

PROCURING A VICTORY AT HOME: HALIFAX WOMEN RESPOND TO THE  
BUTTER RATION, 1939-1946

by

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Dedicated to my Mom who always believed in me

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which women both complied with and resisted government intervention in the form of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board's ration regulations. By examining a number of different sources, and the ways in which Canadian women responded to ration policy, I demonstrate that women in Halifax both reinforced and challenged notions of middle-class womanhood and citizenship as a result of their compliance with and resistance to government involvement. I also focus on the rationing of butter, an important part of people's diets, in order to demonstrate how women responded to rationing overall.

During World War Two, thousands of women volunteered in local organizations. This thesis begins by examining a number of voluntary associations in Halifax. Women's voluntary organizations set their own agenda in addressing issues specific to Halifax; however, they also collaborated with the government to assist the war effort. Another aspect of compliance is explored in the succeeding chapter. In response to rationing, women adhered to government intervention by employing thrift in their cooking, stretching recipes, and finding alternatives to common ingredients. Through this deference to state policy, women allowed the federal government, newspapers, and other media outlets to make the rather private realm of family nutrition public. The final chapter of this thesis shifts away from examining compliance and focuses on aspects of resistance. When it comes to ration policy, fewer women were caught violating ration regulations than men. The Enforcement Branch of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board as well as the policing of women's behaviour by society made it difficult for Halifax women to cheat rationing. Based on evidence found within the Branch's records it is likely that women were policing the behaviour of retailers as well.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB)

Women's Regional Advisory Committee (WRAC)

Halifax Local Council of Women (LCW)

Business and Professional Women (BPW)

The Women's Canadian Club (WCC)

Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC)

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

On 3 September, 1939, the Canadian Government established the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) in order to regulate prices as a means of preventing a rise in the costs of production and living.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Second World War, the WPTB implemented a number of regulations, including ones that directed the rationing of certain goods and food products. Headed by Chairman Donald Gordon, the WPTB restricted markets in wool, tires, gasoline, tin, and other commodities. The majority of goods they rationed were edible: coffee, tea, sugar, butter, milk, meat, molasses, certain canned foods and much more. Food was rationed during the war partly because Canada had undertaken the task of exporting a sizeable amount of food to Great Britain in order to feed both troops and civilians. But rationing also served domestic purposes: it was meant to prevent a rise in the cost of food, to combat shortages, and to guarantee that every Canadian on the home front had equal access to food.

Making sure that the population had fair access to food was especially a concern in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the city's population had exploded since the onset of the Second World War. Unlike the rest of the country, Halifax never truly experienced a "phoney war." It was thrust into war mode almost immediately in the fall of 1939. When the North Atlantic was a combat zone, Halifax assumed its role as a hub of military and naval might. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers, sailors, workers, and professionals flooded in and overwhelmed the city's resources. The city they entered had not yet recovered from the Great Depression; indeed, its industrial basis had never fully

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<sup>1</sup> Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Report of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board: September 3 1939-March 31 1943*, Internet Archive, 1943, 5. <https://archive.org>.



recovered from the 1917 Harbour explosion. More than other eastern Canadian cities, Halifax's institutions and citizens were used to hard times. More than the other Maritime provinces' capitals, it would be a city at war.

For Haligonians who had struggled to earn and stretch a pay packet during the 1930s, food rationing was a new kind of a familiar experience, trying to feed their families. This was particularly true for women, who had traditionally been the gatekeepers of home nutrition. As the main providers and preparers of food for their families and others in their care, women were the main targets of ration regulations. It was up to women to diligently follow ration orders, properly use their ration coupons, and create nutritious family meals using less, and they were often addressed in various media as "needing to realize the parts they had to play in fighting and winning the battle on the home front."<sup>2</sup> Rationing was part of an immense change in Canada, as the nation's government was moving away from individualism and towards an interventionist mode. While not everyone was accepting of these changes, ideas about a greater role for government in the economy made it easier for the WPTB to justify controlling various aspects of daily life.

The discussion of rationing in this thesis addresses two themes in Canadian history. One is the impact of the Second World War on the role of the state. In order to understand how social policy has developed, it is important to refer to its origins as well as the historical dialogue surrounding it. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, social reform has often been a result of demands made by the populace. The ration regulations that were passed during the war were not always asked for; rather, they were mainly introduced as a means of advancing the war effort and protecting the economy.

However, as historian Ian Mosby has claimed, other new policies surrounding food and nutrition encouraged Canadians to demand other social policies aimed at the health and well-being of the average citizen. Although rationing was framed as being a patriotic and heroic project, many found it to be an inconvenience, and thus the rules were not always followed. This thesis expands on Mosby's discussion by examining Canadians' food consumption behaviours during the war as a site of both deference and opposition to the expanding role of the welfare state.

This thesis also argues, along the lines that Ruth Roach Pierson did, that women in Halifax both reinforced and challenged notions of World War Two femininity in their compliance with and resistance to government intervention in the form of ration policy. Captivated by the rhetoric of victory, thousands of women volunteered in local organizations and cut back on waste while finding new and delicious alternatives for common ingredients in family recipes. While my research suggests that fewer Haligonian women were caught violating the rules than men, there is good evidence that they were not completely innocent in their response to tighter governmental control over their lives. In the era of food rationing, these women walked a fine line between serving their country and serving themselves in the eyes of a nation at war.

While confirming the broad lines of arguments made by Mosby and Pierson, this thesis focuses on a particular commodity, butter. Butter was added to the ration list on 21 December, 1942.<sup>3</sup> The allowance of this product was half a pound per household per week for the majority of the war. By March of 1944, the amount had been dropped to 7 ounces per household per week. The rationing of butter and cooking fats has been largely

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<sup>2</sup> "Housewives Must Realize Place," *The Halifax Daily Star*, 13 January 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 197.

overlooked by other scholars, who have chosen to focus on other goods that were regulated by the WPTB.<sup>4</sup> The choice to focus on butter comes from its importance in daily diets, both as a source of pleasure and as a necessity to ensure health and productivity. During this time butter was thought of as one of the best sources of healthy fat and energy. Butter, of course, also was prized for its flavour and its ability to enhance the taste of other foods. For rationing quotas to be legitimate and acceptable, they had to allow enough butter for health, but limit its use as a luxury item. Butter rationing thus presented a regulatory challenge that items such as canned goods or paper did not.

Before the 1950s, a “fear of fat” did not exist. In wartime Canada, most people believed that butter, like other edible fats, was a superior source of energy. This was very important as most people took up wartime jobs that required hard labour and long hours. Canadians needed all the sources of energy they could get. Nutrition science was also beginning to reveal that fat was helpful in health more generally. As we now know in more detail, fats have broad positive health effects. Fat serves as a means of transportation for certain types of vitamins, including Vitamins A and E.<sup>5</sup> It is crucial for growing fetuses, pregnant mothers, and the development of the brain.<sup>6</sup> It also helps to regulate the blood and anti-bodies as well as the immune, anti-inflammatory, and epithelial systems. When butter was placed on the ration list, there was a concern amongst the public that health, and particularly energy, would be in jeopardy, which would in turn affect the war effort. Officials of the WPTB ensured the public that ration

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<sup>4</sup> In Keshen’s book, he goes into detail about the rationing of gasoline and automobile parts.

<sup>5</sup> Louise Lambert-Lagace and Michelle Laflamme, *Good Fat, Bad Fat*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing), 1995, 5.

amounts were established with assistance from nutrition experts in order to guarantee that health and nutrition would not suffer as a result.

The thesis begins by showing that one of the most common ways in which women accepted rationing's shift in the role of the government was through their volunteerism. The Second World War drastically, albeit temporarily, altered the working lives and social roles many women, yet thousands of women continued to serve, as they had before the war, in supportive roles in local and national volunteer organizations, shifting their efforts toward war work. Volunteer organizations that existed in Halifax will receive the most attention; however, certain national associations will be discussed as well. These acts reinforced the notion that women could and should contribute to the nation's war effort as unpaid supporters. For the most part, these campaigns around food meant obscuring women's other contributions as wage-earning war workers. Instead, they asserted the value of domestic labour in the public sphere. In addition to their voluntary work outside the home, women were educated by the national fat and bone scrap salvage campaign about how to turn their kitchens into weapons of war while still participating in traditional feminine activities. As a result, women organized to address this campaign by repurposing fats in their home and by organizing collections in their communities. The following chapter focuses on another form of compliance: food purchasing and home cooking. The campaigns of persuasion addressed women not just as in the public sphere as volunteers, but also in the private sphere, as consumers and cooks. The success of these campaigns to change behaviour is impossible to access conclusively, but two sources – *Chatelaine Magazine* and the “Dear Homemaker” column of the *Globe and Mail* – provide some suggestive hints toward an answer. Voices from the largely middle-

class readership of these publications suggest that the message of the campaigns were enthusiastically adopted. This chapter will contend that through this deference to state policy, women allowed the government to make the rather private realm of family nutrition public through controlling what was allowed to be served in the home during the war. As a result, women adhered to this regulation by employing thrift in their cooking, stretching recipes, and finding alternatives to common ingredients. These two sources provide a rich source of information on what actual home-cooking was like during the period of food rationing and on how willing women were to accept this level of control over their private lives. The final chapter of this thesis shifts away from examining compliance and focuses on aspects of resistance. Drawing upon records of prosecutions, I discovered that when it came to ration policy, more women followed the rules than broke them. The Enforcement Branch of the WPTB and the social policing of women's behaviour stood in the way of a Halifax woman who wanted to cheat the rules; however, some Haligonians, mainly male merchants, were caught violating food ration policy. Their customers were almost certainly women, meaning that it was likely women who were turning them into the authorities. In spite of the pressure to patriotic compliance, the shoppers of Depression- and war-weary Halifax were not always shining examples of wartime patriotism. In Halifax, as elsewhere, women providing for their families struggled to obtain adequate nutrition when food supplies were uncertain, and faced a challenge in navigating a new relationship with the regulatory state.

## **1.1 HISTORIOGRAPHY**

This thesis is intended as a contribution to food history. The current trend of food history began roughly in the 1980s as part of the growing trend towards an interest in

culture and citizenship. Since then, food history has appeared in relation to many of the main topics of Canadian history. This thesis intersects with a variety of historical conversations including food, women and gender, issues surrounding the welfare state and social reform, and Halifax, all within the diverse context of the Second World War. In this section, I will sketch the important developments in these historiographies and discuss examples of the kinds of contributions food history can make to our understanding of women and the home front in Canada during the World War Two. In addition, I will focus on the scholars whose work has influenced mine the most in the writing of this thesis.

The relationship between food and cultural identity is an important aspect of food historiography that can tell us a lot about its significance in ways that go beyond nourishment of the body. Scholar Dorothy Duncan has attempted with her book, *Canadians At Table*, to showcase each region of Canada's culinary traits and the heritage of their food. She argues that the sheer size of the country and its vastly different regions have contributed to a rather unique gastronomic legacy.<sup>7</sup> While her work focuses mainly on the food itself and not so much on the various interactions of food, culture, and the state, it is still a unique piece of literature as it offers a sweeping history of Canadian culinary heritage. Similarly, the earlier works of Harvey Levenstein follow this trend as well, although Levenstein's work focuses on American food trends and history. In his first book, *Revolution at the Table*, Levenstein offers a history of the culinary habits of the U.S. from the settling of the colonies to the early 20th century. He states that he is mainly interested in why Americans have or have not changed their food habits and how

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<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Duncan, *Canadians At Table: Food, Fellowship, and Folklore, A Culinary History of Canada*, (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2011), preface.

this has affected their culinary culture. Levenstein argues American diets changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution and modernization at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Levenstein's second publication, *Paradox of Plenty*, deliberates on why Americans in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century eat the way they do and where nutrition fits into this complex web of tradition and culture. He specifically examines how industry, interest groups, food producers, scientists, etc. have influenced change over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> His third and most recent publication, *Fear of Food*, published almost twenty years after *Paradox of Plenty*, hones in on the different nutrition crises that have plagued the United States over the last few decades. His claim that dietary concerns have become an aspect of American food culture can be seen in his many examples of "nutrition scares" that began roughly during the Second World War. While he agrees that proper health and diet are significant, he states that in many cases, food fears were exaggerated by nutrition experts and big businesses attempting to make money off of health fads.<sup>10</sup> Particularly of use to this thesis is his chapter on "lipophobia," or the fear of fat. In this chapter, Levenstein explains how concerns over the intake of dietary fat exploded after World War Two after studies on the long-term health effects of fat consumption were published.<sup>11</sup> While this thesis does not directly focus on nutrition, it is important to understand the dynamics of the public's response to changes in culinary and nutrition trends affecting the diet. The Canadian magazines and newspapers used as sources in this thesis do not exactly reflect the trends that these broad surveys outline.

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<sup>8</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), preface viii.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), preface viii.

<sup>10</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Fear of Food: Why we worry about what we Eat*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

In the ever-expanding category of food historiography, some scholars have chosen to focus on one specific food item and its place in a certain culture, rather than trying to offer up an all-inclusive history of culinary trends. For example, folklorist Diane Tye explains the prominence of bread as a staple food and important cultural signifier for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Tye explores the intersection of food culture with women's and gender history. Much of her article is devoted to how women fit into bread customs and how their labour in the home revolved around bread making.<sup>12</sup> This article illustrates the ways in which women interacted with and shaped an aspect of a region's culture through food, as well as how food shaped their labour in the home. Tye demonstrates how the preparing of food has become an aspect of "performing gender," and she provides many examples of bread-making as a feminizing act in folk traditions. Her evidence shows how a food can become gendered over time and how that in turn shapes the culture of an area. Like Tye, I have included a focus on a particular food in this thesis because the meanings of food in general are not the same as the meanings of a particular food.

The most recent and among the most influential of the new food historians in Canada is Ian Mosby. Mosby has written a number of articles as well as a book on the importance of food in Canadian society. Two of his articles, "Making and Breaking Canada's Food Rules" and "Administering Colonial Science," demonstrate the complex interconnections between food and the role of the state. In "Administering Colonial Science," Mosby discusses how the nutrition craze that began during World War Two permitted nutrition experts to conduct dietary experiments on Aboriginal children living

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<sup>12</sup> Diane Tye, "Bread for the Road: Intersections of Food and Culture in Newfoundland and Labrador," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* Vol. 26 No. 2 (2011): 175.



in residential schools. Mosby argues that addressing the problem of failing health in Native communities was essential to protecting the settler population from similar deficiencies and to integrating Aboriginals with the rest of society by educating them in the realm of the “new sciences.”<sup>13</sup> This article is an example of one of the ways that the government began to intervene in the lives of its citizens in order to create what was perceived as positive change. Nutrition is also the focus of Mosby’s “Making and Breaking Canada’s Food Rules.” In this article, Mosby provides an examination of the introduction of Canada’s Food Rules in 1942 as a precursor to Canada’s Food Guide. He argues that the Food Rules were part of a larger effort by leading Canadian nutrition experts to advance their own particular political and professional interests by defining healthy eating in a manner that prioritized a certain vision of wartime need.<sup>14</sup> He goes on to argue that the emergence of nation-wide nutrition programs were created in a response to the perceived health crisis of malnutrition. Much like in his other article, Mosby demonstrates the effect that the government and government bodies have on the populace during the war. The Canadian public could easily be convinced that it was their duty to make household nutrition a priority. Much in the same way that ration regulations were followed, proper diet and nutrition were believed to be an asset to the war effort. In contrast to work such as Diane Tye’s, Mosby’s emphasis is on attempts by public agencies to direct popular culture.

While reading through the numerous works of those who have built the body of literature needed for this thesis, one thing was certain in almost every case: it is nearly

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<sup>13</sup> Ian Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, Vol. 46 No. 91 (2013): 151.

impossible for one to discuss how food affects our lives without mentioning the role of women and gender. Women were the main targets of ration policy for a reason; women were and in many cases still are in charge of providing family meals that are nutritious and appealing with every serving. The role of women on the Canadian home front is a central aspect of this project. Ruth Roach-Pierson, who has been a pioneer in the topic of women's role in wartime, has largely influenced the compliance aspect of my thesis. She admits in the introductory chapter to her book, *They're Still Women After All*, that (at the time she was writing) no one had produced any body of literature on this issue, especially not from a feminist perspective.<sup>15</sup> By bringing in this feminist lens, Pierson was able to investigate more deeply why women had the roles they did and what the war meant for them, as opposed to just providing a list of what they did. While much of her book is devoted to women's non-traditional labour and mass entrance into the workforce, she states that the largest contribution made by women to the war effort was through their unpaid labour in the home and through volunteer work.<sup>16</sup> The questions that Pierson raised influenced other scholarly work, including my own, and in a way, the first section of my thesis will be expanding upon her argument. In particular, her question about whether or not the war freed women from concepts of traditional womanhood can be seen in the second and third chapters of this thesis. Much of the work undertaken by women on the home front, particularly when it came to anything food related, was simply an extension of the household duties and skills women were already expected to excel at.

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Mosby, "Making and Breaking Canada's Food Rules: Science, the State, and the Government of Nutrition, 1942-1949," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, edited by Franca Iacovetta, Valerie Korinek, and Marlene Epp, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2012), 410.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Roach-Pierson, *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Roach-Pierson, 33.

Since Pierson's book, numerous scholars have chosen to focus on the impact of women's wartime labour, whether it be inside or outside of the home, and many have addressed the questions that Pierson originally introduced. Much like the work of Tye, independent scholar Mei-Ling Yang's article "Creating the Kitchen Patriot" illustrates how food preparation and even food itself can become gendered over time and through certain acts. Yang examines the influence that newspapers promoting certain wartime ideals (including rationing) had on women on the American home front during the Second World War. It also explores how these women managed to cook and provide for their families in spite of ration orders and food shortages, as well as their response to different media campaigns regarding wartime work in the home. In one section of the article, she laments that housewives were supposed to convert their families to eating more vegetables or "sissy foods" because male soldiers needed meat more than those on the home front.<sup>17</sup> Another example of a facet of war work becoming gendered can be seen in D'Ann Campbell's "Women in Combat" article. In this piece, Campbell analyzes and compares the wartime combat experiences of women in the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Campbell argues that it was the specific beliefs about gender differences and the role of women in America and the U.K. that kept female combatants from ever actually engaging in direct combat and "firing the guns," and in the case of Nazi Germany, only as a last resort.<sup>18</sup> This differed from the women in the Soviet Union, who were permitted to serve on the front line from the outset of war. Campbell concludes that while women's positions in many Western societies improved as a result

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<sup>17</sup> Mei-Ling Yang, "Creating the Kitchen Patriot: Media Promotion of Food Rationing and Nutrition Campaigns on the American Home Front during World War Two," *American Journalism* Vol. 22 No. 3, 2005, 55.

of World War Two, cultural gender norms continued to dictate and place limits on how much progress they could make. Campbell's work addresses Pierson's question regarding whether the war had freed women from society's traditional perceptions of them. In this case, she is arguing that it had not.

In addition to war jobs becoming gendered, some scholars such as Scott Holzer have argued in their work that space can be gendered as well. In a portion of his article, "The Modernization of Southern Foodways," he explains the shift in the Southern United States during the Second World War from shopping at the traditionally masculine space of the country general store to the establishment of large supermarkets where women were expected to shop.<sup>19</sup> Originally, the country store was a place to which women were not welcome, so the shift in expectations that women shop for their family's groceries was rather difficult. This claim appears to challenge what has been traditionally understood about the division of labour in the home; however, it provides the historical conversation about women's and gender history with a fascinating insight into different regions' gender norms. While the sources used in this thesis did not reveal any similarly dramatic regional difference in food culture, Holzer's essay, like Tye's, reminds us that such differences exist, and research methods such as oral history might reveal them in Halifax.

Another scholar who has had great influence on the writing of this thesis is Jeffrey Keshen. Keshen's main area of expertise is Canadian wartime identity and how emerging ideas about national identity, fostered by the federal state, affected the role of Canadians

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<sup>18</sup> D'Ann Campbell, "Women in Combat: The World War Two Experiences in the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union, *The Journal of Military History* Vol. 57 No. 2 (April 1993): 305.

<sup>19</sup>Scott Holzer, "The Modernization of Southern Foodways: Rural Immigration to the Urban South during World War Two," *Food and Foodways* Vol. 6 No. 2 (1996): 98.

in both their public and private lives. Keshen believes that not everyone shared the same viewpoint during the war and that people's beliefs varied widely. This point is reflected in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis where I illustrate the resistance to wartime rationing. In his book, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, and his article, "Black Marketing in Canada," Keshen reveals an alternative side of the Canadian citizen during the Second World War. He claims that not everyone was overcome with overwhelming patriotism and that many who at first were enthusiastic had begun to lose sight of this pride as the war dragged on. Keshen wants to show that there is an alternative to the traditional narrative of Canadian wartime identity by providing information on hoarding, the black market, and those who cheated the ration system. The fourth and final chapter of this thesis has been heavily influenced by these two publications. With my work on ration policy violations in Halifax, I am providing a case study of the "sinners" in this specific region. Although Keshen is more focused on questions of culture and group identity being shaped by the war as opposed to the specific role of women, his inquiries into the proper role of women and the proper role of the Canadian citizen resemble Pierson's. His discussion of women is limited to their role in the WPTB Consumer Branch and other aspects of voluntary work. Much like Pierson, Keshen's discussion of women during wartime is celebratory rather than critical, focusing on their accomplishments and their compliance with government policy. While he does not include any specific examples of women refusing to follow ration regulations by purchasing food on the black market, he does mention that during the war, polls showed that about 20% of Canadians "tolerated" the black market.<sup>20</sup> Keshen failing to mention that the majority of women did the shopping for and preparing of food for their families creates an inadvertent effect that

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<sup>220</sup>Jeffrey Keshen, "One for All or All

results from his assigning gender to the compliers but not to the resisters. The fourth chapter of this thesis aims to fill this gap in the scholarly literature with new understandings on what the role of women actually was on the side of resistance.

Food and the role of government feature in Keshen's survey of the Canadian home front, and Pierson's book encompasses the whole range of women's war time experiences, but neither combines, as Ian Mosby does, the intersection between women, food, culture, and the state. By exploring this intersection, Ian Mosby points to the significance of the change that food regulation represented in both women's experience and the role of the state. In *Food Will Win the War*, Mosby has given an excellent account of how the public sphere of the state intruded on the private sphere of the home through ration policy, and how this traditionally private realm was made public by the policies of the government. He argues that the war drastically changed the ways in which Canadians thought about and experienced food, and shows the role of the state in that change. Each meal served at home, he asserts, was governed by increasingly intrusive state policy.<sup>21</sup> His chapters evaluate several factors that shaped food's changing identity as a result of the war, including the new science of nutrition, rationing policy, women's work on the home front, how ordinary citizens survived without their usual kitchen staples, their contributions to wartime cookbooks, and how all of this was part of the larger plan for Canada to move towards becoming a welfare state. He claims that the introduction of wartime nutrition reform such as the Canadian Dietary Standard and the Canada Official Food Rules provided many Canadians with a compelling moral and

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<sup>21</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 5.

scientific justification for large-scale social and economic reforms.<sup>22</sup> While many Canadians found rationing to be a nuisance, government intervention into public health and diet were popular, arguably because they were based on scientific study and promised improved health and vitality. Mosby provides little evidence that there was any large-scale resistance to these new policies or shifts in the position of government. The final chapter of this thesis again seeks to shine light on this situation by providing examples of resistance through breaking the rules and complaining to the authorities about the “unfair” conditions of rationing.

Alvin Finkel, whose publications revolve around Canadian policy, is another scholar whose work has influenced the writing of this thesis. His book, *Social Policy and Practice*, was a useful starting point for an understanding of the changing role of the state during and after the war. A few of his claims stood out in relation to my work. Finkel states that social policy can either foster a range of choice for individuals and households in society or it can impose a restricted set of options for citizens.<sup>23</sup> For those who figured rationing to be a nuisance, having restrictions set in place by the WPTB was a negative aspect of social reform whether or not it was implemented to benefit the war effort. The rest of the country believed that limitations were essential, and when the war concluded, many were convinced that the government owed them a guaranteed decent income along with a number of reforms for the sacrifices made during the war. Although a large part of the population was wary of government intervention, they recognized the importance of social welfare policy. The toils of the Great Depression still weighed heavily on the minds of many citizens, and the possibility of it happening again outweighed any

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<sup>22</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War*, 175.

trepidation over government intervention. Another point made by Finkel is that there is a general understanding that state reform often occurred as a result of demands by the populace. While this may be true of the period after World War Two, during the war was a different situation. Most regulations passed during this time were implemented as a means of advancing the war effort and were not necessarily demanded by the public. In the case of rationing, public opinion was mixed, as some felt it was needed to ensure a fair share of food during an uncertain time while others argued that Canada could not possibly experience a food shortage and therefore rationing was not needed. Questions like these that are raised in *Social Policy and Practice* can be seen in both sections of this thesis. Fear of another Great Depression motivated women to comply with stricter governmental control of markets. At the same time, the doubt that anything negative could occur from bending the rules led many people to cheat ration rules and resist government control.

The discussion surrounding the position of Halifax during the Second World War is the last scholarly conversation that this thesis aims to contribute to. In *Halifax: The First 250 Years*, Halifax is described as a “conscripted city” because no other region in Canada gave so much of its land and resources over to the war effort.<sup>24</sup> The city’s strong military history and naval port positioned Halifax as a bastion of Canadian patriotism. According to some historians, Nova Scotia and the rest of the Maritime Provinces enlisted to fight the Axis in record numbers and their willingness to serve was motivated

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<sup>23</sup> Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press: 2006), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Fingard, Janet Guildford, and David Sutherland, *Halifax: The First 250 Years*, (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Ltd, 1999), 152.



largely by their traditional loyalties and patriotism.<sup>25</sup> The compliance feature of this thesis can be used as an example of Haligonian deference to wartime sacrifice. For many, a refusal to follow ration policy was regarded as selfish and unpatriotic during a time when selflessness and sacrifice were strongly encouraged. Other scholars such as William Naftel and Michael Boudreau have shown a more negative side of wartime Halifax. Naftel discusses the mass influx of people that the city experienced when the war commenced and how the region had little resources to cope. Despite the fact that Halifax had been slow to recover from the Depression, and despite its deplorable housing situation, the Canadian Government refused to offer the city any special treatment because the entire country was making sacrifices for the sake of the war.<sup>26</sup> While Boudreau's book, *City of Order*, is focused on crime and morality in Halifax before the war than on the war itself, Boudreau demonstrates that despite their reputation as loyal, law-abiding citizens, Haligonians, and in particular, Haligonian women, were fully capable of committing crimes.<sup>27</sup> The resistance side of this project also shows that crimes and issues with following the law were taking place at a time when following the rules was stressed as integral to victory.

By weaving together numerous scholarly pieces on food, gender, Canadian nationalism, the role of government, and Halifax, one can see the complex network through which they are connected. As discussed by Duncan and Levenstein, food is an intrinsic part of all cultures and it touches many aspects of daily life. The work of women in the home has long been dictated by meal preparation and the procurement of food.

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<sup>25</sup> E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muse, *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1993, 308.

<sup>26</sup> William D. Naftel, *Halifax at War: Searchlights, Squadrons, and Submarines 1939-1945*, (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 2008), 25.

During the Second World War, women made enormous gains in the public sphere, yet they were still bound by the housewife model that required them to provide those in their care with nutritious and exciting meals. Government policies regulating the consumption of food brought the private sphere into the public, and made women's work in the home an aspect of battle. By examining each of these aspects that came along with ration policy and by using the body of literature discussed above as a guide, this thesis will go on to demonstrate an understanding of the complex ways in which women both complied with and resisted government policy.

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY**

In order to understand the manner in which ration regulations were created, as well as the response of those targeted by this social reform, I have used a wide range of sources that include newspapers, magazines, government documents, police court records, and more. Newspapers provided me with a lot of information on the implementation of rationing. Newspapers also allow me to gain access to the opinions of the public on specific matters. Part of what newspapers provide is evidence of public information campaigns aimed at the public, but they also report, selectively, some kinds of public responses, whether in news stories or letters to the editor. *The Globe and Mail*, the only national newspaper used in this thesis, is one of the first sources I explored. I used digital search methods to identify any reference to rationing during the period 1942 to 1945. This search allowed me to see national reporting on changes in government control. As the likelihood of rationing became more and more apparent, the newspaper ran a number of articles on what the public thought would happen. *The Globe and Mail*

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Boudreau, *City of Order: Crime and Society in Halifax, 1918-1935*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012, 127.

was also useful for finding stories of violations that were occurring both around the country and overseas. In addition to *The Globe and Mail*, I also searched the microfilm reproductions of the local Halifax newspapers, looking for any references to rationing. I examined in detail the 1939-1945 issues of *The Halifax Evening Mail*, *The Halifax Daily Star*, *The Halifax Chronicle*, *The Halifax Herald*, and *The Halifax Citizen*

I was able to explore women's points of view in public opinion by means of two sources. One was the *Globe and Mail's* "Dear Homemaker" column. The "Dear Homemaker" column disseminated helpful tips on how to keep a proper home and take care of a family. During the war, this column contained valuable information about recipes containing alternative ingredients to rationed goods, information on how to send care packages to family in Europe, and questions from women writing in for advice. The page appears to have been a popular platform for the sharing of information among women on how to survive the war without their usual luxuries. The other source that was particularly information about women's perspectives was *Chatelaine Magazine*, a popular and widely distributed piece of "literature for women" during this time. Although there were no letters on rationing from *Chatelaine's* readers in this period, I was able to compare the advice in *Chatelaine* with the letters and advice in the Homemaker to see if a general picture of making do methods was visible. The purpose in using this magazine was mainly to note the differences in monthly recipes before and after food rationing took place. I also noted how advertisers used rationing themes to sell products. In addition, I was able to observe the increase in food-related articles and the number of recipes in each issue over the period of the war.

Crucial to the second chapter of this thesis are the records of several local voluntary associations, all of which are housed at the Nova Scotia Archives. The meeting minutes of the Halifax Local Council of Women provided insight into the types of activities that women's groups took part in during wartime. This was one of the first sources I examined for this chapter and I used the information obtained from the minutes as a comparison to the activities of other voluntary women's organizations. This permitted me to see the level of compliance that each group had with rationing as well as wartime social policy in general. It also revealed the type of war work that these groups found to be of greatest importance. The other organizations that I followed up with were the meeting minutes and annual reports of the Women's Canadian Club of Halifax, The Business and Professional Women of Halifax, and the records of the Welfare Council of Halifax-Dartmouth. These sources were used as a means of illustrating the level of participation of Halifax women in voluntary war-related service. While scholars such as Ian Mosby and Graham Broad have focused on the work of the Consumer Branch, I chose to analyze the work of groups local to Halifax. Though I do briefly discuss the Consumer Branch, my decision to give more attention to area organizations reinforces the local focus of my thesis.

Government documents were another core source for this thesis. The annual reports of the WPTB from throughout the war provide access to information on what was being rationed that year, who was currently sitting on the Board, and the methods of enforcement used by the Board to punish infractions. These reports make it possible to see the rationale behind much of the WPTB's decision making. The WPTB reports provided general information about the operations and inner-workings of the Board. In

addition to the reports of the WPTB, the meeting minutes and orders of the WPTB provided a detailed overview of the different orders set in place by the Board as well as correspondence between board members and between board associates and members of the community. The correspondence files permitted me to observe how people perceived the news that food rationing would be instated in ways that the newspapers did not. There were other correspondence files as well, including letters expressing complaints and describing monitoring activities. These help to illuminate the similarities and differences between the views expressed in public print and those aimed more privately at government. It is clear from these letters that Halifaxians and other Canadian citizens were unafraid to engage with policy makers. Finally, the WPTB archives also included yearly, national statistics on rationing infractions. These data were particularly significant in helping to build the fourth chapter of this thesis. From this basis I was able to build a case study on the level of resistance to rationing in Halifax.

Drawing on the information on Halifax infractions in the WPTB records, I followed up with the Halifax Police Court documents located at the Halifax City Archives. With these records, I was able to uncover the names and in some cases the addresses of these law-breakers. I then used the Halifax City Directory to find out more about the ration cheaters. First, I looked up the names of all those charged, and from this I was able to uncover their addresses and occupations, who else they lived with, and whether or not they were married. This afforded me the ability to paint a picture of each one of their lives. Second, I evaluated the neighbours of the accused and discovered their status and living situation as well. Doing so allowed me to get a sense of the socio-economic character of the neighbourhoods that these people lived in. After I had found

all the information I could about the accused, I searched through the local newspapers, to monitor any mentions of the Halifax Police Court and to see if the actions of the accused were reported on. Drawing on all this information, I was able to draw some inferences about why they resisted the law.

The city of Halifax was in a unique position at the outbreak of war. Not yet fully recovered from the Great Depression, the Halifax Explosion, and the effects of the First World War, the city was immediately on active duty because of its position on the Atlantic Coast and its history with the military. Nova Scotians joined the armed forces in the thousands, and public authorities stressed compliance, patriotism, and observance when it came to regulations that would benefit the war effort. Women in Halifax, as in Canada, generally joined the war effort in a new way as rationing slowly began to be implemented in 1942. Torn between loyalty to their country and providing those in their care with adequate meals, women in general and housewives in particular had to choose the role they wanted to have. Would they volunteer their time and effort with a local organization? Would they attempt to stretch their weekly butter allowance by using an alternative to the product? Or would they cheat ration policy and defy government intervention to better serve the immediate needs of themselves and their families? As most women chose conformity, the concept of the dutiful housewife and self-sacrificing mother would persist into the following decade. Women were faced with diverse choices during the Second World War; however, since most women fulfilled their patriotic duty by joining voluntary organizations and following the rules at home, the image of the World War Two woman as a proud, selfless, Canadian citizen persists.

## CHAPTER TWO AN ARMY AT HOME: THE MOBILIZATION OF CANADA'S WOMEN THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

During the Second World War, it was assumed that every Canadian would have a specific role to fulfill to aid their country's war effort and maintain stability on the home front. While it is true that World War Two greatly expanded opportunities for women to participate in paid labour and work outside the home, many of their contributions to the war effort were viewed as supportive to the efforts of men and the state. The notion of women as caretakers meant that their role on the home front was largely an extension of their household duties. Even those who were taking over the jobs of men in factories were viewed as temporary help who would happily give up their employment once the soldiers returned home. Historian Kathleen Canning observes that, in the twentieth century, "war came to be understood as 'an activity that ritually marked the gender of all members of a society' as nation states called upon both men and women for distinct but mutually dependent tasks in the conduct of war."<sup>28</sup> One way of acting out of the distinct feminine role as supporters of men's efforts was to participate in the war work of women's volunteer organizations. The federal government's national campaigns aimed at women's domestic labour described some kinds of work and hid others. The Halifax organizations did not always follow the national projects, even though they keenly supported the war effort. However, organized women helped spread the word about the national fat and bone scrap salvage campaign, which instructed women to turn their kitchens into an arsenal of war while still maintaining their role as homemaker.

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<sup>28</sup> Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspective on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 45.

By persuading women into these secondary roles, the wartime government ensured that a large part of Canada's female population maintained perceived notions of proper womanhood and citizenship. In this chapter, I describe the contours of Halifax women's compliance with government policy through the work in national and local Halifax volunteer associations as well as at home with the fat and bone scrap salvage campaign. With the leadership of the city's activist middle-class white women, these activities reinforced the notion that women could and should contribute to the war as unpaid supporters of the nation's war. For the most part, these campaigns around food meant obscuring women's other contributions as workers and professionals. Instead, they asserted the citizen value of domestic labour in the public project of war.

## **2.1 GOVERNMENT AND PERSUASION**

Propaganda posters were a popular method of disseminating important messages to the public during World War Two. While these messages were often exaggerated for the sake of the war, there is no doubt that they spread vital information to the masses regarding rationing, wartime jobs, and victory bonds. Much in the same way that messages about rationing and the preparation of family meals were targeted towards women. Within the collection of Second World War posters at the Canadian War Museum digital archive, more than half of the posters related to food feature women. One such image features a woman in overalls carrying a large basket of vegetables from her victory garden while sporting a military style hat.<sup>29</sup> This portrait conveys the message that one can have a real war job at home without having to enlist in the army. Another popular image portrays three individuals, two men and one woman, with the headline



“ATTACK ON ALL FRONTS.”<sup>30</sup> In the picture, the two men are dressed for combat and holding weapons while the woman is again wearing overalls and brandishing a gardening hoe. The creators of this poster decided that the most appropriate combat image of a woman is one that reflects domestic home front work. The portrait could have been made more accurate by including a second woman in military garb as a way to show the diverse nature of women’s wartime participation. The choice to include a woman on this poster, in gardening clothes only, implies that women’s most important job during the war was growing victory gardens.

A number of propaganda posters were also used to distribute information on canning, a popular home front job in which women canned and preserved a variety of fruits and vegetables in order to cut down on the cost of buying pre-tinned food products. Two portraits in particular showed a woman busying herself with the task of preserving food. In one image, a woman with an armload of canned goods claims that she is “proud to be fighting famine by canning food at home.”<sup>31</sup> This likely refers to Canada’s effort to ship massive amounts of food to Great Britain in order to combat food shortages there. In a second poster, a woman and her daughter are canning food together, while a shelf of dozens of already preserved goods sits behind them.<sup>32</sup> The abundance of canned goods combined with the happy faces of the women in these posters subtly sends the message

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<sup>29</sup> “War Gardens for Victory,” Artifact # 19790385-044. Food Production Poster, Poster Collection, Canadian Wartime Propaganda, Canadian War Museum.

[http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection_e.shtml)

<sup>30</sup> “Attack on all Fronts,” Artifact # 19730004-030. Production Poster, Post Collection, Canadian Wartime Propaganda, Canadian War Museum.

[http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection_e.shtml)

<sup>31</sup> “Am I Proud!” Food Production Poster, Poster Collection, Canadian Wartime Propaganda, Canadian War Museum. [http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection_e.shtml)

<sup>32</sup> “Grown your Own, Can your Own.” Artifact # 19700186-078. Food Production Poster, Poster Collection, Canadian Wartime Propaganda, Canadian War Museum.

[http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/propaganda/collection_e.shtml)

that canning is easy and satisfying. While the women engaged in tending victory gardens and canning food were not serving in the military or undertaking any work for pay, they were still deemed to be important because they were making key decisions about food and nutrition during a time of conflict. By growing their own food and preserving it, women helped enable more food to go from farms and markets to aid the allies. The work of women on the home front was not only viewed by the public as useful but also attributable to women's domestic skills; helping by doing more of the duties than they would normally undertake.

Propaganda posters depicting women on the home front tirelessly working in their kitchens were not the only types of images used to represent women in their wartime roles. There were of course dozens of pictures portraying women both in the armed forces as army nurses and participating in factory work. In many cases, however, most of these images would draw on stereotypes of women only undertaking these "masculine jobs" if they could still look pretty while doing so. While women in the thousands both in Canada and the United States flocked to factories and the armed forces in order to serve their nations, the message that women were still aiding the war in a supportive role pervades all of the propaganda posters.<sup>33</sup> Women would have been bombarded with these images every day, in newspapers, in magazines, and in public spaces. These images must have prompted women to think about the role they wanted to fill in the war. Although there was more than one choice open to them, making extra efforts to produce and preserve food was a strongly supported option. Propaganda posters were not always entirely persuasive; however, government agencies would use them for the duration of

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth Roach-Pierson, *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 35.

the war to make their messages heard. The activities of women's organizations indicate some of the ways in which those messages were heard and sometimes locally transformed.

## **2.2 WOMEN RESPOND: NATIONAL AND LOCAL VOLUNTEERISM**

As a result of wartime patriotism and government persuasion, thousands of women across the country donated their time to both national and local women's organizations that were dedicated to aiding the war effort in any way they could. Perhaps the largest of these nation-wide associations was the Consumer Branch. The Consumer Branch was created as a division of the WPTB on 18 December, 1941, and approximately 16,000 women volunteered as part of the organization during the course of the war.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of this association of women was to aid the WPTB by reporting price increases that violated the price freeze, the sale of low-quality goods at unreduced prices, and other infractions such as hoarding and black market activity. From its outset, the Consumer Branch aimed to differentiate itself from other government agencies. One of the means of doing so was placing a woman, *Chatelaine Magazine* editor Byrne Hope Sanders, in charge of the branch.<sup>35</sup> Having a woman in charge of the organization may have made it easier for other women to trust the Consumer Branch as a real women's group. The Consumer Branch had stations all over Canada where women could report to if they uncovered anything suspect in their daily or weekly shopping routines. In 1942, the branch introduced "blue books," a personal purchase book that was small enough to be hidden inside a handbag.<sup>36</sup> Branch members were to use these books to record the size,

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<sup>34</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 72.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 70.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

price, and other information about frequently purchased items so that they could develop their own figures for each store's maximum ceiling prices. The Women's Regional Advisory Committee (WRAC) was another voluntary patrol unit of similar purpose. Each major city or region had a local WRAC administration that similarly on price ceiling infractions and the black market. According to Ian Mosby, some social commentators worried that all of this policing would turn women into "price cops" whose lives would revolve around hunting for these small details. Others believed that it was a handy resource for women to draw upon, as well as a reminder that average women had been asked to do an important job for their country.<sup>37</sup> This belief helped to justify the very public roles women were starting to take for the war effort.

As highlighted by historian Frances Gregor in her work on voluntary nursing auxiliaries, Halifax was a city of volunteers.<sup>38</sup> Haligonian women attempted to ease the burdens of men and women passing through the city on their way to and from the war in Europe by volunteering in local and national organizations. They would have seen the propaganda posters, with their emphasis on food, but food canning and gardening figured very little in their work. They were deeply engaged in war work, but Halifax's women's groups let the Consumer's Branch and the WRAC take the lead on the rationing question. In Halifax, local priorities shaped the supportive services roles of women's organizations.

Among the Halifax groups, the one that showed the most interest in food questions was the Halifax Local Council of Women (LCW). The Halifax LCW predates

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Frances Gregor, "The Women of the St. John Ambulance Brigade: Volunteer Nursing Auxiliaries in Wartime and Post-war Halifax," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* Vol. 8 (2005): 17.

the First World War, and was entirely run by women.<sup>39</sup> During World War Two, the LCW made the war effort its primary concern. Prior to the war, the LCW worked to aid the community by fundraising for local charities, as well as attempted to advance the position of women in society. In addition to implementing projects around the city for unemployed women, the Halifax LCW also founded an employment bureau for women and agitated for working women's rights.<sup>40</sup> While much of their work before 1939 was rather progressive and feminist, the breakout of war pushed the association towards a more supportive position. During the war, the LCW was mainly focused on aid on the home front. The club usually had two meetings a month: a monthly business meeting and a meeting of the executive committee. The topics discussed at their meetings included education, recreation, public health, immigration and citizenship, and current projects. In this example, acceptance of the shifting role of government can be seen in the LCW's decision to petition the government to create change in their city. While many at this time may still have been skeptical of the usefulness of the government, it appears the Halifax LCW understood and took advantage of the benefits of state assistance.

It is obvious by the meeting minutes and various reports of the Halifax LCW that nutrition and health were among many of the issues taken on by the group. Upon reviewing the meeting minutes for every month during the war it appears that public health was among the most frequent topics at their monthly meetings. Their discussions of health usually had something to do with rationing and diet. For example, in February 1942, John Fisher of the WPTB came to the organization to give a lecture on the actions

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<sup>39</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, Halifax Local Council of Women, "Officers of Halifax Local Council of Women," 1949.

<sup>40</sup> Emily J. Heard, "Gendered Notions of Citizenship and Service in Interwar Halifax," (Master's Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2001), 43.

of the WPTB and particularly on how women on the home front can fight inflation through their shopping.<sup>41</sup> The minutes describe his talk as “interesting and timely.” In an earlier meeting, the LCW had hosted another visitor, Miss Binney. In the report, Miss Binney is described as giving a talk on the importance of nutrition and proper eating, as well as the usefulness of certain foods for “building up the body.”<sup>42</sup> It is clear by this statement that this nutrition talk was following the rhetoric of “eat right, feel right;” the building up of the body through the ingestion of certain nutrients was a direct goal of the Food Rules, which would be published later in 1942.

It seems likely that the LCW were planning on disseminating what they had learned to other women’s groups and members of the public. Pressed between the pages of the LCW’s meeting minutes is an extensive pamphlet, published by the CBC, on the different aspects of home front work related to food and nutrition. This “Vitamin Gardening for Victory” pamphlet contains information on how to start a victory garden, canning, how to prevent waste in the kitchen, the Official Food Rules, recipes, and even a quiz at the back of the pamphlet so that one could test one’s knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Based on what I have observed in their meeting minutes regarding the dispersal of information on health and diet, the Halifax LCW seem to have played a role in distributing this pamphlet throughout the community. It could also have just been used amongst the organization’s members for their own benefit.

In addition to a concern with health and nutrition, the LCW often had discussions on how to better the community and make the lives of the armed forces that much more

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<sup>41</sup> Microfilm Reel # 9597, NSA, Halifax Local Council of Women, “Monthly Business Meeting,” 19 February, 1942.

<sup>42</sup> Microfilm Reel # 9597, NSA, Halifax Local Council of Women, “Executive Meeting,” May 29 – June 3, 1939.

enjoyable in Halifax. Indeed, this work took up more of the groups' time and effort than did food questions, though feeding the service people was part of the caregiving work of this group. During one particular executive member meeting, under the point of education, Mrs. Stewart, an active member of the Halifax LCW and the first woman to sit on the Halifax School Board, presented a report to propose efforts to collect editions of local newspapers and magazines to give to soldiers.<sup>44</sup> The meeting minutes do not mention whether these soldiers discussed by Mrs. Stewart are overseas or visiting Halifax; however, what remains clear is the desire to provide some manner of education on local and national events to those who might not be aware otherwise. Similarly, during another meeting, it is discussed that "the Halifax Local Council of Women is deeply concerned over the lack of social and recreational facilities for the women members of the forces."<sup>45</sup> By the end of the report, the committee decides to ask the National Council of Women of Canada to request the government to "take immediate action" to provide a hostel in Halifax for female service members. Much like the request from a year earlier to acquire magazines and other reading material for soldiers, the committee feels that it is important for female soldiers to have a fun and comfortable place to stay while in the city. The same preoccupation with the military can be seen in the reports of other voluntary women's organizations in the area.

Unwavering support to the service men and women of Canada was an important part of the work undertaken on the home front by women's local voluntary organizations. Another association that was active in the area was the Business and Professional Women

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<sup>43</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. "Vitamin Gardening for Victory." Toronto: unknown date, circa 1942 (interleaved in the minutes of Halifax Local Council of Women Fonds)

<sup>44</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, Halifax Local Council of Women, "Executive Meeting Halifax Local Council of Women," 21 December, 1939.

of Halifax (BPW). The club came into being in September of 1936 as a means of advancing the agenda of business and professional women and bringing several women's rights issues to the forefront.<sup>46</sup> The group also spent a lot of its time making worthwhile contributions to community projects. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the BPW of Halifax turned their attention to home front service. The group was the first women's organization in the city to have its members organized by the special services they could perform, and this list was forwarded to the government.<sup>47</sup> The BPW clearly believed it was populated with strong and intelligent women who could be very useful in case of a war-related emergency. It also suggests that the BPW felt it was their responsibility, not only to comply with whatever the government needed from them during the war, but also to encourage a certain level of intervention. The BPW of Halifax also participated in various community service projects that aided the war effort at home and abroad. The club offered its services one night a week at the local canteen as well as at the Hostel on Barrington Street. Women at the canteen worked in the kitchen making food and serving others. After the hostel closed in 1946, the women moved to canteen service at the Canadian Legion.<sup>48</sup> Women of the BPW also knit for the Canadian Red Cross, and they even organized the "Bundles for Britain Campaign" where the organization donated clothing and other goods to Great Britain.

It is a common theme in many of these women's organizations to assume the role of caregiver. Serving food to visiting soldiers or providing entertainment to members of the forces, the BPW adopted a supportive and somewhat maternal role in their wartime

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<sup>45</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, Halifax Local Council of Women, "Sheet No. 3," 19 November, 1942.

<sup>46</sup> MG20 Vol. 1817, NSA, "A History of the Business and Professional Women File Number 7: Introduction," 1976.



work. This is true of many women's groups at this time, as the government was constantly reminding Canadian women to do their duty (as women and caregivers) to support those fighting the war. In addition to their canteen service and knitting, the BPW also took part in the collection of magazines and newspapers, the putting together of "ditty bags,"<sup>49</sup> and the buying of victory bonds. The Halifax LCW also took part in many of these same activities, showing that many women's organizations were following the same direction during the war.

While the BPW of Halifax may have taken a supportive position when it came to their home front service, they had anything but a secondary role when it came to women's rights issues. The BPW was an incredibly feminist organization that undertook much of the same work that other women's voluntary organizations did leading up to the Second World War. Working towards improvement in the status and lives of women generally, many of the club's particular goals included creating better conditions for working women, equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities for women in the labour field, and equal access to jury duty for women.<sup>50</sup> Some of these issues are still being fought for today, particularly equal pay for equal work. One of the most feminist projects undertaken by the organization was their contribution to the Vocational Guidance Programme in the Halifax school system. The project began in 1944 with committee

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<sup>47</sup> MG20 Vol. 1817, NSA, "A History of the Business and Professional Women File Number 7: Section Two, The First Decade, 1936-1946," 1976.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ditty bags are small, canvas bags used to carry around personal items, toiletries, etc. A number of the reports published by voluntary women's organizations discussed the "putting together" of ditty bags for soldiers. This would likely have been similar to sending care packages overseas.

<sup>50</sup> MG20 Vol. 1817, NSA, "A History of the Business and Professional Women File Number 7: Foreword," 1976.

members gathering data concerning the career interests of young women and girls.<sup>51</sup> The committee was later able to submit completely edited subject matter of the new section in the second edition of “Choosing a Career,” which was published under the authority of the Board of School Commissioners of the City of Halifax. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were expected only to choose a career as a temporary placeholder until they met their husbands. New ideas surrounding women’s rights to have both a career and family began to surface as a result of the early women’s movement and the work of women’s associations such as the BPW. An instructional manual on how to pick a profession that was actually interesting and stimulating may not have been a burgeoning idea; however, with the strong backlash against anything that challenged the housewife ideal during the 1950s, a manual such as this would have been rather important for young girls. The organization made it a priority to inspire young women to be something more than just a home maker, as well as to improve the environment for women who chose a different path.

Another one of the BPW’s major contributions had to do with making the city of Halifax a better place, especially when it came to its living conditions. Housing in Halifax and other Maritime cities was often deplorable and in short supply, even prior to the outbreak of war. The 1941 census reported that Halifax had an average of 4.9 persons per room, and in some cases up to 10 people shared one room.<sup>52</sup> Many houses and apartment buildings were in desperate need of repair, and plenty of these residences had leaking roofs, sagging floors, faulty windows, and rotting woodwork, with poor heating

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<sup>51</sup> MG20 Vol. 1817, NSA, “A History of the Business and Professional Women File Number 7: Section Two, The First Decade, 1936-1946,” 1976.

<sup>52</sup> E.A. Forbes and D.A. Muise, *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1993), 316.

and ventilation. According to a pre-war survey, 192 buildings housing approximately 370 families were deemed beyond repair and unfit for habitation.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the housing crisis, recreational facilities were also lacking in the city despite efforts made by churches and a number of other voluntary groups such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army. As part of their agenda, the BPW made several suggestions to the City Civic Planning Commission's set of recommendations to better the city of Halifax, and many of their suggestions were included in the report. Some of the recommendations included the clearance of slums and the erection of housing for low income groups, the creation of specialized housing for struggling women that would include meal and laundry service, the construction of community centres and recreational services such as gymnasiums, swimming pools, and adult education centres, and lastly, efforts to preserve the "beauty of the city" by educating children to respect public property.<sup>54</sup> The Halifax BPW cared a lot about their city and its residents, and some of their recommendations for the city would eventually be carried out. It does not appear that the BPW made rationing and nutrition a main focal point of their wartime work; their projects were driven far more Halifax's other issues.

The last two voluntary groups that will be discussed in this chapter had a smaller impact on the city of Halifax but were still important when it came to their work on the home front. The Welfare Council of Halifax and Dartmouth was another organization that was concerned with the housing situation in the area. While this Council had both men and women among its members, women predominated. The women of the Welfare Council made wartime housing, child welfare, and public health their top priorities. The

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Council drafted a report on the housing crisis in 1941 and its recommendations were then sent to the Mayor of Halifax along with a statement urging him to make “strong and energetic representations” to the Federal Government, asking them to reconsider their decision not to make available governmental assistance to associations interested in providing housing for low income groups.<sup>55</sup> Previous attempts had been made by the city to petition the government for the allowance of funds to rectify the housing situation in Halifax; however, the most common response to this was that all regions of the country were suffering during the war and Halifax would not receive any “special treatment.” Halifax was not the only Maritime city experiencing a housing crisis; Sydney, Nova Scotia and St. John, New Brunswick were also dealing with similar problems. The women of the Welfare Council would have to keep fighting to make fixing the housing crisis in Halifax a priority for the federal government.

While the shifting role of the state during the war allowed for government officials to have more of a say in addressing issues of social welfare, appearing to favour one situation over another was not in their best interest. The notion of equality and fairness was pervasive during the war, and because everyone had to make sacrifices for the sake of the war, the housing situation in Halifax would not yet get the attention it needed. In a 1942 meeting between the Welfare Council and its War Service Housing Committee, it was suggested that the approximately 1500 children living in unsuitable conditions be removed from their homes; however, it was then decided that the city could

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<sup>54</sup> MG20 Vol. 1817, NSA, “A History of the Business and Professional Women File Number 7: Section Two, The First Decade, 1936-1946,” 1976.

<sup>55</sup> MG 20 Vol. 410, NSA, “The Welfare Council of Halifax-Dartmouth Wartime Housing Report,” 1941.

not afford to do this.<sup>56</sup> During the same year, a delegation was sent to Ottawa by the city of Halifax to plead. Later, Federal Wartime Housing agreed to erect 400 houses on land provided by the city. The Welfare Council of Halifax-Dartmouth made housing and the living conditions of Haligonians their top concern during the war. Much like the BPW, other local concerns were higher on the Welfare Council's agenda than food and nutrition. The housing situation in Halifax took priority when it came to issues facing the city, as opposed to serving and entertaining the troops.

The Women's Canadian Club (WCC) of Halifax was a group active prior to the Second World War, connecting Halifax with an elite nationalist network across the country. During the war, the Halifax WCC focused on educating its female members in a number of skills that were useful on the home front. Following the same pattern as many other voluntary groups at the time, the WCC donated their time to improving the lives of soldiers and service women staying in Halifax, as well as for those fighting the axis overseas. One of the projects undertaken by the WCC was labeled the "motor driving committee." This committee co-operated with the association's entertainment committee to transport soldiers and sailors to and from places of entertainment in the city such as hostels and canteens. Twenty-four members completed a special course in car mechanics to qualify for these positions. In addition, several women volunteered for ambulance driving if needed.<sup>57</sup> Having women who were knowledgeable in mechanics and driving was not only important for driving soldiers around Halifax, but also for the women themselves, who took the war as an opportunity to educate themselves in new ways. In

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<sup>56</sup> MG20 Vol 410, NSA, "The Welfare Council of Halifax-Dartmouth War Service Committee Housing Committee Meeting," 2 February, 1942.

<sup>57</sup> MG20 Vol. 355, NSA, "The Women's Canadian Club of Halifax Minutes and Annual Reports, 1939-1951," Executive Meeting, 9 January, 1940.

addition to the motor driving and entertainment committees, the members of the WCC took part in several other tasks that benefitted the war effort. They also knit clothing for the Red Cross, taught French classes, organized a concert committee that set up entertainment for troops, organized a magazine and recipe collection group, and instructed first aid.<sup>58</sup> All of these smaller committees were overseen by a larger war service body that made sure all of its members were committed to educating themselves on matters that were crucial to the war effort.

Unlike other women's groups that have been highlighted in this chapter, the WCC of Halifax required paid membership for some of its executive members.<sup>59</sup> The dues structure of the WCC reflects what is likely the elite status of the club. This highlights a type of class privilege amongst certain women's voluntary groups. Having paid membership is perhaps why the WCC could afford to have so many instructional classes and luncheons for its members. Whether membership was paid for or free, the women's voluntary organizations in the city gave their time and effort to advancing the war effort at home and abroad. Many volunteered their time by choice, while some may have felt the pressure from the government and its numerous propaganda campaigns to "do your duty." Like the previous two voluntary groups, the WCC of Halifax prioritized the war effort in different ways than the LCW. The WCC made entertaining the troops as well as the education of its own members their focus. Nutrition and issues surrounding rationing and thrift do not surface in their records. Each of these groups partially complied with the government's attempts to persuade women into caregiver roles. All of these the groups

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<sup>58</sup> MG20 Vol. 355, NSA, "The Women's Canadian Club of Halifax Minutes and Annual Reports, 1939-1951," General Meeting, 26 February 1940.

<sup>59</sup> MG20 Vol. 355, NSA, "The Women's Canadian Club of Halifax Minutes and Annual Reports, 1939-1951," Executive Meeting, 11 April, 1939.

assisted the war effort in some way; however, as organizations, they set their own agendas, and, mostly, food did not come first.

### **2.3 THE NATIONAL FAT AND BONE SCRAP SALVAGE CAMPAIGN**

Volunteering one's time with local societies was not the only way women were encouraged to help out. During the war, a national fat and bone scrap salvage campaign was implemented by the government in order to recycle food waste to be repurposed for the war. As discussed earlier in this chapter, when the war initially broke out, housewives were encouraged to spend; however, once rationing became introduced and shortages of food items and other products began to occur, this trend shifted to one of thrift. Women and homemakers were urged to be thrifty when it came to their shopping and the use of food and other goods in the home. A full-page article published in *The Halifax Evening Mail* right before the butter ration began contained a number of "helpful hints and tips" for housewives to cut back on everything from food waste to electricity usage.<sup>60</sup> Food waste was a major concern during the war, and when it came to the fat and butter ration, saving fats to be repurposed was framed as exceptionally important. The Department of National War Services regularly reminded Canadians that fats and bones were essential to munitions production. Fat was used to make glycerine for bombs and bones provided essential materials for industrial glues.<sup>61</sup> Ads produced to remind Canadians of this importance were almost always directed at women because women were presumed to be in charge of preparing meals at home. One such ad in *The Halifax Daily Star* titled "Canada needs Fats and Bones for Explosives, Here is a Day to Day War Job for You!" provides step-by-step instructions on what to do with your leftover fat:

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<sup>60</sup> "Wartime Tactics for House: These Useful Tips will Help you to Effect Savings," *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 11 December, 1942.

You can take your fat drippings, scrap fat and bones to your local meat dealer. He will pay you the established price for the dripping and the scrap fat. If you wish you can turn this money over to your local Voluntary Salvage Committee or registered Local War Charity or... You can donate your fat dripping, scrap fat and bones to your local Voluntary Salvage Committee if they collect them in your community or... You can continue to place out your fats and bones for collection by your Street Cleaning Department where such a system is in effect.<sup>62</sup>

The advertisement features images of a woman in an apron pouring her scrap grease into some kind of container. This was a program that involved private work, at home, for a public purpose.

The National Salvage Campaign was sold to the Canadian public as another integral war job. It was important for each Canadian on the home front to feel as though they were contributing in some way to the war effort. The average homemaker or citizen being able to donate kitchen scraps was made to feel like they were truly making a difference, and this in turn was crucial to boosting morale. Government ads often appeared in Halifax newspapers informing women on the importance of recycling fat. One such ad demonstrated how kitchen grease could be used for war purposes if properly saved. A visual illustration of this in *The Halifax Evening Mail* shows how leftover grease goes from the “frying pan to the firing line” by providing illustrated instructions on how fat is recycled into glycerine.<sup>63</sup> The images begin with a woman in her kitchen pouring grease from her frying pan into a small container and the series ends with the picture of a large missile. Underneath each image are step-by-step instructions similar to ones used in *The Halifax Daily Star*.

Other ads on the same subject took a more propagandistic style of approach to getting women to comply with this campaign. In another edition of *The Halifax Evening*

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<sup>61</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> “Canada Needs Fats and Bones,” Department of National War Services National Salvage Committee, *The Halifax Daily Star*, 16 January, 1943.



*Mail*, one ad depicts a frying pan tipping over and pouring grease onto members of the Axis. As the grease pours, it slowly transitions into bombs and the caption reads, “The next time you are frying or roasting something, just imagine the satisfaction it would give you to pour that hot fat right down the back of Adolph, Tojo, or Benito... Every spoonful of dripping, every ounce of scrap fat, and every bone, cooked, uncooked or dry, must be saved.”<sup>64</sup> Perhaps seeing such a graphic visual was more persuasive than text alone. In November 1942, WPTB Food Administrator J.G. Taggart denied rumours that a butter shortage was imminent and that if there was, it was likely the result of local hoarding.<sup>65</sup> The potential for a shortage of any product that people had grown accustomed to having as part of their daily lives was the reality of life on the home front. Many newspapers downplayed possible shortages so as not to incite panic-buying, and many reported that rationing had greatly reduced these incidents.<sup>66</sup> These advertisements and articles were the government’s way of enlisting women to save every ounce of leftover grease they could.

Voluntary groups helped coordinate that fat salvaging campaign. When the campaign was in full swing, a number of communities, including Halifax, had voluntary organizations collecting people’s food waste and transporting it to munitions plants. The Halifax LCW had a salvage committee as early as May 1941. At that point, some community members had become frustrated that the LCW was not out collecting fat. But, as the entry in the May minutes explained, the LCW committee did not do the collecting;

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<sup>63</sup> “Kitchen Grease—Out of Frying Pan into Firing Line,” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 14 December 1942.

<sup>64</sup> “Save Fats and Bones and Help Smash the Axis!” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 9 January 1943.

<sup>65</sup> Graham Broad, *Canadian Consumer Culture on the Canadian Homefront, 1939-1945*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 36.

<sup>66</sup> “Fair Division Promised: Panic Buying of Butter is Halted by Rationing,” *The Globe and Mail*, 22 December 1942.

rather, it provided the city with information on where to pick up excess fat scraps.<sup>67</sup>

Later, in February 1943, a visitor from the National Salvage Committee discussed with the Council members the importance of saving fats and bones.<sup>68</sup>

While the push to get Canadians to recycle their scrap fat and bones could be seen in dozens of newspapers and different forms of propaganda across the country, the success of the actual campaign (in terms of fat repurposing) is debatable. By 1944, 1,863 voluntary salvage committees were operating across the country, and between May 1941 (when the salvage campaign began) and October 1943, Canadians collected nearly 430 million pounds of salvage materials.<sup>69</sup> This may sound like a lot; however, Ian Mosby has stated that this amount is actually quite small in comparison to the rest of Canada's contributions to the war effort. The limited success of the campaign was spotlighted in a letter written by A.F.W. Plumtre, assistant to Donald Gordon, to H.E. Barnes in 1947. Barnes was concerned after hearing a statement on the radio about a shortage of fats used to make soap products. Barnes then patriotically wrote in to the Chairman urging that something needed to be done to salvage fats and suggested a reinstatement of the National Salvage Campaign. Plumtre responded, stating that this campaign really only works in major cities because of the "scattered nature of the Canadian population," and therefore could not be implemented nation-wide again. He goes on to say that fat renderers make a business out of fat collection by collecting it from butcher shops, restaurants, hotels, and institutions serving meals. Plumtre continues,

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<sup>67</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, "Halifax Local Council of Women Minutes of Monthly Business," 15 May, 1941.

<sup>68</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, "Halifax Local Council of Women Executive Meeting," 18 February, 1943.

<sup>69</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War*, 110.

The amounts of fat which are available for salvage from these sources make such collections worthwhile. Some 20,000,000 pounds of fats are produced a year by these renderers. Collections from households however, are very small, and through a 3 year period during the war when a household fat-salvage campaign was in effect, maximum returns represented slightly less than %7 of this amount in spite of an expensive publicity campaign and collection organization. Since 1943, animal carcasses are defatted by the packers before the meat is distributed for sale to consumers. Approximately 25,000,000 pounds a year of edible fat is saved this way. This means that less fat is available from meats consumed at home with the result that less is surplus for collection.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps because the war was over, Mr. Plumptre held nothing back in his response to Mr. Barnes. The campaign had been a great method of boosting the country's morale but the tangible results had not been all that useful, at least in the homes of Canadians. Since 1943 most of the fat had been collected industrially, on order of the WPTB. The "defatting" of animal carcasses was set forth in an order made by the WPTB. All fats adhering to the body of animal and all internal fats surrounding organs were to be removed prior to the wholesale of the meat, and the excess fat was then shipped to renderers to be recycled into glycerine.<sup>71</sup> This order reinforces Mr. Plumptre's statement on the likely success of reinstating the National Salvage Campaign. It is undeniable that the women who participated in this campaign were making some sort of contribution to the war effort, even if it was small. Advertisements convincing homemakers that recycling fat and bones was a "real war job" shed light on women's daily labour.

## 2.4. CONCLUSION

When the Second World War broke out, the national government called upon the nation's female citizens to put their labour into the service of the war, and they did.

Whether their labour was represented in public as departing from the housewife ideal or

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<sup>70</sup> RG64 Series 1030 Box. No. 515 File No. 13-21 Vol. 00 "Salvage Fats and Bones," LAC, Mr. A.F.W. Plumptre to Mr. H.E. Barnes, 17 April, 1947.

<sup>71</sup> RG64 Series 1020 Box No.114 File Number 406 Vol. 00 "WPTB Minutes and Orders No. 214-294," LAC, Wartime Prices and Trade Board Order No. 252 *Respecting Beef*, 1943.

as reinforcing gendered notions of women's proper work, many Canadian women expressed their patriotism by assisting with the war effort in any way they could. Their contributions were varied, but it was their work inside the home and their compliance with government policy that was most widely recognized in public forums. Like Ruth Roach Pierson, I conclude that the dominant contribution Halifax women made to the war effort was through their unpaid labour and voluntary work. The enormous changes that Canadian and American women made through their paid work in the public sphere sometimes dwarfs the accomplishments made in the home by women who were just as patriotic and hard-working as any other.<sup>72</sup> But, as this chapter has shown, the public uses of domestic labour were a major focus of government propaganda campaigns. Halifax women's organizations responded enthusiastically to the war effort, and the LCW became involved with several food related campaigns. Other women's groups in Halifax engaged in other, more local kinds of caregiving, supporting the service men and women struggling to get help from government with the city's housing problem.

Pierson's book celebrates the victories that women won at home while still pointing out that these accomplishments did not lead to a full breakdown of the barriers that separated men and women. Women's voluntary work was viewed differently than women joining the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) or taking up jobs in war plants. The voluntary work of women during the war was seen to be non-threatening because it was essentially an extension of the traditional work that women already took part in. The roles women were taking in local societies were supportive to the efforts of the war and the state and were often in the form of giving care. The knitting of clothing, the shipping of ditty bags or care packages, the serving of meals, and the entertaining of

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<sup>72</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, 24.

troops are all traditional aspects of “women’s work.” The efforts that women in voluntary clubs such as the BPW and the WCC made to educate themselves and learn certain skills such as how to drive or discuss the ins and outs of democracy could be seen as diverging from the housewife ideal. However, one can certainly argue that if Canada had not been war then most of these women would not have had the opportunity to learn these skills.

This study also confirms some of the conclusions of Ian Mosby’s work in *Food Will Win the War*. Mosby explores the endless ways that women contributed to the war effort through their traditional labour. He also discusses what he calls the “politicization of the dinner table.” The profound impact of the wartime economy was brought home on a daily basis in the kitchen and at the dinner table, and it was mainly women, who did most of the buying and preparing of food, whose daily routines were most drastically altered.<sup>73</sup> Mosby also points out that wartime rationing was part of the trend of the expanding role of the state, as well as the changing relationship between citizen and the state.<sup>74</sup> As the WPTB’s restrictions got tighter and tighter, the level of government intervention into the home and people’s private lives became more visible. Women were the main target for ration regulation and were thus required to follow the rules strictly. Their daily lives largely revolved around smart shopping and practicing thrift in the home routines because they were constantly being told it was their most important job to ensure that there would be enough food for every Canadian. Women were therefore obligated to comply with the WPTB’s policies unless they wanted to appear as immoral, unpatriotic, or bad mothers and wives. The women documented in this chapter confirm some of Mosby’s affirmations; however, they depart from them as well. While all of the voluntary

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<sup>73</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War*, 62.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

associations discussed above dedicated some of their time and energy to “traditional” woman’s work in order to aid the war effort, most also took the initiative to better their community. Tackling local issues specific to Halifax was the main focus of every group except for the LCW, and in many cases rationing and nutrition was not made a priority. Advancing women’s position in society through education and improved social rights departs partially from the theme of compliance, but the government call for women to do their part at home (whether in the public or private sphere) reinforces it.

No other Canadian region heard the call to arms as the Maritimes did. During the war, men and women of the Maritimes who were between the ages of 18 and 35, moved by their traditional loyalties, proximity to the war front, and economic necessities, joined Canada’s armed forces in record numbers. Forty-seven point six percent of the Nova Scotian population joined the armed forces.<sup>75</sup> The readiness with which Haligonian women volunteered their time and service to local women-run voluntary organizations is illustrated in this chapter, and so, too, are their distinctively Haligonian priorities. Women’s war effort could be seen across the country as Canadian women joined national and local volunteer societies in the thousands in order to aid their country. While it has been argued that the Second World War dramatically altered women’s positions in the eyes of the Canadian public, thousands of women across Canada were placed in supportive positions and conformed to government regulations by joining local and national volunteer organizations in the hopes of assisting the war effort. The methods of persuasion used by the government took the form of propaganda posters whose messages constantly bombarded women in local newspapers and in public places. As well, the national fat and bone scrap salvage campaign gave women an opportunity to feel as

though they were participating in a “real war job” without having to join the army, the workforce, or even a volunteer group. Whether the work undertaken by women on the home front was done as a result of government pressure, patriotic duty, and a genuine desire to “win the war,” the voluntary work of women on the home front was an essential part of Canada’s war.

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<sup>75</sup> E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, 308.

### CHAPTER THREE “I CANT BELIEVE IT’S NOT BUTTER!” TIPS, TRICKS, AND THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE INGREDIENTS IN HOME COOKING

Women across the country were expected to do their part in the public sphere during the war; however, there was also wartime work for housewives in the private sphere. It was deemed a wife’s and mother’s job to turn her kitchen into part of the battlefield. Limited in her choices by rationing, she was expected nevertheless to serve her family nutritious and appetizing meals using less familiar, and in many cases less desirable, ingredients. Whether she was making steak or beef heart was irrelevant; it was her duty to turn the less palatable products into “victory meals” for the benefit of the war effort. This attitude is summed up in the 1940 morale-boosting propaganda film “Homefront”: “Modern warfare, reaching out to the remotest community, makes every woman the sergeant major of her home. In this field of personal duty Canadian women render sterling service to their country.”<sup>76</sup> The term “personal duty” is notable: ration regulations would come to make the private act of home-cooking a matter of public duty. By imposing rationing, government sought to control what foods women could serve in the home. Responding to government propaganda, women who felt compelled by patriotism practiced thrifty cooking, stretching scarce supplies, making do, and finding alternatives to common ingredients that were suddenly in short supply. In this chapter, I examine how government, the press, and food industry advertisers instructed women in methods of coping with the strictures that rationing placed on their shopping lists. The women readers’ letters printed in the Dear Homemaker page confirm that at least some Canadian women took pride in their ability to adapt to shortages and cook patriotically.

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<sup>76</sup> *Canada Carries On: The Home Front*, directed by Stanley Hawes, NFB (1940).



Food is a source of comfort. It is loaded with emotional and symbolic significance, connected to the home, family, and community.<sup>77</sup> This is why home cooking was crucial wartime work. Good cooking, like other aspects of domesticity, was celebrated during the war because it helped reinforce a sense of social stability during a period of rapid economic, social, and cultural change. Prior to 1939, families' food choices might have been restricted for personal economic reasons or seasonal shortages. The Second World War made obtaining steady food sources that much more difficult for some people, and newly difficult for those who, before the war, enjoyed free choice. There were shortages of many things, particularly after the war in the Pacific cut off sources of spices, some sugars, tea, and coffee.<sup>78</sup> Rationing initiated by the WPTB severely limited the amounts of food households were allowed to purchase. The year 1942 saw limitations placed on sugar, coffee, tea, and butter. The initial allowance of sugar was half a pound per person per week (the same as butter), and for coffee it was only four ounces or one third of an ounce of tea per week.<sup>79</sup> In 1943 meat was placed on the ration list at one to two pounds a week depending on the type and cut.<sup>80</sup> As the WPTB placed more and more restrictions on food supplies each meal became an achievement, a reflection of housewifely skill. Canadian women were told it was their patriotic duty to comply with the high level of government control and the drastic changes made by the WPTB. Canadian national identity came to be structured around pride in dutifully following the rules and helping out as much as possible.<sup>81</sup> To refuse to comply with the

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<sup>77</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War, The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 113.

<sup>78</sup> William Naftel, *Halifax at War, Searchlights, Squadrons, and Submarines 1939-1945*, (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 2008), 25.

<sup>79</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints Sinners, and Soldiers*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 106.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

WPTB's policies would therefore have made a woman seem immoral, unpatriotic, or incompetent as a mother or wife. As a result, women were keenly interested in advice about how to provide the delicious and healthy meals for their loved ones while still diligently following the rationing rules.

### **3.1 ADVICE ON THRIFT**

Throughout the war, women were bombarded with the message to adopt thrift as part of their home front rituals. The WPTB used local and national newspapers as their mouthpiece to relay their message to readers in an accessible way. The newspaper was also used as a site of dialogue where citizens could air their concerns about waste and thoughts on thrift. The CBC also helped out. Through these outlets, the message of thrift made it into homes of women.

In a 1943 article appearing in *The Globe and Mail*, the civilian population of Canada was called upon to “make 1943 a thrift year.”<sup>82</sup> The article implores of every Canadian on the home front is required to win the war and that saving should be “the keynote of all new year resolutions.” The notion of saving and thrift can be seen everywhere throughout the war. The message that by being thrifty in one's everyday choices through using less gasoline by taking public transportation to work, saving money for war bonds instead of spending on leisure, and using less of scarce ingredients in the kitchen was disseminated to Canadians as priority number one on the home front. The message that these small sacrifices made at home were nothing compared to the unfathomable sacrifices made by those fighting overseas was often used to persuade the public into accepting the rise in government regulation. It is interesting to note that in this article the Canadian Government is asking for the help of civilians and not just women. If

the piece had just been about thrift in the home perhaps the message would have been written differently. A similar article appearing around the same time in *The Halifax Daily Star* conveniently titled “Housewives must realize place,” repeated the same message about thrift and saving, only it was directed towards women.<sup>83</sup> In the article, WPTB Chairman Donald Gordon explains the four-step program to success on the home front: keep the cost of living stabilized, buy only what you need, eliminate waste, and conserve what you have. It is clear that the target audience for this article were women and housewives. The Canadian public was constantly being reminded of how important the war was, and Canadian women especially were bombarded with messages telling them that they had one of the most important jobs of all: the observation of ration policy as a means of providing loved ones with proper nutrition.

The concept of sacrifice got through to the women who wrote into the “Dear Homemaker” column of *The Globe and Mail*. This feature, part of The Homemaker page, was a popular platform for the sharing of information and tips on cutting back on household waste and the use of alternatives in recipes. The author of the column, whose pen name is “The Homemaker,” corresponding with her female fans, would share ideas on how to use substitutes in popular recipes as well as openly discuss any and all issues experienced by women on the home front. One concerned writer expressed her distaste for church lunches. She bemoaned them as an “extravagant waste of food when so many people in the war-torn countries are on the verge of starvation.”<sup>84</sup> She had broached the subject to her local pastor who told her that no one would bother coming to a church meeting if there was not going to be any food. In this example it is clear that this woman

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<sup>82</sup> “Civilian Help is Needed to make 1943 a Thrift Year,” *The Globe and Mail*, 6 January 1943.

<sup>83</sup> “Housewives must realize place,” *The Halifax Daily Star*, 13 January 1943.

is attempting to do her best at following the message of the WPTB's Donald Gordon's. She is attempting to eliminate waste by asking her church to cut back on providing food for church meetings because she believes it is a waste of important food products. A catered church meeting could also be viewed as a type of leisure activity that is taking time away from more important war related tasks on the home front.

Newspapers could also contribute through news coverage to awareness of waste. In Halifax, an article in the *Halifax Evening Mail* described a number of instances where grocers in the city had a collection of salvaged fat on hand and no one came to collect it. As discussed in the previous chapter, fat renderers were required to collect salvaged fat and bone scraps from designated collection spots and grocers during the fat and bone scrap salvage campaign. These waste products would then be recycled into usable materials for the war effort. One grocer threw out 300 pounds of salvaged fat because no one came for it.<sup>85</sup> The grocer had waited so long for someone to retrieve his barrels of fat that they spoiled.<sup>86</sup> The report on that event appears to place the blame on the fat collectors. The decision to throw away the fat is described as the "plight" of many grocers. Such waste during a time when everyone was doing their part to desperately save whatever could be reused would have been rather shocking.

Thrift and salvage were important aspects of life on the home front; self-sufficiency during a time of unsteady food supplies was also becoming more and more significant. In a pamphlet produced by the CBC titled, "Vitamin Gardening Victory," a variety of helpful tips could be found for women on how to save in the kitchen. The very

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<sup>84</sup> "Correspondence: Waste of Food," *The Globe and Mail* "Dear Homemaker," 26 June 1946.

<sup>85</sup> "Nobody Collected Fat so Halifax Grocer Tossed Away 300 Pounds," *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 18 May 1943.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

first page of the document with its large banner “Calling All Gardeners!” explains the importance of home gardening and planting “for victory.” According to the pamphlet, a “1943 garden means economy, work, fun, good exercise, and patriotic service.”<sup>87</sup> This page is educating readers on the World War Two Victory Garden, which was used to grow and produce food in backyards and community lots. Victory Gardens were established in order to alleviate the demand on grocers and commercial farmers, so that more produce could be shipped to Britain instead of being consumed in the home. The following page includes a full-sized chart containing the names of a number of different plants and vegetables that can be grown in a victory garden along with instructions on how to plant them, what kind of soil they need to be planted in, and their uses.<sup>88</sup> Not only are these important things to learn for work on the home front, but these skills can also be used after the war if one wanted to continue the trend of self-sufficiency. The next few pages discuss the importance of proper planting and cooking in order to preserve the nutrients and vitamins in the vegetables. As previously discussed, the importance of proper nutrition came to sweep the nation and this can be seen in the Vitamin Gardening for Victory pamphlet. The handy guide provides a list of what to plant in order to obtain certain vitamins, for example planting spinach and kale for Vitamin B, and tomatoes and cauliflower for Vitamin C.<sup>89</sup> The brochure also provides information on methods for home canning. Canning was another popular task on the home front used to relieve some of the demand for store bought goods. The booklet offers a list of suggestions on what to can, how to can, and its benefits. It is obvious from this literature that self-reliance was a

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<sup>87</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. “Vitamin Gardening for Victory.” Toronto: unknown date, circa 1942 (interleaved in the minutes of Halifax Local Council of Women Fonds)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 4.

crucial aspect of being thrifty in the home. The skills that women would have gained from following these suggestions would have been useful not only for the war but for after as well.

### 3.2 CHATELAINE

As the war progressed, a number of publications began to fill their pages with tips, recipes, and educational information in regards to respecting ration regulations. A special position was occupied by *Chatelaine Magazine*. Not only was it Canada's leading women's magazine, but its editor, Byrne Hope Sanders, was also the head of the Consumer Branch of the WPTB. This link meant that selling the magazine, selling ads, and selling the government message blurred together in its pages. In 1941, Sanders took to the pages of the magazine to inform readers about what the corporation as well as its readers were doing to assist the war effort.<sup>90</sup> Sanders begins by describing her audience as an army of important women. She goes on to claim that, "on them depends the morale of the homes throughout the Dominion," and that they are "the mothers and wives of our fighting forces."<sup>91</sup> The language that Sanders uses to discuss the magazine's readers draws upon notions of white, middle-class womanhood. She is reinforcing the idea that women have a special role to play as mothers and that their inherent nurturing qualities give them a unique edge when it comes to work on the home front. She goes on to explain how *Chatelaine* will provide its readers with suggestions on how they can do their part to aid the Canada's war effort. Sanders closes her bulletin by defining *Chatelaine's* specific role in the war. She states that the magazine will devote space every month to arousing morale and providing its audience with guidelines on what they can do

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<sup>90</sup> Byrne Hope Sanders, "Chatelaine's 'War Effort' Program," *Chatelaine Magazine*, April 1941.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

to make a difference on the home front. In doing so, Canadian women would have been able to fulfill their duty as proper wives and mothers.

The pages of *Chatelaine* were packed with housekeeping tips, suggestions on how best to entertain guests, food preservation guides and recipes. During the war years, the number of pages per issue that devoted to meal preparation increased. Prior to the implementation of rationing, there were approximately four to six food-related ads or feature pages in each issue. After the initial stages of rationing, this number doubled to eight to eleven pages. As the preparation of food became more politicized, the number of messages surrounding food dramatically increased. *Chatelaine* dedicated much of its pages on food advice to hints on how to be thrifty in the kitchen. One aspect of employing thrift in one's cooking was to use "stretchers." This term is used to describe certain ingredients used to stretch the amount of the scarce rationed food being used to make a dish. In one particular example, a page devoted to extending the amount of meat one has through recipe stretchers shows that a smaller amount of a prized product could be made to go farther by using only a little bit of culinary skill. A recipe for "beef rolls in milk" uses only one and one quarter pound of steak beef (barely enough to feed an entire family) with a topping consisting of four cups of breadcrumbs mixed with pan drippings.<sup>92</sup> The breadcrumb topping would likely have been used to replace the flavour of having less steak in the recipe and the amount of it would take up extra space in the casserole dish created from using less meat. In addition, using pan drippings from searing the steak to mix with the breadcrumbs instead of butter would save one from having to use rationed butter to make this recipe. Another recipe from the same article titled oatmeal beef-liver loaf requires only three-quarters of a pound of ground beef mixed with

one quarter of a pound of beef liver.<sup>93</sup> The stretcher used in this meal is the beef liver as it replaces a portion of the regular beef used in a meatloaf. When meat rationing was introduced by the WPTB, Canadians were encouraged to eat more organ meat or “offal” to cut down on the demand for more expensive red meat. The public believed it was more important for soldiers and working men to have access to meat because they required the most energy for their type of war-work. Therefore, recipes using kidneys and liver were increasingly common. In addition to stretching meat, soups and stews could be stretched using some thrifty tricks. In an article in “Dear Homemaker” a woman writes in with her tips on how to stretch these types of meals by using rinsings from ketchup bottles and peanut butter containers.<sup>94</sup> What this accomplishes is that every last drop of peanut butter or soup is used and none is wasted. Rinsing out condiment bottles with water and pouring them into a stew or sauce also increases its amount and stretches the meal a little further.

Many of the recipes found in *Chatelaine* were found in ‘advertorial’ – content that resembled a magazine feature but which was designed to advertise a commercial product. For example, the March of 1943 edition of *Chatelaine* provided readers with a two-page spread lamb recipe from Swift’s Premium Lamb.<sup>95</sup> The type of meat used in this casserole can be interchangeable but in order to “vary the wartime table,” leg of lamb is suggested for this meal. According to the author of the article, lamb is full of high-quality proteins, Vitamin B, and essential minerals.<sup>96</sup> This statement would have made lamb appealing event to someone who had never prepared it. This recipe is also worth noting because it boasts that its preparer will have plenty of leftover meat that can be used again

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<sup>92</sup> Helen G. Campbell, “Stretch it,” *Chatelaine Magazine*, June 1943.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> “Culinary Capers,” *The Globe and Mail* “Dear Homemaker,” 23 July 1942.

<sup>95</sup> “Swift’s Premium Lamb,” *Chatelaine Magazine*, March 1943.



in a number of other dinners. Saving meat by purchasing a large portion and preparing it in a way that created leftovers is a thrifty way of feeding one's family. In many of the recipes that use meat, a common pattern was for a portion of the protein to be replaced with something else. A recipe for meatballs with dumplings cuts down on the amount of beef used for the meal by replacing half the amount of meatballs with dumplings.<sup>97</sup> The recipe claims to "fit into the present higher-living costs picture" because it requires more flour than meat. The recipe is sponsored by Magic Baking Powder, a necessary ingredient in dumplings, handily required in this strategy for using less meat, saving money, and fighting inflation.

Advertisements disguised as healthy meal ideas were also frequently published in *Chatelaine*. An advertisement for Crown Brand Corn Syrup asks the magazine's readers, "Are you a house soldier?"<sup>98</sup> The image accompanying the ad shows a young, well-groomed woman wearing an apron and saluting as she stands. The company claims that their corn syrup is an excellent way of preserving fresh fruit while still maintaining all of their nutrients. The promise of good health and proper nutrition were important for home front work. The Canadian Government needed to ensure that their civilian army was strong enough to be able to perform any task that might be asked of them. Energy was required for working long hours in war plants, and children needed to have all of their vitamins and minerals so that they could grow to become good Canadian citizens. An ad for Campbell's Beef Soup in June of 1942 echoes this sentiment. The image portrays a wife serving her husband a bowl of steaming hot soup with the caption reading, "when he brings home an extra-big appetite from the extra-big job that Canadians are tacking these

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> "A Savoury Meat Dish that Fits Every Budget," *Chatelaine Magazine*, May 1942.

days, he's more than likely to ask for Campbell's Beef Soup."<sup>99</sup> The soup is marketed as perfect for providing an ideal amount of nutrition and energy for the hard labour that men were doing on the home front. The language used in the ad also gives the message that providing your husband with this hearty, meat-filled soup is a victory won in the battle of home front nutrition. Being able to win the war at home meant that women needed to understand how to cook certain foods properly in order to maximize the benefits of that meal as well as cut down on the waste that could result from ineffective cooking. This concept is explained in a collaborative advertisement from Canada's Nutrition Programme and the American Can Company titled, "Cook Hitler's Goose," which enlightens women on the significance of using their ovens to basically "defeat Hitler." Women who knew how to cook could serve their families healthful and pleasant meals that would "have our nation glowing with vitality, strongly resistant to disease, husky and powerful enough to step-up the tremendous job of winning this war."<sup>100</sup> The victory rhetoric seen everywhere throughout the war would then ideally be followed by women and homemakers. The WPTB's control over what was permitted to be served in the home gave advertisers new levers of influence over women as consumers. By framing products as a way to save on waste, as healthy, or as beneficial to the war effort, advertisers were able to use the war to boost their sales and brand visibility. For the readers of *Chatelaine*, the advice on how to cope with advertising came almost indistinguishably from the editors, the advertisers, and government supplied collaborations with both of these.

### 3.3 BUTTER ADVICE

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<sup>98</sup> "Are you a House Soldier?" *Chatelaine Magazine*, September 1942.

<sup>99</sup> "Campbell's Beef Soup," *Chatelaine Magazine*, June 1942.

<sup>100</sup> "How to use your Cook Stove to Cook Hitler's Goose," *Chatelaine Magazine*, January 1943.

Pressure for a butter ration reflected its value as a food: better that all should have less than that there be sudden shortages.<sup>101</sup> One of the biggest concerns that Canadians had about the cutback of butter was that they would suffer from insufficient nutrients. To ease this worry, the Federal Government assured Canadians that ration levels were devised with advice from medical experts and would not compromise their health, and reminded them of their good fortune compared to those overseas.<sup>102</sup> Even with declining health as a potential risk, many Canadian consumers called for the implementation of a butter ration. In a Canadian National Telegram to WPTB Chairman Donald Gordon, the Mayor of Windsor, Ontario Arthur J. Reaume claimed that he had been directed by the city's residents to petition the government to institute a "plan of butter rationing which after all is the only fair and equitable way of handling the matter."<sup>103</sup> The concept of fairness and equality is common in most of the sources where the introduction of the butter ration is discussed. It appears that any fears surrounding malnutrition were overshadowed by the thought that everyone in the country would not all have the same amount of butter in their fridges. Similarly, in another telegram to Food Administrator J.G. Taggart, the mayor of Toronto requested a more structured version of voluntary rationing. His suggestion would require families in the city to register with local retailers who will ration out butter to them. The amount given to each person or family would be based on "statistics, which we will obtain from the suppliers of butter how much will be given to each person."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Broad, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Keshen, 107.

<sup>103</sup> RG64 Series 1030 Box No. 0550 File No. 16-3-7-A. Vol. 01 "Butter Complaints," LAC, Mr. Arthur J. Reaume to Mr. Donald Gordon, 16 December 1942.

<sup>104</sup> RG64 Series 1030 Box No. 0550 File No. 16-3-7-A. Vol. 01 "Butter Complaints," LAC, Mr. Fred J. Conboy to Mr. J. G. Taggart, 18 December 1942.

Of the many concerns of Canadians during the Second World War, nutrition was fairly high on the list. Nutrition had not been a major issue prior to the introduction of Canada's Official Food Rules in 1942.<sup>105</sup> The Food Rules contained a list of daily food requirements established by nutrition experts for proper health and wellness. The Official Food Rules were created as a result of a perceived nutrition scare and a fear that Canadians were not obtaining an adequate amount of vitamins and other nutrients. Much like the implementation of food rationing, the introduction of the Food Rules was another way in which the government could penetrate the private realm of the home and make it a part of the public discussion. Reactions to the Food Rules were mixed. Many took the recommendations to heart, while others pointed out its unfairness to families of the lower and working classes. The amount of food suggested for daily intake by nutrition experts was well beyond what less fortunate Canadians could afford on a weekly basis, let alone daily.<sup>106</sup> When rationing was introduced, the WPTB reassured the public that weekly allowances of food were established under the direction of nutrition experts so that malnutrition would not result from eating less of a certain type of food. However, Ian Mosby has argued that the Food Rules were created as a means of establishing a certain vision of wartime nutrition that reflected rationing, agricultural needs, and exports to other countries.<sup>107</sup> Whatever the reason behind their implementation, the Food Rules were not required to be followed in the same manner that rationing was, but they were expected to be respected in the same way. An advertisement for the Eaton's Company appearing in *The Halifax Evening Mail* stating, "Eat Right, Feel Right: Canada Needs

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<sup>105</sup> Ian Mosby, "Making and Breaking Canada's Food Rules: Science, the State, and the Government of Nutrition, 1942-1949," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, edited by Franca Iacovetta, Valerie Korinek, and Marlene Epp, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 411.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

you Strong!” illustrates the push for Canadians to follow these guidelines so that they can appropriately aid their country.<sup>108</sup> Images appearing in the ad of “Miss Career Girl” and “Mr. Recruit” are used to relay the importance of getting proper nutrition from food. The bottom of the ad contains information on the Food Rules and how to follow them. While following the Food Rules was not required by law, the message of this ad was that if one wanted to do one’s duty and serve the country, either by fighting overseas or working on the home front, proper nutrition and diet were critical.

The Government and local newspapers responded with publishing helpful hints for housewives to follow in cooking without butter. Newspaper and propaganda-style ads explaining how it was up to housewives to wage the battle of nutrition appeared often in numerous publications. For example, an article in *The Halifax Evening Mail* explains that,

Housewives who were weaned on the can-opener are faced with a dearth of canned foods. Tin is needed for more important purposes than preserving food for a lazy housewife...It may be hard at first but our grandmothers did it and so can we. And the nutrition drive will be a help. While the drive is on, the government will see that the bewildered housewife becomes acquainted with all the substitutes that are available to her and the government will see that she learns to cook what used to come out of a can at the twist of a wrist.<sup>109</sup>

The article, which was placed in the paper by the British United Press, appears to be reassuring the public that women were up to the task of handling their family’s nutrition requirements during rationing and periods of food shortages more so than reassuring housewives that they knew what they were doing. The CBC Vitamin Gardening for Victory pamphlet included a variety of helpful tips and recipes that respect both rationing

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 410.

<sup>108</sup> “Eat Right, Feel Right, Canada Needs you Strong!” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 6 February, 1943.

and the Canadian Official Food Rules. The trick was to make vegetables tasty without using a lot of butter. The pamphlet contains a two-page Ideal Daily Diet Chart that provides a list of foods as well as the amount that both adults and children need to be considered healthy. One of the column charts offers information on directions for the use of these foods, while the column next to it handily gives a list of substitutes for each ingredient.<sup>110</sup> In the section on butter and other fats there is a disclaimer to “use in moderation at present.” While there is no date printed on the handbook, the pointer to use some restraint when it comes to butter tells us that it was likely printed in 1943, after the butter ration had been implemented. According to the pamphlet, two tablespoons of butter is required every day for people of all ages and that the amount should actually increase by age.<sup>111</sup> The substitutes column insists that when butter is in short supply to replace the fat in one’s diet with “green and orange vegetables, eggs, cheese, and other fats.” The page following the diet chart contains a number of healthy vegetable recipes that are easy to prepare and “exciting” to eat. Recipes such as acorn squash stuffed with mushrooms and sausage, soy bean casserole, and turnip greens with herbs are displayed on the page.<sup>112</sup> The recipe for soy bean casserole calls for two tablespoons of melted dripping instead of butter, to avoid wasting butter where it wasn’t needed.

Once the butter ration had been fully implemented, Canadian women and homemakers were expected to immediately adhere to the new rules. An important method was to use alternatives to butter. Using alternative ingredients may not have

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<sup>109</sup> Microfilm Reel # 7317, NSA, “Canadians Urged to Eat Right and Stay Healthy: Wage Battle of Nutrition on Home Front,” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 2 January 1943.

<sup>110</sup> Microfilm: Reel # 9597, NSA, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. “Vitamin Gardening for Victory.” Toronto: unknown date, circa 1942 (interleaved in the minutes of Halifax Local Council of Women Fonds)

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

always been appealing, but it was a useful way to stretch the weekly butter allowance and still make much of the same food. The most common alternative used today, margarine, was a controversial product at the time and in some places in the country its use was actually illegal. Invented by a French food chemist in 1869 as a fat substitute for the French Navy, margarine faced a lot of resistance from the North American public.<sup>113</sup> In 1902, the Germans perfected the product through the development of hydrogenation, a process for solidifying liquid vegetable oils. Manufacturers began to use this process around 1910 and in the following decades, margarine manufacturers mixed into their products a combination of hydrogenated vegetable oils, liquid vegetable oils, and animal fats.<sup>114</sup> During the first half of the 20th century, margarine was considered by the public, and by the dairy industry, as a cheap but inferior imitation of butter. Manufacturers aimed to simulate some of the characteristics of butter, such as its taste, texture, and colour.<sup>115</sup> Initially margarine was white; however, manufacturers later began to add yellow dyes to the product to make it appear more like butter. Legislators in Canada and the United States, largely used colouring restriction, as well as production quotas and taxes on margarine producers, to protect the commercial interests of the dairy industry. It was not until margarine became fortified with a number of vitamins marketed as missing from people's diets as a result of rationing that it started to become popular. In 1942, when shortages of butter began to become an issue in Eastern Canada, the demand for margarine began to increase. An article run in *The Globe and Mail* questions the restrictions and states that "with all the difficulties presented by the butter question

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<sup>113</sup> Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 86.

<sup>114</sup> Gyorgy Scrinis, *Nutritionism: The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 110.

throughout the greater part of Canada, one has not been able to find any suggestion that the Canadian public be allowed a plentiful supply of margarine,” and that “no one has had the courage to advocate a supply of this very useful fat.”<sup>116</sup>

Another popular substitute for butter was shortening. Shortening began to be used in home kitchens around 1911 as a substitute for lard. Its texture and taste closely resembled the early style of margarine. After the butter ration was established, *The Halifax Evening Mail* began to publish recipes that offered alternatives to butter (as well as some other scarce products) in making cakes by substituting in shortening.<sup>117</sup>

Shortening was ideal for baking because it had most of the same characteristics as butter. Shortening was also better than both butter and margarine because it did not need to be refrigerated. During the war, *Chatelaine Magazine* often included shortening in the recipes it provided to help with rationing. For example, an advertisement for peach cake in the November 1942 issue calls for a half of a cup of shortening in place of butter.<sup>118</sup>

While this recipe was published before the butter ration was implemented, the company that placed the ad must have either been anticipating the rationing of butter or respecting the butter shortage. Another recipe for “magic cheese biscuits” that also requires shortening reads, “A little thing like a butter shortage needn’t put a crimp in your biscuit baking schedule.”<sup>119</sup> The message attached to these simple biscuits is significant because it reassures the homemaker that despite shortages and restrictions, a sense of normalcy can still be found in the home by making a few small changes and respecting the rules.

While a positive message such as this would have been well appreciated by women

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>116</sup> “Senator Hardy asks Admission of Margarine,” *The Globe and Mail*, 31 December 1942.

<sup>117</sup>, “How to Make Good Cakes with less Butter, Sugar, and Eggs,” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 17 November, 1943.



toiling away in their kitchens, some companies insisted that butter not be given up completely, likely as a way of ensuring that their product still had a consumer base. Knox Gelatin delivers a recipe for stretching one's butter allowance by mixing one pound of butter with water, gelatin, and evaporated milk in order to stretch one pound of butter into two.<sup>120</sup> The message accompanying this recipe states that, "butter is a delicious necessity! Don't give it up, stretch it with Knox Gelatin." It also boasts that it is packed with "healthy butter fats, Vitamins A and D, and protein."<sup>121</sup> For most of the time that the butter ration was in effect, the weekly allowance for households was only half a pound, and this recipe requires one pound of butter. The recipe was also printed before the butter ration was instated meaning it would have to be adjusted later on to meet the new requirements. Being able to double one's amount of butter by using this method would have been incredibly useful and highly favourable. Shortening was not restricted under rationing so women could continue to bake and cook with fat droppings and shortening while still using butter in spreads and having it last longer by utilizing this trick.

### 3.4 DEAR HOMEMAKER

As part of their patriotic duty, women on the home front were required to find alternatives to rationed products in their home cooking as well as to help out other "house soldiers" by sharing this information with them. A popular place to share recipes and tips was the "Dear Homemaker" page. Women would write in to the author with their own suggestions as in addition to sending their responses to questions by others posed in the column. One woman wrote in about an alternative to using butter in sandwiches and

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<sup>118</sup> "Peach Layer Cake," *Chatelaine Magazine*, November 1942.

<sup>119</sup> "Magic Cheese Biscuits: No Butter Needed Inside or Outside," *Chatelaine Magazine*, February 1944.

<sup>120</sup> "Cut Butter Bills with Knox Spread," *Chatelaine Magazine*, September 1942.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

suggests making a bean puree to spread on the bread instead.<sup>122</sup> While using beans as a sandwich spread in place of butter might successfully mimic its texture it certainly would not taste the same. However depending on what the beans were cooked down with the puree could be quite healthier than actually using butter. Others recommended using leftover fat drippings in baked goods as opposed to having it repurposed to make explosives. Home cooks writing into *The Homemaker* suggest using beef fat dripping to replace the fat in cake. The woman who signs her suggestion as “beef dripping” claims that using beef fat in cake is an excellent way to save on butter and that no one will be able to tell the difference.<sup>123</sup> Using fat dripping was a popular and apparently successful method of substituting for butter in baked goods. Another woman wrote in about using chicken fat in place of butter when making pie crust. She writes, “My mother always said chicken fat could be successfully used in any cooked dish which called for butter and in these days of wartime thrift we should certainly look for every possible way of using fat and dripping.”<sup>124</sup> Canadian women were considered resourceful in their use of fat dripping in place of butter; it is possible to see in this traditional method a kind of expertise that allowed women to cope without using commercial products such as shortening and margarine.

The Dear Homemaker letters also emphasised the worries women felt about family and friends overseas. Rationing restrictions were much tighter in England than in Canada, and sending regular packages containing familiar and favourite foods offered one of the most immediate methods of maintaining a link to the soldier’s home amidst

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<sup>122</sup> “Correspondence: The Valuable Bean,” *The Globe and Mail* “Dear Homemaker,” 28 April 1943.

<sup>123</sup> “Correspondence: Suggestions the Neighbours Make,” *The Globe and Mail* “Dear Homemaker,” 9 April 1942.

<sup>124</sup> “Dear Neighbours,” *The Globe and Mail* “Dear Homemaker,” 30 January 1942.

unfamiliar and often unimaginable circumstances.<sup>125</sup> Women's magazines and the women's sections of newspapers regularly offered advice on how to best pack such parcels. In addition to helping to spread information on the fat ration and other wartime concerns, many women who wrote in to the "Dear Homemaker" column were interested in how they could help those much closer to the battlefield. The column received numerous letters from loyal readers on how to send care packages to Great Britain during the war. One woman expressed great concern over the fact that people in England did not have enough butter in their diet, so she suggested sending care packages containing butter shortbread cookies, butter toffee, and "a good many Christmas cakes containing as much sugar and butter as [she] could successfully put into them."<sup>126</sup> Others expressed similar distress over what their relatives in Great Britain had to eat and would write in to the author of the column on what was best to send overseas. Another female reader wrote in to say that she sends absolutely anything that she feels will "brighten someone's day," including newspaper clippings, crossword puzzles, photographs, and tea bags.<sup>127</sup> One writer took to the pages of "Dear Homemaker" to voice her displeasure with the increase of the price of postage. She laments, "May all the readers of your page protest against the exorbitant postage rates on parcels for the weary, half-famished, civilian defenders of our lives and liberties here in well-fed, happy Canada."<sup>128</sup> Sending butter-laden care parcels was just one of many ways in which women and housewives attempted to make a difference through their compliance with wartime notions of femininity and citizenship.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

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<sup>125</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War*, 113.

<sup>126</sup> "Good Things for the Old Land," *The Globe and Mail* "Dear Homemaker," 1 March 1941.

<sup>127</sup> "For Friends Overseas," *The Globe and Mail* "Dear Homemaker," 21 March 1941.

<sup>128</sup> "Suggestions for English Parcels," *The Globe and Mail* "Dear Homemaker," 26 February 1946.

In response to government propaganda, women who felt compelled by patriotism practiced thrifty in the kitchen, stretching scarce supplies, making do, and finding alternatives to common ingredients that were in short supply. Women on the home front were expected to observe ration regulations and provide their families with healthy and delicious meals using less and sometimes unfamiliar ingredients. Women in Halifax and the rest of the country fulfilled their patriotic and feminine duty to allow the government to control the rather private sphere of the home through seeking to regulate what was allowed to be served during the war. Magazines and newspapers frequently ran advertisements, advice columns, and recipe pages that conformed to these changes. Different media outlets were used to pass on the message of thrift, which women were then required to follow. Only in this way could Canadian women win the battle of nutrition at home and earn respectability through their domestic labour.

## **CHAPTER FOUR BREAKING THE LAW: ENFORCEMENT, PUNISHMENT, AND RULE-BREAKERS IN HALIFAX**

Not everyone was ready to accept the changes required by rationing. Some Depression-weary Canadians had had enough of living on the bare minimum by the time the war started. Some were shocked that a country rich with agricultural and natural resources required food rationing. As the main gatherers and preparers of food in the home, women had to make decisions about how dutifully to follow the rules and aid the war effort. Would they risk accusations of being unpatriotic to provide for those in their care? There were other risks, too: the Enforcement Branch of the WPTB also made it difficult for Halifax women to cheat on rationing. People were sometimes caught violating ration policy and resisting government intrusion into their daily choices. While those ration cheaters were mostly men, their existence proves that Depression- and war-weary Halifax was not always a shining bastion of Canadian/British patriotism. The following chapter investigates cases in Halifax of people caught violating the rationing rules. It will begin with a brief discussion of the WPTB's ration system, and then examine two major forms of non-compliance that the Enforcement Branch faced: the black market and hoarding. This chapter will also discuss complaints about rationing, the enforcement of the rules, and the punishment of violators, including specific cases in Halifax, and the amount of coverage these offenses received in Halifax newspapers. By examining each of these aspects along with the cases of law-breakers in Halifax it will become clear that the number of women who resisted ration policy was quite small; however, quite a few Canadians did go against government orders.

#### 4.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENFORCEMENT

In order to regulate and keep track of the production and consumption of food, the WPTB created the coupon rationing system. Booklets containing a certain number of ration coupons were provided to Canadian households every month. Coupons could be exchanged for rationed commodities, and only the amount permitted by the Board could be purchased. The rules governing ration regulations were printed on the inside cover of coupon books; if any of the rules were broken then one could have one's ration allotments decreased, or, worse, one could be charged or even jailed. Ration coupons were required to be detached from the booklet only at the time of purchase and in front of the store manager, whose job was to ensure that the coupon book actually belonged to that individual.<sup>129</sup> Expired coupons could not be used, and the trading of coupons or rationed goods was strictly prohibited by the WPTB. According to the Board this type of behaviour violated the "spirit of rationing" because people still exceeded their allowance of goods and more significantly increased the total demand for that commodity, and so interfered with the WPTB's battle against inflation.<sup>130</sup> In addition to banning the trading of coupons, the Board also had specific rules when it came to the storage of coupon books. A number of transgressions were uncovered, usually by the local mailman, of ration book applications being filled for deceased family members and in some cases even for the family dog. If a cardholder were to die, leave Canada, or join the military, that person's ration book had to be turned in immediately to the WPTB.<sup>131</sup> This was done

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<sup>129</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, "One for All or All for One: Black Marketing in Canada, 1939-1947," in *The Good Fight: Canadians and World War Two*, edited by J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, (Toronto: Copp Clark Limited, 1995), 275.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 108.

in order to prevent another person from increasing their own allotment of goods which could also affect production and supply.

An Enforcement Branch was originally thought to be unnecessary because rationing was supposed to ensure that incidents of over-buying or over-charging would no longer occur. In an article printed in *The Globe and Mail* one month before the butter ration was implemented, the author of the column is imploring that if a butter ration was established then it would surely eliminate or at least curb instances of hoarding and overbuying.<sup>132</sup> However, the need to monitor ration cheating became apparent during the first week of the war as people acted on fears of the same high prices and food shortages that plagued World War One.<sup>133</sup> As a result, the WPTB created an Enforcement Branch in 1941, and immediately, the branch heard of overcharging, price infractions, hoarding and other illegal activity, and dissatisfied consumers.<sup>134</sup> Rationing was supposed to ensure that everyone got a fair share of certain goods, rendering hoarding pointless. However, as butter shortages became more apparent, particularly in Ontario, the Board was insistent that hoarding and other illegal acts were the cause. Whether or not this is true is debatable, but the butter situation may have something to do with the Board's decision to establish its enforcement division. In a 1946 news dispatch, WPTB head Donald Gordon, looking back at the war years, reiterated this conviction: "panic buying has caused practically every shortage we have had in Canada and as soon as shortages appear, black market stories begin to find their way into print. When a shortage is mentioned in the press shoppers throughout the country rush to the nearest store and

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<sup>132</sup> "Fixed Price for Butter," *The Globe and Mail*, 26 November 1942.

<sup>133</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 71.

<sup>134</sup> Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Report of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board: September 3 1939-March 31 1943*, Section IV Enforcement, 1943, Internet Archive, 17. <http://archive.org>

demand supplies at any price.”<sup>135</sup> Again, the causes behind the 1942 butter shortage are up for dispute, but it is clear that the Board had no qualms about blaming people on the Canadian home front for serving themselves before their country.

Supporting this point of view was the emergence of black markets. Only a few months before the butter ration was implemented, a severe shortage was ravaging central Canada, causing the price of butter to increase. As the situation worsened, retailers warned that if something were not done soon about the “butter situation,” then the conditions for a black market in butter would flourish.<sup>136</sup> Even with the government and other agencies constantly reminding the country that patriotism and loyalty to the state were crucial, black market purchases began to rise as more and more people became dissatisfied with their current situation. During the war, Canada had an extensive black market in a number of rationed goods including gasoline, cars, coffee, tea, meat, butter, cigarettes, and alcohol.<sup>137</sup> Those who were not willing to pay full price for a certain commodity or who had already surpassed their weekly or monthly allotment of food could buy goods on the black market for a fraction of the ordinary price. The only extra “price” was the risk of being accused of supporting the enemy and damaging the war effort. Some did not mind paying that price. Historian Jeffrey Keshen shows that not all Canadians shared in the nationalistic fervour that came with being a civilian soldier. Polls taken roughly two years after rationing had been implemented demonstrated that about 20% of Canadians admitted some level of tolerance for the black market.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> RG 64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 03, “Black Market,” LAC, Donald Gordon, “The Black Market Situation,” 26 April 1946.

<sup>136</sup> “Hint Butter Purchases May be Permitted only if Other Goods Bought,” *The Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1942.

<sup>137</sup> Keshen, “Black Marketing in Canada,” 277.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*



Women being the majority of food shoppers in Canada meant that, if a black market grew, it did so because there were women willing to break the rules by buying illegally. Families who were still recovering from the effects of the Great Depression, perhaps struggling to pay back money they had borrowed, were looking for deals after rationing was implemented, and the black market could provide cheaper goods. Despite the difficulties that so many households faced as a result of its policies, the WPTB continued to insist that the sacrifices made at home were required of every citizen, and that that they were nothing compared to those made by the allies overseas. In the same dispatch made by Gordon mentioned above, he explains the difference between the black market in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Gordon states that, “black markets in Canada are transactions where some people express their selfishness, but black markets in many other countries have become a matter of life or death to thousands of persons.”<sup>139</sup> He then implored the public to help “stamp out the black market.”

#### **4.2 REPORTS OF THE BLACK MARKET AND HOARDING IN HALIFAX**

Despite having been a major preoccupation of the WPTB, Canada’s black market received very little newspaper coverage in Halifax. A scan of all of the major Halifax newspapers during the war revealed only one story about black market activity in Halifax. In January of 1943, an article in *The Halifax Daily Star* claimed that a black market in gasoline was widespread: “Bootleg gasoline is being sold in the Halifax area and throughout many parts of Nova Scotia under the noses of officials who apparently lack the machinery to check this illegal practice.”<sup>140</sup> While this is the only news story regarding the black market, it does not mean that gasoline was the only commodity being

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<sup>139</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 03, “Black Market,” LAC, Donald Gordon, “The Black Market Situation,” 26 April 1946.

sold illegally in the province. The fact that the black market rarely got attention in the local paper could mean that the press was encouraged to play down its extent so as not to give publicity to the black marketeers.

Hoarding was another serious problem threatening to disrupt the war effort at home. The act of hoarding is described as over-buying a certain product in order to either create a stockpile of that item or to prevent others from purchasing it. Hoarding became a concern of the Board when rumours of rationing and food shortages caused a panic. Press coverage of rationing showed WPTB chairman, Donald Gordon, attempting to warn the public against undermining the ration system: “[H]oarding of any article, whether rationed or not is illegal. Buying anything at all in excess of current needs, unless advised to do so by responsible officers of the board, is hoarding.”<sup>141</sup> When the butter ration was anticipated, the WPTB was again reported as warning that people purchasing any butter in excess of what they would normally buy would be considered hoarding and that after the first of November all holders of butter (retailers) in excess of 5000 pounds will have to report the amount to J.G. Taggart, food administrator for the WPTB.<sup>142</sup> The article goes on to request of all housewives, restaurants, and other public caterers to “avoid or prevent any extravagant use or waste of butter” in order to maintain a steady supply of the good across the country.

Preventing hoarding was critical for the WPTB because the act prevented the rest of the population from getting a fair share of rationed goods. Hoarders were often portrayed as either selfish or foolish by the press and in propaganda posters. An editorial cartoon in *The Halifax Daily Star* depicts a soldier on the battlefield with a large hand

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<sup>140</sup> “Bootleg Gas Racket Flourishes in Halifax and Province,” *The Halifax Daily Star*, 9 January 1943.

<sup>141</sup> “Rationed Commodities Planned for Canada,” *The Globe and Mail*, 5 June 1942.

hovering above holding a fork. The label “food hoarder” is written on the sleeve of the disembodied arm and the title “stab in the back” can be read at the top of the image.<sup>143</sup> This piece of propaganda illustrates the selfish image of food hoarders often depicted in editorials. Its message is clear; those who hoard are stabbing our servicemen in the back and preventing food from being sent overseas to help them. Again, this goes back to the notion of sacrifice and that Canadians were actually giving up very little in comparison to the rest of the world affected by the war. Another cartoon uses humour to chasten hoarders. In the image, a woman can be seen flaunting her new jewellery while asking her female friend, “How do you like all my loot?” Her friend responds by telling her that if she were more patriotic she would stop “hoarding scrap metal.”<sup>144</sup> While the cartoon might be humorous, the message behind it is rather serious. Spending money on useless accessories was wasteful and unpatriotic, and the term hoarding is used to make these bad attributes look even worse.

In addition to being selfish and unpatriotic, hoarders were also frequently portrayed as foolish or careless. An editorial cartoon appearing in *The Halifax Evening Mail* illustrates this trait of hoarders. A man is shown in his basement with a variety of rationed goods around him. The foolish man is caught by a police officer peering through the window because the cow he has in his basement is making too much noise.<sup>145</sup> The cow appears to be labeled (much like the rest of the items) as “beef.” The caption on the cartoon is “The Hoarder who outsmarted Himself.” In this image, the hoarder is depicted as foolish or even idiotic because instead of hoarding actual cuts of beef, he has stolen an

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<sup>142</sup> “Limit Butter Storage: Hoarders are Warned,” *The Globe and Mail*, 31 October 1942.

<sup>143</sup> “Stab in the Back,” *The Halifax Daily Star*, 19 February 1943.

<sup>144</sup> “Mopsy Cartoon,” *The Halifax Daily Star*, 12 January 1943.

<sup>145</sup> “The Hoarder who outsmarted Himself,” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 12 January 1943.

entire steer. It is important to note that in these images both men and women are shown to be capable of hoarding. The Canadian government was fully aware that women were just as capable as men of breaking the law and that they, too, could be unpatriotic and selfish.

In contrast to national poll results showing positive attitudes toward victory gardens and victory bonds, a November 1941 poll showed that 18% of those surveyed admitted to accumulating some food as a precaution against future shortages and when asked about others, 56.6% said that they were aware of “quite a few who hoarded.”<sup>146</sup> While the black market was barely discussed in Halifax newspapers, stories about hoarding were more frequent. Over the course of the war, fifteen news stories on the hoarding of butter alone appeared in local papers. This may have something to do with the Board’s excess holdings report. Under the butter ration, every Canadian household was required to report to the excess holdings board the amount of butter they had that exceeded the allotment of one pound per household per week. The idea was that such holdings could immediately be redistributed.<sup>147</sup> News stories surrounding the hoarding of butter appeared most frequently at the start of 1943, roughly three weeks after it was placed on the ration list. It was also common to see stories about butter hoarding around the time of the excess holdings report. Between the eighth and ninth of January 1943, there were four stories about localized hoarding in Halifax newspapers. The results of the excess holding reports received a lot of attention from Halifax newspapers. *The Halifax Evening Mail* printed the results later the same day and announced that 273 households held 4803 and a half pounds of butter or an average of 17.5 pounds per person in Nova

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<sup>146</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 106.

<sup>147</sup> “Butter Hoarding brought to Light,” *The Halifax Daily Star*, 8 January 1943.

Scotia.<sup>148</sup> According to the report, these numbers were well below the average for other regions of the country. On the same page as this story, another story claimed that a Nova Scotia couple reported having 65 pounds of butter in their home, enough to last them for five years.<sup>149</sup> Prior to rationing, stockpiling certain goods was an ordinary household practice. The idea that this was “hoarding,” the behaviour of “greedy and unscrupulous people,”<sup>150</sup> would have come as quite a shock. The following day’s edition of *The Halifax Daily Star* continued to deliberate on the excess holdings report citing that “3,547 consumers throughout Canada have reported a total of more than 30 tons in excess of the legal limit.”<sup>151</sup> Most of the news stories regarding excess holdings refer vaguely to households or consumers as opposed to individuals. This makes it more difficult to estimate who precisely was doing the hoarding; however, one can safely assume that many of these law-breakers were women or at least that married women were complicit in their husbands’ decision to accumulate mass amounts of butter.

#### **4.3 GRUMBLING ABOUT RATIONING**

While there is not an overwhelming amount of evidence suggesting that they were consistently violating ration regulations, women in Canada were not shy when it came to making complaints about how the butter ration was negatively affecting their lives. As the country was facing enormous changes politically, socially, and culturally, and a war occurring overseas, many people were understandably anxious. Having to navigate the inconveniences brought about by rationing would have been too much for some to bear, which could have led to some restrictions being ignored or vigorously debated as unfair.

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<sup>148</sup> “Butter not likely to be Taken Away,” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 8 January 1943.

<sup>149</sup> “Couple have enough Butter for five Years,” *The Halifax Evening Mail*, 8 January 1943.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> “More than 30 tons of Butter,” *The Halifax Daily Star*, 9 January 1943.

Traces of this anxiety and anger remain in the WPTB fonds in a file called “Butter Complaints.” Its contents include six letters written by disgruntled citizens to members of the Board about how they have been inconvenienced in some way by the butter ration or shortage. Evidence within the file indicates that these were only a small sample of such letters.

There were two letters from the Maritimes. In a letter written in early 1943, the Chairman responds to Mrs. F.I. Thompson of Moncton, who had written in to the Board inquiring about butter shipments after she read a newspaper article about people ordering creamery butter for table purposes instead of dairy butter.<sup>152</sup> Mrs. Thompson goes on to express her concerns about butter shipments to the Maritimes. Gordon responds, stating that people are purchasing creamery butter for use in the home because they know it will always be of the same quality consistently, as opposed to dairy butter. He assures her it is not because less butter is being shipped to the Maritimes, as the newspaper article suggests.<sup>153</sup> During this time of uncertainty, simple rumours such as this were cause for alarm.

The other document from the Maritimes illustrates a woman’s concern over being unable to obtain butter from her usual wholesaler. A dispatch dated 29 December 1942 describes a letter from Mrs. Thomas H. Hall, a storekeeper in Sheet Harbour, N.S., to L.B. Unwin, Administrator of Rationing for the WPTB. In the letter she describes the difficulty in obtaining butter from her usual supplier for her retail store. The dispatch, which is written by Unwin’s secretary, comments that this letter is like “numerous other

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<sup>152</sup> Creamery butter seems to be the name for butter used in production, while dairy butter is for use in the home.

<sup>153</sup> RG64 Series 1030 Box No. 0550 File No. 16-3-7-A. Vol. 01 "Butter Complaints," Donald Gordon to Mrs. F.I. Thompson, 10 March 1943.

letters on this subject,” and is “a typical example of the complaints which are coming from retailers.” The letter relates to the fact that they [the storeowners] are unable to secure supplies of butter “for the reason that the week in which they were directed to build up their reserve stock they were unable to secure any stock of butter and, therefore, when it came time to exchange ration coupons for further supplies of butter, they were not in a position to do.” The secretary then goes to explain to Unwin that these types of complaints are quite general, and that some action should be taken to remedy the situation.<sup>154</sup>

The letter written by Mrs. Hall is not actually included in the record; however, Unwin’s response to her is. In it, he attempts to reassure her that rationing is fair:

[Y]our wholesaler, Bolands Ltd., should have supplied you with butter had there been any in his stocks. If, however, there were no supplies available to him it would obviously have been impossible for him to fill your order. We have, however, referred your complaint to the attention of our Halifax office which will investigate the situation and ascertain whether or not stocks of butter were available at the time. If your supplies were limited by the time rationing began you should apply to your nearest ration office, 77 Upper Water Street in Halifax[,] for a special purchase permit to buy your normal supplies. I would like to explain to you that rationing of butter was only adopted by the government with reluctance. Furthermore, rationing of its nature cannot assure a supply to everyone, all it can do is to make sure that available supplies are distributed equitably.<sup>155</sup>

In this type of response, the food administrator reminded those who felt wronged by the circumstances of life on the home front what the purpose of these rules were, and reassured them that the government realized not everyone was happy with these changes.

The effectiveness of these letters is debateable. The response to Mrs. Hall is the only example of back-and-forth correspondence within these records. The secretary to

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<sup>154</sup> RG64 Series 1030 Box No. 0550 File No. 16-3-7-A. Vol. 01 "Butter Complaints," dispatch to L.B. Unwin, 29 December, 1942.

<sup>155</sup> RG64 Series 1030 Box No. 0550 File No. 16-3-7-A. Vol. 01 "Butter Complaints, L.B. Unwin to Mrs. Thomas H. Hall, 9 January 1943.

Mr. Unwin describes Hall's complaint as typical, but it is unclear within the letter whether or not Unwin's response is as well. Based on evidence gathered from the reports published by the WPTB regarding the importance of public support, it is likely that his response was typical. Unwin's comment that butter rationing was only adopted out of necessity supports this claim. To have the support of the people, the Board had to maintain a certain level of approachability to Canadians. Admitting that the butter ration was implemented with reluctance might have eased Mrs. Hall's frustrations with the Board.

The suggestion in the "Butter Complaints" file that many letters had been received indicates that Canadians had no trouble with reaching out to their government with their concerns; however, based on the messages presented in propaganda, advertisements, and government dispatches about "doing one's wartime duty," making complaints was likely not regarded as a trait of the proper wartime citizen. Most of these letters were written by women, which illustrates that not all of them were eager to accept the drastic changes that rationing brought. If they were not willing to break the rules then they could at least complain about them. Cheating ration policy was not always easy; the WPTB's Enforcement and Consumer Branches were constantly on the look-out for violations. In addition to this, the notion of proper womanhood and respectability could have deterred women who might have thought about resisting the Board's authority. As Suzanne Morton has discussed in her book *Ideal Surroundings*, women's respectability reinforced their household authority, meaning that taking part in any activities that could damage their reputation was risky.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 68.



The policing of women's behaviour by other women was certainly apparent during the Second World War. In a "Dear Homemaker" article, a woman complains about the shortage of "laundry soap" and does not understand why because soap has not been rationed. She goes on to say that the WPTB does not care about the issues of real homemakers. The author of the column responds that soap is scarce because it is made from rationed fat and that more soap should be in the stores soon, but that she "hopes we aren't going to have it at the cost of more lives in Europe."<sup>157</sup> As women were expected to diligently comply with ration policy, those who showed disdain for wartime sacrifices were often penalized by others. While the *Globe's* Homemaker takes time to educate her complaining fan about the meaning of sacrifice, she still fulfills her patriotic duty and offers up a homemade soap recipe.<sup>158</sup> The monitoring of women's behaviour by society and the existence of the Enforcement Branch made it difficult for women to violate ration policy. Even though it was impossible for the Board to watch everyone in the country, the watchful eye of the Enforcement Branch would still have been a major deterrence to many who feared being publicly identified as unpatriotic.

#### **4.4 THE PUBLIC AND THE ENFORCEMENT BRANCH**

The purpose of the WPTB's Enforcement Branch was simple: to curb infractions and punish those they could catch. From its outset, the branch realized that imposing the rules aggressively would never work. As people read articles in the newspaper and observed in newsreels the horrors of what was going on overseas, the last thing the

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<sup>157</sup> "Soap Shortage," *The Globe and Mail* "Dear Homemaker," 2 November, 1945.

<sup>158</sup> Guilt was often used by others to compel women into certain positions. This observation is confirmed in Katherine Ling's Doctoral Dissertation where she discusses how women were guilted into service in Newfoundland.

WPTB wanted to look like was a form of paramilitary police. In their 1944 report, the Board explains the importance of maintaining civilian co-operation:

Regulations, however desirable they may appear in theory, are worse than useless if they are not widely observed and accepted. Enforcement there must be to deal with the small number of unscrupulous law breakers and to check the careless and the foolish. But enforcement designed to compel observance by a hostile public is neither feasible nor can it have any part in a democratic society.<sup>159</sup>

The Board understood that if people on the home front were coerced or forced into a specific role, then the Board would experience resistance. When the new personal income tax was established during the war, finance minister J.L. Ilesley witnessed a rise in resistance among the tax paying public. Lower-income Canadians as well as married women engaged in war work threatened to miss work and refuse overtime to avoid the tax hike. In addition, those who were financially well off had to be convinced that higher taxes were necessary. The concern was that this portion of the citizenry would refuse to buy victory bonds or otherwise to put their excess income towards the war.<sup>160</sup> Forcing rationing on Depression-weary Canadians without easing them into it with voluntary rationing, or aggressively enforcing the rules would only lead to a similar resistance against the WPTB's policies. While there obviously was some resistance in the form of hoarding and active black markets, rationing was otherwise widely observed. A more aggressive enforcement of the law could have led to organized opposition, which would have created a spike in inflation, an increase in the cost of living, or widespread food shortages.

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<sup>159</sup> Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Report of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board: January 1 1944 – December 31 1944, Section C: Board Policy and Responsibility for Civilian Supply*, 1944, Internet Archive, 20. <https://archive.org>

<sup>160</sup> Shirley Tillotson, "Warfare State, Welfare State, and the Selling of the Personal Income Tax," *Canadian Tax Journal* Vol. 63 No. 1 (2015): 65.

The Enforcement Branch was established not only to find and apprehend violators, but also to serve as a body to which concerned citizens could bring their complaints about prices, supplies, profiteering, and hoarding. A document contained in the WPTB's enforcement records explains how this relationship between government body and civilian was meant to work.

“To all administrators: the establishment of regional Prices and Supply Offices by the Board will permit local investigation of reported cases of violations of the Maximum Prices Regulations and related Board regulations. The public are being asked to refer to the regional Prices and Supply Representatives any reported instances of price increases over the basic period that may come to their attention. Reports of investigation which may indicate violations will be examined by the Enforcement Administrator in order to determine whether further information is required or whether action by way of prosecution or suspension or cancellation of license should be recommended. Such action will be authorized by the Board only on the recommendation of the Enforcement Administrator.”<sup>161</sup>

Note the important role for the public in uncovering price violations. Having the full support and co-operation of the public was crucial to the Enforcement Branch's success. The WPTB persuaded the public to assist with their mission by framing tattling on one's local grocer as a citizen's patriotic duty.

The WPTB created the Enforcement Branch in the hopes of using its powers “sparingly.” According to its initial report, the Board “examined every complaint of profiteering or hoarding that it received [from 1939 through 1943], it attempted to achieve its ends, wherever possible, without recourse to prosecution.”<sup>162</sup> Despite these good intentions, the branch did utilize its authority to prosecute violators. In anticipation of prosecutions, the WPTB set its maximum penalty as a fine of five thousand dollars, or

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<sup>161</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 01 "Enforcement General," F.A. McGregor, Bulletin no. 7 RE: Investigation of Reported Offenses, 4 December 1941.

<sup>162</sup> Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Report of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board: September 3 1939-March 31 1943*, 1943, Internet Archives, 15. <https://archive.org>

a maximum of two years in prison.<sup>163</sup> A sentence this extreme was reserved only for the most severe cases; however, the data provided in the reports show that no one was ever fined the maximum amount. Reports released by the Board indicated what their greatest concerns were when it came to the execution of the law. The WPTB wanted the Enforcement Branch to focus on achieving consumer support, appearing to undertake its methods in a democratic way, enlisting the assistance of women, and breaking up counterfeit coupon rackets.<sup>164</sup>

The commitment to democratic methods was not only a matter of principle: it was also a practical measure to address the “manpower” problems of the WPTB. There were simply not enough people at the Board’s disposal to check every home in Canada for infractions. This is why the Consumer Branch was established; it drew upon the availability of women and used their experience as consumers. Women volunteers could also help interpret the complex rules and remind forgetful consumers of the complicated regulations governing food consumption in the home. The following acts were considered illegal by the WPTB: “making gifts out of rationed goods (if not being sent overseas); giving, selling, or trading of rationed goods and coupons; and the selling of homemade or commercially made rationed items.”<sup>165</sup> It was legal to send rationed items overseas to soldiers or relatives as long as those items were purchased with coupons. This means that one would have to sacrifice one’s monthly allowance in order to send a relative a piece of pound cake.<sup>166</sup> It was also “legal to hold charitable sales of home-made cakes because when a rationed product was turned into a meal or food item in the home it lost its

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> RG64 Series 1240 Box. No. 447 File No. A10-29-8 Vol. 00 "Consumer Branch, Rationing," Consumer Branch WPTB, Bulletin on the “Use of Rationed Commodities Outside the Home,” 11 September 1943.

identity as a rationed product.” Lastly, it was “legal to take rationed food items to the home of a friend or relative as long as that item is going to be consumed in a shared meal that (you) were present for.”<sup>167</sup> With such intricate regulations it is certain that hundreds and thousands of people could have broken the rules unwittingly.

Despite all of the requests made by the government for people to follow the law and respect rationing, thousands of people were charged with violations throughout the war. The WPTB kept detailed records and statistics of infractions for each province. The Enforcement Branch’s records indicate that incidents of rationing and price violations occurred across the country. During the period of September 1939 through November 1944, 1,519 people were charged in Canada under the WPTB’s rationing violation policy and 4,386 were prosecuted for price violations. These numbers indicate that more retailers and wholesalers were charged than individuals. This makes sense as it was much easier to uncover infractions made by those who were selling as opposed to consuming. Six hundred and three of the 5,905 people charged were in Nova Scotia.<sup>168</sup> In addition to these data, the record also states that 95% of people who committed an offense under the WPTB were convicted.<sup>169</sup> While this sounds like a large percentage, many of these convictions were likely just small fines. Enforcement was most productive in the first half of 1943: from January through June of 1943, 111 people in the province (302 in Canada) were charged.<sup>170</sup> In comparison, only ten were fined during the same time frame in 1942. This increase in the number of charges coincides with the implementation of both the

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<sup>166</sup> Pound cake contains more butter than any other type of cake. It is traditionally made with a pound of each of four ingredients (including a pound of butter).

<sup>167</sup> RG64 Series 1240 Box. No. 447 File No. A10-29-8 Vol. 00 "Consumer Branch, Rationing," *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 01 "Enforcement General," Enforcement Administration, Prices Prosecutions Totals, 1944.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

butter and the meat ration. During the following months of 1943, the number of charges dropped significantly, to only six in July and eight in August.<sup>171</sup> The decrease during the summer months could mean a number of things: either the Enforcement Branch was focusing its efforts elsewhere, people in Nova Scotia began to break the rules less, or they simply got better at hiding it. The following section will examine the individual cases of those accused in Halifax and what those cases meant for both the city and women's role in resistance to government enforcement.

#### **4.5 A SAMPLE OF THE RATIONING CHEATS IN HALIFAX**

In addition to containing the statistics for both rationing and prices violations, the WPTB's Enforcement Branch records also hold the names of many of those who were charged, along with their offense and the outcome of their prosecution. By examining these records, as well as the records of the Halifax Police Court, I was able to compile a database of the accused in Halifax. A total of fifteen people were listed in one or both of these documents from 1942 to 1945. Upon finding out what I could about this list of guilty persons using these documents, I then followed up with the Halifax City Directory in order to paint a picture of each of these individuals' lives. Using the directory enabled me to find out the occupations, addresses, and marital status of these individuals, and the makeup of the neighbourhoods in which they lived. In the WPTB records, the infractions were named; unfortunately, the offenses of the six rationing offenders named only in the Police Court record were not specified in the same detail. All of this information provided some insight as to why some of these individuals chose to resist rationing.

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<sup>170</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 01 "Enforcement General" Enforcement Administration, Rationing Prosecutions Totals, 1944.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

The Police Court cases tell us only, generally, the kind of rationed commodity that was involved in the offense. Twenty-two year old Harold S. Brigham was convicted in the Halifax Police Court in 1942 under one count of breaking WPTB regulations and was fined five dollars.<sup>172</sup> Brigham was an attendant at a service station, and he resided on Creighton Street. Brigham was not married and he is listed in the *McAlpine's Halifax City Directory* as living with his parents. Perhaps he was charged for stealing gasoline or for receiving a cut of the sales; he might even have been encouraged by his parents to do so. In the case of Leonard Nowack, a grocery store manager charged in 1942 under two counts of the WPTB regulations and fined twenty five dollars, one can assume he was fined for selling rationed foodstuffs above the price ceiling.<sup>173</sup> Peter Lautenberg, a grocer, and Alexander Smith, a convenience store owner were both fined in 1944, possibly for the same kind of offense.<sup>174</sup>

A small number of the accused were named in both sets of records. While this provides more detail about the charges against them, it is not clear why some were not named in both, and therefore what the real total of offenses was. Out of the eight cases where the type of infraction is named, the most common types were selling above the price ceiling, hoarding, and attempting to purchase without the proper coupons. Retailer Angelos Peros was charged twenty dollars in October of 1943 for selling grapes above their maximum price.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, a grocer named Antonio Morrone was charged with several counts of price infractions during the same year, and was subsequently fined a total of one hundred dollars. Another man, Harold Johnson, was also fined one hundred

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<sup>172</sup> City of Halifax fonds, Halifax (N.S.) Police Department Records, subseries 102-16K, Halifax Police Department court record books. Cases, 4 November 1942.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 1942.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 6 April 1944.

dollars in 1944 for hoarding molasses. Molasses had been added to the ration list in May of 1943, and its storage was strictly prohibited.<sup>176</sup> Out of the cases listed in Halifax, the largest fines went to Morrone and Johnson. Samuel Muir, a welder at the Halifax Shipyards was also caught and fined for hoarding molasses; however, he was only charged ten dollars. The amount of molasses being held by Muir must have been very small compared to Johnson.

In addition to the financial toll of being fined, accusations of violating ration policy could negatively affect one's reputation. George Cik, owner Cik's Lunchroom and Grocery, was accused and eventually charged with hoarding canned milk in his home.<sup>177</sup> This case stands out because Cik was the only business owner I observed who was prosecuted for hoarding, not for a price ceiling violation. And Cik was accused of hoarding a rationed good in his home, as opposed to his business. Accusations such as these could have one labelled as a traitor to the war effort. This could have been very damaging to the reputation of his business, as his case was described in *The Halifax Chronicle*. Interestingly, another business owner charged for cheating ration policy was not mentioned in any local newspaper. Henry Lee, owner of China Café, was fined in September 1944 with one count of selling creamery butter while only having the permit for dairy butter, as well as one count of purchasing butter with no coupons. He was fined ten dollars for each violation.<sup>178</sup> Lee's infraction on this count is mentioned in the Enforcement Branch records of the WPTB, and several members of his family are listed alongside him as having participated in the offense. However, only Henry is listed in the

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<sup>175</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 01 "Enforcement General," Enforcement Administration, Prices Prosecutions, 1943.

<sup>176</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 106.



city directory. His business is listed at 18 Hollis Street, while his home address (18 ½ Hollis Street) indicates that he probably lived in the unit above his business.<sup>179</sup> His family not being listed in the city directory (but all being listed as connected to China Café in the Enforcement Records) could mean that they were undocumented immigrants. It could also mean that the four other people named in the file were his wife and children, as married women and children under the age of sixteen would not have been listed in the directory. Lee's attempt to purchase without coupons was one of four infractions of this type that are described in the Enforcement Branch's records for Halifax. The largest fine listed for this violation (twenty dollars) in Halifax was the one charged to Henry Lee. However, none of the city's newspapers thought that the Lee convictions merited news coverage.

The last incident involving butter in Halifax that was covered in the Halifax newspapers was the case of Murray Ross Fillmore. Fillmore was a carpenter who owned his own home in the respectable neighbourhood of Poplar Street. Murray's case is unusual because the infraction was not described in either the records of the Enforcement Branch or the Police Court: it involved theft rather than just rationing violations, so may have been in the end prosecuted as a criminal offense in another court. It is also unusual that the newspaper reported that Fillmore testified in the Police Court, but his case is not mentioned in the records. The story appeared in *The Halifax Chronicle* stating that, "Constable Felix Thompson found in his [Fillmore's] home twenty-five pounds of butter

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<sup>177</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 01 "Enforcement General," Enforcement Administration, Prices Prosecutions, 1943.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 1944.

<sup>179</sup> *McAlpine's Halifax City Directory*, NSA, 1944.

in a pillow case and two barrels, one containing fifty pounds, the other twenty-five.”<sup>180</sup> According to the article, the butter was known to be stolen from the Canadian National Steamship, and was of a kind destined for export only. His case is also unusual because it occurred so late in the war. Unfortunately, the news story gave no details about Fillmore’s sentence.

Few Halifax women were charged under the WPTB rules. Out of the fifteen accusations I followed, only two were women. Catherine Grand’s name appeared only in the Police Court records, so the nature of her crime is unknown. Grand was fined twenty-five dollars in 1943 for violating a regulation under the WPTB.<sup>181</sup> In the Enforcement Branch records, a woman named Julia Sheppard is named as having been fined fifteen dollars for purchasing butter without any coupons.<sup>182</sup> The rationale behind these women’s decisions to violate rationing legislation is unclear. Grand lived alone and owned her own home on Creighton Ave. There is no indication that Grand was a widow. As a single woman with no listed occupation, whose house was not inherited from her husband, she might have been disabled (living on a pension), or she might have been a prostitute or a bootlegger. Sheppard was married and living with another woman during the war, which was a common method by which a serviceman’s wife could save money in housing-starved Halifax.<sup>183</sup> The existence of these two women amongst the list of violators illustrates either that most Haligonian women were complying fully with rationing policy, or that they were getting caught less often in their ration dodges than were men.

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<sup>180</sup> “Found Butter in Home of the Accused,” *The Halifax Chronicle*, 11 April 1944.

<sup>181</sup> City of Halifax fonds, Halifax (N.S.) Police Department Records, subseries 102-16K, Halifax Police Department court record books. Cases, 4 June 1943.

<sup>182</sup> RG64 Series 1040 Box. No. 0888 File No. 1-20 Vol. 01 "Enforcement General," Enforcement Administration, Prices Prosecutions, 1945.

<sup>183</sup> *McAlpine’s Halifax City Directory*, NSA, 1944.

Out of the thirteen men whose names appear in these sets of documents, only five were married. Beyond the fact that most of these men were unmarried, there is nothing that stands out about their socio-economic condition that would affect their choice to break this particular law. All of them were employed, eight of them owning groceries or cafes, and six out of thirteen were homeowners.<sup>184</sup> The fact that many of them were grocers means that their customers were likely the ones who turned them in. Only two of the thirteen shared their residence with someone besides a spouse and children: this suggests that they were reasonably secure because they did not have to take in lodgers. The accused lived in a number of different areas in the city, although most of them resided on Barrington, Gottingen, and Creighton Streets. The neighbourhoods of the law-breakers were made up of people employed in a number of different professions including stevedores, carpenters, welders, active duty servicemen, and in the case of one of Catherine Grand's neighbours, an employee of the Department of National Defense. It is clear from observing these cases that those who broke the rules and were caught were working-class citizens. Prior to the war, these men might have been quite poor, struggling with the Depression and a fluctuating income. The women married to the accused were not listed separately from their husbands in the city directories, making it impossible to know if they were employed or not. Having this information would provide more insight into the lives of those who violated ration policy and could even perhaps allude to the rationale behind these crimes.

While the individuals discussed above were named in a number of private documents, the stories of their convictions were largely kept secret from the public. Out

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<sup>184</sup> Information about the accused's employment status and residences were found in the *McAlpine's Halifax City Directory* during the war years. The directories are held at NSA.

of all of these, only three of them – Fillmore, Nowack, and Cik – were mentioned in the Halifax press. It is clear that two of these men’s cases made the news because of the staggering amount of food they had stockpiled. Fillmore was charged for hoarding approximately one hundred pounds of butter, while Cik had been arraigned for hoarding 1,880 tins of canned milk.<sup>185</sup> It is unclear what makes Nowack’s story more newsworthy than that of any of the other grocers fined in Halifax. According to the article, Nowack was charged for selling sugar to consumers with expired and improper coupons.<sup>186</sup> For the sake of the war effort, the press had to keep certain things out of the newspapers. It was in the best interest of the press to ignore news that could harm morale. They turned a blind eye to many of the social issues on the home front – drunkenness, an explosion of incidences of VD, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown – and ignored signs of bureaucratic incompetence and corruption.<sup>187</sup> In addition, the Canadian government censored the news. Censorship was implemented in order to keep military and economic secrets out of enemy hands and to prevent civilian morale from breaking down. Most of the censors wanted to keep people at home a bit scared. War news, the main content of the front page, was not always positive. The threat of military failure or even defeat would make people more likely to accept rationing, family stress, long separations from loved ones, and even conscription.

*The Halifax Evening Mail* and the *Halifax Daily Star* reported on very similar types of stories, and each had a women’s section. *The Halifax Evening Mail*’s “Women’s Activities” included news from the community such who has joined the CWAC, and a

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<sup>185</sup> “Hoarding Charge is Heard,” *The Halifax Chronicle*, 3 February, 1943.

<sup>186</sup> “Fine Imposed on Store Proprietor,” *The Halifax Chronicle*, 5 November, 1942.

<sup>187</sup> Mark Bourrie, *The Fog of War: Censorship of Canada’s Media in World War Two*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Publishing, 2011), 10.

few homemaker tips. In January 1943, there were several rationing stories every day, but after January that discussion decreased. By November of the same year there was only an average of four mentions of rationing related issues a week. *The Halifax Daily Star* had a “news and features” for women section that included stories, cartoons, health tips, fashion advice, local stories that may interest women, recipes and other homemaking tips. Much like the *Evening Mail*, the number of stories about the butter ration, or rationing in general, dramatically decreased in the *Daily Star* as the war progressed.

*The Halifax Citizen*, the city’s working-class newspaper, differed from the other major papers as it did not always have a war story on its front page. The publication’s head story on 4 December 1942 was titled, “Social security program for post-war Britain.”<sup>188</sup> *The Halifax Citizen* seemed to be far less concerned with rationing than were other major news sources. Perhaps it was because working-class families were already used to scrimping on food. It often ignored major war stories that other papers had on their front pages, or at least relegated those stories to places further into the issue. A lot of this paper is devoted to complaining about workers’ hardships and the unfairness that some workers faced in their place of employment.

The three rationing offenses that were reported appeared *The Halifax Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* is the only newspaper in the city that mentioned any specific examples of citizens breaking ration policy. The reports on Fillmore, Nowack, and Cik are brief and simply describe the nature of each man’s offence. There is no attempt to moralize or sensationalize. Police and crime news were reported more frequently in *The Halifax Chronicle* than in the other newspapers. However, *The Halifax Herald*, another of the city’s major news outlets, also published more police and crime material in its city news

section near the end of the issue than did the *Mail* or the *Daily Star*. The latter two were the evening papers, and the *Herald* and the *Chronicle* morning papers. It is possible that police and crime news stories were more often reported in these two publications because morning papers were typically read by white-collar and professional men. Evening newspapers were read more by blue-collar workers and women of all classes.<sup>189</sup> Evening papers also included more syndicated fiction that could be read together by families. Though there was coverage of a few rationing offenses, none of the papers bombarded citizens with stories of resistance, whether local or national. To do so would have been detrimental to morale levels on the home front or might have led readers to believe that since so many people were breaking the law then cheating must not be that serious an offense.

It is clear that more women followed the law than broke it. While most of the ration violators were men, their existence proves that Depression- and war-weary Halifax was not always a shining bastion of Canadian/British patriotism. As well, it demonstrates that Canadians were not always ready to accept such drastic changes in their lives. The existence of a black market in rationed goods, as well as numerous instances of people hoarding, shows that not everyone felt the same pride in following every home front rule. While women were not completely innocent when it came to breaking the rules, most of the cases involving ration infractions in Halifax were men. Many women were not afraid to share their dissatisfaction with their current situation with the WPTB. The fact that most convicted men included in this sample were grocers could mean that women in Halifax were complaining about unfair prices and turning in their local retailers. Perhaps

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<sup>188</sup> "Social Security Program for Post-War Britain," *The Halifax Citizen*, 4 December 1942.

women so strongly believed in the fairness and equality initially promised by the Board that they were more willing to monitor the behaviour of their fellow citizens for any discrepancies than take any risks themselves.

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<sup>189</sup> Charles Johanningsmeir, "Frank Norris' 'A Salvation Boom in Matabeleland: The Bibliographic Problems of Syndicated Fiction,'" *Text*, Vol. 10 (1997), 286.

## CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

During World War Two, The Wartime Prices and Trade Board's restrictive ration regulations had a drastic impact on the lives of Canadian women on the home front. As the main shoppers and preparers of food for those in their care, women were under a lot of pressure to respect these new changes and to follow the rules. This thesis demonstrated that during World War Two, women in Halifax both strengthened and defied notions of "proper" womanhood and citizenship in their compliance with and resistance to government intervention in the form of ration policy. Government persuasion and the call to win the war at home compelled thousands of women to volunteer in local and national organizations, cut back on waste, and discover new and delicious alternatives for common ingredients in family recipes. While Propaganda posters did not always convince voluntary organizations to change their agenda, messages about the home front were pervasive in the media, and companies used the war to sell their products to women.

This thesis concluded with the revelation that more men than women were caught and prosecuted for breaking rationing rules. When this project began, I predicted that there would be a more visible dichotomy between women who chose compliance and those who resisted. Based on the knowledge that women were the primary consumers of their households, it is not unusual to assume that there would be a lot more cases of rationing infractions involving women. While I cannot attest to what the rates of punishment were throughout the rest of the country, evidence revealed that very few women in Halifax were charged with violations. The near absence of charges involving women could mean a number of things. One might suggest that women in Halifax were



better at avoiding being caught by the authorities, or that perhaps the Enforcement Branch in the city was less apt to convict female law-breakers; however, evidence in support of these theories would be very difficult to find. The most likely explanation as to why there were so few cases of women in Halifax is the explanation presented in this thesis.

Despite not being able to witness a stark dichotomy between compliance and resistance, one is left wondering if anything occupied the space in between. Joking about rationing or not treating it as seriously as the government portrayed it is a way that many navigated the plane between following the rules and breaking them. In this way, one could still be a good citizen while still finding a way to relieve the tension caused by rationing's restrictions. Joking about rationing is discussed in Barry Broadfoot's *Six War Years*, where memories about the World War Two home and battle front are presented. In his brief section on rationing, one individual claims that "victory gardens got to be a laugh," and that "they [victory gardens] caught on really fast, a lot of people found they had green thumbs."<sup>190</sup> The same individual goes on to describe the effect that canning had. He explains that the government wanted people to can all that they could; however, there were never enough bottles. "...and to make more [bottles] they would have to take glass materials away from what they called the vital war effort. So not everybody could preserve the stuff, and by this time an awful lot of people didn't want to see another cabbage or cob of corn."<sup>191</sup> In this example, humour is used to ease the frustrations caused by rationing and the government's requests of Canadians to "grow your own, can

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<sup>190</sup> Barry Broadfoot, *Six War Years: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad, 1939-1945*, (Don Mills, Ontario: Paper Jacks Publishing, 1974), 34.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid, 35.

your own.” Interestingly, joking was considered to be an acceptable form of expression, while complaining was not.

Instead of breaking the law and purchasing large quantities of butter on the black market, women and housewives made do with the new changes instituted by the WPTB, or they found innovative ways of stretching the product to last longer. Butter’s importance to the diet and, at the same time, the wide possibilities for substitution made it an important focal point of this project. As a commodity, butter presented different kinds and degrees of challenge than did other rationed commodities. The fat in butter was among the best known dietary sources of energy, crucial for wartime work. But some of its uses were more luxury than necessity, and it could be easily substituted or stretched, far more easily than could other items such as coffee. While meat was also an important part of people’s diets, it was more easily reduced in or eliminated from cooking than was butter and, therefore, did not provide as much of a challenge to women cooks. In *The Globe and Mail* “Dear Homemaker” and in *Chatelaine*, recipes using butter substitutes were fewer than those using meat, and would have been more prized by those needing help with stretching their weekly butter allowance. Obtaining less nutrition if consuming less butter was a widely-held worry that distinguished butter from high energy, but low nutrition sugar.

Initially, this thesis set out to challenge the work of one scholar and to fill a gap left by another. In Ruth Roach-Pierson’s book, *They’re Still Women After All*, Canadian women are celebrated for their commitment to duty by joining the work force, and most importantly for this thesis, for their work in voluntary organizations that aided the war effort. At its outset, this project aimed to dispute her claims by showing how women

could refuse to follow the path established for them. However, as my research has shown, women breaking off and challenging what was expected of them was not as common as one might think. This thesis reiterates Pierson's point that women made an enormous contribution through their time and effort on the home front. Her question about whether or not the war freed women from concepts of "traditional" womanhood is also answered in the first two chapters of this thesis. The lack of female law-breakers also illustrates how women (at least in Halifax) were not willing to abandon their wartime duty for their own good.

This thesis also originally aimed to further develop the work of Jeffrey Keshen on those who broke the rules in wartime Canada. As previously discussed, the notion of women as criminal would have illustrated another aspect of Keshen's argument, which does not focus on women. Perhaps examining the enforcement records of another region of Canada would have yielded different results. In addition, an even more thorough analysis of the lives and neighborhoods of the accused might have revealed more information about their socio-economic status. As previously discussed, the sample of law-breakers in Halifax described in this thesis concluded with the knowledge that these individuals were from respectable working-class backgrounds. It is unusual that with all of the issues taking place in wartime Halifax that none of these men or women exhibited any signs of the extreme poverty associated with a large portion of the city. This raises questions about whether or not this is truly a Halifax story. Scholars of Halifax often present the notion that this region of the country is exceptional or different in some way. The evidence shown in this thesis does not support this common claim. In addition, I am still not fully convinced that more women were not breaking the law; however what this

thesis has shown is that Halifax, and in particular, the women of Halifax were compliant in serving their country and that they were willing to offer their time, energy, and to even police the behaviour of others to win the battle at home.

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