Crime in Southern Alberta," in *Law and Society in Canada*, eds. Bercuson and Knafla, pp. 53-88.

lation — namely the destitute — without direct biographical evidence linking particular groups to particular crimes. Nevertheless, this aggregative method, although far from ideal, has been employed judiciously by numerous historians.⁴¹ It will allow one to determine whether the severe economic dislocation of the Depression years witnessed a rise in property crimes when compared to Vancouver's previous history as well as to assess whether, within the 1930s, property crime was correlated with short-term fluctuations in the economy.

It is necessary, then, to construct indices which reflect the changing economic and social conditions of Vancouver's population. Bartlett has provided us with an excellent real wage index covering the period 1901 to 1929 as well as yearly series pertaining to percentage unemployment in trade unions and the value of building permits issued.⁴² The latter two series were carried forward to 1940.⁴³ A yearly average index of employment, moreover, was compiled for the years 1922 to 1938.⁴⁴ In addition, a series was created comprising the yearly amount of municipal relief expenditure provided to Vancouver's poor spanning the entire period from 1906 to 1940.⁴⁵ This series should approximate most closely to changing levels of poverty within the city. Population estimates were taken from *Annual Reports* of the City of Vancouver.⁴⁶ Since Van-

⁴¹ In addition to the works by Beattie and Zehr cited in footnote 40 see Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America*, pp. 65-85. See also Ted Robert Gurr, Peter N. Grabosky and Richard C. Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict: A Comparative History of Four Cities* (Beverly Hills, Sage Publications Inc., 1977).

⁴² Eleanor A. Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," *BC Studies* 51 (Autumn 1981): 3-62. The revised Bertram and Percy Index, yearly average prices, was utilized in this study. See table 10, p. 53.

⁴³ Percentage unemployment in trade unions was taken from *The Labour Gazette*, 1930-1940. The value of building permits was gleaned from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Yearbooks*, 1930-1940.

⁴⁴ Data for Vancouver were based on tables entitled "INDEX NUMBERS OF EMPLOYMENT BY PRINCIPAL CITIES," in *The Labour Gazette*, 1922-1938. The index takes 1926=100.

⁴⁵ These figures were compiled from the City of Vancouver Social Services *Annual Reports*, V.C.A., S.I. Unfortunately no gross figures are available for the yearly expenditure of charities.

⁴⁶ See in particular City of Vancouver, *Annual Report*, 1941, p. 63 V.C.A. The method of arriving at the annual population estimates is not spelled out. Base Census Years were utilized and yearly intercensal changes were more than likely based on multipliers applied to City Directory totals. These figures clearly separate out Vancouver from its surrounding suburbs and (since they span the years 1886-1940 and originate from a single source) possess a degree of internal consistency. Bartlett makes brief use of these statistics. See Bartlett, "Standard of Living in Vancouver," p. 7n. See also Norbert Macdonald, "Population Growth and Change in Seattle and Vancouver, 1880-1960," in *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, eds. J. Friesen and H. K. Ralston (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1976).

couver's fortunes were linked to the wider economy of British Columbia, relevant material pertaining to cyclical fluctuations in the province during the inter-war period was consulted.⁴⁷

Crime data obviously must be analyzed in conjunction with shifts in the total population and usually are expressed as per 100,000 people. This will be the format utilized here. One must remember, however, that the city of Vancouver was amalgamated with the suburbs of Point Grey and South Vancouver on 1 January 1929, thus adding well over 80,000 to the new expanded municipality. Vancouver's population thus increased from 149,262 in 1928 to 240,421 in 1929. Unfortunately crime statistics for Point Grey and South Vancouver have not survived. Since it is likely that general crime rates were lower in these suburbs than in the city proper, the amalgamation would probably tend to artificially deflate crime rates in the 1930s. To be sure, this does not pose a problem in assessing the short-term changes in crime rates between 1929 and 1940 or between 1906 and 1928, but it does mean that the validity of long-term comparisons might be affected.⁴⁸

Although the following discussion will concentrate mainly on crimes against property in the 1930s, one should begin perhaps with an examination of overall patterns of crime throughout our entire period. Graph 1 gives annual rates of prosecutions and convictions per 100,000 for all cases appearing in the Vancouver Police Court through the years 1906 to 1940. It would appear that the general crime rate dropped in the 1930s and that the 1920s experienced the highest rates over the long term. Table 1 represents mean rates for select periods prior to 1940 and indeed bears this out. Both prosecution and conviction rates for the period 1930-

⁴⁷ See L. Blain, D. G. Paterson and J. D. Rae, "The Regional Impact of Economic Fluctuation During the Inter-War Period: The case of British Columbia," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 7 (August 1974): 381-401; and Larry A. Blain, "Regional Cyclical Behaviour and Sensitivity in Canada 1919-1973" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1977).

⁴⁸ Difficulties in this regard can be overcome to some extent by paying close attention to the absolute totals of prosecutions and convictions. Where such totals actually fall in the 1930s below levels observed in earlier periods, this clearly would reflect real declines in the crime rate since one would expect the addition of Point Grey and South Vancouver to increase the actual number of cases now brought before the Vancouver Police Court. Where crime rates per 100,000 increase in the 1930s, this will generally reflect real increases which are cancelling out the artificial deflation produced by adding so much additional population. It is possible, of course, that the wealthier area of Point Grey might have higher levels of breaking and entering than Vancouver in the pre-1929 period, thus perhaps inflating rates for this type of crime in the 1930s. High levels in Point Grey, however, may have been cancelled out by lower levels in the less affluent South Vancouver suburb. In the absence of relevant statistics, such reflections are pure speculation. In any case trends between 1929 and 1940 are not affected by such considerations.

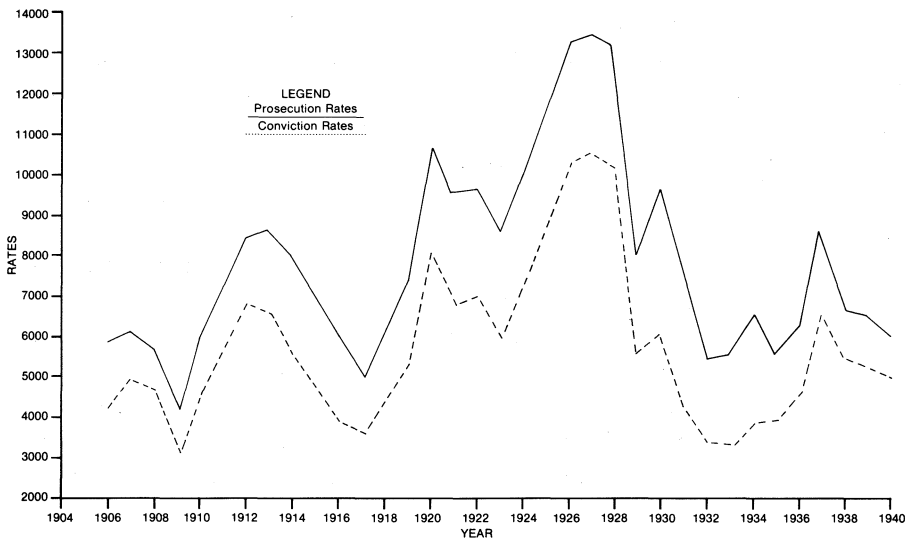
39 were considerably lower than in the 1920s and lower still than in the period 1914-21. It is likely that the overall rates for the 1930s were somewhat artificially deflated by the amalgamation of 1929. Nevertheless, the fact that the absolute totals of prosecutions and convictions in the 1930s were often lower than in the late 1920s would suggest a real decrease in the general crime rate.⁴⁹ Rates did move noticeably upward in 1930, the first year of the Great Depression, as well as in the years 1913 and 1920, when earlier downswings in the economy had occurred.⁵⁰ The most prominent feature, however, is the marked peak in both prosecution and conviction rates in the years 1925 to 1928 and their subsequent fall in the 1930s. Such a pattern is perhaps not surprising. In most cities studied thus far in Europe, the United States and Canada — London, Stockholm, Chicago, Boston, Buffalo and Calgary — the 1930s witnessed declining rates for general crime, signalling an overall long-term improvement in public order. Although the reasons for this decline are extremely complex, Gurr is right to suggest that the long-run improvement in the effectiveness of social control — the technique of legal criminalization, uniformed policing and incarceration — as well as declining levels of interpersonal aggression played important roles in this regard.⁵¹

All students of criminal statistics are agreed, however, that general crime rates — which comprise such a vast array of different offences —

⁴⁹ See graph 1(A) in Appendix for absolute totals of prosecutions and convictions 1906-1940.

⁵⁰ Bartlett cites three major depression periods in Vancouver prior to the Great Depression — the years 1907-08, 1913-15 and 1920-22. See Bartlett, "Standard of Living in Vancouver," p. 32. The worst year of the 1920-22 Depression was 1921, and unfortunately an exhaustive search failed to produce any data for this year. By 1922 economic conditions had improved considerably. The percentage of unemployment in trade unions fell from 23.5 percent in 1921 to 12.4 percent in 1922. The real wage index moved upwards from a level of 104.8 in 1921 to 108.0 in 1922. The value of building permits more than doubled between 1921 and 1922, rising from \$3,045,132 to \$8,661,695. There are grounds then for arguing that 1922 was not a severe Depression year. Table I and subsequent tables therefore include 1922, with the years 1923 to 1928 as years of relative prosperity.

⁵¹ See Ted Robert Gurr, "Development and Decay: Their Impact on Public Order in Western History," in James A. Inciardi and Charles E. Faupel, eds., *History and Crime: Implications for Criminal Justice Policy* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1980), pp. 35, 36, 43 and 44. For London and Stockholm see Gurr, Grabosky and Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict*, pp. 112, 160 and 281-320. For Chicago see Ted Robert Gurr, *Rogues, Rebels and Reformers: A Political History of Urban Crime and Conflict* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1976), p. 63. For Boston see Theodore N. Ferdinand, "The Criminal Patterns of Boston," *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (July 1967): 87. For Buffalo see Elwin H. Powell, *The Design of Discord: Studies of Anomie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 125. Data on Calgary is in Watson, "Calgary: A Study of Crime," M.A. thesis, p. 16.



GRAPH 1

*Total Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
Vancouver, 1906-1940*

TABLE 1

*Mean Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000,
for Select Periods — Vancouver, 1906-1939**

<i>Period</i>	<i>Prosecution Rates</i>	<i>Conviction Rates</i>
1906-1913	6491	5071
1914-1921	7511	5294
1922-1928	11440	8641
1930-1939	6820	4719

* These periods comprise roughly equal time periods spanning important phases in Vancouver's history. The period 1906-13 covers the pre-WWI period. The years 1914-21 cover WWI and its aftermath. The years 1922-28 span the relatively prosperous years of the twenties. The period 1930-39 covers the Great Depression. The year 1929 was omitted since amalgamation occurred in this year. The deflation in rates here would unduly bias the 1920s values in a downward direction. (No conclusions presented here were affected by excluding 1929.) Mean rates presented here and in following tables were calculated by averaging the yearly rates within each period.

can tell us little of significance about the inter-relationships between criminal activity and socio-economic change. Clearly one must probe further and observe patterns occurring within certain crucial categories of crime. Graphs 2, 3 and 4 examine longitudinal trends from 1907 to 1937 in prosecution and conviction rates in three broad categories: crimes against the person, crimes against property, and crimes against the peace.⁵² Table 2 provides mean rates for these three groupings in select periods.

The long-term shifts revealed in these data suggest a number of conclusions. If the general crime rate fell in the 1930s, this appears to be due to a precipitous decline in the large volume of crimes against the peace which began in the late 1920s and reached a trough in 1933 and 1934 (graph 4). Table 2 clearly reveals that the period 1930-37 witnessed the lowest levels in Vancouver's history. The declines here were most marked with respect to morality offences; namely, liquor-related infractions, gambling, drugs and prostitution. Prosecution rates for prostitution, for example, dropped 70 percent in the period 1930-37 when compared with 1922 to 1928. Rates of prosecution for gambling, liquor and drug offences fell 59, 61 and 89 percent respectively.⁵³ Lesser declines are observed for prosecution and conviction rates relating to crimes against the person (graph 2). These rates dropped in the 1930s and remained relatively stable. Table 2 shows a pronounced long-term decline from the high rates observed in the 1907-13 period.

The only category of crime experiencing increased rates for prosecutions and convictions in the 1930s was crime against property, which generally rose in the early 1930s, reaching an all-time peak in 1934, and then tapered off between 1935 and 1937 (graph 3). In terms of absolute volume such crime reached unprecedented heights in the 1930s.⁵⁴ It is significant as well that the earlier depression years of 1907-08, 1913 and 1920 also revealed peak rates within their respective decades. This certainly suggests some connection between increasing property crime and depressed economic conditions. Over the long term, however, the pattern

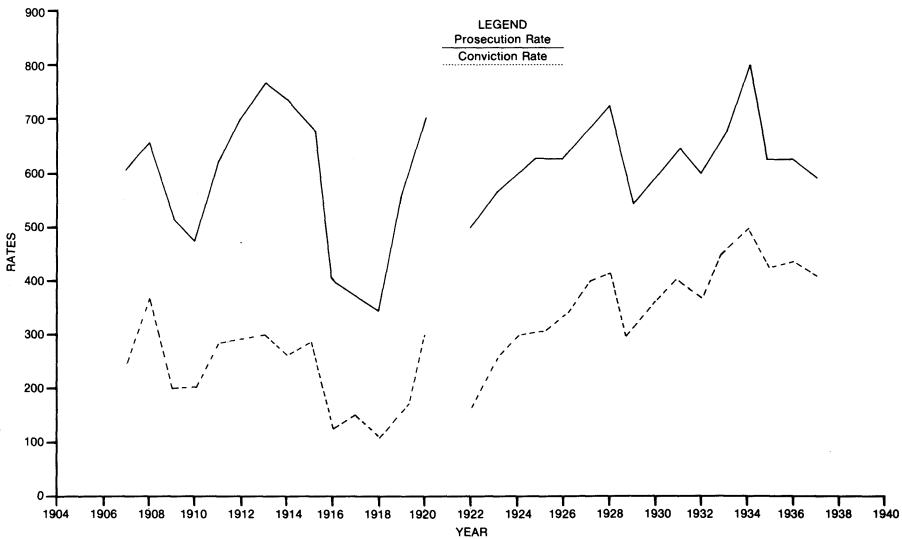
⁵² For the subcategories contained within these groupings see footnote 37 above. Crimes against property in the following graph and tables exclude malicious offences against property such as arson and vagrancy (h), since the analysis is focused on property theft. Estimates for 1920, 1922 and 1934 were made on the basis of partial data for these years using seasonal trends in proximate years. No data were available for 1921. For absolute totals of prosecutions and convictions see graphs 2(A), 3(A) in Appendix A.

⁵³ See table 1(B). Appendix B.

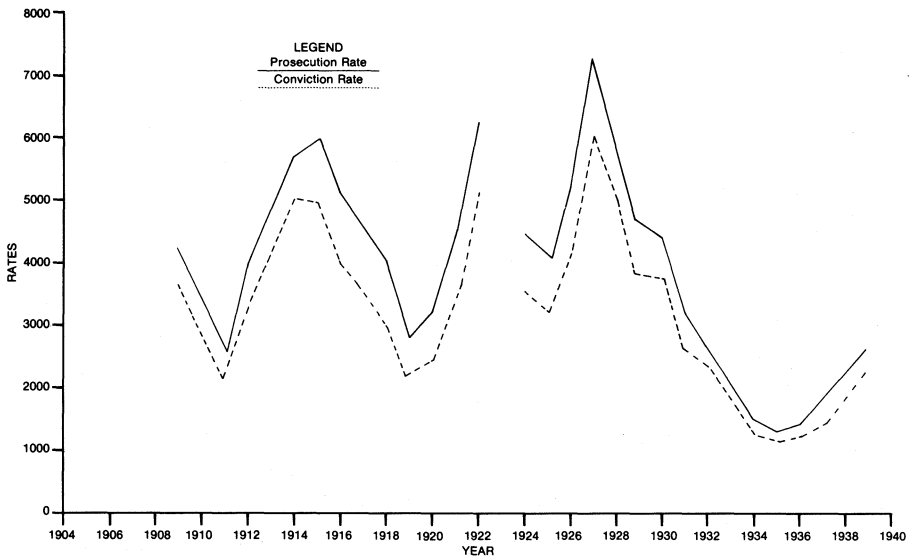
⁵⁴ See graph 2(A). Appendix A.



GRAPH 2
*Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
 Crimes Against the Person — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



GRAPH 3
*Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
 Crimes Against Property — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



GRAPH 4

*Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
 Crimes Against the Peace — Vancouver, 1907-1937*

TABLE 2

*Mean Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000,
 by Category of Crime — Vancouver, 1907-1937**

Period	<u>Crimes vs. Persons</u>		<u>Crimes vs. Property</u>		<u>Crimes vs. Peace</u>	
	Pros.	Conv.	Pros.	Conv.	Pros.	Conv.
1907-1913	339	149	626	272	4331	3839
1914-1920	278	88	545	206	4409	3448
1922-1928	262	87	608	311	5221	4304
1930-1937	183	66	639	417	2064	1745

* No data are available for 1921, 1938, 1939.

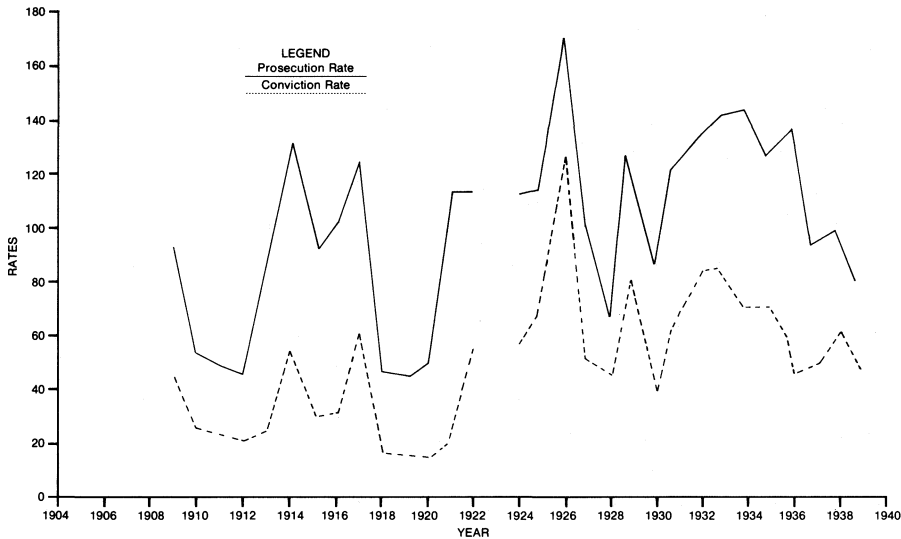
is complicated by the fact that both prosecution and conviction rates rose steadily in the relatively prosperous years between 1922 and 1928. It is nevertheless the case that both prosecution and conviction rates for crimes against property in the 1930s display the highest average levels ever recorded in Vancouver's history prior to 1938 (table 2).

These long-term patterns raise a host of fascinating questions. An analysis of crimes against the person and morality offences will be left to further investigation since, on the surface at least, they appear least responsive to the economic effects of the Great Depression. Forthcoming work will suggest that the long-term decline in crimes against the person throughout the period under review is clearly a reflection of the steady decline in assaults against individuals which comprise the majority of offences in this category. Interpersonal violence perhaps was becoming subject to much stronger internal and external controls, and its fall from high levels prior to 1914 also may indicate a move away from the more turbulent "frontier" nature of early Vancouver society. Such hypotheses at this stage, however, must remain highly tentative. The drastic decline in the rates for morality offences in the late 1920s and 1930s, it will be suggested, does not indicate an actual decline in such offences, but rather reflects the unwillingness or inability of the police to arrest. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that three major investigations into police corruption were initiated over the very period (1928-36) when prosecutions and convictions for morality crimes dropped to the lowest levels ever recorded in Vancouver's history prior to World War II.⁵⁵

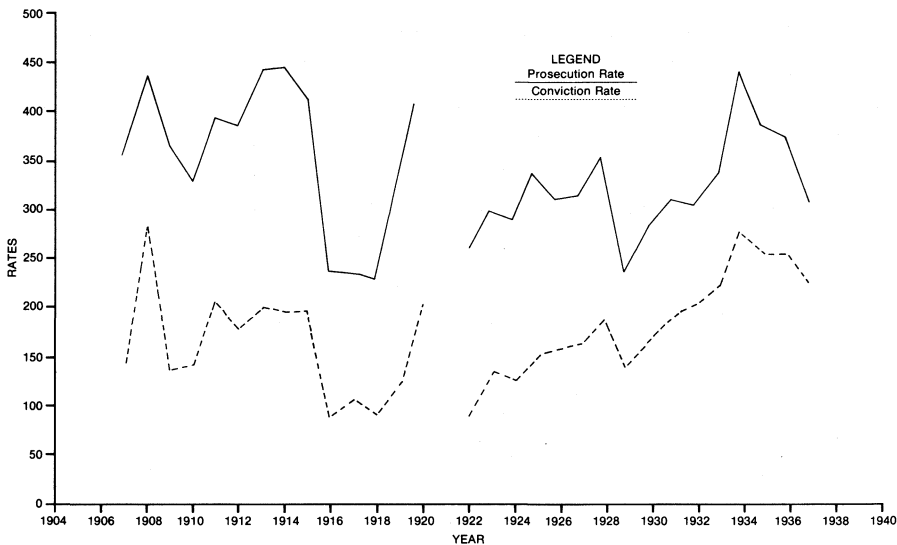
The discussion that follows will focus on the relationship between property crimes and the economy, both over the long term and within the years of the Great Depression. The general category of crimes against property was further broken down into three more specific areas: violent crimes against property, general theft and non-violent crimes against property. Violent crimes against property include more serious and violent cases of theft such as robbery, robbery with violence, hold-ups, burglary and breaking and entering. General theft contains a wide range of petty theft such as shoplifting as well as the theft of automobiles and bicycles. Non-violent crimes against property comprise various types of fraud, embezzlement, forgery, counterfeiting and false pretences.⁵⁶ Graphs 5, 6 and 7 present long-term trends in prosecution and conviction rates

⁵⁵ The whole issue of violence in Vancouver as well as the relationship between the police, vice and politics will be explored in a book being researched entitled "Crime, Community and the Police: Vancouver 1886-1940." For the investigations into conditions in the Vancouver Police Department see *Vancouver Police Inquiry 1928*, V.C.A. 37(D)12 - 37(D)22. For the January 1935 investigation see Police Chief W. W. Foster's report to the Chairman and members of the Vancouver Police Commission in *Mayor's Correspondence 33-B-5*, vol. 12, V.C.A. For 1936 see the *Macdonald Inquiry* and the *Tucker Report 75(F)3* and *75(F)4* respectively in the V.C.A.

⁵⁶ Once again malicious offences against property such as arson and vagrancy (h) are excluded from analysis.



GRAPH 5
*Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
 Violent Crimes Against Property — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



GRAPH 6
*Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
 General Theft — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



GRAPH 7

*Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000:
Non-violent Property Crimes — Vancouver, 1907-1937*

TABLE 3

*Mean Prosecution and Conviction Rates per 100,000,
Property Crimes — Vancouver, 1907-1937**

Period	<i>Violent Crimes vs. Property</i>		<i>General Theft</i>		<i>Non-Violent Crimes vs. Property</i>	
	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>
1907-1913	79	33	389	185	158	54
1914-1920	86	30	342	145	116	30
1922-1928	111	66	312	147	194	98
1930-1937	119	65	345	225	174	126

* No data are available for 1921, 1938, 1939.

for these categories, and table 3 provides mean rates for select periods to 1937.

The most observable patterns occur with respect to general theft and violent property crime. The former (graph 6), which constitutes the majority of property violations appearing in the Vancouver Police Court,

reveals a steady rise in the worst years of the Great Depression between 1929 and 1934, and then a decline through 1937. These general theft rates, as well, reveal an extremely close correspondence with earlier depression years, rising in 1908, 1913-15 and 1920. Mean rates for the period 1930-37 were clearly higher than in the 1920s (table 3). In absolute terms the volume of such prosecutions and convictions reached uniquely high levels in the 1930s.⁵⁷ It should be pointed out that the period 1907-13 reveals a higher mean prosecution rate than the 1930s, although there might be factors applicable to this earlier period, such as the substantially higher proportion of males in the population, tending to inflate rates unduly when compared to the 1930s.⁵⁸

In terms of violent property crimes rising rates are observed only in the very early 1930s (graph 5). On the whole, there is less correspondence with earlier Depression years. Particularly noticeable are the peaks occurring in the relatively prosperous years of 1912 and especially 1924. Nevertheless, the 1930s as a whole reveal the highest mean rate for prosecutions in the pre-1938 period (table 3). The sheer volume of such prosecutions in this period was unprecedented. Conviction rates, however, remain stable between 1930 and 1937 when compared with the 1920s.⁵⁹

The data thus far indicate that with regard to general theft and violent property crime the early years of the Great Depression, particularly prior to 1934, experienced increases, and that for the period 1930-37 as a whole rates were generally higher than in Vancouver's previous history.

⁵⁷ See graph 6(A). Appendix A.

⁵⁸ The population of Vancouver, of course, was much lower in this period than in the 1930s. The population stood at 60,100 compared to a 1937 population of 259,987. Thus a smaller number of prosecutions would carry greater weight between 1907 and 1913. There might have been, as well, a greater visibility of crime in a smaller population. More importantly, however, it is clear that Vancouver had a highly distorted sex-ratio in 1911 with roughly 150 males for every 100 females, a much higher ratio than the 114 males for every 100 females in 1931. (See *Census of Canada 1951*, vol. I, table 17). Such a preponderance of males — a higher risk group for crime than females — might unduly inflate rates for general theft in the earlier period when compared to the 1930s. Forthcoming work which will treat the pre-1930s period in more detail will argue also that the police were cracking down on crime in this period, especially when compared to the period 1929-34.

⁵⁹ The fact that the conviction rate in the 1930s does not rise in conjunction with the prosecution rate is due to a higher percentage of violent crimes against property being referred to higher courts during this period. Between 1930 and 1937 almost 19 percent of all cases initiated in the Vancouver Police Court on charges of violent property crime were sent to higher court, compared to 14 percent in the period 1922-28. In the 1930s only 3 percent of cases for general theft were so referred. Thus conviction rates for violent property cases are not as reliable an indicator of overall convictions when compared to similar rates for general theft. For total prosecutions relating to violent property crime see graph 5(A), Appendix A.

Non-violent property crimes reveal a less clear-cut trend in the 1930s (graph 7). Prosecution rates reached all-time peaks in the later 1920s and declined on average in the period 1930-37 when compared with 1922 to 1928 (table 3).⁶⁰ Within the lower levels of the 1930s, peaks occurred in 1931 and 1934. Since non-violent property crime clearly reflects levels of fraud and embezzlement, it appears that this type of crime flourished in the boom years of the late 1920s where opportunities for such criminal activity no doubt expanded rapidly, and then fell in the 1930s when such opportunities declined. It may well be, too, that greater vigilance during the Depression by those with money to lose played a role. The pattern here with respect to the 1920s and 1930s is very similar to Gurr's findings for London and Stockholm in terms of white-collar crime.⁶¹

The preceding observations, of course, have been based largely on direct visual observations of trends in various types of prosecution and conviction rates. Might correlations between annual indicators of Vancouver's economy and such rates reveal associations between levels of property crime and destitution in the Great Depression? Table 4 presents yearly time series correlation coefficients between different categories of property crime and crucial social and economic indices for the years 1929-37 where crime data is available.

With regard to correlations involving rates for property crimes as a whole between 1929 and 1937, all coefficients score high in the direction of an association between downswings in the economy and increased property prosecutions and convictions (table 4). Increases in the average yearly percentage of persons unemployed in trade unions, for example, are positively correlated with overall increases in property crime. As the average employment index (an index reflecting the number of persons employed) rose, overall property crime declined. The strongest and most

⁶⁰ The rise in the mean conviction rate for non-violent crimes against property in the period 1930-37 (table 3) is due to a marked decrease in the percentage of cases dismissed or withdrawn. In the period 1922-28, 47 percent of such cases were so disposed compared to only 22 percent in the 1930s. This would suggest that the courts in the latter period were coming down harder on this type of offence.

⁶¹ See Gurr, Grabosky and Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict*, pp. 632-37. It must be remembered, as well, that there is probably more of a time lag between the committing of white-collar crime and eventual prosecution than of other types of property theft. Thus the peak in 1931 may reflect crimes committed as early as 1928 or 1929. Forthcoming work will test this hypothesis by employing the Police Court Calendars. It should be noted, in addition, that the peak in 1934 was well below levels in the late 1920s and below the peak in 1913. This latter peak again might reflect the time lag hypothesis and pertain to white-collar crimes committed in the boom years of 1911 and 1912.

significant correlations, however, pertain to fluctuations in the value of building permits and per capita relief expenditure. The former, which is considered a good indicator of cyclical trends,⁶² reveals a very high negative correlation with total property crime; that is, as construction activity increased, indicating general economic improvement, property crime as a whole declined. Per capita relief expenditure, most closely approximating poverty levels, displays, on the whole, the most positive association with increases in property crime. As the amount per head rose, reflecting increased levels of indigence, so did rates for overall property crime.

A glance again at table 4 clearly reveals that within the broad category of overall property crime general theft rates are most closely associated

TABLE 4

Pearson Correlation Coefficients: Property Prosecutions and Convictions with Economic Indicators for the Same Year — Vancouver, 1929-1937

		<i>Average % trade union un- employ- ment</i>	<i>Average employ- ment index</i>	<i>Value of building permits</i>	<i>Per capita relief expen- diture</i>
Prosecution Rate	All Property Crimes	+ .58 (.10)	— .62 (.08)	— .54 (.13)	+ .61 (.08)
Conviction Rate	" " "	+ .64* (.05)	— .63 (.07)	— .84* (.01)	+ .86* (.01)
Prosecution Rate	Violent Property Crimes	+ .48 (.19)	— .38 (.30)	+ .09 (.82)	— .12 (.76)
Conviction Rate	" " "	— .01 (.97)	+ .21 (.59)	+ .47 (.20)	— .53 (.14)
Prosecution Rate	General Theft	+ .55 (.13)	— .56 (.12)	— .79* (.01)	+ .85* (.01)
Conviction Rate	" "	+ .52 (.15)	— .53 (.14)	— .88* (.01)	+ .88* (.01)

* Significant at the 5% level. Significance levels in brackets. No difference to the conclusions drawn occurred when crime was lagged one year behind the economic indicators. These correlation coefficients are generally higher than observed elsewhere. See Vold, *Theoretical Criminology*, pp. 174-78; Gurr, Grabosky and Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict*, pp. 208, 210-11, and 310-11; and Zehr, *Crime and Modern Society*, pp. 45, 51 and 59.

⁶² See Bartlett, "Standard of Living in Vancouver," p. 8.

with the economic indicators. In particular very strong significant positive correlations can be observed between per capita relief expenditure and general theft rates (+.85 and +.88). As the value of building permits rose, general theft rates declined. Coefficients pertaining to average percentage unemployment and the employment index are clearly in directions supporting the hypothesis linking economic downswing with increased levels of general theft.

Correlations with respect to violent property crime rates given in table 4 reveal, on the whole, much weaker coefficients than general theft. Not much reliance, however, can be placed on conviction rates since almost one-fifth of all cases pertaining to this type of crime appearing in the Vancouver Police Courts were sent to higher courts.⁶³ Even with respect to prosecution rates, coefficients are negligible when violent property crime rates are related to the value of building permits or per capita relief expenditure. Some association does emerge, however, between rising average yearly unemployment and increasing prosecution rates for violent property theft.

The foregoing discussion of crime pattern based on prosecution and conviction rates and their correlation with various economic indices suggests that the onset of the Great Depression contributed to an increase in both the rate and volume of total property crime mainly as a result of increases in general theft, which comprised the bulk of such crimes. Both overall property crime and general theft rates rose in the early severe years of the Depression (graphs 3 and 6), reaching peaks in 1934 and then tapering off in 1935, 1936 and 1937. The high coefficients that these types of crime reveal when correlated with economic indicators clearly reflect such a pattern (table 4). Violent crime rates against property display, on the whole, less obvious trends, rising between 1929 and 1932 and then fluctuating through 1937 (graph 5). The lower coefficient values observed with respect to this type of crime again confirm these variations.

As stated at the outset, however, one must remember that increasing prosecution and conviction rates do not necessarily reflect real increases in crime levels. Higher prosecution rates, for example, may be due to a growth in police efficiency, leading to a greater ability or propensity to arrest. Evidence for the early 1930s, though, suggests that the efficiency of the police was in fact declining. The strength of the force, for example, dropped from 357 men in 1930 to 336 in 1935, and then steadily in-

⁶³ See note 59, above.

creased to a high of 384 in 1939.⁶⁴ The *Vancouver Police Annual Report* for 1930, moreover, stated that the “necessity of withdrawing men from regular duties to assist in the controlling of parades of the unemployed, as well as the lack of efficient motor equipment, had done much to hamper the Department during the year.”⁶⁵ These sentiments were echoed in the 1931 *Annual Report*, which claimed that “much valuable time which would otherwise be devoted to investigation and suppression of crime was taken up in curbing street demonstrations and maintaining ‘the Peace’.”⁶⁶ Wage cuts were introduced in March 1932 and further reductions made in February of the following year.⁶⁷ Thus, at the very time that prosecution rates for property crimes were rising, police effectiveness was more than likely on the decline. These rates of prosecution, then, probably reflect real increases in such criminal activity.

Furthermore, the early 1930s gave no indication of an effective campaign to clean up crime in the city. It was not until his landslide mayoralty victory in December 1934 that Gerry McGeer, in concert with his newly appointed Police Chief and Board of Police Commissioners, attempted a serious drive against criminality. McGeer had introduced his campaign in November 1934 with the slogan: “Are you for me or the underworld?”⁶⁸ Incumbent Mayor Taylor replied by echoing a retort he had given in his earlier 1928 campaign: “I don’t believe in running Sunday School City.”⁶⁹ The effectiveness of McGeer’s attempts to rid Vancouver of crime in 1935 and 1936 is yet to be determined. A glance back at graphs 3, 5, 6 and 7 certainly indicates that his clean-up campaign in these years did not lead to increasing prosecution rates for property crimes — rates, in fact, decreased. In any case, the point to be made is that such policies emerged too late in the 1930s to have been a factor influencing rising rates prior to 1935.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ See the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Criminal Statistics* for the 1930s. The totals given here correspond exactly with those provided in the *Van. Police Annual Reports* that survive.

⁶⁵ *Van. Police Annual Report 1930*, p. 4. By 1932 the Vancouver Police equipped twenty-one of its thirty-two cars with radios. The overall impression, however, is one of declining efficiency. See *Van. Police Annual Report 1932*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1931, p. 2.

⁶⁷ See *Van. Police Minutes*, 10 March 1932 and 21 February 1933. V.C.A. 85(A)6 and 75(A)7. Wages were reduced by up to 20 percent depending on the salary level.

⁶⁸ *Vancouver Sun*, 14 November 1934, p. 1.

⁶⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, 27 November 1934, p. 1.

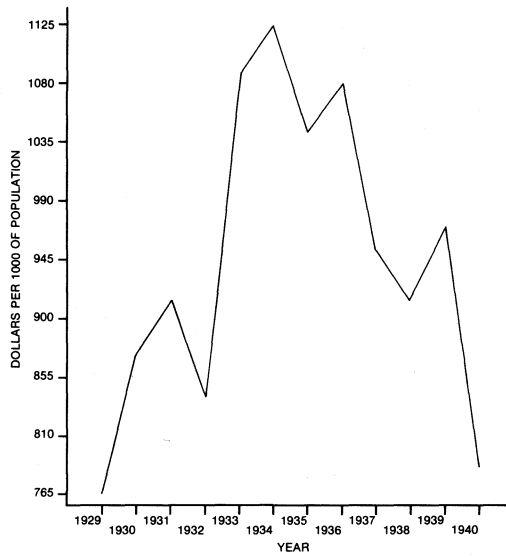
⁷⁰ The situation in the early 1930s was in marked contrast to the mid and late 1920s. The number of police, for example, increased steadily from 223 in 1922 to 263 in

The evidence, then, indicates that rising prosecution rates for property crime were not unduly influenced by levels of police efficiency or political pressure in the early thirties. It nevertheless clearly remains the case that the most reliable, if still imperfect, indicators of the real volume of crime are offences known to the police. To be sure, there will be variations in levels of reporting, but over the short term these will not pose great problems. Clearly, this type of information should provide for a better assessment of actual crime trends in the 1930s.

The data presented in the following graphs span the years 1929 to 1940 and are based on police statistics pertaining to property offences known as well as on the annual value of stolen property presented in their annual reports.⁷¹ This material, since it covers the years 1938, 1939 and 1940, provides the added advantage of observing trends at the tail end of the Depression. Graph 8 presents annual figures on the value of all known stolen property in Vancouver between 1929 and 1940 expressed in dollars per 1,000 population. Graph 9 gives annual rates per 100,000 population for breaking-and-entering offences known to the police, while graph 10 provides similar information with respect to robbery with violence. Breaking and entering offences are combined with those for robbery with violence in graph 11 to reveal trends for violent theft as a whole. Graph 12 displays rates for all thefts known to the police. These rates include, in addition to the aforementioned violent thefts, all petty theft, as well as automobiles and bicycles known to have been stolen

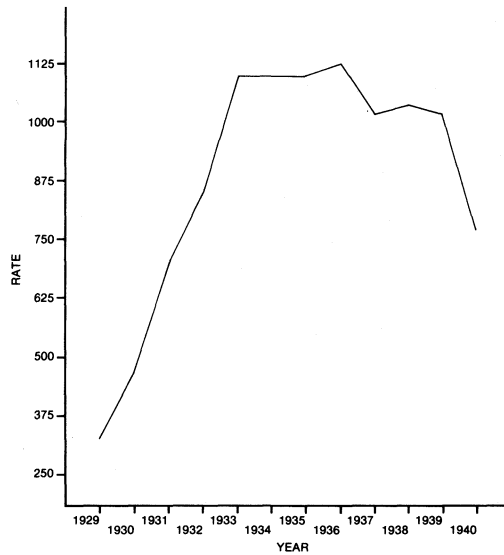
1928, just prior, that is, to amalgamation. The police, moreover, claimed in 1925 that crime "has not materially increased during 1925 despite a noticeable increase in the number of arrests." See *Vancouver Sun*, 31 December 1930, p. 1. The Police Commission Minutes and the newspapers are replete, in addition, with references to clean-up campaigns, crackdowns on all types of crimes, and especially raids on liquor and gambling establishments as well as on bawdy houses. In December 1927 the Attorney General promised to aid in prosecuting criminals. See *Van. Police Minutes*, 13 December 1927 (75)(A)5, pp. 31-32, V.C.A. For evidence of raids and a tightening up of law enforcement see especially *ibid.*, 7 May 1925, 12 August 1925, 18 September 1925, 28 November 1927 and 15 November 1928. See also the *Vancouver Sun* and in particular 3 January 1925, 9 January 1925, 11 August 1925, 27 May 1926, 30 December 1926. It is likely that such raids, moreover, turned up more property offences. Increased police efficiency, then, might partly explain rising property prosecution and conviction rates in the 1920s.

⁷¹ Vancouver Police Department *Annual Reports* for the years 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1938, 1939 and 1940 were consulted. All of these are in the V.C.A. except for 1931, which is held in the North West History Room of the Vancouver Public Library. Additional data for the years 1934 through 1937 were kindly provided by Staff Sergeant Joe Swan of the Vancouver Police Force. Unfortunately no *Annual Reports* could be found for the years 1921-28. It is likely that none were published in these years. Earlier reports between 1906 and 1917 and for 1920 do survive in various locations but do not provide statistics on offences known to the police.



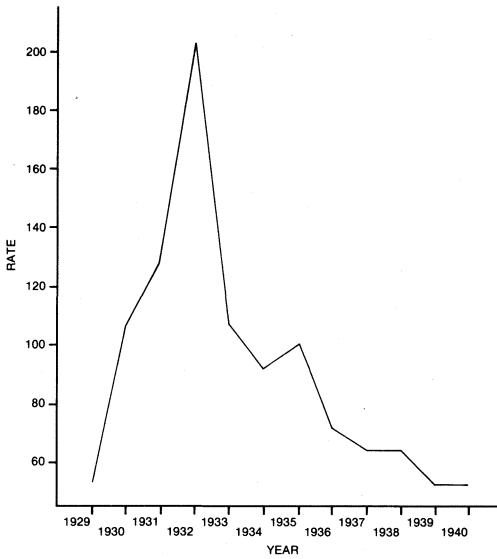
GRAPH 8

Stolen Property Rate per 1,000 — Vancouver, 1929-1940



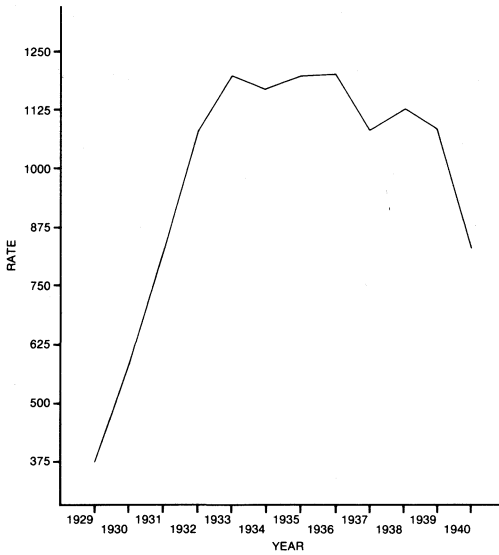
GRAPH 9

Breaking and Entering Rate per 100,000 — Vancouver, 1929-1940



GRAPH 10

Robbery with Violence Rate per 100,000 — Vancouver, 1929-1940



GRAPH 11

Violent Theft Rate per 100,000 — Vancouver, 1929-1940

between 1929 and 1940. Typically, the annual reports give no indication of offences relating to fraud or embezzlement, and thus one cannot examine white-collar crime in this context.

The patterns revealed in these graphs certainly confirm and, indeed, enhance the conclusions respecting prosecution and conviction rates. The value of stolen property, for example, rises markedly in the early thirties, peaking in 1934, and generally declines thereafter (graph 8).⁷² Rates for breaking and entering reveal even steeper increases in the early years of the Depression, reaching high levels in 1933 which were maintained through 1939 (graph 9). Robbery with violence displays equally steep increases, peaking in 1932 and falling thereafter (graph 10). Graph 11, which provides rates for all violent property offences, suggests that this type of crime remained more persistent during the Depression than earlier evidence with respect to prosecution and conviction rates indicates (see graph 5 above). The overall pattern observed here is clearly a reflection of the high rates for breaking-and-entering offences. A perusal of graph 12, which pertains to the total volume of property theft offences in the Great Depression, leads to a similar conclusion. It was claimed earlier that crimes against property as a whole, based on prosecution and conviction rates, peaked in 1934 and then declined through 1937 (see graph 3 above). The data at hand pertaining to offences reveal a sharp decline in 1932,⁷³ but indicate a return to high levels which persisted as late as 1936.

By 1940 all indicators of property crime offences had fallen below peaks reached during the Depression, in some cases to levels comparable to or below those prevailing in 1929. The years 1938 and 1939, which suffered late but less severe downswings in the economy,⁷⁴ experienced slight rises in crime rates, particularly with respect to violent property offences. On the whole, this analysis of offences known to the police suggests that the Depression's impact on property crime extended well beyond the early thirties and was, in general, more persistent than indicated by reference to prosecution and conviction rates.

Correlation coefficients were run for the various categories of property offences known between 1929 and 1940 against the major economic

⁷² The pattern here conforms closely to that observed with respect to prosecution and conviction rates for crimes against property in graph 3 presented earlier.

⁷³ The decline in 1932 is most likely due to the steep decline in stolen automobile offences, which numbered 3,162 in 1931 and fell to 1,912 in 1932. This might also partly explain the fall in the value of stolen property in 1932 (graph 8).

⁷⁴ My economic indicators show rising per capita relief expenditure and unemployment in 1938 and a decline in the value of building permits in 1939.

indicators utilized earlier. Table 5 clearly supports the hypothesis that depressed economic conditions were conducive to rising rates of crime against property. As in the similar analysis previously, the strongest correlations emerge with respect to per capita relief expenditure and the value of building permits. The values of stolen property, breaking-and-entering offences, violent theft and total theft rise markedly with increases in relief expenditure and decline with increasing values of building permits. All property crime rates, moreover, tend to increase as unemployment rises and fall as the employment index moves upwards, although the coefficients here are not as strong. The weakest coefficients are with violent robbery as against the value of building permits and per capita relief expenditure. This, while somewhat puzzling, may reflect the probability that these crimes were the work of professional criminals who earned their living from burglary and therefore were less likely to commit crimes in response to changing economic conditions.⁷⁵

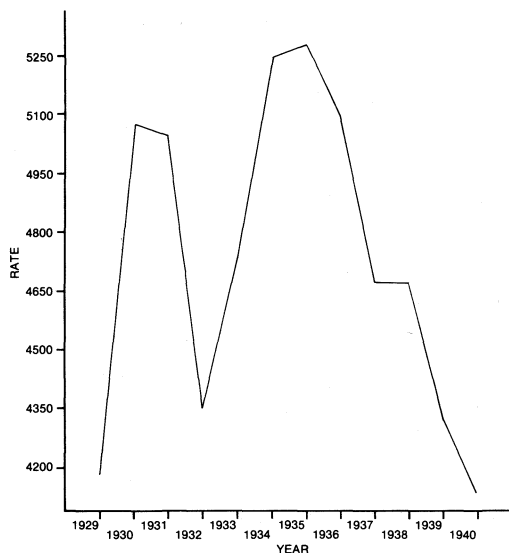
TABLE 5

Pearson Correlation Coefficients: Property Offences Known with Economic Indicators — Vancouver, 1929-1940

	<i>Average % trade union unemploy- ment</i>	<i>Average employ- ment index</i>	<i>Value of building permits</i>	<i>Per capita relief expen- diture</i>
Value of Stolen Property Rate	+ .55 (.07)	— .53 (.12)	— .70* (.01)	+ .80* (.01)
Breaking and Entering Rate	+ .48 (.11)	— .47 (.17)	— .90* (.00)	+ .86* (.00)
Robbery with Violence Rate	+ .75* (.01)	— .54 (.10)	— .33 (.29)	+ .29 (.35)
Violent Theft Rate	+ .60* (.04)	— .54 (.10)	— .94* (.00)	+ .90* (.00)
Total Theft Rate	+ .55 (.07)	— .58 (.08)	— .68 (.09)	+ .81* (.01)

* Significant at the 5 percent level. Significance levels in brackets. No difference to the conclusions drawn occurred when crime was lagged one year behind the economic indicators. These correlation coefficients generally are higher than observed elsewhere.

⁷⁵ This still would not explain the relatively strong positive correlation of robbery with violence as against unemployment. More work on this specific crime is clearly needed. For a discussion of the professional burglar see Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, pp. 44-45.



GRAPH 12

Total Theft Rate per 100,000 — Vancouver, 1929-1940

What general conclusions can one draw from the preceding analysis in terms of crime during the Great Depression in Vancouver? Looking at prosecution and conviction rates from a long-term perspective, it is clear that general crime rates dropped markedly in the 1930s. This, in itself, is not surprising since other cities, including Calgary, experienced declines in such rates. What does stand out, however, is the magnitude of the fall, especially with respect to morality offences. Although Calgary experienced declines in the latter category between 1929 and 1934, these apparently were not nearly of Vancouver's magnitude.⁷⁶ As stated earlier, a full exposition of this important phase in the history of Vancouver crime patterns must await further research.

Within the overall pattern of general crime, it was observed that the only types of crime to rise in the 1930s were those against property, and specifically violent offences of this kind as well as general theft. With regard to these categories, it was pointed out that in terms certainly of

⁷⁶ Watson uses arrest figures to show that prostitution and gambling arrests declined from fifty-six and seventy-two respectively in 1929 to twenty-three and fifty-five respectively in 1934. These represent declines of 58 percent in prostitution and 19 percent for gambling. The figures here are too small, however, to draw valid comparisons, especially in percentage terms, with Vancouver. See Watson, "Calgary: A Study of Crime," M.A. thesis, table 6, p. 68.

sheer volume but also of rates of prosecutions and convictions, the levels attained on average in the 1930s were higher, in most cases, than ever seen in Vancouver's previous history. Given the strong possibility, moreover, that amalgamation more than likely artificially deflated such rates in the 1930s, the figures presented for the Great Depression, if anything, underestimate the extent of such criminal activity. It should be noted, as well, that every indicator of Vancouver property crime — prosecution rates, conviction rates and offences known to the police — rose between 1929 and 1931 with the exception of the non-violent category. This indicates that many of the contemporaries quoted at the outset of this study were not far off the mark in their observations. No doubt they were acutely conscious of the rapid and unprecedented increases in the sheer volume of property crime.

Vancouver in the early years of the Depression conformed closely to the experience of a wide range of cities in the United States and Europe. Boston, New York and Chicago, for example, all witnessed increasing rates of breaking and entering, robbery and larceny between 1929 and 1931.⁷⁷ London and Stockholm reveal similar patterns in relation to known indictable thefts and reported thefts respectively.⁷⁸ In Calgary, the only Canadian city for which a comparable study exists, arrests for general theft rose between 1929 and 1931, while robbery with violence and housebreaking increased only in the year 1930.⁷⁹

Although Vancouver's very early Depression years were typical of urban property crime patterns elsewhere, the trends observed later in the 1930s diverge from the experience of cities like London and Stockholm, which witnessed declines, or at least a levelling off, of rates for property offences in the mid-years of the Depression.⁸⁰ Calgary experienced sharp

⁷⁷ See Warner, *Criminal Statistics in Boston*, tables 7 and 8, pp. 144-45. See also Theodore N. Ferdinand, "The Criminal Patterns of Boston," pp. 93, 94 and 96. Unfortunately no study of crime in Seattle has been carried out. This city would be the most logical choice for a comparison with Vancouver.

⁷⁸ See Gurr, Grabosky and Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict*, pp. 628-29 for London and p. 282 for Stockholm. The other cities included in this work are Sydney and Calcutta.

⁷⁹ Watson, "Calgary: A Study of Crime," M.A. thesis, pp. 40, 44, 45 and 47.

⁸⁰ Rates for London generally fell through the mid-1930s and experienced slight rises after 1936. Stockholm's rates remained stable throughout the 1930s, rising only in 1939. See Gurr, Grabosky and Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict*, pp. 628-29 and p. 282. Buffalo, New York, however, exhibits a pattern similar to Vancouver's with rising property crime in the mid-years of the Depression. See Elwin H. Powell, *The Design of Discord*, p. 121. Boston reveals a steady increase in burglaries in the 1930s and much smaller increases in larcenies in the late Depression. See Ferdinand, "Criminal Patterns of Boston," pp. 94 and 96.

declines in all categories of property theft between 1931 and 1934.⁸¹ In Vancouver, however, property crime levels peaked in most cases either in 1934 or as late as 1936, suggesting that the Depression had a more persistent effect on property crime than elsewhere.

It would be unwise, at this stage, to push such comparisons too far. What they do suggest, aside from some interesting questions for comparative analysis, is that Vancouver provides yet another case study illustrating the impact of the Great Depression on rising property crime. Furthermore, the relatively high degree of correlation observed between such crime and indices reflecting poverty and unemployment must cast serious doubt on the arguments of those who categorically deny any positive correlation between rising indigence and theft.⁸² The fact that the strongest positive correlations that emerged were between per capita relief expenditure and most offences against property suggests that during the 1930s, at least, a denial of such a relationship would run contrary to historical experience.

There are further implications here with respect to municipal relief expenditure. Watson has argued that increasing amounts of such expenditure was a key factor in bringing down property crime in Calgary between 1931 and 1934, under the assumption that such provision reduced the necessity to steal.⁸³ Short had earlier posited a similar thesis with respect to the depression in the U.S.A.⁸⁴ Such clearly was not the case in Vancouver, where rates for property crimes rose almost in unison with increases in relief. Was relief more generous in Calgary? Since Watson gives no per capita figures on such public expenditure, one would have to undertake a comparative analysis of municipal relief systems in both cities to answer this question fully. What one can say is that in Vancouver, at least, provisions were far from adequate and very grudgingly bestowed. Lane, in fact, has argued that even single men in relief camps were well sustained compared to city families on municipal relief. One individual summed up being on relief as a situation where "you practically get down on your knees every week or so, and beg for your handout of dole tickets."⁸⁵

⁸¹ Watson, "Calgary: A Study of Crime," M.A. thesis, pp. 40, 44, 45 and 47.

⁸² See above, pp. 214-16.

⁸³ Watson, "Calgary: A Study of Crime," M.A. thesis, pp. 40, 44, 45 and 47.

⁸⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁵ Marion Lane, "Unemployment During the Depression: The Problem of the Single Unemployed Transient in British Columbia, 1930-1938" (unpublished Honours Essay, University of British Columbia, 1966), pp. 66-67. The quotation she gives is from the *Vancouver Province*, 3 August 1935, p. 7.

This study, of course, has utilized aggregate rates of property crime in conjunction with very broad social and economic indicators in order to test for associations between the two. Although the evidence suggests that the Great Depression was closely related to rising rates of property crime, the specific mechanisms by which this happened are far from clear. As Tepperman points out, there is clearly more involved here than economic need:

More important, Radzinowicz argues that the crime rate increases not so much when the level of prosperity is low as when it drops precipitously. Crimes committed under these circumstances are not crimes of want but result from anomie, a loss of social and normative constraints, and other psychological and psychiatric factors. Because of the subtle relationship between economic deterioration and criminal behavior, time may pass between changes in the one and changes in the other, and the two changes may differ in intensity, but moving in the same direction at about the same time. Finally . . . prosperity is less effective in reducing the incidence of crime than is a depression in raising the incidence.⁸⁶

Clearly, in order to examine such fine distinctions one would like to move from aggregate-level analysis to individual-level analysis. As emphasized earlier, this study is subject to the "ecological fallacy." But given the paucity of data on individual offenders it is impossible, at this stage, to link particular subgroups of individuals to particular crimes. Future research will attempt to merge information provided in the detailed Police Court Calendars with City Directories, although it is unlikely that this will provide sufficiently representative samples for analysis since the latter type of evidence is skewed toward the more stable and prosperous groups in Vancouver's population. Indeed, individual-level methodology often runs the risk of committing the "individualistic fallacy" whereby results from subgroups are inappropriately generalized to entire populations.

Historians, of course, rarely have the luxury of ideal sources at their disposal. Criminal statistics, moreover, are the most difficult of all social statistics to compile and interpret. If the preceding pages are full of "perhaps" and "suggests," the author makes no apologies, but rather is reminded of G. R. Elton's recent remarks in his introduction to a collection of historical writings on crime: "As the frequent signals of doubt, uncertainty and cautious reserve indicate, the essays here assembled are

⁸⁶ Tepperman, *Crime Control*, p. 182.

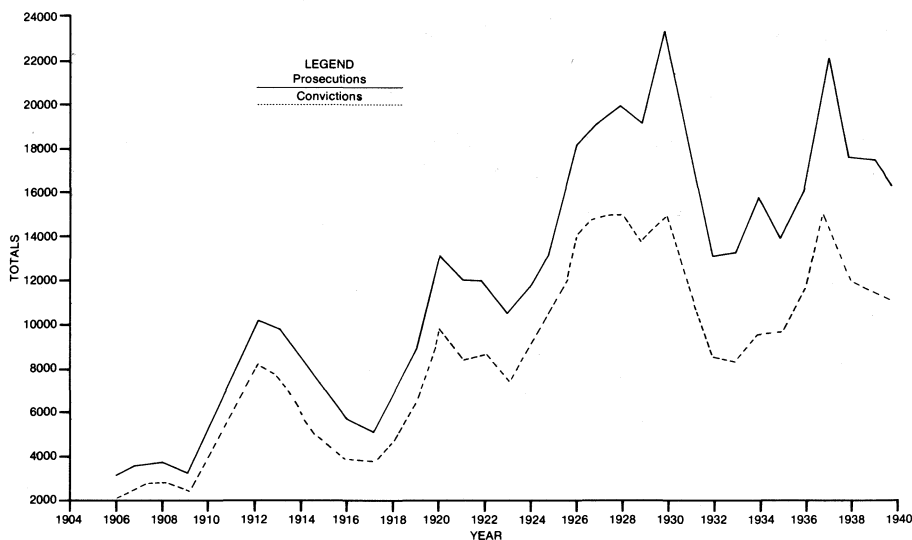
the work of scholars pioneering in something like a wilderness."⁸⁷ Part of this important terrain in Vancouver's history has been charted here, and one hopes that the results, though necessarily tentative, will stimulate further exploration by social historians.

⁸⁷ G. R. Elton, "Introduction: Crime and the Historian," in Cockburn, ed., *Crime in England*, p. 1.

APPENDIX A

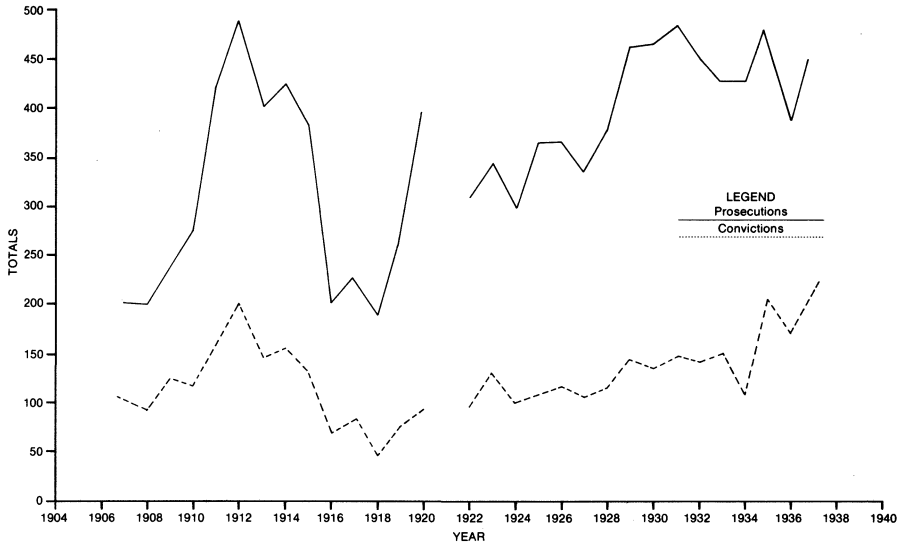
Total Prosecutions and Convictions for Various Types of Crime: Vancouver, 1906-1940

The following graphs 1(A) through 7(A) provide yearly totals of prosecutions and convictions for different categories of crime in Vancouver between 1906 and 1940. The most significant patterns are the fall in the overall volume of general crime between the years 1930-36 [graph 1(A)] and especially the very steep decline between 1928 and 1934 in crimes against the peace [graph 4(A)]. Note, in contrast, the rise to unprecedented levels in crimes against property [graph 3(A)], violent crimes against property [graph 5(A)] and general theft [6(A)].



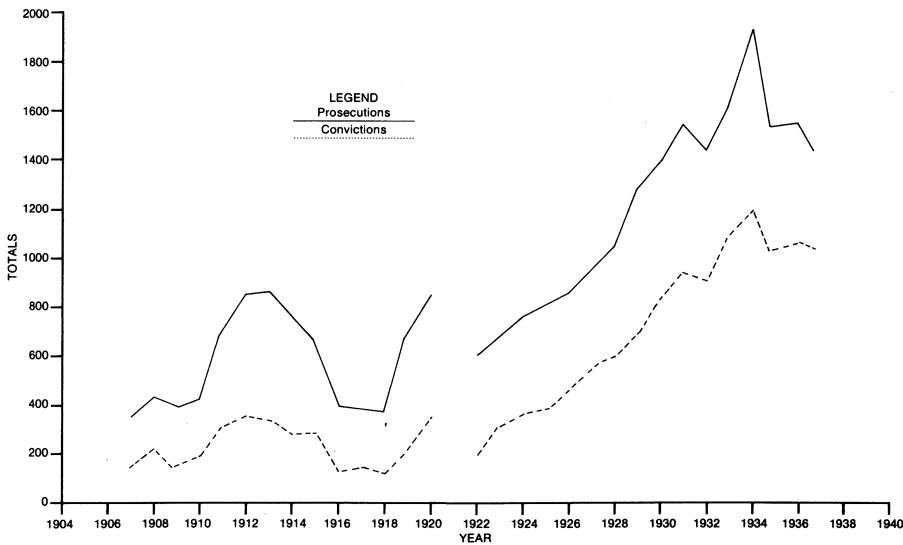
GRAPH 1(A)

Total Prosecutions and Convictions — Vancouver, 1906-1940



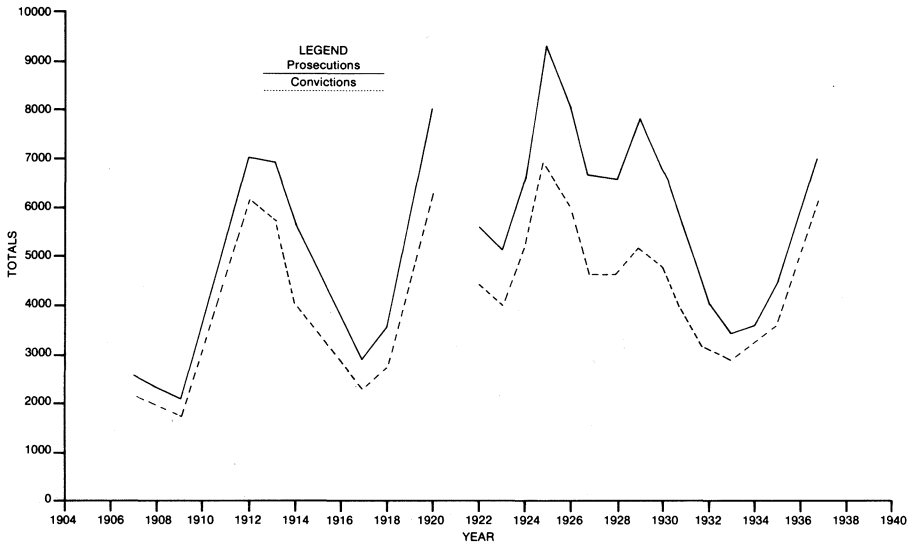
GRAPH 2(A)

*Total Prosecutions and Convictions:
Crimes Against the Person — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



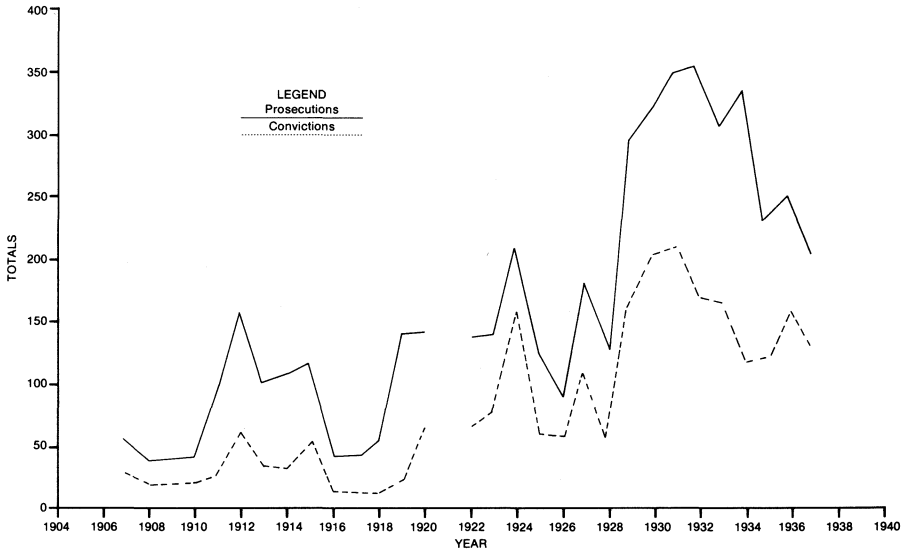
GRAPH 3(A)

*Total Prosecutions and Convictions:
Crimes Against Property — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



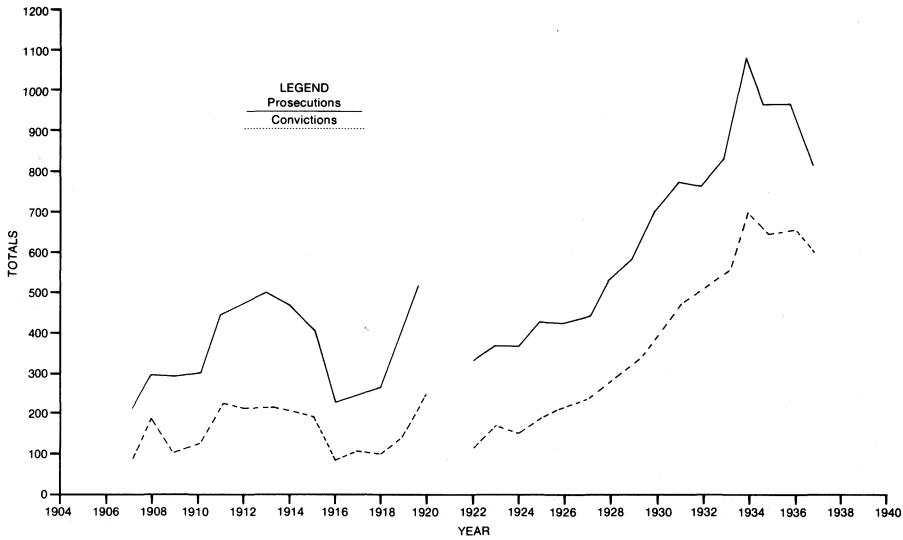
GRAPH 4(A)

*Total Prosecutions and Convictions:
 Crimes Against the Peace — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



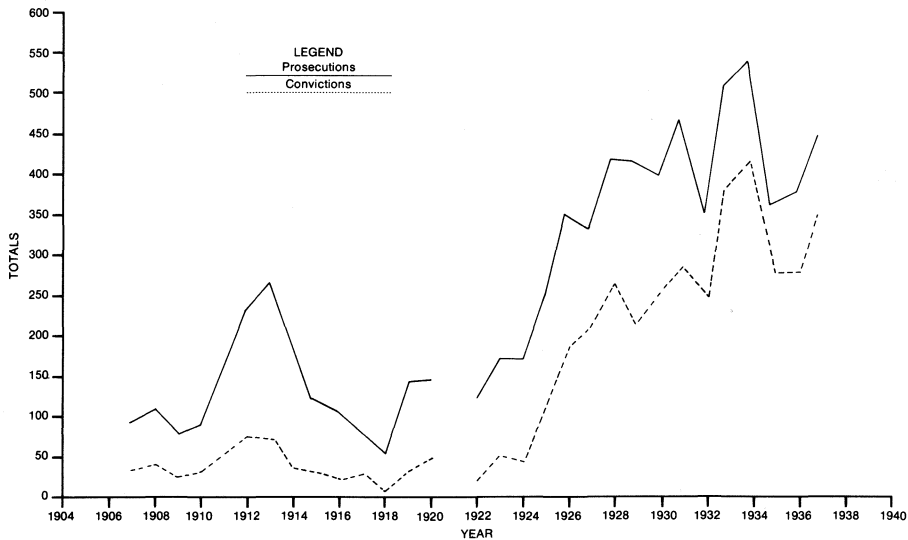
GRAPH 5(A)

*Total Prosecutions and Convictions:
 Violent Crimes Against Property — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



GRAPH 6(A)

*Total Prosecutions and Convictions:
General Theft — Vancouver, 1907-1937*



GRAPH 7(A)

*Total Prosecutions and Convictions:
Non-Violent Property Crimes — Vancouver, 1907-1937*

APPENDIX B

Decline in Morality Prosecutions and Convictions, 1922-1937

TABLE 1(B)

*Decline in Prosecution and Conviction Rates for Morality Crimes:
Vancouver — 1922-1937*

<i>Period</i>	<i>Liquor</i>		<i>Gambling</i>		<i>Drugs</i>		<i>Prostitution</i>	
	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Pros.</i>	<i>Conv.</i>
1922-1928	1839	1338	1654	1563	232	171	962	903
1930-1937	712	611	673	609	25	16	293	269
% Decline	61.2%	54.3%	59.3%	61.0%	89.2%	90.6%	69.5%	70.2%