



Te Ope Whakaora

Family Tracing Service

Finding the Missing Peace

Mrs Booth's Enquiry Bureau: Salvation Army's detective agency goes international

By Sheilla Jones and Jim Burns

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The tales of the Victorian-era detectives of Scotland Yard in England and the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency in the United States of America continue to entertain us today. But few people are familiar with a detective agency of that same era that boasted a network of connections beyond those of Scotland Yard and Pinkerton's combined.

Mrs. Booth's Enquiry Bureau was set up by The Salvation Army in 1885 in the impoverished London neighbourhood of Hackney, and run by a professional detective. Within a year, the Bureau opened branch offices in New York, Chicago and Toronto, as well as Melbourne and Sydney in Australia. The agency was immediately swamped with queries asking for help in finding missing family members, and it had a remarkable success rate.

Percy L. Parker, writing in 1897 in the British magazine *The Young Man*, said of the success of the Army's search for people:

...the average of finds is very large—one in three. Scotland Yard—which is supposed to be the best detective agency in the world—only averages one in ten.

In the 19th century, millions of British citizens were on the move. Young men and women left the impoverished farms in the counties for the promise of jobs in cities like London. Shiploads of emigres set sail for Canada, Australia or other British colonies. Many were never heard from again.

As families fretted about the lack of news from a daughter gone off to be a domestic in a big house in London, or wondered what had become of a son who joined the flood of immigrants seeking farmland on the Canadian prairies, they turned to The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army had established a great many corps in rural England, and in many cases, its officers

were often the only official network families could turn to, other than the police, for help finding their missing kinfolk.

By 1885, SA founders William and Catherine Booth were already overseeing rescue homes for abandoned and destitute women and were running shelters for destitute men. William Booth lamented that, in any year, some 18,000 husbands, sons, mothers and daughters disappeared into the factories and slums of London—and 9,000 were never heard of again. He instructed the Army's head of women's social work, his daughter-in-law Florence Booth, to establish the bureau to answer the many pleas for information on the missing. 'Mrs. Booth's Enquiry Bureau' opened in 1885 at 259 Mare Street in London.

The Army wanted a professional detective to run the Bureau, and Clifford Harland fit the bill. Harland was already a successful and well respected detective working on the sensitive investigation of a British Member of Parliament when he caught the attention of William Booth. Harland attended his first Salvation Army meeting in 1886 on Oxford Street in London's West End. He was there in search of his agency chief, a Salvationist, for instructions on the case, but since his chief was part of the service, he was forced to sit through the sermon before he could speak with him. Harland was so impressed with the meeting leader's oratory that he decided then and there that the Salvation Army was right for him. He quit his employment with the private detective agency in 1888 and took on the management of the Enquiry Bureau at the rank of Staff-Captain.

The first public record of a Bureau investigation was in October 1885 with an appeal from a husband whose wife had disappeared, which was published in the British *War Cry*, the Army newspaper sold to the public. By the end of that year, the Bureau initiated



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its first international case in the search for a missing woman in Canada. Initially, the Bureau's work was fairly straightforward—tracking down a lad too embarrassed by his failure in the city to return home, or a maid who had been put out into the street after rejecting the advances of her employer and turned to prostitution to survive. This the Bureau undertook for a fee of 10s. 6d. (ten shillings and six pence), or for free if the applicant was unable to pay.

Other cases were more complicated. Some involved investigating the abductions of young women at train stations and parks by sophisticated enterprises bent on entrapping girls into prostitution. Other girls were sold into brothels or shipped from the country into white slavery on the Continent, and in South America and the Near East. As noted in the *War Cry* (Canadian edition, 8 June 1896), Bureau agents were employed to 'hunt up the titled and rich scoundrels who gloat over the ruin of many girls, and bring them to justice'. The Army used moral suasion to have them take responsibility or sign legal promises of financial support for the children they fathered, collected by the Army on behalf of the children.

The Bureau's agents went far beyond just finding missing people and letting their kinfolk know. Part of the agency's mandate was to help restore and heal families where they could. Sometimes, it meant protecting people who had good reason to run away from those seeking them. Or it could mean encouraging a father who had abandoned his children to do right by them. The Bureau offices also served as a refuge for any girl seeking to escape prostitution or who felt trapped in a bad situation.

The Enquiry Bureau investigated more than just missing persons cases. It took on cases involving disputes between masters and servants, as well as wills, legacies and other property matters. Interestingly, the Bureau also advertised that it would take cases 'of a certain nature' for those who could pay the fee, a sufficiently vague description that opened the door to a potentially wide range of investigations.

Some investigations led Bureau agents to the remote corners of civilization, and in that they were aided by the roughly 10,000 Army officers posted throughout the world. As author Henry Rider Haggard noted in his 1910 description of the Enquiry Bureau:

The result is that a large percentage of individuals sought for are discovered, dead or alive, for in such work the Salvation Army has advantages denied to any other body, scarcely excepting the police. Its representatives are everywhere, and to whatever land they may belong or whatever language they may speak, all of them obey an order sent out from Headquarters wholeheartedly and uninfluenced by question of reward.

The Army also made good use of the 'Missing!' columns in the *War Cry* to advertise for assistance in their enquiries. The British edition had a circulation of 300,000, with other versions of the *War Cry* published in a variety of languages in 23 other countries.

In 1897, the London office alone was receiving some 3,500 enquiries a year. The Army changed the structure of the Bureau at that point, and renamed the agency the International Investigation Department.

Mrs. Booth's Enquiry Bureau, begun in 1885, continues to this day as The Salvation Army Missing Persons or SA Family Tracing Service, with offices in 120 countries. The Army now limits its cases to locating missing family members, reunifying families, and helping heal the wounds that may have caused separations.

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