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## Care of the Poor in Elizabeth River Parish, Norfolk County, Va 1749-1761

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CARE OF THE POOR IN ELIZABETH RIVER PARISH  
NORFOLK COUNTY, VA 1749 - 1761

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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By  
Cecile G. Glendening  
1987

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my husband, Bruce, whose patience and understanding during the completion process was my main source of inspiration and motivation.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the methods by which the poor of Elizabeth River Parish were sustained, and to what extent networks of aid existed within the community. Elizabeth River Parish is located in Norfolk, Virginia. The time period for this study was 1749 to 1761. Other research topics included the role of the household and family units in the care of the poor, and prevalent attitudes toward poverty and charity and how they affected the care of the poor.

Names of individuals receiving aid were identified as "poor" through examination of the vestry books of the parish. Individuals who tendered aid were identified through the same records, and labelled as "caretakers". Through examination of extant primary sources, various networks were discovered to have been operating within the community. Familial (or kinship related) and geographic networks predominated in care of the poor. The caretakers consisted mainly of relatives of the poor, neighbors, and others from middle to lower middle economic and social ranks.

The groups identified as "poor" and "caretaker" were found not to be mutually exclusive. Membership in one group did not preclude membership in the other. Community networks operating in the care of the poor generally followed the precedents set in England, with some adaptations to the New World economic situation.

Literature of the period, and current laws were examined to determine attitudes toward the poor. These were found to closely follow those in England during the same time period. The poor should be marginally cared for and sustained, but not made comfortable in their poverty.

As high mortality rates dissolved the traditional nuclear family unit, quasi-kin took over the role of caring for dependant members of the family. Often these quasi-kin were found to reside in the same area as the dependant individual, creating a geographical network of assistance.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The problem to be addressed in this study is the care of the poor in eighteenth century Norfolk County, Virginia. While some studies of urban poor in the northeast colonies of America exist, few, if any, deal with both urban and rural poor in Virginia. The poor of Norfolk County in the eighteenth century included both of those situations; the Borough was a fast-growing commercial center, while the rest of the county was mostly rural and agrarian in nature. The logistics of how the poor were cared for are important to economic and social historians, but to an anthropologist, the motives of the people involved, their social groupings and networks, the interaction between the various groups and their place within the community are pertinent areas of study as well.

Research questions were chosen for this study to highlight the anthropological concerns discussed above:

Who are the people involved in the care of the poor?

What different segments of society do they represent, and why are these particular segments represented?

How do these groups interact and what is the extent of the caretaker networks within the community?

What was the role of the household and the family unit in the care of the poor?

Is it possible to determine if there was a system of reciprocity and/or obligation operating within the community?

What were the prevalent attitudes towards poverty, charity and old age and how did they affect the care of the poor?

In this study, "poor" does not necessarily indicate only those with low incomes, but rather those who could not support themselves, their children or parents. "Caretakers" are those people who supported the poor in any way, although some were ultimately reimbursed by the Church.

The methods used to answer these questions are varied. The data consist of both primary and secondary sources. Most important are the primary records, including the vestry book for Elizabeth River Parish, deeds and wills, and land records for Norfolk County. (The primary records for Norfolk are available through the Virginia State Library or the Colonial Williamsburg Research Center.) The vestry book includes the years from 1749 to 1761, when the parish was divided into three smaller parishes. The vestry book was a record of all money handled by the church, and most business decisions reached by the vestrymen were recorded in it. Any construction undertaken by the church, policies on caring for the poor, and solutions to various problems encountered in administering the monies of the church are found in the vestry book. It is the only extant vestry book from this parish, and because of its relatively short

length, makes a manageable case study. Combined with the fairly complete records of the Borough and County of Norfolk, enough information can be assembled upon which some theories on the care of the poor can be based.

Among the Norfolk County records which are most enlightening are surviving tithable lists from 1730 – 1750, and the Minutes of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, 1736– 1798. The tithable lists helped determine in which area of Norfolk each individual lived, not necessarily showing exact neighbors, but at least separating families and individuals into different geographical areas. This information is important when studying the networks between the poor and the caretakers.

The Common Hall Minutes contain information parallel to the vestry book, but on a wider scale. The business decisions of the Borough, and the administration of the laws and monies of that area showed what the priorities were of the people in power, and the standing in the community of various individuals.

Richard Allestree's semi-religious tract, The Whole Duty of Man (1658) proved helpful in determining popular attitudes toward the poor and poor relief. Daniel Defoe's "Giving Alms No Charity," written in 1704 to protest an English workhouse program also provided insights into attitudes toward aid to the poor and the poorhouse system.

To begin this study, lists of all those who received aid from the parish, and of those who were paid by the parish for care of others were compiled. The minutes of the vestry meetings record all financial transactions, and it was through this document that the initial information was obtained. Through this information two separate categories of individuals were identified and that could be studied in relation to each other and to themselves. Although two distinct groups (poor and caretakers) were identified, membership in one of these groups did not preclude membership in the other.

The names of both the "poor" and the "caretakers" were traced through existing deeds, marriage, birth and death records, court records, tax records, tithable lists, the vestry book, minutes of the Common Hall, and any other available records in order to place the individual within the social, economic and geographical community. Any analysis of the networks operating within the community and their effect on the care of the poor must necessarily begin with this information. Attitudes towards the poor were found in all sources, sometimes explicitly stated, at times implicitly. Attitudes were inferred from sources with extreme caution in order not to place undue bias or twentieth century attitudes on the information.

One of the problems of studying the poor is that they are not mentioned in the records of a community as frequently as other social or economic ranks. Birth and death dates, as well as other vital statistics were scarce for those classified as poor in the church records. Under-registration of the poor in the tithable lists is evident when checked against the names of the poor in the vestry records. For example, individuals receiving aid in 1750 are not listed in the tithable lists for the same year. This can be explained by the fact that many of the poor were exempt from tithes, and so would not have been listed. Where some of the poor were listed they were not counted as a tithable, evidence of their exemption from payment.

Enough poor are traceable in the records to begin to see some patterns emerge from the data. The fact that neither people nor patterns are evident in the primary sources is informative in itself. The role of the poor in society can be determined not only by positive evidence but also by negative evidence. What the poor (and their caretakers as well) were not doing can be just as informative as what they were doing. This type of information will be discussed in relation to an individual's place in society. If a majority of the poor were listed as paying tithes, then it is probable that they had some sort of dwelling of their own. Caretakers might or might not be office holders, members of the vestry or

other governing body. If the names of caretakers are not found in positions of importance or decision-making, one might infer that they are not of the same social rank as those who did hold those positions. A comparison of methods of poor relief and attitudes toward charity in England and Virginia, as well as prevalent attitudes in New England will be discussed in later chapters.

The anthropological theories most applicable to this study are those concerning networks. The theories of exchange networks have been discussed by many social anthropologists. The term network is defined by Radcliffe-Brown as, "The set of social relations which exists in reality" (Radcliffe-Brown 1968: 190). A social network has also been described as a "field of relationships between individuals" (Barnes 1954: 98-99), and has been given more specialized definition by various British anthropologists (Dirks 1972; Mayer 1968; Wolfe 1970 and Mitchel 1969). Variables used to define social networks vary, but usually include kinship, information or economic exchange. Lomnitz' study of marginal populations in urban centers of Latin America uses intensity of exchange as an underlying variable to define networks. She also recognizes the individual as the center of a network, while belonging to several networks simultaneously, and the existence of diffuse networks. She defines intensity of exchange as "... the relative measure of the reciprocal flow of goods and services, in quantity,

frequency, and social value, within a conventional time interval" (Lomnitz 1977: 132).

An important work in the field of network theory is Carol Stack's All My Kin. Stack's idea that a community, household or family unit all function as part of a network will be demonstrated in this study as well. Although All My Kin is set in a modern (unidentified) urban society in the United States, it highlights the complexity of the networks operating among the poor of "The Flats" and how the same person may alternately belong to the group considered caretakers and those being cared for. A complex system of exchange and reciprocity was developed to distribute the wealth of the community evenly, at the same time ensuring that while an individual belonged to the exchange network, they would not be able to rise above the poverty level due to the drain on their resources. The situation of an individual acting alternately as both caretaker and dependant also existed in eighteenth century Norfolk.

Much of the evidence used in studies of reciprocity (Mauss, Bott, Stack) are dependant on observing existing communities as opposed to observing them through the historical record. The principle of reciprocity and obligation is implicit in the complex networks operating in Norfolk, and in the fact that many of the individuals tracked in this study were found on both sides of the poor/caretaker system. It is possible that a

similar system of reciprocity, obligation and exchange existed in Norfolk as did in Carol Stack's study area.

Elizabeth Bott's Family and Social Network also discusses family networks and exchange systems, but is less applicable to the situation in Norfolk as it dealt with a different set of problems. The families studied by Bott were concerned with more than surviving poverty, or caring for those unable to support themselves.

Relationships between husband and wife, friendship patterns and other emotional, rather than material networks are highlighted. These are systems functioning within all societies, but are areas difficult to discern through the historical record. The existence of networks operating within families, households and other groups of individuals is pointed out in Bott's work, but the logistics and concerns of these networks are not very similar to those discovered in the communities of Norfolk. Bott also recognizes the importance of geographical location and accessibility of kin to the kin based network.

On a very basic level all domestic networks within a community could be seen to work toward similar ends, that is the easing of problems of daily life, and the reinforcement of one's membership within a group along with the emotional security that that membership brings. The specific functions of a community's domestic networks, however are shaped by the special needs of that community



and its sub-groups, families or households. The networks operating within Norfolk in the eighteenth century can be seen as a community response to the problem of caring for the poor. These networks existed among the poor and the caretakers as well as between these two groups.

## CHAPTER II

### NORFOLK COUNTY AND ELIZABETH RIVER PARISH

Prior to 1634, Norfolk County was part of Elizabeth City County. By January 1637, Lower Norfolk County was created and embraced later Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties. Norfolk itself was established as a town in 1682 and incorporated as a borough in 1736 (Tarter 1979: 5-6). Norfolk was an important commercial town and large population center on the Chesapeake during the eighteenth century; the county contained both rural and urban settlements. Farms covered the southern part of the county (which stretched to the North Carolina border) and the Borough of Norfolk was a thriving merchant and maritime community (Tarter 1979: 3-29). Although Hampton was the headquarters for the customs district of lower James River, Norfolk had a brisk maritime trade with the West Indies and along the coast of America, throughout the mid-Atlantic region and New England.

Norfolk became a borough through adherence to English models. Political or ecclesiastical towns of importance (i.e. London and Canterbury) bore the name of city, all others were boroughs. No other Virginia town was called a borough as none were incorporated until after the Revolution (Tarter 1979: 3-6).

During the two decades preceding the Revolution, Norfolk was a fast-growing commercial center. By 1765, it contained more than 3500 people, 400 houses, facilities for maintaining and fitting out large vessels, and other industries pertaining to shipping (Tarter 1979: 11). Much of the maritime trade was with the West Indies, which included the rising grain trade as well as other commodities. Most of the corn and wheat grown in Virginia was shipped down the James River, where Norfolk was ideally located to collect it for shipment. Grain exports during the years 1738, 1742, 1768 and 1772 rose from a value of £11,500 to £130,000, a much sharper rise than the value of tobacco imports (Tarter 1979: 3).

As a busy trading center, Norfolk was the temporary residence for many business agents working for large Scottish merchant firms. These firms captured a large share of the sales of British goods as well as the export business (Soltow 1969: 83-98). By 1770, the inspector general of the royal customs estimated that 95% of all dutiable goods imported into the James River Valley were landed at Norfolk, the center of trade in the district (Frese 1973: 314).

The governing body of Norfolk in the eighteenth century was the Common Hall. It consisted of a mayor, a recorder, eight aldermen and sixteen common councilmen. The councilmen were chosen by the other officers of the

corporation from among the inhabitants and freeholders of the Borough. Subsequent mayors and aldermen (the first were named in the original charter) were chosen from among the councilmen. The Common Hall was established by the charter of 1736, and until then Norfolk was entirely governed by the county court. The governing of the Borough was the responsibility of the Common Hall; it assessed taxes, kept the streets and public areas in order, created ordinances and by-laws for the regulation of trade and executed the laws of the colony (Tarter 1979: 7).

When Norfolk was first incorporated the Borough did not have complete control over the land, buildings and people within its boundaries. Instead, it merely provided special services in an urban area that were not needed in the rest of the county. Gradually, more political powers were assigned to the Borough, at the expense of the county.

Elizabeth River Parish, which was coterminous with Norfolk County until 1761 (Cocke 1964: 232), was formed originally from Kecoughtan Parish. Beginning in 1636, it continued to serve Norfolk County until 1761, when it was divided into Elizabeth River, St. Bride's and Portsmouth Parishes. For the area surrounding Elizabeth River Parish during the period in this study, see Figure 1.

The first reference to a church in Norfolk County is in 1637 when the Reverend John Wilson was minister. The church building was completed in 1641. The present St. Paul's Episcopal Church in downtown Norfolk was completed in 1739. Its construction was ordered when it became apparent that the old Elizabeth River church would be inadequate for the newly formed Borough of Norfolk. This church served as the "Borough" or mother church for the entire parish. Other chapels were located at Tanners Creek, Great Bridge, Southern Branch and Western Branch. The Reverend Charles Smith was the rector of Elizabeth River Parish from 1749 to 1761, when he transferred to Portsmouth Parish (Altar Guild of St. Paul's 1936: 24). The first references to poor relief in Elizabeth River Parish are in the parish vestry book, beginning in 1749.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE POOR OF NORFOLK

The methods used by the Elizabeth River parish to support the poor took several forms: direct payments of tobacco or cash to an individual; support by another member of the community or by a relative; apprenticeship of children; payment for services to the church (such as cleaning the buildings or linens); or lodging in the poorhouse. A review of other Virginia parish vestry books for the same period indicates that these relief methods were not unique to Elizabeth River Parish, others such as Stratton Major Parish also tried to deal with the problem of poor relief with the same solutions.

A good analysis of poor relief in rural eighteenth century Virginia can be found in Amanda Jane Townes' masters thesis, "The Care of the Poor in Surry and Sussex Counties, Virginia 1742-1787" (1978). The methods described by her are parallel to those used in Norfolk. The types of relief are documented in the vestry records of Surry and Sussex counties, as well as various individuals who are identified as being involved in the relief process. This thesis was written from a historical perspective, and was concerned with the logistics of poor relief as well as the historical and economic basis for

this system. Townes did not examine local poor relief from an anthropological viewpoint with regard to the systems and networks involved in the process.

From the data available for Elizabeth River Parish, it is hoped that some trends of kinship involvement in this process will emerge, as well as the identities of the groups defined as the "poor" and the "caretakers." Although the problem of underdocumentation of the poor exists, in this case study enough information can be found upon which to base an examination of this particular situation. Those individuals among the poor who were receiving help from the parish or from someone who was reimbursed by the parish are in the records. Those who are cared for informally by a relative or neighbor, with no involvement by the church, are not in the written records. Many instances of assistance will therefore not be apparent in the vestry book and other sources.

A total of 88 persons can be identified as the poor of Elizabeth River Parish. In terms of assistance they fall into two categories: those cared for by another member of the community, and those paid directly by the church.

Children, whether of poor parents unable to sustain them or orphans, constitute two thirds of the poor who were cared for by others. This potential financial problem was solved in a number of ways. Children could be kept by another member of the community but only through

an agreement with a church warden or vestryman (Walter 1924: 28), by housing them in the poorhouse, or binding them out as apprentices. Most of the poor adults were supported through others because they could not care for themselves. The labels applied to them most often were "poor," "old," "crippled," "infirm," and "helpless."

Many individuals were cared for due to sickness — there are several entries of payments for "nursing" an individual. Twice as many men were listed as nursing an individual, but this does not mean that men did the actual nursing. This ratio is also seen in the total number of male caretakers to the number of female caretakers (43 to 20). It seems probable that while the male head of the household received money for expenses, in reality the women of the house actually carried out the tasks of care-taking. A review of the data shows that it is only when the women become widows or were living alone that they were listed in the vestry records as caretakers.

In Elizabeth River Parish, direct payments of tobacco or cash constituted 25% of all aid to the poor, 22 persons received aid directly, out of 88 total needy during the period 1749 to 1761. These people (including those who were paid for the upkeep of their own children or parents) were probably able to care for themselves, or had no one through which to receive aid. John Warren, listed in the tithables list as "a cripple"



(Wingo 1975: 39) is one of the few paid directly by the church. The man with whom he lived, Henry Stafford, received money from the parish for keeping two orphaned children (Walter 1924: 22-25). It is possible that there was a private agreement for board charges between Warren and Stafford, but no record of it exists.

The poorhouse became a solution for dealing with the poor in 1750, and was apparently a workable one. In October 1750, the vestry ordered that:

"the church wardens" of Elizabeth River Parish do contract with some workman to build an House on the Parish land to the following dimensions: 50' long 20' wide with a shade 10' wide length of the house, stack of chimneys in middle, four fireplaces — 2 in forerom, 2 in the shades. Tilled [sic] floors above and plank above with a shingle roof, windows, and doors according to their direct" (Walter 1924: 5).

In all likelihood this was the original poorhouse in Elizabeth River Parish. Several entries after 1750 pertain to maintaining the poorhouse, a doctor to care for the occupants, and salaries for the overseers of the poorhouse. No such entries exist prior to construction of this structure.

Dr. Campbell was allowed 4,000 pounds tobacco for attending the sick at the poorhouse in 1751, and in October of 1756, Dr. John Ramsay agreed to attend to all the poor of the parish within two miles of the Borough of Norfolk. In 1759 however, his obligation was reduced so

that he was only responsible for those at the poorhouse, at the same salary of 4,731 pounds of tobacco.

In 1756 when the poorhouse "hath lately been burnt down by accident" (Walter 1924: 23), another was ordered built in its place. 11,211 pounds of tobacco were collected to pay for the rebuilding. £131 in cash was the bid for building the original poorhouse. Second only to the minister's salary, the cost of building and rebuilding the poorhouse was a major expense for the parish, and a separate tithe was levied to meet this expense.

The overseers of the poorhouse during this period were William Kitchin and Morech Meach. Their actual duties were not specified, and the first record of overseers appeared in 1754. William Kitchin agreed to "keep the poorhouse for one year for £16 per year." (Walter 1924: 16). When Kitchin died soon after, Morech Meach took over the job, and was paid 1,920 pounds tobacco for nine months service, and subsequently 1,560 pounds tobacco for each year after (1755-58). He was also paid 80 pounds tobacco in 1755 for his wife's service in laying out the body of a parish Negro. Meach's only known earlier public role was in 1738 when he was appointed with three others to "keep watch in the town" (Tarter 1979: 53). Neither Kitchin nor Meach are found in the records to any great extent. It is unlikely that either Kitchin or Meach were from the upper class; they did not hold important positions in the community; their birth and

death records, like others of lower social rank are not in the records of the county or parish. The reference to Meach's wife laying out the body of a negro is the only one of its kind in the vestry book — other negroes were probably performing this duty, or if whites were, they weren't paid for it. To judge from the frequency of the entries of this type in the vestry book and other original sources, this might have been a rare occurrence.

The poor consisted of four major groups: the old, the infirm, widows and orphans, and other poor. There are several references to the illnesses of the poor, such as Aron Timberlake's exemption from the levy "during his indisposition" (Norfolk County Orders: 1756). The poor were nursed by others in the community, and attended to by a doctor hired for this purpose by the vestry (Walter 1924: 22). The poor were frequently described as "old," "helpless," and "crippled." Those not labelled in some way and not traceable in the records we must assume fell into one of the socially acceptable categories for being poor. Poverty that was merely the result of idleness and transient living was not tolerated, an attitude which was evident from the statutes of the colony and the vestry orders. The community was willing to care for the needy, if their need was the result of acceptable behavior. The only instance of the community not being willing to tolerate the poor was when the poverty was a result of socially unacceptable behavior, such as

premarital pregnancy, vagrancy, or idleness.

There are a few exceptions to the general profile of the poor. One is the case of Lewis Conner's children. His three children were kept by Hugh Purdie in 1754. Yet when Lewis Conner died in 1753, he left six children and a wife. In 1734 when his father died, Connor had 12 siblings. (Norfolk County Wills 1734: 49). The executors of the Conner will were Col. William Craford, Samuel Boush the Elder, Captain James Ivy and Mr. John Swan, an attorney from North Carolina. These men sat on the vestry as well as the Common Council of Norfolk. Lewis Conner was appointed inspector of beef and pork, as well as inspector of tobacco in 1742 (Norfolk County Orders 1742: 12, 18). Without more evidence, it is difficult to say why three of Conner's children were taken in by Purdie. We can only assume that the other family members were either not living or unable to care for the children. Lewis Conner, however, was not the "typical" poor person. None of the others (or their children) who received assistance from the parish held any official positions within the community, or had any recorded contact with the elite of society, as Conner seems to have had.

Some of the poor are mentioned in the court records, usually as defendants in a debt action, or presented as vagabonds, such as William Manning was in 1755. Two Manning children (probably those of William),

were kept by George Bowen from 1753-55 (Walter 1924: 15, 17, 19). Although William Manning was described as a vagabond, and no records indicate that he was assisted by the parish, his children were cared for. Children were not cut off from aid, although the expense of keeping them was closely monitored. In this case we can see that the "sins of the fathers" were not passed on to their children. Manning, as a vagrant, belonged to the socially unacceptable category of the poor, and as such was not given official aid by the community. Such aid would have condoned his idleness, and might have encouraged other vagrants to seek assistance.

As an example of the monitoring of aid to children, in 1755, George Bowen and John Wright were informed that "no further allowance should be given by them for keeping said orphans." (Walter 1924: 20). John Wright had been keeping an orphan of Daniel McNeil. There are no more entries concerning these two cases, indicating that an agreement between Bowen, Wright and the churchwardens could not be reached, or that other arrangements for the care of the children were made.

There is some indication that work in the church itself was used as a means to aid the poor. This method of poor relief was used in other parishes including Albemarle Parish in Surry and Sussex Counties (Townes 1978: 33). In Elizabeth River Parish, Mary Hodges was paid for cleaning the Southern Branch and Great Bridge

Chapels during the years 1755-1758. In 1742, she was fined for a "base-born child" (Norfolk County Orders 1742: 16). There is no record of additional assistance to Mary Hodges aside from cleaning the chapels. During the years 1755 to 1759 Mary Hodges earned 200 lbs. of tobacco a year. Compared to the salary of Morech Meach, overseer of the poorhouse during the same time period, this was a small amount of money. Meach earned 1,560 lbs. of tobacco a year for overseeing the poorhouse during the years 1755 to 1758.

Benjamin Hodges, a caretaker of the church, was almost certainly a relative of Mary Hodges. He was recorded as nursing Margaret Mollire in 1758. This is only one instance of many in this parish where members of the same family are found in both groups — the caretakers and the poor.

Many families can be identified both as caretakers and the poor, such as the Ward, Simmons and Cooper families. Thomas Ward was paid for keeping a child in 1751; William Ward kept Millicent Wrighting in the same year. However, Joshua Ward's children, Patience and Elizabeth, were kept by Henry Stafford, 1756-58. Thomas and William Ward, and Henry Stafford all lived in the Western Branch Precinct, so distance was probably not the reason why Thomas or William Ward did not care for Joshua's children.

It is possible that children did not fall under the normal rules of kinship obligations. Quite a few children were cared for by individuals not discernably linked to their family group, and as well as being a source of labor for their benefactor, children might not have been viewed in the same light as other poor individuals. Kinship obligations as they relate to children seem to have been different than those for other poor individuals, as it was not felt necessary for poor children to stay with members of their family group. How they were matched with their "host family" cannot be determined, but the lack of any mention in the primary records of concern for the child staying within its family group coupled with the evidence that they were cared for more often than not by individuals outside their family unit might imply that keeping the child within the nuclear family unit was not of utmost concern.

Some general trends of who the poor and the caretakers were can be identified. The caretakers for the most part were not of the "elite", they were not vestrymen or council members, nor did they figure prominently in civic or ecclesiastical affairs. Their names occur in the court records with more frequency than the poor; eight sat on juries while none of the poor did so. The poor appeared in court only as defendants, while none of the caretakers appeared as such, only as plaintiffs. Available inventories of caretakers ranged from £10 to

£1,148. From a total of 15 inventories known for caretakers, 12 are under £500, 2 are between £500 and £1,000, and one is over £1,000 (Figure 2). The caretakers do not appear to be from the same economic class as the poor, but they are not drawn from the very wealthy. (Too few inventories of the poor are available to make any conclusions about their material wealth. Most likely, they had very little and could not support themselves or they would not have been receiving aid from others.) Determining the social class of the caretakers is difficult beyond broad generalizations. There are individual instances of a caretaker being appointed Sergeant of the Borough, a constable or a tithetaker, although most did not hold public positions; their civic duty seems to have been fulfilled mainly by sitting on juries. None of the caretakers were listed in public records with any sort of title, such as Sir, Gentleman, Esquire, or any military title. It has been suggested that use of these types of titles may be an indicator of social class.

There was a good deal of contact between caretakers and the poor, either through family ties, residence patterns, or other means. Witnessing wills was one of the most common forms of contact between the two groups and was tied to familial and neighborhood connections. This situation is comparable to that found by Townes in her study of the care of the poor in Surry County, Virginia.



Poor relief does not seem to have been the responsibility of the extremely wealthy, rather of the merchant or public servant class. The care given to the poor in most instances seems to have been on a personal level. Whether in the caretaker's home or not, it was not in the abstract. In order for this person-to-person type of care to exist, there had to have been some basis for contact between the two groups. Caretakers do not seem to have been assigned to the poor (or vice versa) by the church or courts, they seem to have come together on their own. There are many entries in the vestry book of someone coming into the vestry and agreeing to keep an individual, rather than being ordered to do so (the exception to this are the cases of adolescents bound out in apprenticeships) (Walter 1924: 16, 20, 26 and 28).

Contact did not normally occur between the extremely wealthy and the poor. Although a few court cases are recorded where a member of the wealthy sued someone identifiable as belonging to a low economic group, these instances are rare. The usual contact between these two groups was in the form of bequests or blanket gifts to the poor, rather than care on an individual basis.

This difference in type of aid to the poor by social or economic class is a continuation of an English tradition of the seventeenth century and earlier, outlined by Lawrence Stone in Crisis of the Aristocracy. In England, merchants were the largest donors to charity,

while aristocratic charity declined, taking the form of casual, abstract bequests (Stone 1965: 46-47). The attitudes of the two groups towards charity was not markedly different, but their financial situations were. Merchants possessed more fluid capital than the landed classes, they had no title to pass on and were not obligated to keep their property intact. In Elizabeth River parish this same class division existed within charitable giving. Matthew Godfrey, a vestryman council member and one of the wealthier men in the community, bequeathed 100 acres of land and a number of slaves to be sold. The money was to be used for the support of the poor (Tarter 1979: 322 n. 75). Richard Bennett, of Nansemond County to the west of Norfolk, left in his will the sum of "£30 annually forever" for the use of the poor of the county (Henings Statutes, VIII: p. 288). The day-to-day, personal needs of the poor were met by those closer to their socio-economic level with whom they would have had personal contact, whereas the wealthier classes confined their giving to general blanket gifts. In John Pound's Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England, contributions by merchants toward relief of the poor totalled over £68,000 during the years 1561 - 1600, compared to £22,900 contributed by the nobles, upper and lower gentry combined (1971: 62). The pattern of assistance for the poor by the merchant class was established in England long before the colonization of America.

## CHAPTER IV

### ATTITUDES TOWARD POVERTY

Popular reading material of colonial Virginia holds clues to prevalent attitudes towards charity and poverty. These books are a viable source of personal attitudes, one of the few sources available that offer some insights into the ideas of the people of the time. It is quite likely that some of the ideas espoused in the common reading material were socially agreed-upon attitudes. If they were too far from how people generally felt and at least sometimes acted, they would not have been so widely read. Whether these attitudes were reflected in people's actions is a question open to debate, yet, factual records build a picture indicating that these attitudes were carried over into real life.

The idea of responsibility for the poor can be traced back through the English aristocratic system. As a wealthy merchant and landowning class developed in the eighteenth century, the sense of social obligation to the poor became more evident (Stone 1965: 45-48). It was from these classes of English society that models for behavior and thought were drawn to form the structure of Virginia society (Wright 1940: 63-67). English precedent for the care of the poor in Virginia can be seen in legal,

religious and social aspects of society. To understand the actions and motivations of Virginians in caring for their poor, one must examine the English background from which those actions stemmed.

Richard Allestree's The Whole Duty of Man was first published in 1658 and remained a popular source for private devotional reading through the nineteenth century. It is noted as being one of the most likely books (along with a copy of a Bible) that would be in an eighteenth century Virginia library (Smart 1938: 45). Analysis of probate inventories reveals that this book has been found not only in the libraries of wealthy planters, but also in the estates of yeomen and smaller planters (Smart 1938: 52). This is significant when one realizes that it is not only the wealthy planters who took care of the poor. Members of the merchant class, small-holdings planters and yeomen also extended aid. Inhabitants of the parish were required to pay tithes to help support the poor, and most were ultimately reimbursed by the Church, but it does not seem likely that their involvement was motivated solely by that fact. Aiding the poor was probably not a profitable activity.

Allestree devoted forty-seven pages to a discussion of charity and almsgiving. The word "charity" was then a synonym for love, or compassion, and did not possess the modern meaning of "liberality to those in need or distress; alms-giving" (1978 Pocket Oxford Dictionary).

Yet in the chapter on charity, half of the text was concerned with almsgiving, for people believed it was out of the Christian feelings of charity that one was motivated to give to others. Many passages in the Bible encourage almsgiving (i.e. Matt. vi 20, 1 Cor. xiii 3, Luke iii 11); "And he answered them, 'He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none, and he who has food, let do likewise.'" (Luke iii 11). Allestree used these and other Biblical reference to reinforce his reasons for and rewards of giving generously to the poor. Readers were exhorted to give prudently, seasonably, and cheerfully (Allestree 1658: 300-303); the motives for almsgiving were to be based on feelings of charity and compassion, not on an effort to enhance one's image in the eyes of others. Allestree's book was popular in England before it was brought to America, giving the English settlers a model for social behavior. According to Virginia Bernhard in her article "Poverty and the Social Order in Seventeenth Century England," ties between England and Virginia were strong, and the English country gentry served as a reference group and source of values for Virginia society (1975). Most of the inhabitants of Norfolk were recently Englishmen and women themselves. By the mid-eighteenth century Virginians had a solid grounding in what was the proper Christian attitude towards the poor. One treated the poor with compassion, saw that they were given what they needed, but not make

them comfortable in poverty (See Stone: 1965 and Wright: 1940). It would be impossible to know whether these values were adhered to all the time, but from my examination of the Norfolk parish records, Virginians in mid-eighteenth century appear to have behaved in accordance with these ideals.

Gertrude Himmelfarb's The Idea of Poverty is a good source for background on the English attitudes toward poverty and the mechanisms developed by the English for dealing with the poor. She shows how the idea of public responsibility for the poor arose, and how the attitude that poverty was considered a natural condition affected the methods of poor relief in England. One of the overriding concerns in England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was the problem of the chronically indigent; this problem would attract much attention in Norfolk as well. Himmelfarb feels that the social attitudes at work in England consisted of a mercantilist ethic superimposed on a Puritan ethic creating an "ethic of productivity." (Himmelfarb 1984: 28). The workhouse as a means of providing employment for the able-bodied poor and at the same time helping to offset the costs of maintaining the poor was attempted in England, but with little success and varying support.

Daniel Defoe's Giving Alms No Charity was written in 1704 to defeat a bill in Parliament authorizing an extensive workhouse program (Defoe 1704). Defoe argued

that if new products were created through a workhouse system, the market was being taken away from those who worked in the same industries (spinning and weaving were the most popular for workhouses). If no new markets could be developed, then an increase in the amount of products could only send others into poverty. Despite the views in England that the workhouse system could not be profitable, it was attempted in the colonies with some increase in its success.

Later writers on the subject espoused varying motives for charity. For example, Robert Nelson, in his Address to Persons of Quality and Estate, Ways and Methods of Doing Good (London, 1715) argued that charity might be immediately profitable, for an "unexpected inheritance, the determination of a lawsuit in our favour, the success of a great adventure, and advantageous match, are sometimes the recompenses of charity in this world." (Nelson 1715: 254). A comparable mood was evident in Bernard Mandeville's Fable of the Bees (1714) and his Essay on Charity Schools (1723), both of which contain a detached, cynical and calculating attitude to the problem of poverty (Coats 1976: 108).

According to A.W. Coats, attitudes toward the poor in England during the period 1660-1780 fall into three broad categories. Until around 1700, genuine concern for the welfare of the poor was combined with an emphasis on the need to provide employment for the able-

bodied. There was enthusiasm for workhouse schemes, stemming from the assumption that in properly regulated conditions a profit could be made by selling the products of pauper labor (Coats 1976: 107). In the early eighteenth century, however, the workhouse theories came under attack. Defoe's pamphlet was probably influential in promoting the theory that workhouses only deterred those able to work from doing so, allowing them to live off parochial or private relief.

Coats' third phase dates from the mid eighteenth century, and becomes apparent with the rise in food prices in the 1750's and 1760's. A more sympathetic outlook prevailed, based on a combination of moral philosophy and economic analysis. During all of these periods, however, attitudes toward poor relief were not uniform, and critics as well as defenders of relief systems can be found. There is evidence of both a sense of responsibility for the less fortunate members of society and the use of good works designed to alleviate hardship (Coats 1976: 108-111).

The poor laws enacted in Virginia were based on Elizabethan precedents, specifically the Poor Law of 1601. This statute required that children whose parents could not maintain them were to be bound out as apprentices. It also allowed for the taxation of the community to raise money for the relief of those unable to work (Statutes of the Realm: 962-965).



In 1642, the first recorded statute concerning the relief of the poor was enacted in Virginia. This law departed from Elizabethan poor laws by ordering that all those unable to work through sickness, infirmity or old age, be given a certificate which would free them from public duties (Henings Statutes, I: 242).

In 1727 and following years, legislative provisions were made for the removal of "rogues and vagabonds" (Henings Statutes, IV: 209) to their last place of residence. A person was not considered eligible for relief from the parish until he had resided there for one year. There were also penalties for hiring a vagrant or keeping one in your house. The legal complexities of removing a person to their own parish, and the costs involved in caring for the sick of another parish seem to have been many. In the Virginia statutes from 1727 on, there is much discussion as to what constitutes a vagrant, where their legal residence is, who is responsible for them, and how costs for their care can be recovered. Legislators made an effort to insure that these vagabonds did not become an unnecessary burden on a parish.

In 1727, Virginia law defined vagabonds as:

All persons, able in body, and fit to labour, and not having werewithal otherwise to maintain themselves, who shall be found loitering, and neglecting to labour for the usual and common wages; and all persons who run from their habitations, and leave either wives or children,

without suitable means for their subsistence, whereby they are like to become burthensome to the parish wherein they inhabit; and all other idle, vagrant, or dissolute persons wandering abroad, without betaking themselves to some lawful employment, or honest labour, or going about begging, shall be adjudged and deemed rogues and vagabonds. (Henings Statutes Vol.4: 209).

Penalties were also assessed for discharging a sick or disabled seaman from a ship:

...that if any master of a ship or vessel shall turn away from the service of such ship or vessel, any sick or disabled sailors, without taking due care for his or their maintenance and cure, every such master shall forfeit and pay ten pounds current money, to the churchwarden of the parish wherein such disabled sailor shall be put on shore... (Henings Statutes Vol.4: 212).

Apparently by 1727 this was a sufficiently common occurrence to warrant legislation to prevent seamen from depleting parish coffers. Curiously enough, in the maritime community of Norfolk there are no references to seamen cared for by the parish. Either the statute concerning this problem was strictly enforced, or seamen in the care of the parish were not identified as such. No known seamen appear in this study but the number of men in the poor category was 33, compared to 44 women. Labelling of the poor by occupation or other variable was very infrequent, so it is possible that some of the poor men were seamen but were not identified as such.

Fines were also imposed on women who gave birth to bastard children, or on those people in the community who harbored them.

... any lewd woman shall be delivered of a bastard child, and be thereof lawfully convicted, she shall, for every such offence, be liable and compellable to pay the sum of five hundred pounds of tobacco, and cask, or fifty shillings current money of Virginia, to the churchwardens of the parish, wherein she shall be delivered... every person so refusing or failing, shall receive on her bare back, at the public whipping-post, twenty-five lashes, well laid on (Henings Statutes Vol.4: 213).

By 1769 the statutes required the father to pay for the maintenance of the child (Henings Statutes, VIII: 376).

The overriding concern in the legal statutes was the reduction of expenses in caring for the poor. Workhouses were one solution but the colonial demand for labor made workhouses for the able-bodied unnecessary in many areas. References to unused workhouses indicate that they were not always a successful solution (Townes 1978: 18). In 1750, five years before Virginia legislation mentions the poorhouse as an alternative for dealing with poverty, the vestry contracted to build one, presumably in the hope that it would reduce long term costs to the parish. They allowed salaries for overseers of the poorhouse, for a doctor to tend to the sick, and for money to maintain the building. The fact that the parish

rebuilt the poorhouse when it burned down implies that it must have been considered a reasonably successful method of caring for the poor, as it was not abandoned or allowed to decline. References to the poorhouse continue to the end of the eighteenth century in the Common Hall records and indicate that it was a viable part of the community (Tarter 1979: 279, 412-13, 417, 418).

In Elizabeth River Parish, attitudes toward the poor paralleled those in the rest of Virginia as described by Townes. While the vestry was willing to care for orphans, cripples, the sick and the aged, they were always careful to do so in a prudent and practical manner. There are several references in the vestry book which indicate that those caring for orphans had to have an agreement with a church warden or vestry member in order to be paid for their expenses. For example, in 1755, John Wright and George Bowin were informed that no further allowance would be given them for orphans under their care, as they did not have an agreement with the vestry to reimburse them for their expenses (Walter 1924: 20). There are also records of individuals coming to the vestry and agreeing to care for an orphan or poor person for a specific sum (Walter 1924: 20, 26). Legislation enacted from 1727 onward echoed the vestry's concern for keeping expenses to a minimum. The 1727 statutes, section XI, stated that, "... the parent or parents of any child ... who shall be judged incapable of supporting and bringing

up such child, ... that then it shall be lawful ... for the churchwardens of said parish to bind out or put to service such child..." (Henings Statutes, IV: 218). In 1748, the poor laws noted that, "... if any house keeper shall entertain any such poor person, and shall not give notice to the church wardens of the parish, ... he or she shall forfeit the sum of five pounds or 1000 pounds of tobacco" (Henings Statutes, VI: 32.). An important statute, authorizing the building of a workhouse for the poor, in order that beggars or indigents might produce goods or work at a trade was enacted in 1755 (Henings Statutes, VI: 475-6.).

In 1758, the clerk of the vestry recorded that "all persons who shall hereafter take any strouling sick or indigent person into their houses without an order or consent of church wardens or vestrymen shall bear all costs" (Walter 1924: 28). In the same vestry minutes, it was also noted that ". . .it be a standing rule that all Orphan Children or such whose parents cannot maintain them and are above the age of four years shall be delivered to the poorhouse — or that no allowance shall be made by this vestry for keeping them unless it is done by Order of the Church Wardens or some of the Vestrymen" (Walter 1924: 28).

In a statute enacted in 1755 the poor were required to wear a badge. Anyone who received relief from the parish had to "upon the shoulder of the right sleeve

of his or her uppermost garment . . . wear a badge, with the name of the parish to which he belongs, either in blue, red or green cloth" (Henings Statutes, VI: 478). Refusal to wear such a badge was punishable by suspension of their allowance or whipping. Besides identifying the poor for administrative reasons, the badge also served an obvious social function. It visually separated one category from the rest of society. Whether the poor were pitied or scorned is not certain, but the badge visually established class boundaries.

Many English precedents existed for the use of the poor badge. Employed by various towns in Tudor times, it served as a means of distinguishing the poor of the town (who were licenced to beg) from strolling vagrants (Marshall 1926: 102). Later it was used to prevent persons aided by the parish from begging. The badge also indicated from which parish the pauper came; preventing him or her from begging in other parishes. English records show that, as in Virginia, refusal to wear the badge would result in termination of assistance. In Brighton,

At a meeting of the churchwardens...  
Susan Stone, the widow of Thomas,  
refused to wear the town badge upon  
which she was put out of the weekly  
pay (Marshall 1926: 103).

Marshall cites many such instances, indicating that this law was resented, both for social and economic reasons.

Aside from the humiliation of being visually identified as poor, the badge would prevent an individual from participating in the popular trade of begging (Marshall 1926: 103).

The solutions to the problem of caring for the poor and the documented attitudes toward the poor offer a variety of ways to deal with poverty. The family seems to have been expected to solve its own problems if possible, but if the family unit had broken down, or was unable to support itself, others in the community (individuals as well as institutions) stepped forward to assist those in need. Even though Norfolk was not a particularly small community, it was made up of various districts that functioned as micro-communities within the whole. It is probable that, as is usual in small towns, there was little privacy with regard to family matters. The conscience of the group as a whole served to regulate behavior within the individual family units. When one of these units was no longer able to function, the larger group that it belonged to (whether a geographical or familial group) would oversee the regulation of that unit. From the evidence in the primary records, it is apparent that no one family was isolated from the rest of the community. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Extreme intermingling and interconnection of family groups along kinship and geographical lines occurred to bind the individual family groups together into a community. The role of kinship was

important for the care of the poor and was probably the primary means of support for the poor.

Bernard Farber's article, "Family and Community Structure: Salem in 1800" (included in Michael Gordon's The American Family in Social and Historical Perspective) discusses the guardianship of children and its effect on family structure of the "laboring class" in Salem.

The strong role of the community in the guardianship of children from laboring-class families must have interfered with the organization of the households as autonomous conjugal units. The participation by community authorities in decisions affecting the lives of family members among the poor blended family life and community life so that distinctions between them were easily lost. (Even today the easy access of social workers and other community representatives into the families of the poor may inhibit the development of strong family boundaries and may instead contribute to the disintegration of family units.) (Gordon 1973: 106).

Farber uses the terms "family" and "household" interchangeably, but others have defined these terms as different entities. Laslett sees the family as the elementary society of man, wife and children, and the household as a co-residing group consisting of the elementary family with the addition of kin, servants and lodgers (Laslett 1972: 20). Among the poor of Norfolk the number of children being kept by individuals outside their nuclear family was high, and could possibly have generated



the same type of situation discussed by Farber. Whether the poor families of Norfolk considered themselves to have weak boundaries is not known, it is possible that the child care arrangements were more along the lines of those found in Stack's All My Kin: a complex network of kin and non-kin members arranging child care as a vehicle to reinforce membership in the various networks. In place of the traditional nuclear family with easily defined boundaries there existed the above mentioned networks, better suited to dealing with the problems of poverty through their flexibility.

## CHAPTER V

### NETWORKS OF POOR RELIEF

To determine the importance of geographical proximity to the networks which governed the care of the poor in this community, tithe lists were used to establish in which precinct individuals lived. For 1750, the only year which is represented in both the vestry records and the tithe lists, the largest percentage of caretakers listed lived in the Borough of Norfolk and along the southside of Tanner's Creek (Figure 3). The largest number of poor listed are found in the Western Branch precinct. The Borough and surrounding areas were settled by the wealthier merchants, while the outlying rural areas, depending on the quality of the land, were settled by a mixture of large and small scale planters. While these statistics tell us that more caretakers lived in one precinct than in another (and similarly for the poor), it does not tell us about individual cases and what connections may be discerned between caretaker and poor. A substantial number of cases are clearly related through proximity (Figure 4). Living in the same precinct, without any discernible family connection, was taken to be an indication of a geographical tie. In a system where no evidence exists that the poor were assigned to a caretaker

by the courts or the church on a random basis, it seems that proximity would play a part in pairing caretakers and the poor, facilitating the job of the caretaker. Out of a total of 59 cases where someone was assisted by a third party, 28.8% were such that the poor and their caretakers lived in the same precinct. Taking into account the underregistration of the poor in the tithe lists, this number is probably conservative. In 47.5% of the cases no connection (kin-based or geographical) was apparent (Figure 4).

Although the precincts in which individuals lived in are known, more exact records do not exist. No plat books or surveyor's records from the time period have been found. In some cases, the names of corresponding caretakers and poor are listed next to each other or very close in the tithable list. There is disagreement, however, on the actual methods of tithetaking. There is no evidence for a house-to-house method, and it is generally believed that names were brought to the tithe-taker, who assembled the list. The order of names within the list therefore may not be significant. It is also considered likely that tithetakers would use the list from the previous year, and merely change the numbers (Ed Ayres: personal communication). This would account for the names being in the same order from year to year.

The debts accrued by the parish for the poor and other parish expenditures were totaled at the end of

the year and divided by the number of tithables, thus determining the tax per tithable. The number of tithables assisted by the parish is difficult to determine. Many of the individuals listed as receiving aid in 1750 are not recorded in the tithe lists of the same year. In 1642, the first recorded poor law in Virginia states that the poor could be exempted from public charges (Henings Statutes, I: 242), and often the poor, because of age or illness were exempted from parish levies. If the vestry records are combined with the tithe lists, a more complete number is obtained. In 1750, 2.6% of the total number of tithables were assisted by the parish. However, only 1.2% of those are found in the tithe lists, indicating that half of the recorded poor were not paying tithes.

If the tithables from 1730 to 1750 are counted for each year, and the percentages calculated for the known poor found in the tithe lists, we see that the number of tithables assisted by the parish stays below 2% for all but one year (Figure 5). Assuming that the discrepancy between the numbers of poor found in the tithe lists for 1750 and the total known poor is representative, then the percentage of poor in the parish would be roughly double that shown in Figure 5. However, the problem of under-registration of the poor still exist.

The role of the family is an important factor in understanding poor relief in eighteenth century Virginia. How great a role the family played in caring

for the poor determined to what extent individuals other than relatives were involved in this process. Someone in need of aid might turn to their immediate or extended family first, but for many of the poor, their immediate families were almost as poor as they were. Other members of the nuclear family of the poor were being cared for by others, and can be placed in the category of the poor themselves. In the vestry records, a parent or sibling of an individual is often labelled as such, and given an identifying tag to show to what family group they belonged.

It was not readily apparent why someone was cared for by a person not linked to their family network. Many of the cases examined in Elizabeth River Parish indicate that the poor person had no discernible kinship tie with their caretaker. However, due to gaps in written records and lack of information on individuals, there are probably more instances of a kinship ties than are apparent. It is possible that caretakers would look after a poor individual for economic gain, counting on his reimbursement from the church to be more than his actual expenses. There is also the possibility, especially with children, that the caretaker would be motivated by the prospect of an additional laborer in the household. These are possibilities, but unfortunately cannot be supported by the records.

In Figure 4, we see the distribution of the poor according to their relationship with their caretaker. Familial and geographical connections are roughly even. Geographical connections refer to the number of cases where the poor and their corresponding caretaker lived in the same tithe precinct. Familial connections were defined as those where the poor individual and the caretaker had any discernible kinship connection. A network based on neighborhoods most probably operated within the community and it is difficult to totally separate the neighborhood networks from the familial ones. Because kinship ties are presumed to carry more weight in a pre-industrial society than simple contiguity, I placed individuals in the familial group wherever a kinship tie could be demonstrated. Of higher frequency than these two categories is a third group, where no relationship was apparent.

Cases involving an unidentified poor child or adult, and relief paid directly to individuals are not included in this graph. Of the total, 23.7% fell into the "family" category, 28.8% in the "geographical," and 47.5% in the "not known" category. In all likelihood, some cases in the third category did not have any connection between the poor and their caretaker. It is unclear how pairings that were neither familial or geographical were arranged, but there is no mention in either the church or civil records of the supervising organization arranging

them. Many of the cases in this group might fall into one of the other two categories if more information were available.

The importance of the family in caring for the poor seems to have been equal to the networks established by residence patterns. However, when the fact of under-registration of the poor and lack of vital statistics is taken into account, the familial connection between the poor and the caretakers would probably be the greatest of the two groups. It is probable that the poor receiving aid or assistance directly from other family members were not recorded in the parish vestry book. This type of aid might be similar to the reciprocal obligations described by Stack in All My Kin. The present study, however, is concerned mainly with those poor receiving aid through the parish system, not solely through family networks.

Although the mortality rate in the Chesapeake had decreased since the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was still sufficiently high to create a large number of poor children needing assistance. Almost half the total number of poor in Elizabeth River Parish between 1749 and 1761 were listed as children. The family networks were not sufficiently dense to care for these children; almost three times as many children were cared for outside the family as were cared for by the family (Figure 6). Even if some of the children that were apparently cared for outside the family actually had an

indiscernible kinship tie to their caretaker, there would still be a substantial number cared for by families not related to their own. It is possible that poor orphans living with someone not linked to their family group were an essentially free source of labor to their benefactors. In a time where subsistence was the main goal, the practice of taking in orphans who could work for you might not have seemed so cynical or callous as it might to us today; it would have been extremely practical.

As Darrett and Anita Rutman point out in their article "Now-Wives and Sons-in-Law: Parental Death in a seventeenth century Virginia County (Rutman 1979: 153-182), the death of parents and the incidence of orphaned children was extensive. High mortality rates prevent the formation of dense family networks, and the role of parenting falls to cousins, aunts or "quasi-kin" (Rutman 1979: 169). In Elizabeth River Parish in the mid-eighteenth century, the situation seems similar. Among the poor, mortality rates and financial difficulties within the family cut off one of the alternatives for child care, and the responsibility for those children was taken up by neighbors, friends or others within the community.

As in many other societies, the networks functioning in Elizabeth River Parish are quite dense, although not uniformly so. Certain families appear in the data more often than others; the density of "exchanges" or



"connections" between individuals or families ranges from light to heavy. The varying densities of networks refers to the number of contacts found in the records for the families studied.

The ways in which the poor and their caretakers are connected are numerous: marriage, witnessing wills, adjoining land, occupancy of the same household, lawsuits, charity, nursing, business arrangements, guardianship of children, and service as executor of a will or appraiser of an estate.

When determining the extent of the networks operating within this community, the appearance of an individual's name in any of the above means of contact was considered contact between those involved in that particular situation. Also, it must always be assumed that there are networks that are not visible through written records. The extent of the networks in Elizabeth River Parish are quite dense. There are networks within the families themselves as well as a variety of contacts between families. The flow of relationships does not go in only one direction. As has been discussed earlier, the roles of caretaker and poor are not fixed; many individuals were found to belong to both groups at different times during their lives. One group of caretakers, the merchants of the Borough and nearby Tanner's Creek, generally remained discrete. The caretakers who belonged to the same economic and social rank as those they were helping are more

difficult to categorize. Certainly family and kinship ties were important in caring for the poor. It is likely that many more kinship connections exist between the poor and their caretakers that might never be known due to the fragmentary nature of the written record. In the vestry records, many are labelled as the "child of..." or "the mother of..." or by some other kinship term. When such a link is not expressly mentioned, it might mean that the relationship was widely known, and there was no need to mention it, or it might indicate that there was no recognized kinship tie between the persons involved.

The role of women is even more difficult to ascertain than that of the family. Almost all the women that were listed as caretakers could be identified as widows or as living alone. The fact that a man was reimbursed by the vestry for taking care of an individual indicates only that he was receiving the money. Rarely were women explicitly mentioned in caretaking roles if they had living husbands. One exception was Morech Meach's wife, who is listed as "laying out the body of a Negro" (Walter 1924: 18). Here the reason for her performing this service is not clear; it is likely that she assisted her husband in the administration of the poorhouse, and that the Negro who died was a resident there.

The organizational framework of the care of the poor in Elizabeth River Parish consisted of various

levels. Networks of families and individuals functioned on many of those levels. Kinship systems, neighborhood and residence patterns, the various social and economic ranks involved in caring for the poor, all exhibited networks of varying density. These networks cannot be isolated from each other; no one part of the caretaker/poor relationship emerges as substantially more important than another. Kinship probably carried more weight than other motives in defining the caretaker/poor dyad; a broad generalization on this point cannot be made without more information. The family does not seem to have been the only network apparent in the care of the poor; we can be fairly certain that other networks of contact, exchange and reciprocity were at work within the community.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Applying an Old World pattern of poor relief in a New World environment, the community of Norfolk sought to contain the problem of maintenance of the poor. They based their actions on English models; the parish and family system of relief, the precedent of the merchant classes contributing money for the care of the poor, and the poorhouse system.

While these solutions contributed in part to the care of the poor, high mortality rates in Colonial Virginia necessitated the formation of various networks within the community to take the place of dissolving family units. The family, which would normally serve as caretaker for its poorer members, was broken up by higher mortality rates. In reaction to the changing role and function of the household and family unit in colonial Norfolk, kinship networks became wider in scope and more varied in function. As the nuclear family unit could no longer provide for its members, quasi-kin became more important in offering assistance. Networks other than kin-related assumed an important role in caring for the poor; geographical or "community/neighborhood" networks

are clearly visible when the pairings of the poor and their respective caretakers are studied.

The English precedent of the merchant classes' involvement in the care of the poor was successfully carried over to the situation in Norfolk. It was not continued unchanged, however, for in addition to bequests, the merchant class seems to have been more directly involved on an individual level in the relief of the poor. According to Pound, the merchant class in England bequeathed more money than any other segment of society toward the relief of the poor (Pound 1971: 38). In Norfolk the need seems to have been more immediate, and as the merchants would have had more liquid assets than the gentry, they were more able to supply relief. This particular segment of the community, along with other community networks, began to fulfill the role formerly played by the family.

The groups labeled "poor" and "caretaker" were by no means discrete. Many individuals and families were found to belong to both groups at different times. This is a logical condition for those living at the subsistence level; a small fluctuation in crops or wages would place the individual on the other side of the poor/caretaker line. This same situation was found in Carol Stack's All My Kin. Since the individuals had no cushion of savings, they were susceptible to slight changes in their economic situation.

The purpose of this study has not been to evaluate the success or failure of the adaptation of the English system of poor relief to the needs of colonial Norfolk, but rather to examine some of the networks in place within the community and their function in the care of the poor. Households and the family unit changed as mortality rates increased, and other groups within the community took their place in caring for the poor. Further studies of other colonial communities with the same variables in mind would make possible comparisons between those communities. Although the size of this sample is small, enough information exists for some trends to become visible. The specific function of a study as specific as this is to raise questions as to the function of the various networks involved and to offer some possible trends that might exist outside the area examined.

FIGURE 1

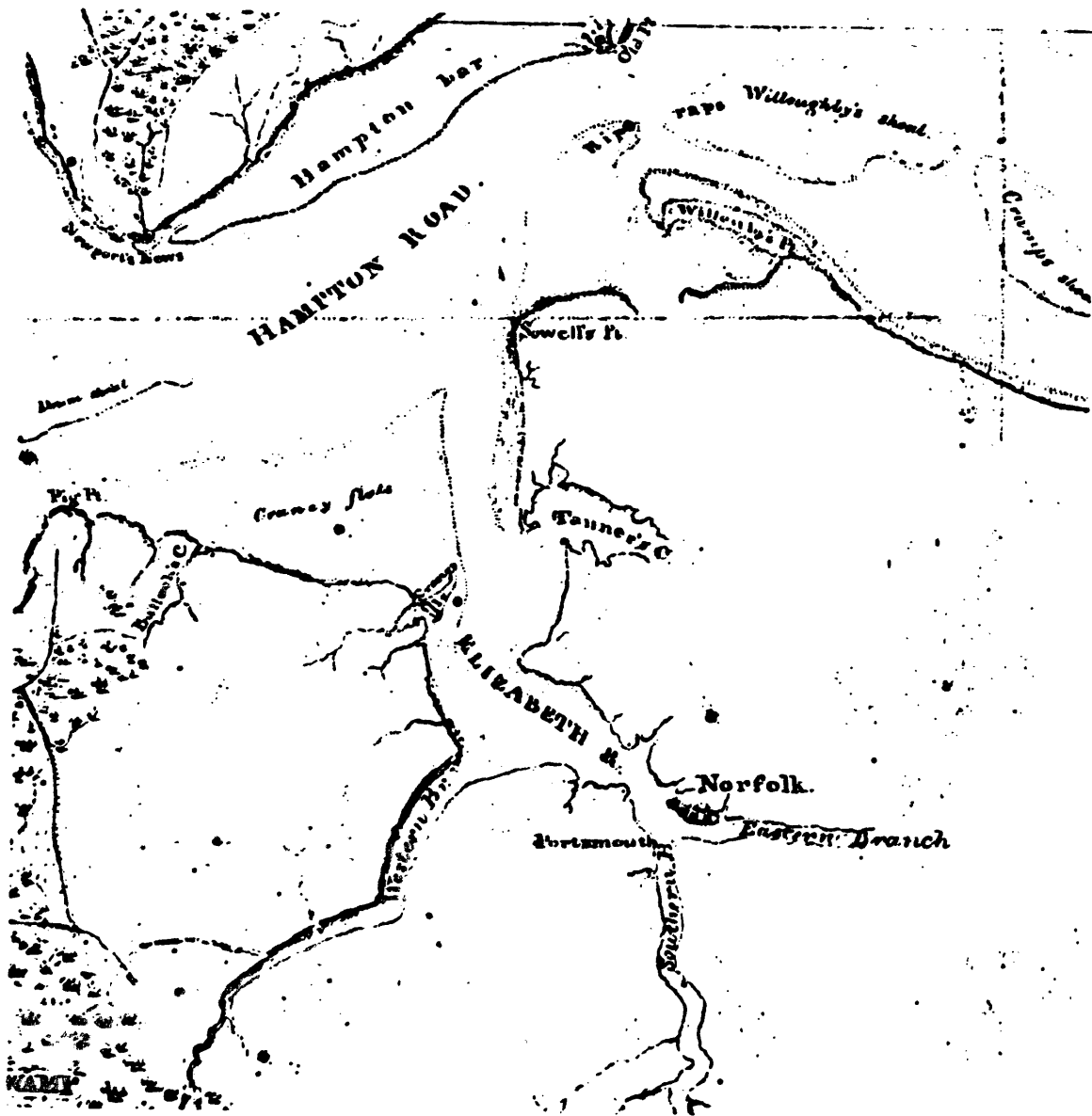


FIGURE 2

Value of Caretaker's Inventories  
Total=15

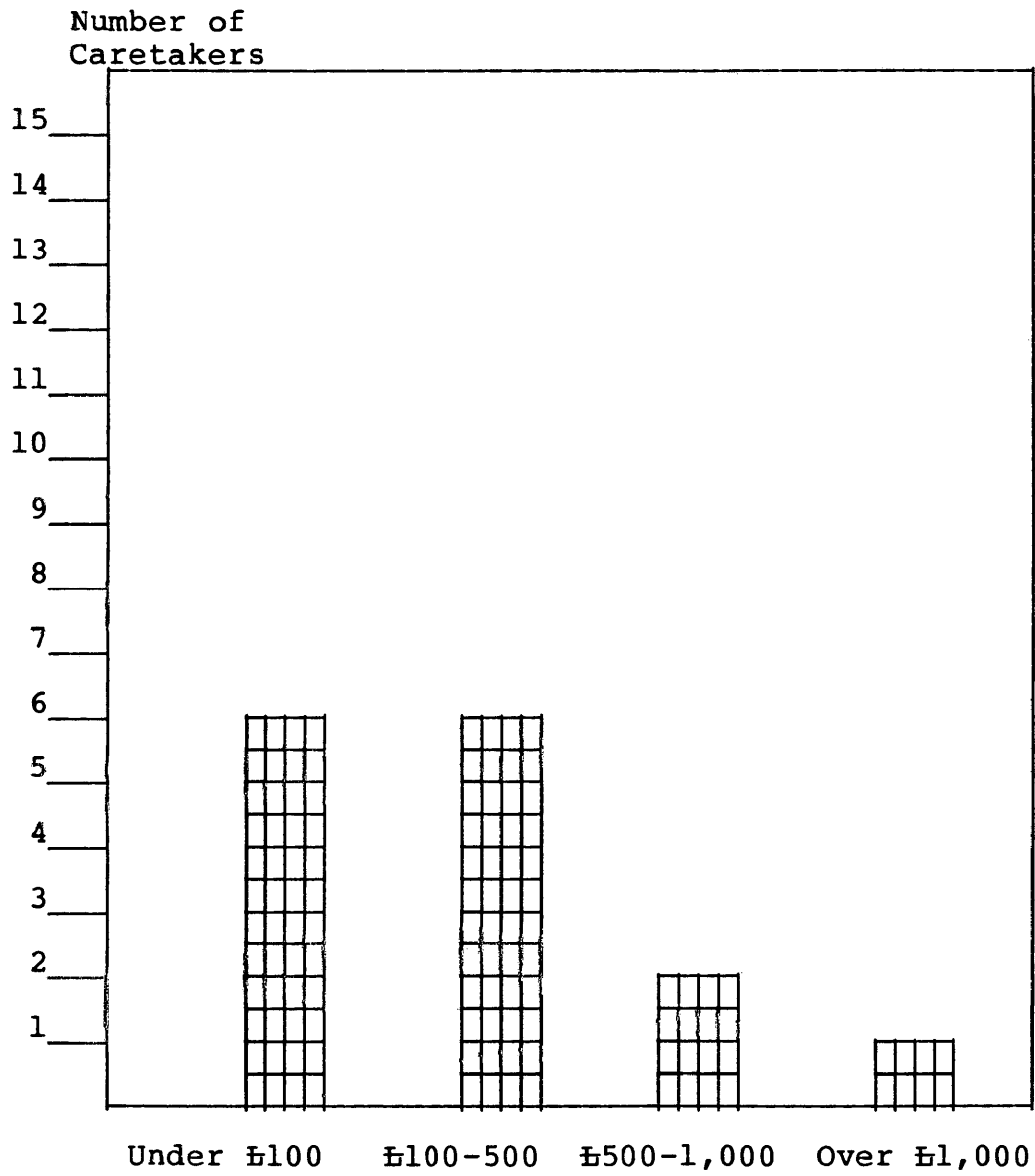




FIGURE 3

Geographical Distribution of Poor & Caretakers  
in the 1750 Titheable List

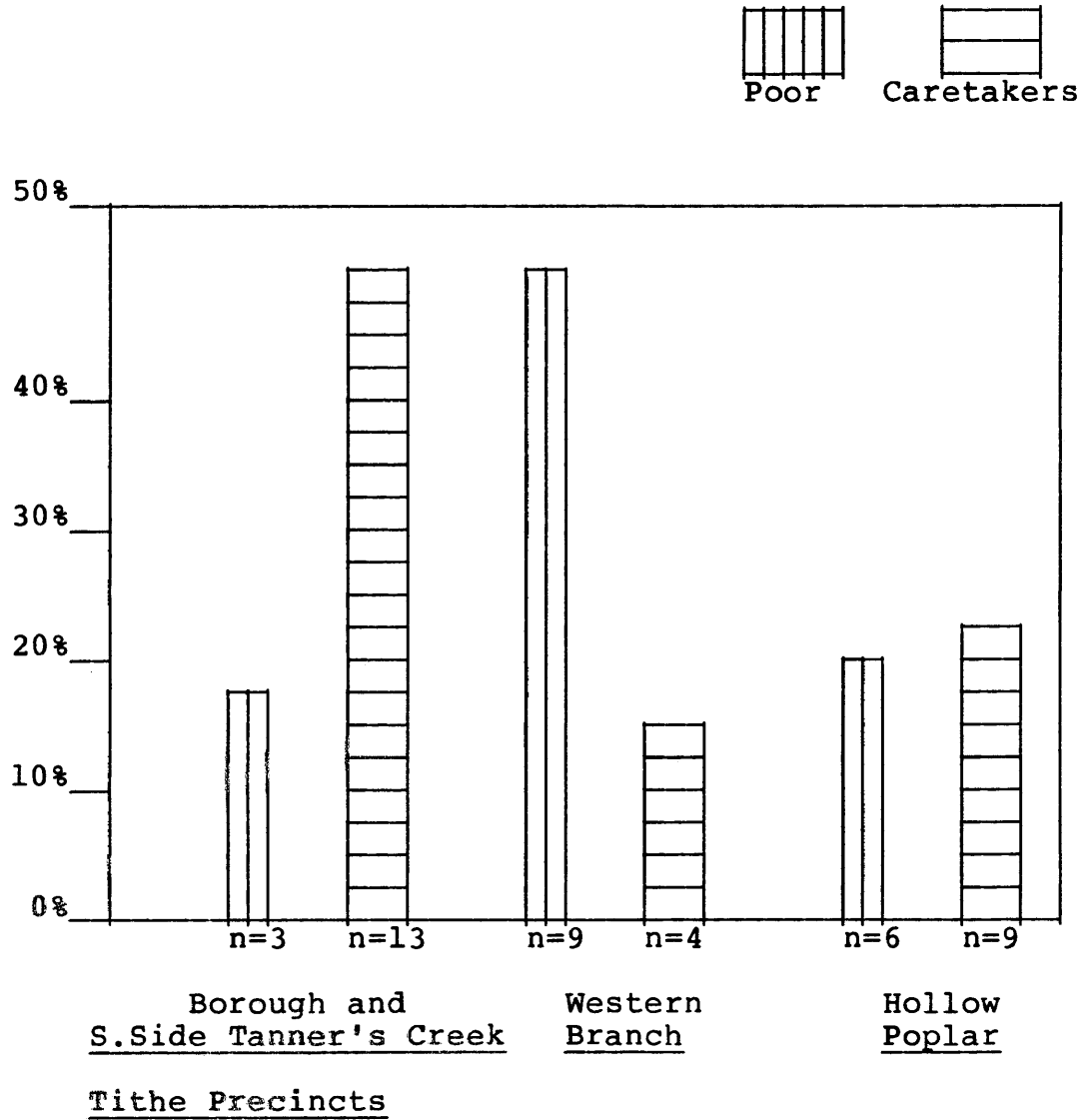


FIGURE 4

Relationship Between Poor & Associated Caretaker

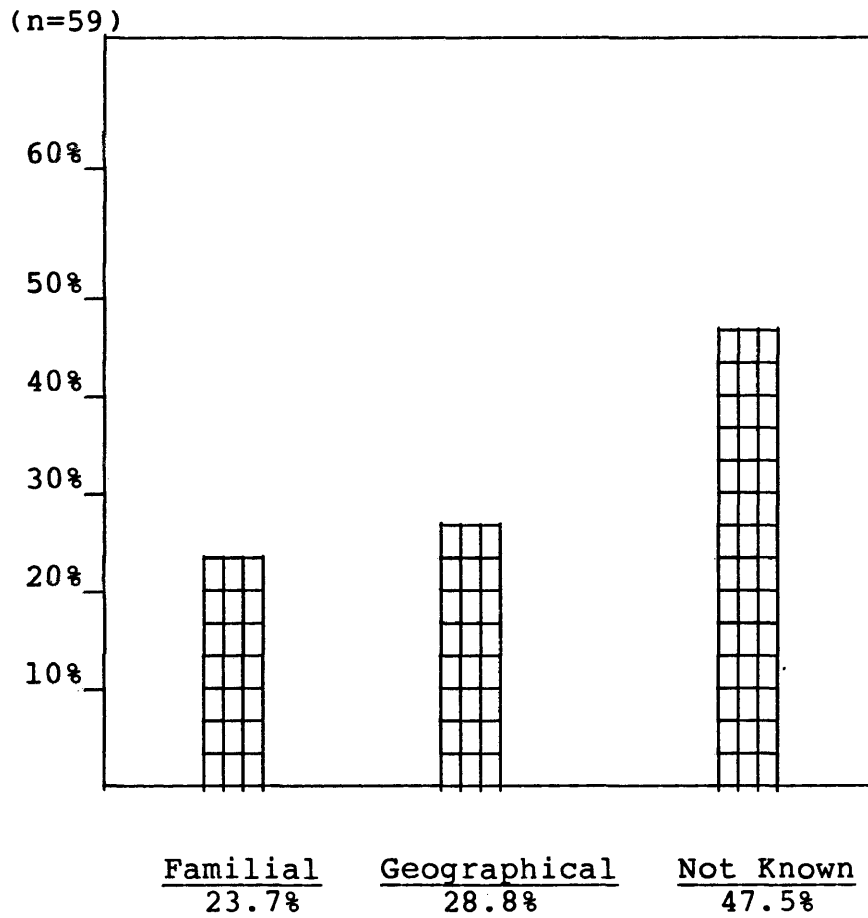


FIGURE 5

Percentage of Tithables Assisted by Parish

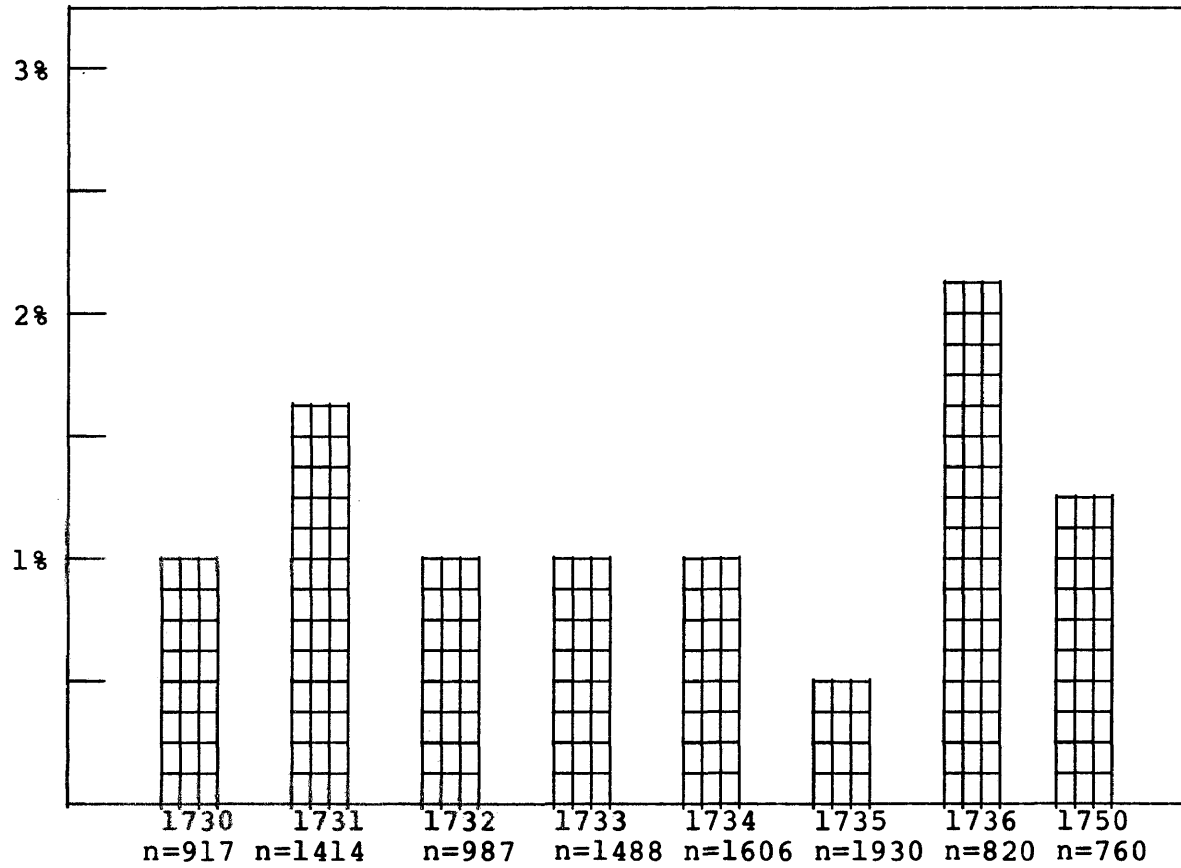
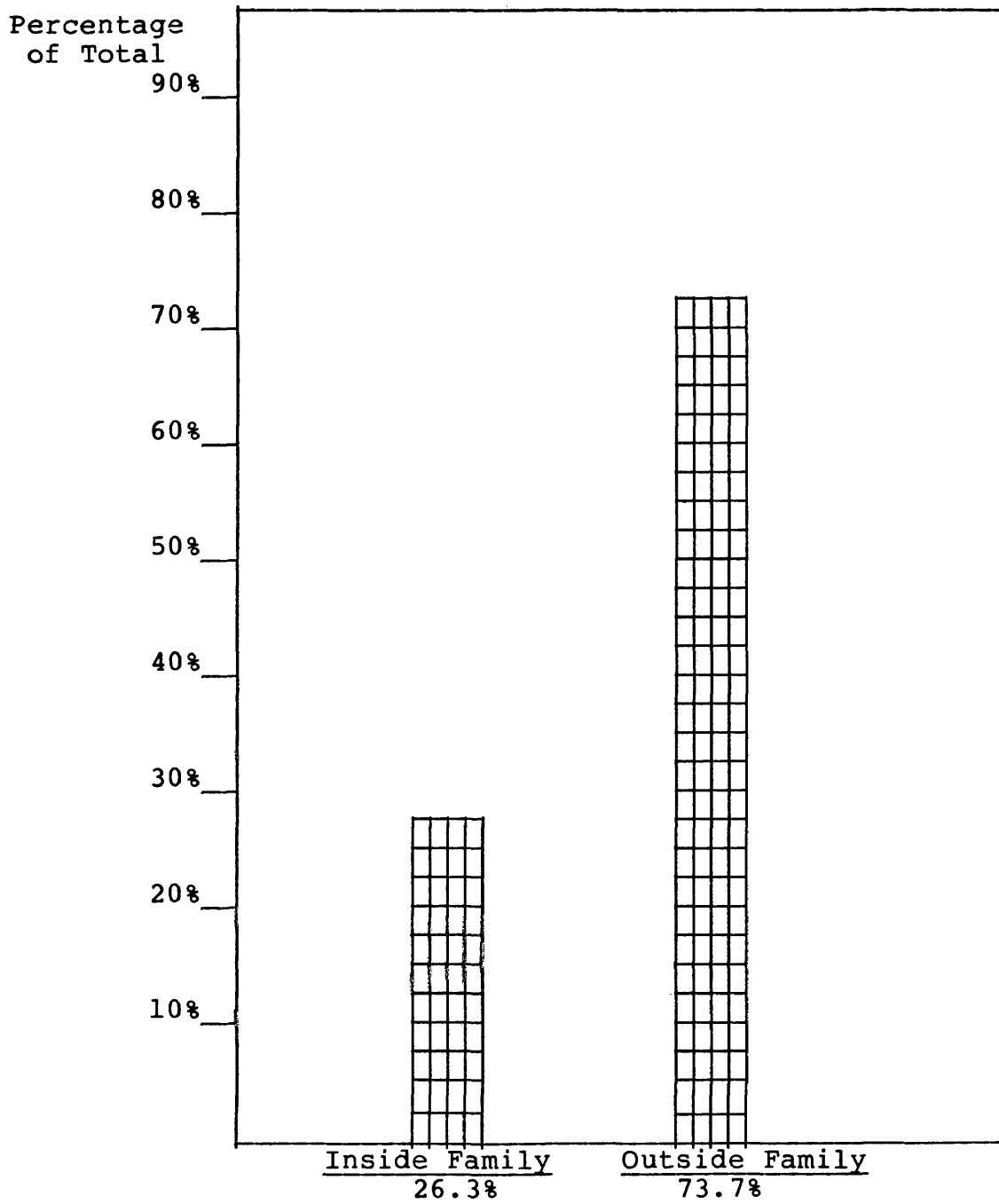


FIGURE 6

Familial Relationship of Poor Children  
to Their Caretakers



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