



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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## Letters

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**Employment Advisory Service**

Sir:

Hopefully, you will not yield to the suggestions that the pages of *The Actuary* be made available for advertisements for actuarial employment. Your publication is in my opinion performing a very useful function and maintaining an excellent standard, and I am convinced that advertisements could not help but detract from this.

I do feel, however, that there is a very real need in our profession for some form of advisory service regarding actuarial employment, for both employers and employees. Such a service would help to ensure the better use of the actuarial talent available and hopefully might lead to more actuaries being employed outside of the traditional fields for actuaries as in Great Britain.

The problems in North America are undoubtedly very different from the problems in Great Britain but I feel that the Society (and the Canadian Institute) would do well to appoint a small committee to investigate the function performed by the Appointments Board of the British Institute.

Quoting from the Year Book of the Institute the objects of the Appointments Board are:

- “(i) To provide authoritative guidance to prospective employers of actuaries who seek such guidance.
- “(ii) To provide a recognized means of bringing suitable vacancies to the notice of members of the Institute.
- “(iii) To provide an opportunity for members who wish to do so, to discuss matters affecting their careers with a senior member of the profession.”

Keith J. Harding

**PLACEMENT NOTES FROM  
ALL OVER**

“Wanted: Half an Actuary”

[Headline in Financial Times (London) advertisement seeking an actuarial student]

Better than none? Or half the wage?

**DEMOGRAPHY IN EARLY AMERICA**

James H. Cassedy, *Demography in Early America, Beginnings of the Statistical Mind, 1600-1800*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., (1969); \$8.50.

by Frederic Seltzer

“This day the weekly bills come out  
To put the people out of doubt  
How many of the plague do die;  
We sum them up most carefully.”

About the only pleasure I have had commuting to and from the office this winter has come from reading *Demography in Early America*. It is to James Cassedy's credit that the registration and counting of the sick and the dead is described in such an entertaining manner.

In the Preface the author states, “This book deals with a phase of the social, intellectual, and scientific history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America. It is an inquiry into the introduction and growth of statistical methods and ideas in early America, mainly insofar as they were applied to human vital events and population movements. My focus is primarily on the use of these statistics in public health and medical settings.”

John Smith, William Bradford, John Winthrop, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and other well-known historical figures make their appearance in this book as persons interested in the study of population and disease, some to a surprising extent.

Counts of population in the early 1600's by Captain John Smith and others in Jamestown showed such high mortality that they were suppressed by the London Company. William Bradford's history of Plymouth and John Winthrop's account of New England included some demographic data—reports of marriages, smallpox deaths, etc. The 1662 study *Natural and Political Observations Made Upon the Bills of Mortality* by Sir William Petty, patron of John Graunt, was one of the first scientific studies of vital data. His concept of “Political Arithmetic” treated colonization as a demographic phenomenon.

Benjamin Franklin printed regular reports of Philadelphia interments in the Pennsylvania Gazette. He also speculated on the rate of natural increase in an article in *Poor Richard* in 1749. These observations were pursued further

in his later published *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* in which he estimated the population doubling period in the colonies at twenty years. Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* of 1784-85, was a compilation of geographic, sociologic, demographic, and governmental information. It included population data by sex, age, and color.

The keeping of parish registers was established in Spain before Columbus and, after the Council of Trent, had been compulsory in the Catholic Church. This requirement did not appear in English law until the early 17th century. The registers usually recorded baptisms, church weddings, and burials not births, marriages, and deaths.

Illiteracy, the shortage of ministers, the general problem of staying alive, and the scattered distribution of population impaired colonial record keeping, as did religious discrimination, and social and economic barriers to church membership in some of the colonies.

Sir William Petty proposed a central statistical office in England to carry out population censuses and economic surveys, and to improve registration systems. It was also to collect colonial data on migration, occupation, religious affiliation, longevity, and fertility. He was ahead of his time.

Insurance enterprises began to appear in the colonies in the early 1700's but they were mostly marine and fire insurance companies. The Presbyterian Ministers Fund—a church-related insurance society—was established in 1759 and was modelled after the Widows Fund of the Church of Scotland. It had been established in 1744 and used Halley's table of life expectancies. In 1771, Richard Price published his *Observations on Reversionary Payments* making him an authority in life insurance and finance. Statistics were also gathered to establish a fund for the benefit of Massachusetts clergy, Harvard faculty, and their widows. Though the fund was never started it led to the publication in 1789 of Edward Wigglesworth's table, the first national life table of the general population in America.

The preceding excerpts describe or a small portion of *Demography in America*. For those who want to pursue the subject further there is an excellent bibliography and extensive index. □