

## John Howard: The Narrative

In this paper I conduct an analysis of the biography of John Howard, an 18<sup>th</sup> century English reformer who dedicated his life to the improvement of prison conditions. Howard's life history plays an intrinsic role in imparting an ethos to the Canadian organization that bears his name; the John Howard Society. I examine several renditions of his biography that appear in organization documents and compare and contrast these noting components of the biographies which contribute to the identity of the organization. I use the work of Paul Ricoeur on narrative and identity to look at how the organization reconstructs the past to lend credibility to an organization that challenges the status quo. The John Howard biography is thus used as an origin story in which the modern identity is tied to traditional past. I broaden this examination of organizational identity to examine the tensions in the organization in response to the requirements of operating as a rational modern corporate entity and its traditional roots in reformist religious values. I then launch into an examination of the restorative justice principles that underpin the values of the John Howard society and discuss the origin narratives of restorative justice. The notion of Howard the reformer is re-characterized into notions of anti-authoritarian and oppositional alternatives to the punitive justice systems. It has taken the identity of John Howard and re-written the character to embody current values while reaching back into a past to lend authority and solidity to those values. This narrative continues to have an authoritative voice in the institutional identity in spite of pressures to function in an environment that is plastic, malleable and open to change. Similarly, as a proponent of restorative justice, it imbues restorative approaches to crime with a humanitarian sensibility that is seemingly lost or negated within a bureaucratic, state centered penal system.