

# “Hearth and Home”

The Struggles of Life on the Home Front and Guysborough County  
During the Second World War

Gerry Madigan and Norma Cooke

1 April 2019

## Part 1 Spring has sprung!

The dog days of winter were still with us early March. Spring was just around the corner, as I looked forward to my latest project with Norma Cooke. The days seemed to be getting both warmer and longer, the snow receding upon the lawn.

Wistfully, like many readers, I looked forward to forthcoming favourite spring and summer activities, some good fishing, and some refreshing gardening after a long winter's nap. It became exceedingly difficult to investigate or write about anything for all beckoned.

In my last years of work, I constantly had visions of casting, catching, and looking forward to my trips to Nova Scotia. The short vacations here, spread over the idyllic days of spring, summer, and fall; found me in the out of doors on its many lakes, streams and rivers. It was all about being here, enjoying mother nature's magnificence!

So, it was of no surprise that Melodie and I upped stakes when I retired from the Canadian Armed Forces and moved back to Nova Scotia. That move expanded our horizons. We had visions of doing a little gardening and maybe living a little healthier, perhaps off the land as well.

Melodie and I once had a hugely successful foray "on the land". It was in the early years of our marriage. We had a small garden plot at Macdonald College, an agricultural institution, where I was a grad student and studied private forestry. At the end of the day we canned the most delicious succulent stewed tomatoes ever. They were canned, stored, and eaten up over the winter months. It was the sweet taste of summer with each opening.

As it happened with many grad students in our day, there were few opportunities in our chosen fields. Alas a career in forestry was not meant to be and we moved on, surprisingly to a military career. It happened that many postings put paid to our gardening aspirations though. This aspiration was only realized once again when we returned to Nova Scotia some 28 years later.

I soon found out, to my chagrin, that I never did possess a green thumb. My gardening efforts failed miserably in the dribs and drabs of the odd tomato,

misshapen carrots, rotted potatoes, and minimal harvest of beans and peas. There was never enough to feed a flea much less two adults (and Melodie says, “It cost us a pretty penny too!”).

My poor results never dissuaded me from trying year after year though. It soon became evident that the benefit was more about the exercise, serenity and turning the ground and not the food. Food sustenance was a mere side line. If left to my own devices, Melodie and I would surely starve and never survive a winter. Thank God then for the convenience of the modern grocery store!

My efforts seem laughable, but I recently recalled an exercise on one grad course concerning food security. Our class was tasked to figure out the minimal crop area required to sustain the nutritional needs of a typical Canadian family. Surprisingly, the solution turned out to be a mere half acre. This figure was recently corroborated by further research on another area of interest, war time rationing in the United Kingdom. Their data and experience suggested that a family of five could live comfortably well on a mere 300 square foot garden plot for 8 months of the year.<sup>1</sup>

I have often wondered then, given my own experience, if our generation could ever be able to sustain ourselves, should the need arise. It’s a matter of food security after all. We never know what the future may bring. As it happens, we do have an answer to the question in the example of Canada during the Second World War, wartime rationing.

## Part 2 – Waste not, want not

Canada’s rich history and body of experience, concerning war time rationing, illustrates it had an impact on our health and psyche. I never experienced it first hand. As a child of the fifties though, that experience came as a carry over, found in frugality in the family home.

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall, *The Ministry of Food – Thrifty Wartime Ways to Feed Your Family Today*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2010, Pg. 53

To my mother, Shirley, it remained a question of “waste not, want not” in those days. Shirley always saved bacon grease in a jar at the back of the fridge. It was safeguarded there for later reuse as she experienced that shortage during the war. Fats, butter and other oils became scarce, so, nothing was ever wasted, fats were saved. It was a habit that she continued long after the war.

#### USES FOR RENDERED FATS:

**SUET or BEEF FAT:** (1) In sauces instead of butter. (2) If softened by melting with half the quantity of lard, stirring occasionally while cooling to prevent separation, it may be used to replace lard in many recipes.

**PORK or BACON FAT:** (1) For panfrying potatoes, lean meats, etc. (2) Shortening in pastry, cakes, cookies, etc.

**CHICKEN FAT:** Shortening in pastry, cakes, cookies, etc., as soon as rendered (without clarifying).

**CHICKEN FAT:** (From roast chicken) Render, then clarify to remove flavours. Use as shortening for spiced cakes, cookies, etc.

**LAMB FAT:** Too strong-flavoured to be particularly suitable for cooking.

*Notes*—1. Use only fats of good flavour. 2. Allow sufficient quantity to accumulate before rendering, to save time and fuel. 3. Cover fats tightly and keep in a cold place. 4. Rendered fats may be combined with ordinary shortening for cooking.

We suggest that you write the Consumers' Section, Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa, for their wartime folder—“Saving and Using Fats in the Home” which is available without charge.

Source: Economy Recipes for Canada's Housesoldiers. The Canada Starch Company, March 1943, pg. 18

I suppose to the modern, post millennial 21<sup>st</sup> century nose and palette, this is off putting. Imagine; recycling grease with bacon bits for later use! But every Friday, Mom would pull out this jar, put a dollop in a hot skillet and fry up some of the best home fries and lightly dredged cod for our Friday evening meal. You simply could not beat the flavour and taste. And sadly, it's a recipe that I am unable to replicate either in texture or flavour today. But as it was then, as it is now, it was simple homecooked comfort food.

Food and food conservation were more than symbolic; they were in fact weapons of war. Central to Canada's wartime food policies, was an obligation to feed its allies and soldiers overseas. Canadian food exports were an essential lifeline to Britain.<sup>2</sup> The reigning fear was that an effective U-boat blockade preventing exports, spelt disaster and meant certain defeat.

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Mosby, Food on the Home Front during the Second World War, (essay), McMaster University, Wartime Canada, 2019

It followed that Canadians at some point would feel some privations of food shortage and wartime rationing. Canadians were encouraged to aid Canada's food export commitments by avoiding foods that were required in Britain.

Citizens were asked to consume more "Canadian" foods to assist both farmers and fisherman whose traditional European markets were now gone. Patriotic food alternatives to meat; such as lobster, a luxury food item today, were strongly encouraged.<sup>3</sup> Cheaper and rougher cuts of meat were utilized to stretch the protein reserves; such as tongue, hearts and liver to name a few. Rationing eventually followed several federal government's "request and suggestion" campaigns.

#### Venison at its Best

##### Marinade

2 onions, sliced  
2 bay leaves  
pinch of thyme  
¼ cup vinegar  
1 pint ginger ale

1 tsp. salt  
1 clove garlic  
2 cloves  
Black pepper to taste

Cut venison into serving size pieces and place them in the marinade in an earthenware or glass jar for several days. (in refrigerator)

##### Chops or Steak

Wipe off pieces with a damp cloth and fry in butter or cooking oil 15 to 20 minutes on each side.

With permission -The Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia – Mrs. John A. McLean et al (ed.) **The Country Kitchen - Old and New, 1983**, pg. 44  
Venison Recipe

Canadians enthusiastically assisted in whatever way or means possible. Nothing was wasted. Every effort was made to conserve. Canning was strongly encouraged, and extra sugar rations were provided for that effort. With canning and wartime production, came a forced standardization of packaging. Limitations were placed on the number of tin-can sizes, that reduced their number from over 116 to only 9 standard sizes.<sup>4</sup>

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Source: <http://wartimecanada.ca/essay/eating/food-home-front-during-second-world-war>  
Accessed: 18 March 2019

<sup>3</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, Wartime Canada, 2019

<sup>4</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, Wartime Canada, 2019

## CANNING and PRESERVING

### AMBER MARMALADE

6 oranges  
2 lemons  
1 grapefruit  
5 quarts cold water  
4 cups sugar  
6 cups Crown Brand Corn Syrup

Wash fruits, remove peel and cut in very thin slices. Slice pulp thinly and set aside in a covered bowl. Cover peelings with cold water and let stand overnight. Next day bring to boiling point and add sugar and *Crown Brand Syrup* (which have been heated gently together but not allowed to boil). Add also sliced fruit pulp. Cook rapidly, stirring very often, till marmalade gives the jelly test (see Fresh Raspberry Jam for test)—(about  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour). *Yield*: Approx. 5 pints (Wine Measure).

### FRESH RASPBERRY JAM

2 lbs. or 2 quarts (8 cups) fresh raspberries, cleaned  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  pound ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups) sugar  
1 cup Crown Brand Corn Syrup

Wash fruit if necessary; reject unsound portions. Combine with sugar and *Crown Brand Syrup* and let stand 1 hour. Mix well and stir over moderate heat until sugar dissolves and mixture comes to a boil. Boil rapidly over high heat, stirring frequently, for 18 to 20 minutes or until thick and clear, and mixture will give jelly test—(2 drops coming together and falling reluctantly from the side of a spoon). Pour into hot, sterilized glasses ( $\frac{3}{4}$ " from top). Seal, cool, label, and store in a dark, dry, cool place. *Yield*: Approx. 3 pints (Wine Measure).

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Source: Economy Recipes for Canada's Housesoldiers. The Canada Starch Company, March 1943, pg. 18

### Part 3 – The Flood Gates Opened Wide

The Great Depression was still a very recent memory in the early days of the Second World War. Canada's fiscal policy became an instrument of economic development and, more importantly, it was also an instrument of great social change.

The "Dirty 30s" or the "Great Depression" was to many citizens, Canada's most traumatic and darkest period in its history. It was a low point that deeply shook the Canadian psyche to the core. Its impacts were felt very deeply by many Canadian families. Many were impoverished and lacked the basic necessities of life, food or shelter for want of a decent paying job.

The statistics of the day paint a horrible picture. More than half the wage earners in Canada, were on some form of relief at the height of the Depression. One in five was on the dole.

Interestingly, the poverty line was marked at \$1000 per year for a family of four. What points to the desperation and plight of Canadian families though, was the fact that the average income was less than \$500 per year for many households.

People and families had been left to their own devices. These were truly desperate days, the blackest days in Canadian history, and with a "government"

unmotivated to act to spare the suffering.<sup>5</sup> That desperation was the crucible for change.

Change came and for many, that happened September 10, 1939, the day Parliament declared war on Nazi Germany. It was a change that was both noticeable and palpable. For many Canadians the government's declaration effectively ended the Great Depression. September 10 ended the government's fiscal parsimony. The purse strings had suddenly opened!

Although war brought great privations, trials and tragedy; it also brought prosperity, jobs, and wealth. There was a vast industrial expansion. The addition of defence spending boosted demand for labour for war production, that brought with it, full employment.

A country that had been unable to find work or succour for a fifth of its people in the Dirty 30's and Great Depression, suddenly and miraculously, was able to find work for all, including women, young boys and old men.<sup>6</sup>

It was an economic miracle that had not gone unnoticed!<sup>7</sup> And with it, it brought a whole new set of problems, inflation, unmet consumer demand, and increased prices. It was a set of problems that had to be solved too; largely through rationing and wage and price control.

#### Part 4 – Wage and Price Control

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Berton, **The Great Depression - 1929-1939**, Anchor Canada, 2001 (copyright 1990), Pg. 9

<sup>6</sup> ibid Pierre Berton, **The Great Depression - 1929-1939**, 2001, pg. 503-504; and Donald F. Ripley, **The Home Front – Wartime Life in Camp Aldershot and Kentville, Nova Scotia**, Lancelot Press, Hantsport Nova Scotia, 1991, pg.30

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Brady and F.R. Scott, **Canada After the War – Studies in Political, Social, and Economic Policies for Post-War Canada**, The Canadian Institute of International Affairs, The Macmillan Company of Canada Lt, Toronto, 1945 (@1943), Pg. 3

"if we are not now to take thought for the future, we can expect nothing but backsliding to the bad old ways of the inter-war period. As to the claim that thinking of the post-war future slackens the war effort, nothing could be paltrier. People are bound to think of the future. Only the promise of better things to come sustains us in war. If this promise is not to be frustrated and our high hopes disappointed, we must be prepared to discuss now in a realistic manner the modifications of our institutions necessary to fulfil man's aspirations for a "better world".'

Prosperity and the war raised some concerns, some of which concerned the consequences of inflation and prices. Full employment in a state of “Total War”, threatened the gains in our economy and to Canadian social well being. The cause lay behind the potential in a rampant increase of prices for goods and services.<sup>8</sup> It was a simple fact that demand exceeded supply.

So, a report in 1944 on how Canada handled and avoided a “wage and price” crisis was timely. It also addressed the issues of food security and its impacts on Canadian health and welfare. Many useful yardsticks were discussed that measured the consequences, yet these yardsticks did not necessarily provide a complete or clear indication of the reasons for rationing.<sup>9</sup>

“Food” in Canada was generally available. The first big ration impacts were felt in other commodities; such as, the availability of gasoline or durable goods. And rationing was not necessarily equitably distributed; particularly gasoline.

Then Nova Scotia Premier A. S . MacMillan complained to Munitions Minister Lowe, 17 May 1942 that “Nova Scotians refuse to 'accept diminished gasoline rations while all Canada outside the Maritime Provinces continues with unchanged rationing” .

MacMillan went on to suggest that Nova Scotians were being discriminated against. He was concerned by the government’s lassitude when announcing gasoline rationing changes that, “Many persons had been `hundreds of miles away from their homes and could not secure sufficient (gas) to enable their return.” What irked MacMillan more than the change was the inadequate notice given so Nova Scotians could prepare themselves adequately. Rationing worked, but not always smoothly, nor without controversy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, A. L . Cawthorn Page, Globe and Mail 1 Jul 1944 Pg. 2/21

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, A. L . Cawthorn Page, Globe and Mail 1 Jul 1944 Pg. 2/21

<sup>10</sup> Globe and Mail, **Nova Scotia Premier 'Resents' Gasoline Cut**, 17 May 1942

Source: <https://collections.museedelhistoire.ca>

Accessed: 4 March 2019

It became a huge problem because many sectors were largely lent over to war production. Ready supplies of consumer goods became increasingly unavailable or scarce for Canadian consumers. The available stocks of consumer goods thus had to be prioritized and distributed accordingly.<sup>11</sup> In many cases there was nothing to be had, even if there was money to be spared.

Rationing was applied to imported goods first. Canada was largely self reliant for its own food production and domestic food security. The key food items that were rationed included sugar, tea and coffee. It followed later that some Canadian food items were also rationed; such as, meat and butter.

Canadians took wartime “wage and price control” as well as rationing in their stride. In fact, many Canadians wished to do more. Sometimes they did so by ignoring government policies and desires. One area that bucked government direction was the matter of victory gardens.

The government saw the implementation of a Victory Garden program as a waste. The program was perceived as a diversion of scarce resources, energy, manpower, and tools; and a drain on the total effort required in the production of vital war materiel.

The government feared an increased demand and need for garden tools and other implements would burden its already strained production capacity. There was just no spare industrial capacity for this effort. Regardless, Canadians simply ignored government “direction” and got on with planting their gardens.

The Victory Garden effort was in fact quite successful. At its peak in 1944, approximately 209,200 victory gardens were in operation on front, back lawns or empty lots. Canadian gardeners harvested a total of 57,000 tons of vegetables produced nationwide that year. The government finally relented and threw in the towel. The bureaucratic effort to hinder the movement ceased in early 1943.<sup>12</sup>

## Part 5 – Canadians take a hand!

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, A. L . Cawthorn Page, Globe and Mail 1 Jul 1944 Pg. 5/21

<sup>12</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, Wartime Canada, 2019

Ensuring Canada's food security was a matter of grave concern to Canadians. It went far beyond the production of food; it was also a matter of public health. The Depression greatly affected people's health. Many starved or were malnourished. The Depression's impacts were felt at recruitment centres for Canada's armed services. It was not surprising then that many volunteers were rejected as unfit because of poor health.

It all stemmed from their poor diet during the Depression that was recognized by 1941. The country's leading nutritionists warned that upwards of 60 percent of the country suffered from some form of vitamin and mineral deficiency. They observed and, in their words, it was evident in the "alarming rates of medical rejections by the Canadian military."<sup>13</sup>

It had to be dealt with and quickly. The federal government responded with its first ever national nutrition education program by creating a new government department, the Nutrition Services Division in 1941. The Division launched the Canadian Nutrition Program the following year, that inundated Canadians with nutritional advice throughout the war years.<sup>14</sup>

This effort was the precursor to the National Food Guide. Their guide enumerated and listed the requirements of a healthy diet, consisting of dairy, cereals, breads, fruits, vegetables, eggs and, finally, "meat, fish, etc.". That guide was meant to establish a basic caloric intake to affect an improvement in health and general well-being of Canadians. It did have one great impact; Canadians soon became healthier.<sup>15</sup>

Canadian families seemed to have taken the government's advice to heart. Canadians of that era often looked back fondly and nostalgically on their wartime diet.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, *Wartime Canada*, 2019

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, *Wartime Canada*, 2019

<sup>15</sup> Anon. **Canadian Nation Healthier Because Of Better Living**. *Hamilton Spectator*, 31 Dec 1943

War Museum Canada Archives 149 WAR Europe 1939 Canada Health

Source: <https://collections.museedelhistoire.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5052142>

Accessed: 22 Mar 2019

<sup>16</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, *Wartime Canada*, 2019

## Part 6 – Rationing

By 1943, the impacts of shortages were starting to be felt, some three and a half years after the war begun. Rationing was first instituted in the control of favoured food items; such as, fats, butter, sugar and meats. Canadians had to make do with alternatives or supplement their larders by other means. In Guysborough and other rural areas, meats and fish were easily harvested off the land to fill the gap.

Rationing was important because it ensured an equitable distribution for all Canadians. All were to receive their fair share of caloric requirements necessary to sustain a healthy life. Beyond that, it was also about the military requirement to be fighting fit, and industrially, to be efficient for the jobs/tasks under a war economy. Rationing was implemented slowly. Gradually the way Canadians shopped and ate, changed.

The first small steps were taken December 1941 with the introduction of a universal price freeze. Some few months later, that was followed with the introduction of coupon rationing of sugar July 1942.<sup>17</sup> It was the beginning of what led to be the larger program.

The average weekly food ration for adult Canadians was a mere 8 oz of sugar, 7 oz of butter, 2 oz of tea, 8 oz of coffee per family member in September 1944. Evaporated milk was also controlled and limited to one to 16 oz daily for infants.

There was also sundry rationing on jams, canned fruit, molasses, honey and syrups. Supplies were limited to monthly amounts of 12 oz for jams and 20 oz for canned fruit per person. Surprisingly meats were not listed as “rationed” items in September 1944.<sup>18</sup>

Yet meat availability was to be impacted too. Meatless Tuesdays and Fridays were instituted to buffer and make up for any shortfalls in supply.<sup>19</sup> And still Canadians were able to warmly welcome many a lonely serviceman into the hearts of their home for a good meal and companionship despite rationing.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, *Wartime Canada*, 2019

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, A. L. Cawthorn Page, *Globe and Mail* 1 Jul 1944 Pg. 7/21

<sup>19</sup> Ibid Ian Mosby, *Wartime Canada*, 2019

The abundance of food was largely due to the prodigious efforts of Canadian farmers and fishermen. Even the little places in rural Canada made a tremendous contribution and impact on Canada's war economy.

In the matter of substitution and alternatives, such places as the local lobster cannery made a difference to the war effort. Once such place was the lobster canning factory operation at Drum Head in the 1940s. This cannery not only provided food, but also many jobs for both men and women in the area. It was operated by O'Leary and Lee Limited of Halifax.<sup>20</sup>



From the archives of Norma Cooke, Isaac's Harbour

In 1942 Mr. Ted Greencorn came to Drum Head as buyer and to manage the Drum Head Fish Plant. He provided a lot of jobs for both men and women as fish cutters and packers. Burns Fisheries bought the fish in the form of fillets.

Mr. Greencorn's arrival was propitious for other reasons too! In his second year as operation's manager, he hired a number of Newfoundland boys to work in the plant. It seemed that this resulted in several of the local girls finding husbands.<sup>21</sup>

But the increase in fish and lobster harvesting also brought activity in secondary sectors of the economy. All the produce or goods brought in had to be transported.

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<sup>20</sup> Norma Cooke, Auto-Biography (In Her Words 2018), 29 October 2018 (transcribed)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

## Part 7 – Family fun, making do, and living life to the fullest

Norma Cooke fondly remembers her father, Austin Henderson of Drum Head, Guysborough County and the trials of his small trucking business. Austin had a contract to transport fish to Antigonish to be shipped out by rail to Burns Fisheries Ltd. in Halifax. <sup>22</sup>



From the archives of Norma Cooke, Isaac's Harbour

Austin worked hard. Most times it would be early evening before the shipment was ready as he left for Antigonish, over a distance of about 52 miles. He had a tight deadline for meeting the midnight freight train. Austin made his way to Antigonish and found at times the train was hours late in arriving. Often as not, Austin wouldn't arrive home until noon or later the next day. <sup>23</sup>

It was a bone jarring drive and there was no way of communicating with him back then while he was on the road. By today's standards the distance isn't all that great, but in the 1940s, roads were unpaved. It wasn't until you reached St Andrew's that you hit tarmac. And most of the roads then as now were in very poor condition, especially in Spring, with the frost coming out. There were places that were almost impassable. <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>23</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>24</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

Norma also recalls her family's experience with war time rationing. "I can recall the War Ration Coupons Mum would have to use for certain things and her saying food had to be used very sparingly."<sup>25</sup>



From the archives of Norma Cooke, Isaac's Harbour

Living in the country back in the 40s, most people did all their shopping through mail order for everything except groceries and meats. There were two meat trucks that came around the community once a week.<sup>26</sup>

Simpson's and Eaton's were the main sources for supplies, but I can recall sending films away to be developed to different companies in Ontario and sending the occasional order to the Free Press Weekly.<sup>27</sup>

Small parcels would come through the mail, but larger items would be sent on the freight boat which made regular trips. The trip from Drum Head to Halifax took two to three days, depending on her stops. The earlier freight boats carried passengers as well as freight.<sup>28</sup>

The last of the steam boats was the "Chedabucto" . The government paid a subsidy for the upkeep of these boats, this continued until after the trucking took over and then the subsidy was withdrawn. Chartered boats then took over until

<sup>25</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>26</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>27</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>28</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

the mid 60s and then became obsolete. Very large items would be shipped by rail and would have to be picked up at the train station in Antigonish.”<sup>29</sup>



From the archives of Norma Cooke, Isaac's Harbour

Norma also spoke about sending catalogue orders to Simpson's and Eaton's for clothing and other necessities and having most of the money returned as the goods were unavailable. The war had an impact, even in Drum Head.<sup>30</sup> Still the people persevered. And they persevered in many ways and by other means; and perhaps, life was much more enjoyable and memorable.

In the late summer many families did a lot of berry picking. There was an abundance of raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, and foxberries. Norma recounts that she “loved to pick berries and most every day after school I headed for the barrens.” It wasn't just the children, a lot of the adults picked berries too. “What berries couldn't be made use of while fresh were preserved or put down some other way for use over the long winter months!”<sup>31</sup>

During the winter months I enjoyed coasting and skating. My father had a pair of snowshoes and I loved to go out on the glade back of our house on them.

Occasionally Doug Nauffts who owned a movie theatre in Canso would come to Drum Head and show a movie in the hall. It was usually a western and sometimes it would be a silent type. His equipment wasn't the best and you'd just get

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>30</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>31</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

interested when the film would break. Sometimes this would happen a couple of times during the movie. I think I paid 25 cent admission.”<sup>32</sup>

Every summer the Henderson family would take a trip to Halifax by train to visit with cousins, and every Fall, Austin would take his family to Antigonish for a special day. That day “consisted of a dinner at Wong’s Restaurant and doing a bit of shopping at the two department stores. The Antigonish 5c to \$1 is still in business but the other store with the squeaky floors, I’ve forgotten the name ((sic) Goodman’s), is no longer in existence.”<sup>33</sup>

Norma’s account is a great vignette of life and times on the home front in Guysborough during the war years. It was likely an experience that all shared one way and or another. And a good life was lived as well.

#### Part 8 – A community gathers together

The war brought new opportunities and roles for women to fill too. Canadian women worked tirelessly in the home. There was much to do in domestic labours, war-related volunteer work with women's organizations, in military canteens, or war work in the factories and shipyards across the country.<sup>34</sup>

The Women's Institutes (WIs) and other women's groups did their part too during the war. It was their members' experiences in adapting recipes to wartime shortages though, that are of particular importance. The WI published special cookbooks to assist the average homemaker, struggling to prepare meals within the restrictions of food rationing.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>33</sup> Ibid Norma Cooke, transcribed, 29 Oct 2018

<sup>34</sup> Canada. Veteran’s Affairs, Women and War .**Canada Remembers Women on The Home Front**, 14 Feb 2019

Source: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/women-and-war/homefront>

Accessed: 2 April 2019

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, **Canada Remembers Women on The Home Front**, 14 Feb 2019

The WI also assisted Canada's food security; and used its agricultural connections in cooperation with government to establish farm labour bureaus. These bureaus helped many women to volunteer with harvesting crops. Additionally ,they held "canning clubs" that helped preserved fruits and vegetables for future use.<sup>36</sup>

Locally, the Women's Institute (WI) first began in Guysborough County 27 August 1914, with the first branch at Sherbrooke organized by Miss Jennie Fraser, the superintendent of the WI of Nova Scotia. The movement soon grew beyond, and another organized 28 August at Newtown-Denver. On 29 August another branch was organized in Aspen-Glenelg. Others quickly followed.<sup>37</sup>

#### GUYSBORO

Aspen - Glenelg  
Cross Roads - Country Harbour  
Drumhead - Seal Harbour  
Indian Harbour Lake  
Isaac's Harbour  
Liscomb - Spanish Ship Bay  
Lochaber  
Newtown - Denver  
Port Bickerton  
Port Hillford  
Sherbrooke  
Sonora

With permission - The Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia –  
Mrs. John A. McLean et al (ed.) **The Country Kitchen - Old and New**, 1983, pg.72  
Guysborough County Branches 1983

The organization of the "Women's Institute" in 1914 was timely. The First World War had just started. There was a need to outfit and comfort Canadian soldiers. The WI soon played a role in knitting for Canadian boys serving overseas.<sup>38</sup> What was truly amazing though, was that the WI did wonders on a total lack of funds!

The women of the WI earned cash to buy their materials by the "sweat of their brows". Many members had sons and daughters serving in the military. Regardless, all worked hard in quilt making, mat making, spinning and weaving, that saw great comfort and warmth brought to their sons and, yes daughters too, serving overseas.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, **Canada Remembers Women on The Home Front**, 14 Feb 2019

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. John A. McLean et al (ed.) **The Country Kitchen - Old and New (A History-Cookbook compiled by the Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia on their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)**, Published by the Women's Institute of Nova Scotia, 1983

<sup>38</sup> Mrs. John A. McLean et al (ed.) **The Country Kitchen - Old and New**

Their work went beyond that too. They raised funds for appeals and reliefs. The WI bought field ambulances that brought the wounded in from the field thus saving many lives.<sup>39</sup>

Their invaluable work was to be repeated once again, a mere generation later, with the Second World War. Their knitting needles were hard at it once again. The WI sent books, newspapers and special treats to military hospitals overseas. All these creature comforts were needed. The WI's efforts and other good works greatly assisted the Red Cross and service personnel, overseas and at home too.

Life on the home front was not all doom, gloom and high tension. There were also moments of surprising normalcy, making do, enjoying what little you had to the fullest, and perhaps most importantly, enjoying the pleasures of one another's company. That was often found in the company of strangers from far and away. It was based in sharing and; often, a gathering and food.<sup>40</sup>

The WI and communities were involved here too. Service members were recognized by their communities through "Send-off" parties organized for the men and women proceeding on active service both home and abroad.

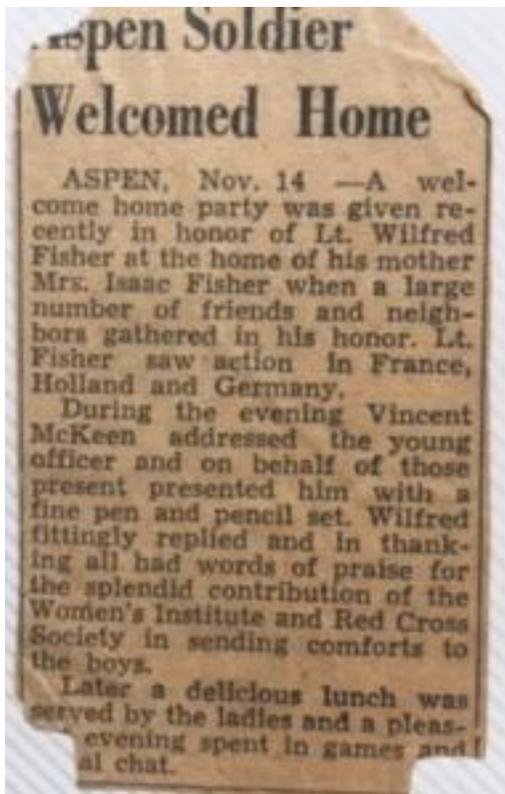
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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, Mrs. John A. McLean et al (ed.) **The Country Kitchen - Old and New**, pg. 43 1983

<sup>40</sup> G Christian Larsen, "**The Saint Croix Courier**" (**St. Stephen, NB**) **01-April-1943** (visitations and hospitality), Pennfield Parish Military Historical Society, 3 April 2019

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/141841559219547/?fref=nf>

Accessed: 2 April 2019



Source: Family Album and Scrapbook, Scott MacKeen, Second World War Memories

Perhaps more importantly, it was the relief and joy that was found in the “welcome home” parties, for the returning service personnel from their area, that was most appreciated. After the war, the WI was in the forefront to create the many local war memorials for those sent overseas, but never returned home.<sup>41</sup>

The WI’s role was played on the home front as well. The organization was a source for home economy. They helped stretched rations and their books were a source of many valuable recipes.<sup>42</sup>

But it was in the homecomings, send offs and hosting where it all paid off. These social occasions meant that hospitality and the breaking of bread was shared. And it was all done on a dime. War time recipe books ensured hospitality was plentiful and tasty despite rationing.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, **Canada Remembers Women on The Home Front**, 14 Feb 2019

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, Mrs. John A. McLean et al (ed.) **The Country Kitchen - Old and New**, pg. 43 1983



Source: Family Album and Scrapbook, Scott MacKeen, Second World War Memories

Careful substitution and improvisation meant that Canadians and their guests were well taken care of. And it had not gone unnoticed. Canada was the land of milk and honey to many Allied service men and women.

Denis Slater, then a young RAF Airman commented on his arrival in Canada. He remarked "The plentiful food, though the armed forces were well fed in the UK, there was not much variety.... When we arrived in Canada, we experienced a degree of hospitality unknown in Britain at that time. We were regularly invited into peoples' homes after the briefest acquaintance."<sup>43</sup>

And so rationing continued for a time and was finally ended in the late 1940s. It had served its purpose. Canadians survived the war, thrived and were healthier. All this was accomplished based on household economy, resourcefulness, substitution, sacrifice, and perhaps a little hunting, fishing, and gardening too. Would we do so well today? I think not.

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<sup>43</sup> G Christian Larsen, R.J. Denis SLATER, No.34 OTU Veteran - MEMORIES OF AN AIRMEN, Pennfield Parish Military Historical Society, 09 March 2010

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/141841559219547/permalink/2517202431683436/>  
Accessed: 9 March 2019

My own pittance from gardening never amounted to much, nothing more than a few leaves of lettuce and a mere tomato, all incapable of sustaining the feeblest of human beings not more than one meal, forget about a winter's needs. I might do by fishing, but given the sardines caught of late, that is somewhat doubtful too. Hunting, well maybe; that is another matter, best not discussed.

It goes to show how truly vulnerable we are when it comes to our food security. Perhaps it's time to take a lesson from days gone by, to become more self-reliant, source locally, and be a tad more resourceful when selecting our food choices. And may be, just may be, the choices found in the old food guides of the Second World War hold and have value for us today too.

Perhaps that's where our government should look for some answers, found from the "Hearth and Home" in the memories of days gone by.

Postscript:

Gerry (GD) Madigan, CD, MSc, MA is a retired logistician, Canadian Armed Forces. Major (Retired) Madigan's career spanned 28 Years as a finance officer. He is a graduate of Saint Francis Xavier University (BSc), McGill University (MSc) and the Royal Military College of Canada (MA (War Studies)).

Norma Cooke, a long-time resident of Isaac's Harbour, is a notable Guysborough County historian in her own right. This article benefitted from Norma's insight, written notes, photographs, and news clippings that brought to life the history of Guysborough County and times during the Second World War.

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