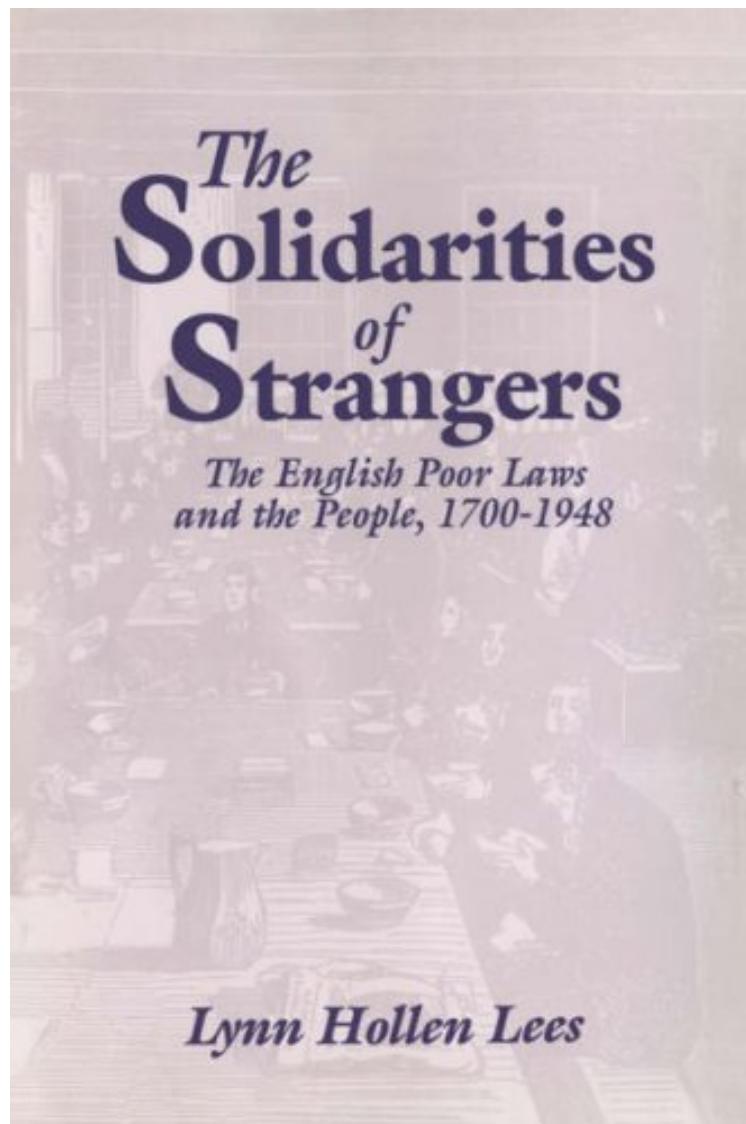


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The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948

Lynn Hollen Lees

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This study of English policies toward the poor from the seventeenth century to the present combines individual stories with official actions. Lynn Lees shows how clients as well as officials negotiated welfare settlements--cultural definitions of entitlement, rather than available resources, determined amounts and beneficiaries. The English poor laws went through cycles of generosity and meanness that affected men and women unequally. The long term history of welfare in England and Wales was not one of continued progress and improvement but one determined by continually changing attitudes toward poverty.

"Lynn Hollen Lees' book...puts flesh on the dry bones of poor-law administration....it is of great value in making sense of the wide range of poor law research in recent years and in focusing on the human experience of public relief." John Burnett, *Times Literary Supplement*"...this is a significant book...because it is an informed attempt to understand the long, and sometimes troubled, history of the poor laws within the framework of English society as a whole....of striking value to the field of British history in general." Peter Dunkley, *Albion*"[the book] proves that there is still exciting and original research to be done on this topic...[Lees] presents it with sophistication and an impressive command of the historiography...Lee's study is also remarkable for the attention she devotes to age and gender distinctions...Lees has produced a superb study of the poor laws." *Victorian Studies*"Lees...significantly extends our knowledge of how female-headed households were treated under the poor laws, and how the comparative treatment of male and female relief applicants changed over time. Overall, *The Solidarities of Strangers* provides an excellent introduction to the changing nature of the English poor laws over three centuries." George Boyer, *EH.NET*"Lees' account is most valuable for attending to the terms in which the encounters of poor and officials were cast." James Rosenheim, *Social Service*