

Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaning Lives in
Post-1945 North Bay, Ontario

by

Jennifer Beatrice Evans

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Graduate Department of History
University of Toronto

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Abstract

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” uses the memories of nearly seventy women who lived in northern Ontario during the post-1945 period. These women represent a diverse cross-section of the population including English- and Franco-Ontarians, European immigrants as well as Anishinaabe and Métis peoples. Although northern Ontario has been understood as a white and masculine space, this project provides a corrective narrative by uniting the food stories of Euro-Canadian and Indigenous women to consider cross-cultural perspectives, inter-relationships as well as complex racial, colonial and religious dynamics. This project largely argues that women from diverse backgrounds used food to negotiate the physical, cultural and ideological spaces they inhabited. For these women, food and its related activities became a critical site for identity formation and a sense of belonging but also a source of fear, loneliness, exclusion and discrimination.

Each chapter is organized to examine a facet of women’s food experiences. Chapter 1 analyzes how the North and northern Ontario impacted the availability and cost of food, and the strategies women used to ensure they obtained food including berry-picking, hunting and fishing. In chapter 2, I combine women’s memories and cooking literature to consider the ways women learned to cook as well as the imaginative, transformative and healing elements of

preparing dishes. Chapter 3 discusses the complex connections between food and family relationships, as episodes of familial happiness were recalled alongside those of struggle, neglect and abuse. Chapter 4 looks at the consumption of food-related items and technologies as the fulfillment of creativity, desires and cultural norms as well as a symbolic movement away from the pains and struggles of their past. And finally, chapter 5 investigates the community building and interactions centered on the making, eating and sharing of food.

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For my mom, dad and brother

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**Introduction:
Welcome to the Gateway of the North**

During her interview, Pamela Handley shared a snapshot under the famous welcome sign, “Gateway of the North: City of North Bay.” It captured her standing sharply with her dark blazer, hands folded in pant pockets and short-bobbed hair. Like other tourists, passerbys and residents entering North Bay, Ontario, Handley posed under this sign to take a postcard-like photograph marking her entry into northern Ontario. The sign and moniker represented a particular conceptualization of the city. As a 1960 vacation brochure explained of the sign,

“It is a true symbol of the north...its spirit...its people...its industry...its way of life. On passing through the famous gateway one suddenly feels the intangible spirits that is the ‘Northern Way of Life.’ For here we are home again, in the land of lakes and forests, of cities and towns, of farms and mines, of lumber and pulpwood. Here in the north we find true friendships regardless of racial origin, religious differences, education or monetary wealth. Here people are judged on merit and not by what they represent.”¹

North Bay was posed as the entry point for northern Ontario. Passing under the sign women and men, the public relations material declared, left behind the complicated class, ethno-racial and religious dynamics of southern Ontario. They entered into an idyllic setting where they were accepted and judged individually on the basis of ability, values and work ethic. This region offered wildlife, the rugged outdoors and a rural landscape as well as the amenities of modern city-life. A reportedly positive and tolerant space, people could easily form a homelike attachment and adopt the northern way and pace of life. The sign, and the city, framed itself as the gateway to northern Ontario—a transition into a new space on both physical and imagined levels.

Many women, like Pamela Handley, passed under the well-known “Gateway of the North” sign, symbolically signaling their entrance into northern Ontario. British-born Handley first passed under the Gateway sign in 1957, meeting her husband and eventually building her

¹ “The Gateway That Refused to Die,” *North Bay Nugget*, July 1960.

² Pamela Handley, interview with author, 8 May 2009. Unless otherwise indicated all interviews were conducted by

life and family there.² Born in North Bay in 1928, Sister Betty Mitchell often crossed under the sign as she pursued her vocation as a teacher in communities throughout northern Ontario.³ Darlene McIsaac, a Métis woman, saw the entryway after her family left their small town in northern Ontario to move to the “big city” of North Bay.⁴ In 1959, Italian-born Rosa Valentti, her husband and son first laid eyes on the gateway sign when they went to live with her father in the city, following a pattern of family sponsored immigration.⁵ Although women, like men, frequently passed under this sign, much less is known about their experiences after they made the passage. As Karen Dubinsky, Kerry Abel and others have pointed out, a white, male population has come to define the landscapes and impressions of northern Ontario.⁶ This is understandable given that the economy of northern Ontario has largely depended on resource extraction and men, mainly European immigrants, employed for this work lived in mining and lumber camps or boarding houses. Literature has focused on the development of ethnic communities, exploitive work conditions and radical labour politics in the early twentieth-century.⁷ The work of Varpu Lindström-Best, Nancy Forestell and most recently, Stacey Zembrzycki, remain as important exceptions examining women, gender divisions, domestic

² Pamela Handley, interview with author, 8 May 2009. Unless otherwise indicated all interviews were conducted by the author and took place in North Bay, Ontario.

³ Sister Betty Mitchell, interview, 17 August 2007.

⁴ Darlene McIsaac, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

⁵ Rosa Valentti, interview, 30 April 2009.

⁶ Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); See esp. chap. 6 “Sex and the Single-Industry Community: The Social and Moral Reputation of Rural and Northern Ontario,” 143-162; Kerry Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 373-380; Nancy M. Forestell, “Women, Gender and the Provincial North,” in *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History*, eds. Kerry Abel and Ken S. Coates, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 107-109.

⁷ H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974); Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *‘Remembering Kirkland Lake’: the History and Effect of the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners’ Strike, 1941-42* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Donald Avery, *‘Dangerous Foreigners’: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979).

labour and family relationships in male-dominated, northern resource towns.⁸ To date, this historiography has well shown the cultural diversity in the region; however, the focus on labour relations, ethnic identity and community as well as the early twentieth century largely ignores discussions of women's experiences and relationships among different racial, ethnic and religious groups.

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” uses the life narratives of women living in a city whose population included a diverse mix of English and French speaking Canadians, immigrants and Anishinaabe peoples. Although northern Ontario has been understood as a white and masculine space, my project unites the food stories of Euro-Canadian and Indigenous women to consider cross-cultural perspectives, inter-relationships as well as complex racial, colonial and religious dynamics. The study examines how women from diverse backgrounds used food to negotiate the physical, cultural and ideological spaces they inhabited and how food and its related activities became a critical site for identity formation and a sense of belonging but also a justification for exclusion and discrimination. In doing so, the project asks: What were the identities, experiences and feelings of women living in northern Ontario? How did region shape women's food experiences? What were the connections between food and identity? How were food and cooking used as a tool in inclusion and exclusion? How were class, race and ethnicity reproduced in matters of food and taste? How did women use food to organize memories of living in this northern city?

⁸ Nancy M. Forestell, “Bachelors, Boarding Houses and Blind Pigs: Gender Construction in a Multi-Ethnic Mining Camp, 1909-1920,” in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 251-290; Varpu Lindström-Best, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1988; Stacey Zembrzycki, *According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); “‘We Didn't Have a Lot of Money, but We Had Food’: Ukrainians and Their Depression-Era Food Memories,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 131-139; “‘There Were Always Men in Our House’: Gender and the Childhood Memories of Working-Class Ukrainians in Depression-Era Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 60 (Fall 2007): 77-105.

To answer these questions, this study examines women's food experiences in households, supermarkets and community spaces in post-1945 northern Ontario. It does so by employing nearly seventy interviews with women and men collected between 2007 and 2012, providing access to their perspectives, memories and experiences. The stories at times create a collective account of life and food in northern Ontario, and at other times verge off into intimate, personal and emotional stories.⁹ In addition to interviews, this project uses the *North Bay Nugget*, census data from 1951 to 1971 as well as collections of government records, cookbooks, magazines, autobiographical writings, photographs and film to create a picture of the physical geography and social, domestic and cultural life in North Bay.¹⁰ The combination of oral and print sources gives voice to women's self-identities and experiences, while also allowing us to understand the cultural, political and physical contexts that informed and enforced them. It is an approach to sources that reconciles elements of the national and societal with the telling of women's personal stories, the results of which are evident in Yasmin Saikia's book on the violence South Asian women experienced in 1971 war-torn Bangladesh and Karen Turner's scholarship on the contributions Vietnamese women made to the North Vietnam war effort.¹¹ The bringing together of oral and print sources allows us to reconstruct the world these women found themselves in, and to better understand their daily routines and decisions as they navigated their way around.

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” is a study on the daily lives of women living in post-1945 northern Ontario. It contributes to our understanding of women's

⁹ Pamela Sugiman, “‘Life is Sweet’: Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 45, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 189.

¹⁰ I surveyed the *North Bay Nugget* from 1945-1970. I focused specifically on local news, advertisements and the women's sections. In 1941, the *Nugget* became a daily circulated newspaper. The local newspaper described itself as the “heartbeat of a community.” See “History recorded day by day,” *North Bay Nugget*, 20 June 1967; “It's been a great Fifty Years!” *North Bay Nugget*, 2 August 1975.

¹¹ Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Karen Gottschang Turner with Phan Thanh Hao, *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (New York: Wiley, 1998); See also Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

self-identities, family relationships and financial circumstances; it tells us about the spaces they occupied and navigated, the realities and fantasies of their lives. This research confirms the findings of feminist scholars who argue food, cooking and the kitchen were not women's natural domain despite what cultural and social commentators said at the time. Rather, women's stories reveal that they connected food with fear, loneliness, intimidation and ignorance. Women struggled to provide sustenance for their families, develop cooking skills, learn about nutrition and do so in ways that satisfied the expectations of neighbours, family members and social commentators. Their memories were not always happy moments of cooking dinner in the kitchen. This research also highlights differences in women's food memories. Although the ethnic and national identity of dishes were not so significant to English Canadian women, for French Canadian, Jewish and immigrant women, the foods cooked for dinner every night marked reminders of their ethnic and religious heritage. Food was especially significant for these women living in North Bay, a predominately white city space and one that did not have the population demographics or cultural institutions to support their unique ethnic and religious identities. For Anishinaabe and Métis women, food and cooking remained wrapped up with colonial institutions and racial politics. The return to traditional practices and foods marked a form of healing and reclaiming of Indigeneity. This research project also contributes to our understanding of northern Ontario, and how this physical space shaped women's food practices and lives. Modernity arrived to post-1945 North Bay, but supermarkets were expensive and did not always stock the foods women wanted. Women adopted strategies using wild food sources, shipping food from larger, southern spaces and sometimes even imagining a different lifestyle for themselves where food was more readily available. This project contributes an understanding of women's lives, self-identities and food practices in a northern Ontario setting.

The stories women told in their interviews were centered on food. Often in response for interview requests—even in some instances at the end of three hour-long interviews, I heard the

refrain that went something like this: “I don’t know what I can tell you about food. It was just something I did.” For these women and others, the activities surrounding food were seen as ordinary, mundane and routine—nothing particularly historically noteworthy or important. Yet their interviews revealed just how fundamental food remained to their lives. It went well beyond their need to eat for survival.¹² As Carol Counihan and Penny Van Esterik explain, “food touches everything”: it forms the basis for every economy, it is central to the politics of states and households, it “marks social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions” and the act of eating food represents an “endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family and community relationships.”¹³ And indeed, in response to questions about food, women shared stories about migration, physical and emotional abuse, community and cultural celebration, divorce, northern Ontario, economic hardships as well as family reunification. Yes, their memories were about getting food and sustenance for their bodies, but they also revealed deeper meanings giving us access to personal and emotional aspects of their lives. These women’s food stories tell us about how they saw themselves and others, their efforts at community building and networking as well as attempts to heal from family dramas and legacies of colonialism. An aim of this project is to showcase the voices, self-identities and experiences of these women, and how they used food as a form of “self-expression, self-actualization, resistance, even accommodation and power.”¹⁴

In the postwar years, North American foodways underwent changes. As Canadian and American historians have well documented, the Cold War created a profound political insecurity and concern for physical safety at home.¹⁵ News of the atomic bomb, and fear of communists

¹² Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp, eds., “Introduction,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 4.

¹³ Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., “Introduction,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

¹⁴ Psyche A. Williams-Forsion, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁵ Elaine May Tyler, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006); Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*

reached North Bay. Helen Randle remembered of this time, “you felt threatened. And you knew something was over, but it wasn’t.” Her sense that “[t]here was something else brewing,” echoes the uncertainty that shaped living room conversations across Canada.¹⁶ On a similar note, the *North Bay Nugget* ran headlines that read “Traitors in our Midst Moscow Papers Warning,” “Today’s Atom Spy Is Friendly Fellow” and “Freedom Centres’ Battling Communism.”¹⁷ Bringing the ‘menace’ to North Bay, a columnist reported how “one of the oldest hotbeds of Communism is right here in northern Ontario.” Blaming “[h]eavy European immigration” and “newcomers’ insecurities,” it reminded North Bay residents that the atomic bomb and communist hazards were “gigantic time-bombs sitting in our midst.” It referenced an incident in northern Ontario where an immigrant communist sect was nearly “beat up” and their “literature was torn up and tossed at their faces.”¹⁸ This discourse reinforced common prejudices, shaping ethnic and racialized minorities as treacherous others. It reminded readers that even living up in northern Ontario, they were not safe from communist and atomic threats.

Just as conforming to the nuclear, heterosexual family was presented as a form of domestic defence against communism, so too (and relatedly) was food. Following years of uncertainty during the Depression and the Second World War, and faced with another international crisis with the Cold War, the home and family life, as Elaine May Tyler describes, “held out the promise of security in an insecure world.”¹⁹ The homemaker wife and breadwinner husband, living a life of affluence with their children in modern suburban homes provided a

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). For a discussion of the political developments of the Cold War, see Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 14- 19.

¹⁶ Helen Randle, interview, 24 January 2007.

¹⁷ “Traitors in our Midst Moscow Papers Warning,” *North Bay Nugget*, 9 April 1953; “Today’s Atom Spy Is Friendly Fellow,” *North Bay Nugget*, 16 June 1953; “Freedom Centres’ Battling Communism,” *North Bay Nugget*, 12 January 1952.

¹⁸ “Communism in the North,” *North Bay Nugget*, 15 March 1952.

¹⁹ May Tyler, *Homeward Bound*, 3; 12.

reassuring image of the superiority of democratic life.²⁰ Fathers faced pressure from advertisers to purchase consumer goods, being the first on their neighbourhood block, for example, to afford a television for their family. Fathers measured their own success and masculinity, as Robert Rutherford has found, by financially providing their family with the “good life.”²¹ Another part of this consumer driven, family-centered vision was also the call for women’s rededication to the household, especially food and cooking. Magazines and cookbooks promised that homemade meals eaten around the dinner table every night ensured the normalcy, emotional stability and health of the family. To save time and spend more time with their family, women were encouraged to incorporate into their cooking frozen, processed and prepackaged foods.²² Well-stocked grocery stores and new kitchen technologies such as electric refrigerators, freezers and stoves also informed this image of family and abundance.²³ In addition to shaping the lifestyles of Canadian-born families, the ideal of family and kitchen consumerism impacted the reception of European immigrants. As Franca Iacovetta details in *Gatekeepers*, while there was some acceptance of immigrants’ ethnic foodways by Canadian social and food professionals, there was also a push for immigrant mothers to “abandon their folkways for ‘modern’ shopping and homemaking techniques.” Both new and old Canadians participated in democracy and fought communism through their activities in their home and kitchen.²⁴ In discussing their kitchen activities, the women interviewed neither talked about the larger political implications, nor did they see them in this light (although they were still impacted by Cold War messaging).

²⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

²¹ Robert Rutherford, “Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Good Life During Canada’s Bay Boom, 1945-1965,” *Journal of Family History* 24, no. 3 (July 1999): 353-354. See also Rutherford, Robert. “Fatherhood and the Social Construction of Memory: Breadwinning and Male Parenting on a Job Frontier,” in *Gender and History in Canada*, eds. Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996), 357-375; Chris Dummitt, “Finding a Place for Father: Selling the Barbeque in Postwar Canada,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 9, no. 1 (1998): 209-223.

²² Laura Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York: Viking, 2004), xix-xx; xxiii-xxiv; Erika Endrijonas, “Processed Foods from Scratch: Cooking for a Family in the 1950s,” in *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 158.

²³ Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 140.

²⁴ Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 138; 140.

Their lack of real commentary on the Cold War reflects that these women were not heavily politicized and not active members of the far left. Indeed, their daily choices surrounding food and food-related activities were most often discussed in terms of household economics, regional availability, personal and family preferences, identities and simply, the need to eat food.

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” contributes to the still growing field of women’s and gender history. As Sonya Rose explains, gender history is committed to understanding the perceived differences between women and men and “concerned with how these differences and relationships are historically produced and how they are transformed.”²⁵ This project shares a feminist commitment to understanding gender discrimination, difference and oppression.²⁶ Women’s and gender historians who have studied Mennonite rape victims, Depression-era wage-earners and southern Italian immigrants living in Toronto, collected the stories of women to learn about their identities and lived experiences. They have shown us how women’s gender identities and lived experiences as women, wives, mothers, workers and foreigners, took different shapes depending on their class, ethnic, racial, sexual and religious identities as well as the context in which they lived.²⁷ They also remind us that one woman’s experience shopping and preparing meals in the postwar period could be very different from another, as women’s multiple and intersectional identities influenced what they could do, how they saw themselves and in turn how they were seen by their society and culture.²⁸ Like these works and others, “Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful

²⁵ Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History* (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2010), 4.

²⁶ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 8.

²⁷ Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Katrina Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters: Young Working Women in a Depression-Era City, 1929-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993); see also, Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., “Introduction: Conceptualizing Canada’s Gendered Pasts,” in *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003), 1-11.

²⁸ Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa, eds., “Introduction,” in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3; 6.

Lives” recognizes that gender does not operate as a singular entity, in isolation from other categories of identity. Rather it understands the “interlocking and mutually constitutive character” of identity.²⁹

Food is very much connected to identity. In her bid to understand the changing ethnic character of American identities, Donna Gabaccia has notably asked, “If we are what eat, who are we?”³⁰ Gabaccia’s question prompts us to think about what we can learn about identity by investigating food choices. As an area where they have traditionally held much control, food has been an important source for women’s gender identity.³¹ This is especially true for mothers, as Marlene Epp states, “whose fundamental relationship with their children is that of providing physical sustenance.” When women cannot satisfy this food role or feel it threatened due to circumstances such as poverty, displacement and migration, they accordingly suffer a loss of status and even disempowerment.³² Class and economics determine what foods individuals could afford to eat, and the food shopping, growing, picking and preparation strategies they undertook to ensure physical sustenance for their families; religious identities dictate what individuals could and could not eat, and on what days.³³ As the work of Gabaccia, Epp and other scholars of migration attest, food also played a significant role in defining and maintaining connections with ethnic identity and community. These scholars have taken up calls to take serious account of immigrants’ pre-migration identities and lived experiences in order to fully understand how they rebuilt meaningful post-migration lives for themselves in Canada. Stories

²⁹ Ruth Roach Pierson, “Introduction,” in *Nation, Empire and Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, eds. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 2.

³⁰ Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 9.

³¹ As the editors to *Edible Histories* note, food and the work surrounding it will all be coded women’s responsibilities “regardless of how many men may perform these functions.” Iacovetta, Korinek and Epp, *Edible Histories*, 15.

³² Marlene Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women,” in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 315.

³³ Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6-8.

about immigrants' responses to the "feast" they encountered in North American, for example, make all the more sense when we take into account the famine they experienced in their impoverished and war-torn European homelands.³⁴

Race also plays a key role in shaping women's identities and experiences in northern Ontario. Race, like gender, is not an inevitable or stable category of identity. It is historically constructed, constantly being made and remade.³⁵ As Paige Raibmon points out, the construction of racial binaries were connected to ideas about authenticity. "Real Indians," for example, were assigned a set of cultural values that would never allow them to be seen as modern, civilized, political or prosperous.³⁶ It was a sorting technique that "like all classificatory techniques, it is based on established categories and scales of comparison."³⁷ Northern Ontario has been constructed as white. The climate, rural geography as well as the lack of racial diversity helped to shape northern Ontario as a space of whiteness.³⁸ In the project, I ask what were the identities and experiences of non-white people there? How did race shape responses to the foods women ate and prepared for their families? By analyzing categories of whiteness, redness and blackness, I assess how women's racial self-identity shaped their experiences and how perceptions of their racial identity influenced how women's daily lives were seen, judged and valued by themselves and others.

³⁴ Franca Iacovetta, "Gendering Trans/National Historiographies: Feminists Rewriting Canadian History," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 210-211; See also Epp, Iacovetta and Swyripa eds., "Introduction," 7-9; 13-14; Diner, 16-20; Gabaccia; Epp, "Semiotics of Zwieback," 328-331.

³⁵ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 5-7; Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 8-14; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7-8; Gail Beaderman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 20-23; Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters*, 8.

³⁶ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 7-9.

³⁷ Ann Stoler quoted in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.

³⁸ Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 53; Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 73-74; Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison, "Winter and the Shaping of Northern History: Reflections from the Canadian North," in *Northern Visions: New Perspective on the North in Canadian History*, eds. Kerry Abel and Ken S. Coates (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 23-35; Abel, *Changing Places*, 406; 396.

My dissertation is interested in the social lives and interactions that occurred over food, contributing an important multi-ethnic and cross-cultural perspective to the study of women's food experiences in postwar Canada. Food provided a form of social capital, creating a site for sociability among community members and, within families, an expression of love and caring. Food brought people together over special occasions such as holidays, coming-of-age ceremonies and religious services as well as more routine events such as nightly dinnertimes.³⁹ The making of food involved informal networks of kin and neighbours, and often relied on female cooperation and sociability.⁴⁰ Food and eating habits also informed outsiders' impressions of community members. For example, Mexican American women selling chili in San Antonio or African American women peddling their chicken at train depots shaped social hierarchies and relationships and created opportunities for inter-racial mixing.⁴¹ "Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives" brings together the stories of Canadian-born, immigrant and Indigenous women; a history that, as Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta note, has usually been studied separately.⁴² It considers cross-cultural episodes in which Euro-Canadian and Indigenous women met and shared food and how women made choices about what to absorb or resist, and when to adapt to a "local" ingredient or recipe. It also recognizes that food has been a site where cultural borrowing and hybridity took place as well as one to which ethnic and racial identities are fixed, and hence a source of xenophobia.

³⁹ Diner, 5.

⁴⁰ Tracy N. Poe, "The Labour and Leisure of Food Production as a Mode of Ethnic Identity Building Among Italians in Chicago, 1890-1940," *Rethinking History* 5, no. 1 (2001): 134-135.

⁴¹ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "'Who Chased Out the 'Chili Queens'? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943," *Food and Foodways* 16, no. 3 (2008): 173-200; Williams-Forsen.

⁴² Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta, "Making Aboriginal People 'Immigrants Too': A Comparison of Citizenship Programs for Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples in Postwar Canada, 1940s-1960s," *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (September 2009): 427-461.

All the interviewees for this project lived in North Bay and directly outlying communities for large portions of their lives.⁴³ They were born in this city, arrived as young girls with their parents or came as young adults—sometimes with their own children in tow. Women interviewed were English- and French-speaking Canadians, Anishinaabe and Métis women as well as immigrants arriving most often from desirable northwestern European nations such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany in the post-1945 period. In regards to religion, they were practicing and non-practicing Christians, Jehovah Witnesses and Jewish women. Many had experiences with real poverty, one woman even losing all of her teeth by the age of twenty-one from poor nutrition. These early economic circumstances profoundly impacted their views on food, family relationships as well as household finances and budgeting. Women joined the paid workforce as domestics, teachers, nurses and administrators—some of the only respectable career options available for women at the time. As dutiful daughters and budgeting mothers, they entered the workforce intermittently (before marriage and after children entered school) to provide economic reprieve for their families. Women were also single, vowed religious, married, widowed and divorced. Although most of the women entered into marriages at some point in their lives and eventually had children, others chose to remain single for their entire lives. Husbands' issues with substance addiction as well as physical and emotional abuse informed women's difficult decisions to end marriages. These women represented a broad cross-section of identities, impacting their stories and ideas about food.

⁴³ After obtaining consent from the University of Toronto in agreement with the Tri-Council policies on ethical research involving human subjects, I contacted potential interviewees through various channels, including meeting with coordinators at the North Bay & District Multicultural Centre, Discovery North Bay Museum, the North Bay Heritage Gardeners, the Nipissing Branch Genealogical Society, the Canadian Federation of University Women North Bay, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Davedi Club, the Nipissing Indian Friendship Centre as well as various local churches and activity directors at local retirement homes. In these contexts, I relied most successfully on referrals. Women who were interested in participating in my study self-selected contacting me through information left with coordinators and activity directors. For more information on Tri-Council policies, see <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/policies-and-procedures/>.

Oral history methodology lets us ask questions about memory: the way these women remember, what (and whom) was involved in the process of remembering. As Pamela Sugiman reminds us, women's narratives tell us much about the act of storytelling. Women cannot recount all the details of their life stories during interviews. Instead, they make decisions about what details and stories they want to pass on and those they want to keep to themselves.⁴⁴ In listening to their stories, I have considered how women have taken an active role in the construction of their stories through their word choice, body language, silences and emotional cues like laughter. The women's testimonies also tell us about their relationship to me, and more specifically how they perceive me as a cultural insider or outsider within the interview context. As the daughter of a Dutch immigrant, I could be seen as a cultural insider having some familial knowledge about immigrant experiences. But at the same time, I did not interview any Dutch women and my age, education and cultural identity invariably shaped interview dynamics and the stories told in response to those questions asked.⁴⁵ My identity as a white woman based in Toronto also excluded me from certain interviews. I was unable to dedicate the time and resources to build meaningful community relationships with the Nipissing First Nation community.⁴⁶ My interviews with Anishinaabe and Métis women are in fact found in the Institute for Community Studies and Oral History at Nipissing University, an archival collection of oral histories with people from northern Ontario. Second readings of these and other interviews are useful, as Joanna Bornart has said, as long as there is an awareness of the context

⁴⁴ Sugiman, "Life is Sweet," 189.

⁴⁵ Joanna Bonart, "Oral History as a Social Movement: Reminiscence and Older People," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 190-191; 201; Belinda Bozzoli, "Interviewing the Women of the Phokeng," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 157-160; Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters*, 10-11; Following every interview, I took extensive field notes reflecting on my impressions of the interview dynamics as well as our informal interactions before, during and after the interview.

⁴⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999); Julie Cruikshank with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

in which they were produced.⁴⁷ In analyzing women's memories, I have considered the stories women told and what was involved in their telling.⁴⁸

There are different approaches to interviewing. The interviews conducted were videotaped, and lasted from one and a half to three hours and took place in North Bay. During the course of interviews, I asked the standard set of research questions I had developed. The questions focus on a woman's experiences with food and cooking, loosely organized around a life review chronology. As scholars of memory have shown, the interview structure can place pressure on people to find concise answers and to neatly summarize complex experiences.⁴⁹ Active listening or listening rather than talking, can steer the interviewer away from pre-set questions as they ask follow up questions and discuss experiences and feelings that are central to the interviewee's understanding of their past.⁵⁰ Interviewing also requires a degree of respect and sensitivity for the interviewee and their often intimate, emotional and painful stories. Some of the most difficult moments to occur during interviews happened when women shared stories of severe food deprivation, neglect and physical and emotional abuse. In the process of remembering painful stories, writes Mark Klempler in his essay on life-review interviews with survivors of trauma, "the atmosphere of the interview becomes charged, and may trigger unexpected emotional reactions, both in the narrator and in the interviewer."⁵¹ Within the context of the interviews themselves, I often struggled to find the "right" response as a woman

⁴⁷ Joanna Bornat, "A Second Take: Revisiting Interviews with a Different Purpose," *Oral History* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 47-53.

⁴⁸ For discussions about issues surrounding memory, see Marlene Epp, "The Memory of Violence: Soviet and East European Mennonite Refugees and Rape in the Second World War," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 1 (1997): 58-87; Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 87-100; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

⁴⁹ Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson with Olivia Bennett and Nigel Cross, "Ways of Listening," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 143-144.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 17.

⁵¹ Mark Klempler, "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 201.

remembered and recounted sad and desperate stories. Knowing when not to ask a follow up question or the hard question of a vulnerable person as Joy Parr has described, and, instead demonstrate an appropriate level of empathy, required a degree of sensitivity on my part that I had not quite comprehended before undertaking the interviews. It required me to open up and share aspects of my personal life, for as Alessandro Portelli reminds us, “people will not talk to you unless you talk to them, will not reveal themselves unless you reveal yourself.”⁵² I also grew to recognize that while some women used a defence mechanism while detailing difficult memories, the most common being an “off-sounding” laugh, other women were evidently sharing their stories with an outsider for the first time, and usually cried or shed tears at some point.⁵³

By focusing closely on the interconnections between space, place, and identity, “Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” contributes a spatial perspective to food history and memory studies. Social and feminist geographers have found it analytically useful to use the categories of “space” and “place” to distinguish between the sites one merely inhabits (space) and those to which one feels a sense of intimacy, familiarity, and real sense of location (place).⁵⁴ Much like the contributors to the recently published *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada*, I believe that the distinction between “space” and “place” is made through our memories creating meaning, attachment and significance out of the physical spaces we inhabit.⁵⁵ Feelings of place can be positive, as in a beloved family home, or negative,

⁵² Alessandro Portelli, “Memory and Resistance,” in *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 52.

⁵³ Ibid., 198- 200; 203; 208; Joy Parr, “‘Don’t Speak For Me’: Oral History amidst the Legacies of Conflict,” *Journal of Canadian Historical Association* 21, no. 1 (2010): 1-11; Katrina Srigley, “Stories of Strife? Remembering the Great Depression,” *Oral History Forum/ d’histoire orale* 29 (2009): 7-8.

⁵⁴ Sarah De Leeuw, “Intimate Colonialisms: the material and experienced places of British Columbia’s Residential Schools,” *Canadian Geographer* 51, no. 3 (2007): 342; Michael Lansing, “Different Methods, Different Places: Feminist Geography and New Directions in US Western History,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no. 2 (2003): 231.

⁵⁵ James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); see also Shelley Trower eds., *Place, Writing and Voice in Oral History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

as in a source of hurt, exclusion, and exploitation.⁵⁶ Memories can also serve as a source of mental escape, as happened with Jewish women in concentration camps who, as Myrna Goldenberg records, shared food stories that, at least temporarily, transferred them back to the kitchens and homes with which they identified strong feelings of comfort and family.⁵⁷ Memories are also influenced by experiences of mobility and displacement requiring us to listen to the advice of feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey, who suggests we conceptualize place as “a product of interconnecting flows—of *routes* rather than *roots*” (a static concept).⁵⁸ Listening carefully to women’s memories, allows us to understand how they experienced northern Ontario, challenging our perceptions of what it was like to live, work and eat food in this context.⁵⁹ We hear how their identities were formed both in intimate, local settings (the kitchen or grocery store) and in larger contexts such as their nation of birth or adoption.⁶⁰

The Gateway of the North: Welcome to the City of North Bay

All of the women’s stories were centered on North Bay and directly outlying northern communities. As Adele Perry notes, there has been a “historiographical obsession” with the urban south.⁶¹ By looking outside of big cities in the urban south, “Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” considers regional differences and how region shaped

⁵⁶Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7; 43.

⁵⁷Myrna Goldenberg, “Food Talk: Gendered Responses to Hunger in the Concentration Camp,” in *Experiences and Expressions: Women, the Nazis and the Holocaust*, eds. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 161-179.

⁵⁸Cresswell, 13; Massey discusses this concept in her chapter, “A Global Sense of Place.” She argues that we integrate the local and the global, and instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries, “they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings. But where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself...” But where a large portion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself. See Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 154-155.

⁵⁹Shelley Trower, ed., “Introduction,” in *Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3-4.

⁶⁰Tracy Poe, “The Origins of Soul Food in Black Urban Identity: Chicago, 1915-1947,” *American Studies International* 37, no. 1 (1999): 6-8; Pilcher, 174-176; 181-182; Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: the Material, the Moral and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). See esp. chaps. 3 and 9.

⁶¹Adele Perry, “‘Oh I’m Just Sick of the Faces of Men’: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability,” *BC Studies* 105/106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 28.

women's identities, relationships and experiences.⁶² North Bay is scenic and well positioned geographically. Looking at a map, North Bay is located where the province of Ontario narrows before expanding into the northern lake-studded wilderness. The city is located approximately 330 kilometres north of Toronto, and 360 kilometres northwest of Ottawa. Part of the Canadian Shield, the jutting rocks and verdant forests create a rough and scenic landscape. It straddles the Ottawa River watershed and the Great Lakes Basin, and the urban core of the city is situated between Lake Nipissing and Trout Lake. Until the Great Depression and post-1945 period, North Bay had been largely unable to capitalize on this advantageous physical location. It was seen as a sleepy railway town, left in the backwash of prosperous mining districts like Sudbury, Timmins and Kirkland Lake. Dramatic changes came, however, bringing growth and development in manufacturing, military connections as well as tourism and reframing the identity of this region.⁶³ It came to be seen as a modern city in development with all the necessary amenities, and yet a little bit outside city limits wildlife and green space were found with "civilization nowhere in sight."⁶⁴

The city's physical location aided the development of manufacturing and military interests. North Bay was seen as a geographical halfway point from its position in the centre of Ontario. In terms of industry, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) had made the city a divisional point, the Grand Trunk Railway had extended to North Bay, gaining access to the CPR line, and the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario railway had made North Bay its headquarters and southern terminus.⁶⁵ It was also the meeting point for three major highways

⁶² Suzanne Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal Special Issue* 25, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 120-121; Forestell, "Women, Gender, and the Provincial North," 108-111.

⁶³ "What Next? Ask North Bay Riding Tourist, Mining Boom," *North Bay Nugget*, June 1952.

⁶⁴ "North Bay Hub of Huge Vacation Paradise," *North Bay Nugget*, June 1952.

⁶⁵ Françoise Noël, *Family and Community Life in Northeastern Ontario: The Interwar Years* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 16-19.

opening up travel to the mines, lakes and wilderness of northern Ontario.⁶⁶ The strategic geographical position meant that although North Bay was not a mining centre itself, the city developed a manufacturing industry to serve the growing needs of northeastern Ontario's huge primary industry.⁶⁷ Another major source of industry in the city was the military complex located in the northeast corner of the city. The Canadian Forces Base (CFB) North Bay was established in 1953, after a small airfield began to be used as an auxiliary training base to help in the preparations for the Second World War.⁶⁸ By the time of the Cold War, the Canadian government continued and expanded the city's military role as it contributed to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) including housing fifty-six Bomarc Missiles.⁶⁹ Perhaps most notable about North Bay's military role was the massive underground complex, located 600 feet below the surface and requiring the removal of 765,000 tonnes of rock in its construction. The underground complex housed a computer system to track and compile information about airspace, and, in case of attack, the complex purported to support up to 400 people for up to four weeks.⁷⁰ By June 1975, it was estimated that the 1550 military personnel had a payroll of \$21 million and made purchases in the city amounting to \$2 million.⁷¹ The

⁶⁶ Highways 11, 17 and 63 all meet in North Bay. Highway 11 runs northwest of North Bay and is part of the Trans-Canada Highway. It takes drivers from Toronto to Thunder Bay, and further westward. Highway 17 is the primary route of the Trans-Canada Highway. It runs east-west from Ottawa to the southerly portion of the Ontario-Manitoba provincial border. Highway 63 begins in North Bay and travels northeast to the Ontario-Quebec provincial border.

⁶⁷ "Road to Riches Passes through Ontario's Gateway to the North," *North Bay Nugget*, 20 June 1967; "Letter from Leslie M. Frost," *North Bay Nugget*, August 1975.

⁶⁸ Originally Royal Canadian Air Force Station North Bay, it was renamed Canadian Forces Base North Bay in 1966, part of the Canadian government's effort to merge the country's air force, army and navy.

⁶⁹ CFB North Bay had CF-100 squadrons on 24-hour standby as part of the contribution to NORAD. These were replaced by CF-101B supersonic VooDoos until the unit was disbanded in 1964. In July 1972, an electronic warfare squadron returned with CF-100s and T-33s. Eventually North Bay would lose its role in Air Defence Command to Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Bomarc Missiles would stay in the city from 1963-1972. Dan Gauthier, "Military payroll hits \$21 million mark in city," *North Bay Nugget*, August 1975.

⁷⁰ The underground complex was part of the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) and responsible for the 22nd NORAD Region, physically the largest of the eight regions comprising Canada's far North as well as much of Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. See "A Virtual Exhibit of North Bay's Underground Complex." Accessed: <http://www.UGC50.com#!/home/mainPage> . Last accessed 27 June 2014.

⁷¹ "Military payroll hits \$21 million mark in city"; "It was 1925 and North Bay was to become Ontario's newest city," 2 August 1974.

location of North Bay as an intersectional point for major highways as well as its military connections, drew people to the city, generated jobs and created revenue for local businesses.

The city attracted tourists. The much-publicized birth of the Dionne quintuplets in 1934 launched the city as a tourist centre and changed the tourism economy of northern Ontario.⁷² Despite sending out literature exhorting the fishing, hunting and scenery, the region had previously struggled to attract vacationers willing to travel that far north just to take a holiday. With the births of the five identical girls, hoards of Canadian and American tourists came to visit “Quintland.” Taken away from their French-Canadian parents and placed under custody of the Ontario government, the girls were exploited and put on display during twice daily showings on their playground.⁷³ As a tourist attraction, the Quints changed the way promoters sold northern Ontario to tourists. No longer a rough and masculine space that only appealed to men and boys looking for adventure in the outdoors, northern Ontario and “Quintland” now symbolized a family destination where dozens of tourist camps were erected to accommodate parents, children and their cars.⁷⁴ Nancy Avery remembered spending long summer afternoons at the summer camp her grandmother ran on the shores of Lake Nipissing. To amuse themselves during summer months in the 1950s, she and her girlfriends sat on their front stoop “to see which one of us could identify the license plate on the car coming up the road.”⁷⁵ As a vacation guide produced by the *North Bay Nugget* explained of this phenomenon, “The visitors had a Lakeland paradise, they were astounded.... When summer ended, they returned home to tell

⁷² The Quints were born just southeast of North Bay in the small community of Corbeil, Ontario. Born to a poor French-Canadian family who already had five children, their parents were seen as “too ignorant” to raise the girls safely. The children were put under the care of Dr. Allan Roy Dafoe and two other guardians. The five girls were made provincial wards until they reached the age of 18.

⁷³ By 1943, an estimated 3 million visitors had travelled to Callander to see the girls. “Story of the Quints began in Corbeil farmhouse in 1934,” *North Bay Nugget*, August 1975; “Came to See the Quints, Then Tourists Stayed On,” *North Bay Nugget: Vacation Guide 1952-1953*, June 1952; Cynthia Wright, “They were five: The Dionne Quintuplets revisited,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 5-14; Mariana Valverde, “Families, Private Property, and the State: The Dionnes and the Toronto Stork Derby,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 15-35; Katherine Arnup, “Raising the Dionne Quintuplets: Lessons for Modern Mothers,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 65-85.

⁷⁴ Wright, 9.

⁷⁵ Nancy Avery, interview, 29 January 2007.

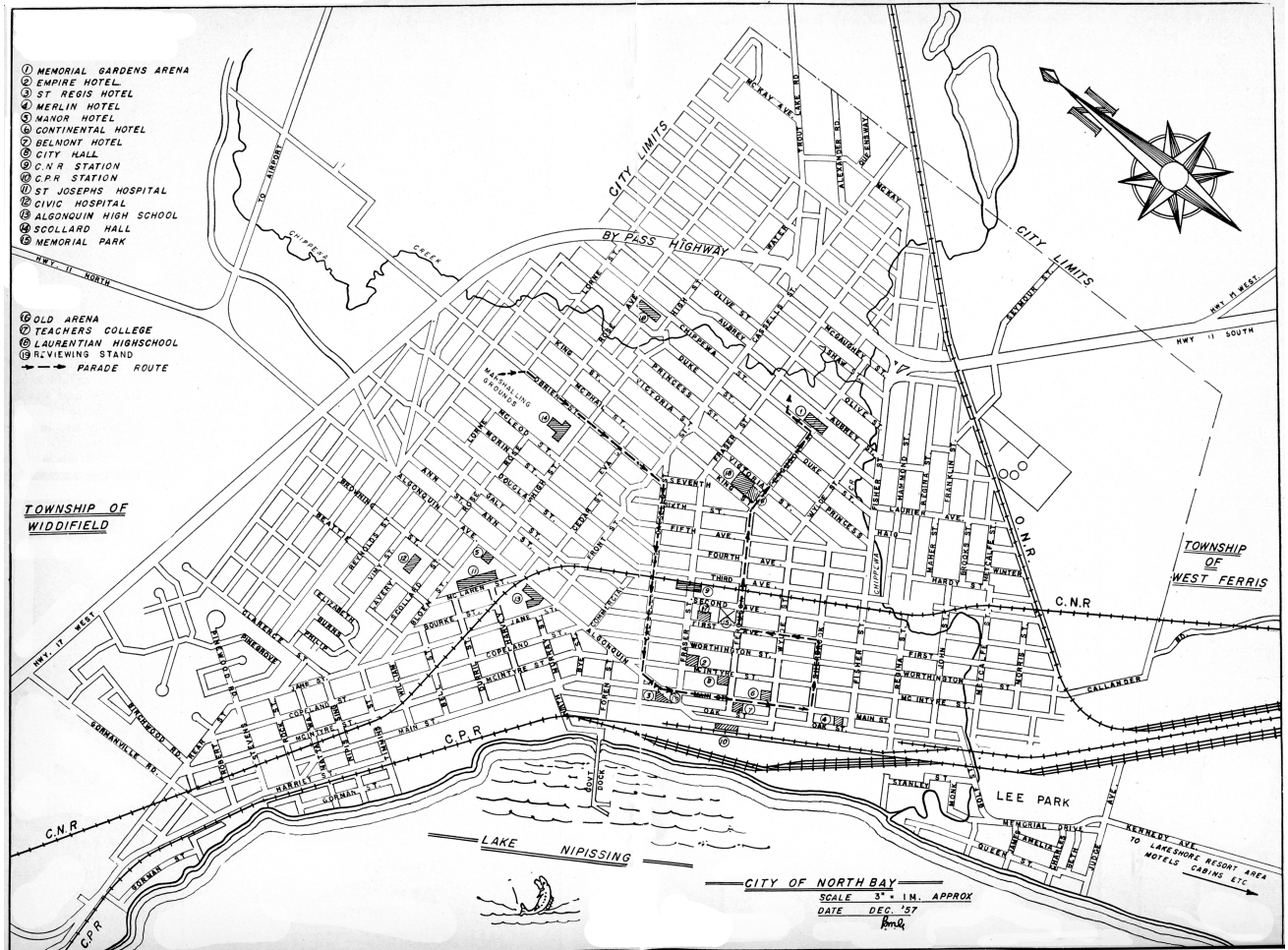


Figure 1: "Welcome: Gateway of the North," Kiwanis Souvenir Book, 1959.
Image courtesy of Françoise Noël.
Printed with permission of Kiwanis Club of Nipissing, North Bay.

expected to find a cold barren country studded with rock and muskeg. When they found instead their friends and neighbours of what they had found.”⁷⁶ The Indigenous populations represented another draw to the region. Gisela Commanda, a white woman who had married an Anishinaabe man, explained to the *Nugget*, “Money has been poured into developing other tourist baits, but Indians—with their picturesque costumes and customs—only needed publicity to become colourful attractions to Canada.”⁷⁷ Tourist brochures for North Bay and the surrounding areas advertised the “picturesque” Nipissing First Nation community of Garden Village, including driving directions, descriptions of Anishinaabe lifestyles and recorded oral traditions about their arrival to the region.⁷⁸ The Quints, scenery and wildlife as well as the promise of “colourful” displays of Indigeneity, all shaped the growing tourist industry in northern Ontario.

With all the growth and development of industries, North Bay witnessed population growth. In 1951, North Bay had a population of 17,944 and by 1971 that population had grown to 49,185. The foreign-born population doubled during this period, from 1,856 to 4,720. Mirroring national patterns, the numerically largest groups came from Britain (38 per cent), Europe (37 per cent), and the United States (10 per cent) with the Italians and Germans the largest groups, representing 14 per cent and 9 per cent respectively of North Bay’s immigrant population in 1971. Women figured prominently in the city’s story of immigration, representing 51 per cent of its foreign-born population.⁷⁹ A large part of the growth was also due to the city amalgamating with neighbouring Widdifield and West Ferris Townships in 1968. Its physical size now made it the largest city in Ontario, and the second largest in Canada—a fact that then

⁷⁶ “Came to See the Quints, Then Tourists Stayed On,” *North Bay Nugget: Vacation Guide 1952-1953*, June 1952.

⁷⁷ “Says Indians Overlooked as Big Tourist Attraction,” *North Bay Nugget*, 12 April 1949.

⁷⁸ “Colourful Indian Reserve Near Sturgeon Falls,” *North Bay Nugget*, June 1951; “Indian Village Picturesque Spot,” *North Bay Nugget*, June 1952; “The Mystic Islands,” *North Bay Nugget*, June 1953.

⁷⁹ Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, “Table 48, Population by birthplace for sex, for incorporated cities, towns and villages of 10,000 and over, 1951” (Ottawa 1951); Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, part III, “Table 37, Population by birthplace and sex, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971” (Ottawa 1971).

mayor Merle Dickerson proudly and repeatedly announced.⁸⁰ The amount of new construction climbed from \$408,195 in 1945 to \$2.1 million in 1952 all the way to \$23 million by 1975. Outside its direct population, it was estimated that North Bay served 85,000 people who travelled to the city for provisions such as shopping for food and clothing and visiting doctors.⁸¹ With all of the population growth and development, it is no wonder that city promoters carefully differentiated North Bay from other northern mining and lumbering centres, claiming that tarpaper shacks and shantytowns were not found in this metropolitan city.⁸²

Although there were pronouncements about the city's acceptance of diversity, this was still largely a white, Protestant-Catholic community. North Bay was described as a "God-fearing community," where "our churches have been the cornerstone upon which our city has been built."⁸³ It was a community that connected its population and development to Christianity. 94 per cent of the population identified with Christian religions including 50 per cent Catholic, 20 per cent United Church and 13 per cent Anglican; 1 per cent of the population identified with non-Christian religions, and 4 per cent with no religion.⁸⁴ The outward image of the city due to population demographics and its northern location was also white. As Karen Dubinsky and others have noted, region is often a coded word for race, and the way it combines with other categories of identity, create powerful perceptions of entire regions.⁸⁵ There were very few visible racial minorities living in North Bay. Out of the 49,185 population in 1971, for example, there were recorded 35 African Canadians, 265 Chinese, 20 Japanese, 15 West Indians and 345

⁸⁰ Lorne Gannon, "Midnight ceremony greets birth of new North Bay," *North Bay Nugget*, January 1968.

⁸¹ Kurt Johnson, "North Bay—a rocky site to 81,210 acres," *North Bay Nugget*, August 1975.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ "It was 1925 and North Bay was to become Ontario's newest city," *North Bay Nugget*, 2 August 1975.

⁸⁴ These breakdowns are based on the total population. Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1 (part 3) "Table 13: Population by religious denomination, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971" (Ottawa 1971).

⁸⁵ Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 143-144.

Indigenous peoples living inside the city.⁸⁶ In 1952, city promoters travelled to the Canadian National Sportsmen's Show in Toronto in their bid to promote northern tourism. Sitting at the booth in front of a printed backdrop of northern wilderness was 19-year old Marilyn Reddick, a white, blonde haired beauty and former Miss Canada.⁸⁷ Her presence projected a white, feminine image for northern Ontario. Coverage of social gatherings hosted in the city depict young, white North Bay dancers covering their faces with black paint in their bids to dress up as Aunt Jemima, minstrel performers, Mexican Americans and Indigenous peoples.⁸⁸ Playing up to racialized stereotypes demonstrates how these dancers operated within a context where this form of racism not only went unchallenged, but was also something to be publicized and lauded in local newspapers. Being white and Christian was the implicit norm in this context, despite outward messages that said otherwise.

North Bay is also located on traditional Anishinaabe land. The Nipissing First Nation have lived in the area surrounding Lake Nipissing for at least 9,600 years.⁸⁹ Generally the Nipissing are considered a part of the Anishinaabe people, a group of people speaking Algonquian languages including the Odaawaa, Ojibwe and Alonquins. The Nipissing First Nation land base is located on the north shore of Lake Nipissing between North Bay and Sturgeon Falls. The territory encompasses the communities of Beaucage, Dushesnay, Garden Village and Jocko Point. Although some newspaper coverage in the *North Bay Nugget* depicted "the Indians [as] completely modernized," living off the money gained from treaties and guiding

⁸⁶ Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, part III, "Table 37, Population by birthplace and sex, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971," (Ottawa 1971).

⁸⁷ "Nugget Exhibit Gets Much Attention at Sportsmen's Show," *North Bay Nugget*, 17 March 1953; Bob Vezina, "Sports Show Smashes Records," 20 March 1953.

⁸⁸ "The Camera Attends Act March of Dimes Benefit Show," *North Bay Nugget*, 22 January 1951; "Gay Costumes at Sturgeon Mardi Gras," *North Bay Nugget*, 7 February 1951; "Grand Time Had by All at Masquerade Bonspiel," *North Bay Nugget*, 26 March 1952; "Carnival of Costumes as Golf Club Ends Season," *North Bay Nugget*, 29 October 1952.

⁸⁹ "NFN History: Historical Background," Nipissing First Nation. Accessed here: <http://www.nfn.ca/historical/background.html> Last accessed: 30 June 2014.

summertime tourists, other articles hint at the lives and struggles Anishinaabe peoples faced.⁹⁰ Superintendent of the Nipissing Agency Henri Gauthier reported that there were plans in March 1954 to build a road for the Dokis First Nation Reserve on the French River, to allow residents easier access to food and supply shopping and “stop the tedious trip of reaching the reserve by boat from Sturgeon Falls.”⁹¹ At the age of 81 years old, Catherine McLeod, a member of the Nipissing First Nation, exercised her rights of citizenship voting for the first time in a Nipissing by-election.⁹² In December 1955, it was reported that hydro was finally being installed on Nipissing territory and all of “talk in the village, these days, is of radios and TV sets, refrigerators, electric irons and electric stoves.”⁹³ The rights of members of the Nipissing First Nation to hunt under the Robinson-Huron Treaty also went frequently challenged, as hunters found themselves jailed or fined for failing to pay for hunting and fishing licenses as well as hunting and fishing outside the timeline of government mandated seasons.⁹⁴ This community faced challenges, restrictions and racialized stereotypes; they also strove to create positive relationships and connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The “Gateway of the North” provides the setting for the women’s stories told in the following chapters. Chapter 1 analyzes how the North and northern Ontario impacted the availability of food resources, and the means women used to procure food. In chapter 2, I

⁹⁰ “Colourful Indian Reserve Near Sturgeon Falls,” *North Bay Nugget*, June 1951.

⁹¹ Dokis First Nation is a community located on the boundaries of the districts of Parry Sound, Sudbury and Nipissing; “Plain Roads and House Reserves for Indian,” *North Bay Nugget*, 6 March 1954; See also “About” and “History: In the Beginning...,” Dokis First Nation. Accessed here: <http://www.dokisfirstnation.com>. Last accessed: 30 June 2014.

⁹² “81 year Old Indian Woman Enjoys First Vote Privilege,” *North Bay Nugget*, 17 September 1954.

⁹³ “Colored Lights on Christmas Trees for Garden Village Indians This Year,” *North Bay Nugget*, 3 December 1955.

⁹⁴ The Huron-Robinson Treaty of 1850 gave Nipissing First Nation and Dokis First Nation members the right “to hunt and fish in territory they ceded to the white man ‘for as long as the grass grows and the water flows.’” “Ask Supreme Court Rule on Indian Hunting Rights,” *North Bay Nugget*, 21 February 1938; “Deprive Indian of Last Rights Under 1850 Pact,” *North Bay Nugget*, 19 February 1940; “Indians Possess Fund of \$100, 000 to Hold Rights,” *North Bay Nugget*, 21 February 1940; “Claims Indians Are Due Redress For Pact Breach,” *North Bay Nugget*, 26 February 1940; “Young Chieftain Says Indians to Protect Rights,” *North Bay Nugget*, 28 February 1940; “Indian Defends Moose Shooting,” *North Bay Nugget*, 25 July 1947; “Take Most Moose Meat Away from Reserve. Indians Face Fine,” *North Bay Nugget*, 19 March 1951; Josephine Boldt, “Garden Village chief sees no need for new laws on hunting, fishing,” *North Bay Nugget*, 1 April 1971.

combine women's memories and cooking literature to consider the ways women learned to cook as well as the imaginative and healing elements of preparing dishes. Chapter 3 examines the family dynamics surrounding food, cooking and mealtime—both positive and negative. Picking up on themes of fantasy, chapter 4 looks at the consumption of food-related items and technologies as the fulfillment of creativity and desires as well as a symbolic movement away from the pains and struggles of their past. And finally, chapter 5 investigates the community building and interactions centered on the making, eating and sharing of food.

Chapter 1 Growing, Hunting and Finding Foods in Northern Ontario

When she arrived to the northern Ontario bush in 1957, Swiss-born Annemarie Vos was well trained in gourmet and international cuisine. In Switzerland, Vos completed a rigorous apprenticeship in home economics and, following the Second World War, found positions with “high society” families cooking for the president of *Good Housekeeping Magazine* in London and then acting as a nanny for a military family in Paris, France. It was while in Paris, she met her husband. What started as a lost Dutchman asking for directions ended up as an afternoon touring along the Champs-Élysées and visiting Notre-Dame Cathedral. After Vos returned to Switzerland, the two corresponded and soon he asked her to join him in Canada. Before he had even met her parents, she agreed, explaining to me, “I came over here...in the bush, to a lumber camp!” Vos’s husband accepted a position as a lumber camp foreman just outside Temagami, Ontario. The couple quickly married because company policy barred unmarried women from living at the camp. Placing her head into her open hands, still incredulous about what she discovered on her arrival at the lumber camp she said, “I thought to myself, ‘Oh God! No running water, no electricity, nothing!’”⁹⁵

Vos soon adjusted to her surroundings, however, especially after lumber camp workers became outraged over the declining quality of food. According to Vos, the workers threatened her husband: “the cook is drunk again, and if you don’t get somebody else we all leave!” Turning to his new wife, he asked, “can you cook?” And while she agreed to take the position, she also hesitated concerned whether the sixty to seventy lumber camp workers would eat the foods she knew how to cook. Vos remembered her attempts to dress up available ingredients and create set dinner menus. For instance, when preparing bologna, she fried it, forming it into little bowls and filling it with peas. “And the guys just looked at that,” Vos explained with big

⁹⁵ Annemarie Vos, interview with author, North Bay, Ontario, 8 May 2012. Unless otherwise indicated all interviews were conducted by the author and took place in North Bay, Ontario.

eyes, “what the heck is that! You know, it also had to look nice and they were not used to anything like that.” Trying to encourage her efforts, her husband said, “Just think you are a missionary trying to teach them something—a little more cultivated eating.” Working within a tight company budget and with rudimentary equipment, Vos invented ways to add sophistication to meals. Moving from comfortable and metropolitan surroundings, Vos described these early years of her marriage as an “adventure” living in the northern Ontario bush and cooking for lumber workers. At the conclusion of our interview, Vos took me on a tour of her home showing me a photograph of her husband around the time they met. When I remarked on the handsomeness of her husband in the portrait, Vos cheekily responded, “Why do you think I moved to Canada?”⁹⁶

In many ways, Vos’s was a love story: a chance encounter on the streets of Paris that resulted in a lifelong marriage and four children.⁹⁷ Hers was also a story about adjusting to life in the northern Ontario resource industry, a setting known for being traditionally dominated by men that required rugged individualism, aggressiveness, virility and physical courage.⁹⁸ Largely isolated from the company of other women, Vos relied on her food and cooking knowledge to prepare meals for the lumber camp workers who made up this resource community. And rather than giving into stereotypes about rough and hardy backwoodsmen, Vos introduced culture and refinement into their foods and meal routines.

This chapter focuses on women’s relationship with their northeastern Ontario setting. Though we have learned much about how immigrant men formed their identities in the lumber camps and mining towns of northern Ontario, we know far less about this as a space where women negotiated identities and relationships; especially overlooked is the perspective of the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Kerry Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 373-380.

women themselves.⁹⁹ In doing so, this chapter examines women's experiences with grocery stores, gardens and wild food sources, analyzing their engagement with and adaptation to their physical surroundings as well as how those surroundings impacted the availability and usage of foods. It argues that women's stories about food gathering, preparation and consumption reveal the personal and familial strategies they invented to confront the realities, and often limitations, of northern Ontario. Indeed, women's extra, unpaid labour took advantage of the food resources available within their physical contexts as well as compensated for shortages and limited availabilities.

This chapter examines the food resources women obtained in northeastern Ontario, and more specifically, how living in this region shaped their efforts. Our memories are shaped by the geography of where an event or experience occurred and the visual appearance of space.¹⁰⁰ In our opening narrative, for instance, Annemarie Vos assumed male lumber workers from the northern Ontario bush needed to be introduced to "cultivated" foods and ways of eating, and it was her role to do so. The physical space impacted how she saw herself and how she related to those surrounding her: she adopted a colonial position as a missionary woman educating rough and uncultured lumbermen.¹⁰¹ This was a personal strategy used to ease the transition to her physical environment. Our sense of space and geography is also made meaningful by memory. As James Opp and John Walsh have reminded us, our sense of geographical space is more often "defined by meanings, sentiments and stories rather than by a set of co-ordinates." Our

⁹⁹ Abel, *Changing Places*; Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Nancy M. Forestell, "Bachelors, Boarding Houses and Blind Pigs: Gender Construction in a Multi-Ethnic Mining Camp, 1909-1920," in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 251-290; "Women, Gender and the Provincial North," in *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History*, eds. Kerry Abel and Ken S. Coates, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 107-109; Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Varpu Lindström-Best, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1988).

¹⁰⁰ Abel, *Changing Places*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Vos, interview.

memories of individual and collective pasts bring significance to our physical settings, expressing relationships to surroundings, shaping the images we have of ourselves and others and helping us to make sense of our past and present behaviours.¹⁰² The physical spaces we inhabit shape our memories, and in turn, our memories shape our perceptions of physical spaces.

Categories of identity also inform our understandings of geographical spaces. In discussing Atlantic Canada, Suzanne Morton argues that studying gendered identities and relationships in regional contexts has the potential to move regional historiography beyond “geography, economics and formal politics.”¹⁰³ And there are growing numbers of examples about the ways geographical spaces shape the contours of gender, class, racial, religious and sexual identities. In the Canadian context, Karen Dubinsky explores “imaginary geography” or how the sexual imaginings of Niagara Falls attracted prosperous and honeymooning tourists in search of the “exotic” and created quite a different portrait of this geographical space than those working there in the tourist and service industries.¹⁰⁴ In the American context, Karol Weaver’s study of Pennsylvania’s coal country examines how regional health conditions prompted responses rooted in gender, ethnic and religious identities and were delivered in spaces geographically separated from men such as homes and gardens.¹⁰⁵ Both works remind us to consider how multiple categories of identity impact how individuals imagine physical spaces, and how those imaginings are historically constructed and contested.

In the context of northern Ontario, there are increasing numbers of studies that have looked at the analytic import of gender in the North. Largely due to its physical terrain and

¹⁰² James Opp and John C. Walsh eds., “Introduction,” in *Place Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2010), 3-5; Abel, *Changing Places*, xvi-xxi.

¹⁰³ Suzanne Morton, “Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History,” *Special Issue: Atlantis: A Women’s Studies Journal* 25, no. 1 (2000): 120.

¹⁰⁴ Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1999), 12-15; See also Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 13.

¹⁰⁵ Karol K. Weaver, *Medical Caregiving and Identity in Pennsylvania’s Anthracite Region, 1880-2000* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2011).

climate, the North has often been gendered as a masculine, rugged space or as “a man’s country.”¹⁰⁶ At the turn of the twentieth-century, the North was often positioned as the end of civilization, where radical, male immigrants dominated homosocial resource-based communities and women were not only isolated from other female company, but also encountered danger from male violence and sexual threats.¹⁰⁷ This colonial and imperial rhetoric helps to explain Annemarie Vos’s discourse of cultivation and sense she was elevating immigrant and Franco-Ontarian lumber workers. Such constructions of the North, while powerful, have overlooked the experiences of the people, especially the women who lived there. As Nancy Forestell notes, often there is a “women were there too” approach to histories of the North, where women’s presence is noted as an aside or there is a focus on the endeavours of a few adventurous women.¹⁰⁸ There are important exceptions. Forestell herself explores how the instability and danger of mining work made it near impossible for working-class families to reproduce gender roles and family relations according to Canadian and American norms.¹⁰⁹ Other scholars have studied the work, family and ethnic community lives of women living in northern Ontario.¹¹⁰ Most of this work, however, has focused on the early twentieth-century and on specific immigrant-ethnic groups. By studying a diverse cross-section of women who shared a northeastern context, we can draw comparisons and learn how their various identities impacted

¹⁰⁶ Ken Coates and William Morrison, “Winter and the Shaping of Northern History: Reflections from the Canadian North,” in *Northern Visions: New Perspectives of the North in Canadian History*, eds. Kerry Abel and Kenneth Coates (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 23-35; L.E. Hamelin, “Images of the North,” in *Interpreting Canada’s North*, eds. Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1989), 9-10; Ken Coates and William Morrison, *The Forgotten North: A History of Canada’s Provincial Norths* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1992), 1-3.

¹⁰⁷ Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 143-147; 154-155.

¹⁰⁸ Forestell, “Women, Gender and the Provincial North,” 107; 111-112.

¹⁰⁹ Nancy M. Forestell, “The Miner’s Wife: Working-Class Femininity in a Masculine Context, 1920-1950,” in *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, eds. Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 157.

¹¹⁰ Lindström-Best, 66-68; 73; Stacey Zembrzycki, “‘We Didn’t Have a Lot of Money, but We Had Food’: Ukrainians and Their Depression-Era Food Memories,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 131-139; “‘There Were Always Men in Our House’: Gender and the Childhood Memories of Working-Class Ukrainians in Depression-Era Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 60 (Fall 2007): 77-105.

their experiences within this cultural and physical space. The focus on a shared setting also gives us insight into how geographical spaces organized women's memories of their lives there. It allows us to consider how women's experiences with food resources such as grocery stores, gardens and wild foods were impacted by their real and imagined physical surroundings.

Dear Lord, Where is North Bay? Memories of Living in Northeastern Ontario

In order to more fully understand the lives of women in the North, we need to understand how women living there saw this geographical space in both real and imaginary ways. In Kerry Abel's excellent *Changing Places*, she argues, "it has become almost commonplace to hear that history is about time and geography is about space. Yet none of us experience time as disembodied from place, and indeed our understanding of time is often shaped by the space in which we experience it."¹¹¹ For the women interviewed, their sense of northeastern Ontario as a geographical space was shaped by their lived experiences as well as the physical terrain and climate that surrounded them. In our 2007 interview, Sister Rosemary Carroll was adamant that the North did not shape her identity: "I don't think it shaped me at all because I never lived anywhere else for one thing." As she put it, "So I can't tell you very much, I was fused to the North and that's the only place that I've lived!"¹¹² On the topic of the North, Joyce Patel simply stated, "I am a northern girl." When she briefly left to attend nursing school in Hamilton, Patel could hardly wait to return to the family, landscape and weather of North Bay.¹¹³ Like many of the women interviewed, Nora Stewart loved the "rocks, trees and lakes" found in the North. As a union representative for mental health workers in the 1960s and 1970s, Stewart often traveled to Toronto. As she said emphatically, "I hated it! I would never live in the city. I didn't like the smell, I didn't like the noise, too many people, everybody in a hurry and

¹¹¹ Abel, *Changing Places*, 4.

¹¹² Sister Rosemary Carroll, interview, 5 July 2007.

¹¹³ Joyce Patel, interview, 30 August 2012.

they're not going anywhere!"¹¹⁴ Being able to travel outside of northern Ontario created a point of reference and comparison. Patel found herself craving the quietness and pace of life found there. For the women interviewed, who still live in North Bay and have for large portions of their lives, their familiarity with the region and its landscape informed their identity and sense of belonging.

When asked to describe living in northern Ontario, most women talked about the natural environment that surrounded them including the abundance of green spaces and fresh water sources as well as the rocky interior landscape. The 1952 *North Bay Nugget: Summer Guide* depicted young white women enjoying the northern landscape. With their rolled up pants, plaid shirts and neatly styled hair, these two women were shown in a series of photographs with different natural, typically northern, backdrops. Their explorations of the rocks, lakes and tall pines did not challenge their feminine gender identity. Rather, the photographs reaffirmed it by portraying them as enjoying fun in safe, innocuous settings (figure 2). This was not a space where young women and men met, or interracial exchanges took place. Indeed, just as the environment was pure and wholesome, so were the messages learned by these young women. The young women photographed could easily have been interviewees, who reminisced about their love for their natural surroundings. Eva Wardlaw thought living in North Bay was ideal because "you could go anywhere, within five minutes you could be at Trout Lake or Lake Nipissing."¹¹⁵ Sister Norah Murphy described in detail how the landscape in northern Ontario influenced her identity: "I guess part of it is to be a person who is surrounded by water, and lakes, and rocks, and hunting and fishing and all those things that it is to live in northern

¹¹⁴ Nora Stewart, interview, 25 June 2012.

¹¹⁵ Eva Wardlaw, interview, 27 August 2013.



Wholesome Youth and the Great Outdoors

Figure 2: “Wholesome Youth and the Great Outdoors,” *North Bay Nugget: Summer Guide 1952-1953*. Printed with permission of the *North Bay Nugget*.

Ontario.” With a warm smile she confided, “I still fish, you know. I have worms in the fridge right now.”¹¹⁶ Echoing these sentiments, Barbara Reid discussed the freedom of the space “being able to go fish with dad, and then go jump in the lake.”¹¹⁷ For these women, the natural environment and the recreational activities they enjoyed outlined what it meant to live in northern Ontario. Raised in the Duchesnay Creek community on Nipissing First Nation territory, Marianna Couchie described memories of her “great life.” As she said in detail, “We had the bushes here to explore, we had the lake to swim in everyday in the summertime, and in the wintertime we would make rinks.” Even though her family did not own snowshoes, they often went ice fishing carrying their axe and pick on the long trek and using “dead smelts as bait.”

¹¹⁶ Sister Norah Murphy, interview, 27 June 2007.

¹¹⁷ Barbara Reid, interview, 12 May 2012.

Reflecting on her childhood she surmised, “even though we were all poor, and I never considered myself poor—none of us did—but when we look back on it, yes we were all poor but we didn’t feel that way, we felt rich.” She elucidated, “We had these loving parents, loving relatives, we just had so much freedom to roam, to play, to explore. It was a good life.”¹¹⁸ These women did not talk about their explorations as challenging their feminine gender identity. Rather, they incorporated mobility into their identity, seeing it as an important part of what it meant to live in their northern environment. They talked about their sense of freedom and discovery, fostering an adventurous spirit and their connection with the natural.

As women’s stories underscore, the weather, especially during winters, impacted their understandings of northern Ontario. “Without winter,” argue Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, “the North is only a direction, not a place; the two are thus inseparable.”¹¹⁹ The realities of withstanding winters in northern Ontario became a point of pride for women, many deriving a source of identity from having survived the challenges it posed. Sister Carolyn Schan, who grew up in Thunder Bay, Ontario, said, “We northerners are a hardy people.” She clarified, “not that we were fierce outdoors people, you just learned to deal with the weather and cope with things.”¹²⁰ Sister Cecilia Morin from Killarney, Ontario echoed these sentiments declaring northerners are a more “stalwart people because of the cold.” She surmised that those living in Toronto “haven’t a notion what the winters are like in northern Ontario.”¹²¹ When two secular sisters from Surrey, England visited North Bay, the local newspaper reported that the women were struck by the “miles upon miles of unbroken snowscapes.” To their great surprise, these tough conditions did not keep the locals from enjoying a winter’s drive in the “vast wide-open

¹¹⁸ Marianna Couchie, interview with Françoise Noël, 27 July 2005, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

¹¹⁹ Coates and Morrison, “Winter and the Shaping of Northern History,” 24.

¹²⁰ Sister Carolyn Schan, interview, 13 August 2007.

¹²¹ Sister Cecilia Morin, interview, 16 August 2007.

spaces.”¹²² Living in northern Ontario, women remembered coping with the harsh and unforgiving winters and they felt a sense of pride regarding the physical efforts it took to deal with and persist within these conditions.¹²³

Women also faced difficult adjustment periods, feeling scared, isolated and apprehensive about living in the North. Sister Shirley Anderson, who had grown up in North Bay, recalled her reaction when she found out the location of her new teaching post. “I couldn’t believe I was going to Wawa,” she said. “I thought I was going to the end of the world.”¹²⁴ With North Bay as her point of reference on a map, Anderson imagined Wawa, Ontario as an extremely northern locale. The most anxious about their new physical settings were immigrant women. Unsurprisingly, none had even heard of North Bay before their relocation there, prompting one German-born woman to ask, “Dear Lord, where is North Bay?” upon learning she would be moving there.¹²⁵ Most of the women agreed to move for practical reasons, primarily the promise of jobs, usually for their husbands, and the comforts of family. As a French war bride, Charlotte Aimes came to North Bay when her English Canadian husband got an accounting job there in 1948.¹²⁶ Like most Italian immigrants coming to Canada at this time, Rosa Valentti and her family were sponsored by kinfolk. A shared living arrangement with her father in North Bay, allowed them to save enough money to pay back their debt and eventually own their own home in the city.¹²⁷ In 1964, Welsh-born Frieda Kendall followed her husband who had been stationed at Canadian Forces Base North Bay. After her husband died unexpectedly, Kendall stayed

¹²² “English Ladies Say N. Bay Finest Place in Canada,” *North Bay Nugget*, March 1949; “Most Brides Happy Over Homes in Canada,” *North Bay Nugget*, 2 March 1946.

¹²³ Abel, “History and the Provincial Norths,” 128.

¹²⁴ Sister Shirley Anderson, interview, 26 May 2008.

¹²⁵ Frenssen, interview.

¹²⁶ Charlotte Aimes, interview, 27 April 2009.

¹²⁷ More than 90 per cent of postwar Italians came to Canada came as Valentti had, through sponsorship by kin, whereas the average for immigrants from all other nations was 47 per cent and for those considered racially desirable, like Germans, below 40 per cent. Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hard Working People: Italian Immigrants in postwar Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 46-49.

prioritizing the need to find a source of income to support herself and her two children.¹²⁸

German-born Elfredie Bremermann moved to North Bay when her husband was offered an engineering position. On her initial impressions of the city in 1961, she said frankly, “I thought oh no! There is nothing going on here.” She promised her husband they would stay for two years, explaining, “North Bay was not what it is now.” What most frightened Bremermann about her surroundings was the natural environment: “I was very afraid then of the wild, of the wolves, bears and skunks—so I thought in two years we will go back to Germany.” They wound up staying for the next ten years.¹²⁹ For immigrant women who had a greater sense of global geography, North Bay seemed like a small, rural community, offering a frigid climate, wilderness and very few amenities. Their sense of isolation and wilderness made it a less than desirable setting.

Other Canadian-born and immigrant women talked about the freedom and safety they felt living in the North. In *Improper Advances*, Karen Dubinsky looks at the changing sexual politics in northern Ontario. While social commentators depicted the North as a community in creation and a safe, rural space away from the potential dangers of city life, by the turn of the twentieth century there were warnings about the North as a dangerously immoral and uncivilized space largely due to the large immigrant, male population living there.¹³⁰ This again was a loaded discourse of racial hierarchy and colonialism. Contradicting this rhetoric, women in their interviews talked about feeling a sense of safety in northern Ontario. For some, this perception was shaped by previous experiences fleeing war-ravaged Europe or escaping a physically and mentally abusive husband. Others felt a sense of security raising their children there, undoubtedly seeing this space as being tucked away from the unknown moral and social

¹²⁸ Frieda Kendall, interview, 21 April 2009.

¹²⁹ Elfredie Bremermann, interview, 10 June 2009.

¹³⁰ Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, see esp. chap. 6, “Sex and the Single-Industry Community: The Social and Moral Reputation of Rural and Northern Ontario,” 143-162.

perils of city life in southern Ontario. Eva Wardlaw talked about the sense of familiarity gained from living in a small city: “You know everybody in town, you know every area. So there is nothing strange about being in North Bay.”¹³¹ Irish-born Leon and Francis Fennel shared thoughts about the safety and freedom of living in Ontario’s north. When the couple first moved there with their three children in 1955, they thought the setting was “totally different.” “The bush was wonderful, we couldn’t understand people complaining about it. The freedom, the canoeing and the fishing. We fell in love with it,” Leon Fennel said. “We were in the North, and we weren’t going anywhere.” As they continued to use the adjective “freedom” to describe their experiences in the North, I asked how they envisioned or witnessed this freedom.¹³² Answering Francis Fennel said, “The kids were young, and you met another young kid on the road and they had the freedom of the whole country.”¹³³ The Fennel’s description of their northern environment called on ideas about the freedom of movement, the amount of natural space and the ability of children to explore the region safely. Women saw the North as a safe physical and moral space, a space to raise children unfettered by the pitfalls of the urban south.

Physical spaces in the North were also heavily racialized. Darlene McIsaac, a Métis woman, recalled the stigma linked with living in her Mattawa, Ontario neighbourhood. “I was born in the part called Squaw Valley,” she said. “So right there, we had that Native stigma: ‘Oh you must have Indian blood in you.’ And so, we were also raised with the shame of it—you weren’t supposed to acknowledge that—being fair-skinned was a benefit supposedly.”¹³⁴ There are multiple and changing connotations with the term “squaw.”¹³⁵ As Beatrice Medicine states it

¹³¹ Wardlaw, interview.

¹³² Leon Fennel, interview, 14 November 2012.

¹³³ Francis Fennel, interview, 14 November 2012.

¹³⁴ Darlene McIsaac, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

¹³⁵ For discussions on the term “squaw,” see Nancy J. Parezo and Angelina R. Jones, “What’s in a Name?: The 1940s-1950s ‘Squaw Dress,’” *The American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 373-404; C. Richard King, *Unsettling America: The Use of Indianness in the 21st Century* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), see esp. chap. 8, “De/Scribing Squ*w: Indigenous women and Imperial Idioms in the United States”; Mark

most commonly remains as “a very derogatory term for Indian women. It equates them with sexuality and perpetuates the stereotype that Indian women are loose and promiscuous.”¹³⁶ The term was essentializing, ascribing sexual qualities to Indigenous women and imprinting a racial, cultural and moral inferiority onto an Indigenous community.¹³⁷ McIsaac and her family eventually moved away from the community to North Bay, explaining, “So moving to town was a time to leave that behind you, and we’re going to be civilized city people.” She continued, “But we did fish, and iced fish. And as far as hunting, actually, when my children were little, I spent a winter snaring rabbits out of necessity for a while, and partridge hunting.” McIsaac’s narrative tells us about the construction of space, how racist and sexist stereotypes were attached to a neighbourhood based on the assumed racial identity of the people living there. The city of North Bay was viewed as more civilized and urban, where Indigenous food traditions—although contrasting images of refined city life—continued as a necessary economic and nutritional strategy. McIsaac’s narrative also gives insight into race relations in northern Ontario. Being “fair-skinned” was perceived as an advantage. Métis Nicole Petrant-Rennie largely agreed with this sentiment. As she recalled, “I definitely wasn’t raised as though I was Aboriginal because we could pass as non-Aboriginal.” Later on in her interview she returned to the topic, reflecting that for her father “once he started having children and we could pass as non-Native, that was seen as a gift, because we wouldn’t have to endure the hardships that they did. And I don’t think he ever saw the part where we became proud of it because he died.”¹³⁸ Both of these women were taught to hide their racial identity and try to “pass as non-Native” because historically their families encountered racial discrimination and hardships within this northern space. The sexist

Monmonier, *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow: How Maps Name, Claim and Inflamm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); William Bright, “The Sociolinguistics of the ‘S-Word’: Squaw in American Placenames,” *Names* 48 (2000): 207–216.

¹³⁶ Quoted in King, *Unsettling America*, 97.

¹³⁷ King, 97.

¹³⁸ Nicole Petrant-Rennie, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

and racialized naming of spaces informed a sense of shame about cultural and racial identities as well as a desire to distance themselves from or hide those identities. These Métis women's stories point out that the freedom of northern Ontario was a privilege of whiteness. Indigenous women carefully navigated the colonial and racial dynamics of northern Ontario, all too aware that their behaviours were monitored and judged.

Shopping for Food in Northern Ontario's Grocery Stores and Supermarkets

The city of North Bay offered food shoppers smaller, family-run grocery stores such as Demarcos and larger scale, chain supermarkets such as Dominion and Loblaws Groceteria. When the Loblaws Groceteria opened its doors in 1955, cars lined Main Street in North Bay and hundreds turned out to shop in the store heralded as “one of most modern in Ontario” and a symbol of “progress” for northern Ontario. It advertised brilliant lighting and extra wide aisles, which supposedly made it easy for the busy housewife to pick up all the items on her grocery list.¹³⁹ As Tracey Deutsch reminds us, post-1945 supermarkets like Loblaws Groceteria were advertised as spaces offering customers, especially female customers, low prices, abundant choice and quantities of products as well as modern décor. Yet food shopping in these spaces also required hard work as women (most often responsible for grocery shopping) searched endless shelves, cut and saved coupons, compared products and remained watchful for overcharges at the register.¹⁴⁰ Not all women living in northern Ontario had access to these larger, modern supermarkets because of the remote locations of their homes as well as family finances and, even those who did, remembered that in addition to the usual work of grocery shopping, they also had to cope with a lack of selection and irregular and infrequent delivery of fresh foods. These added difficulties made their unpaid labour with vegetable gardening and

¹³⁹ “Another Step Forward,” *North Bay Nugget*, 27 June 1955; “Interior of New Supermarket,” *North Bay Nugget*, 27 June 1955; “Shopping Spree as Loblaws Store Opens,” *North Bay Nugget*, 29 June 1955.

¹⁴⁰ Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 184; 198-199.

wild foods so key to their success in providing food for their families. Women also undertook extra work in grocery stores, travelling to find certain ethnic ingredients, ordering foods from larger Canadian cities, stockpiling food supplies and sometimes, simply going without the foods they really wanted.

For immigrant women, grocery stores and supermarkets in North Bay often lacked the ethnic foods they desired. The immigrant women interviewed recalled in remarkable detail their amazement at the amount of foods they encountered in the city's grocery stores. The contrast for these women was made all the more stark because they came from situations of severe food deprivation and scarcity in their war-torn European homelands. And while they described the plentiful amounts of food available in North Bay (and were thankful), many newcomer women also found it lacking as they longed to consume the ingredients and foods that reminded them of their homelands. Although impressed by the abundance of food, Parisian-born Charlotte Aimes still could not get the type of French cheese she craved and the processed, American cheddar cheeses available in her local grocery store were frankly, unsatisfying. At one point, Aimes became so desperate for *Camembert* that she tried to bring a wheel back after a visit to Paris. But the cheese spoiled over the weeklong journey on the ship and filled up her tiny cabin with a smell so terrible she initially mistook it for one of her son's dirty diapers.¹⁴¹ German-born Lottie Frenssen had better luck when Mr. Winklemeyer's refrigerated van pulled up outside her West Ferris home. Answering a knock on her door, she was elated to discover she could finally purchase German liverwurst and rye bread, which were not stocked in North Bay grocery stores. As she explained, "He had everything in there our hearts desired. And I said to Mr. Winklemeyer PLEASE come back every Thursday." Thankfully, he did, and Frenssen said, "that's how we got back into it." This refrigerated van allowed Frenssen to purchase and

¹⁴¹ Aimes, interview.

consume the German foods she and her family so dearly missed.¹⁴² In North Bay especially, the supermarket was at once a place of abundance and little variety. A lack of demand for so-called “ethnic” specialty items, meant few grocery stores regularly stocked them, prompting immigrant women to find strategies to get foods and ingredients their “hearts desired.” These women’s stories also remind us of the deeper meaning of food in their lives. Consuming ethnic ingredients and dishes maintained a connection with the homeland where they no longer lived and, often at times, missed.

Other immigrant women tried to be pragmatic about their food cravings. Lina Karakans used infrequent trips to Toronto to purchase Latvian ingredients such as cracked barley and *sprats*, a type of canned, smoked fish. Karakans, however, did not especially care about her ability or inability to obtain these items. Coming from a context of severe food deprivation in the Second World War, Karakans felt less concerned about satisfying her desire for Latvian ingredients and much more so with securing nutritious food for her family regardless of its ethnic origins.¹⁴³ Annemarie Vos continued to make Swiss-based foods living in Temagami, Ontario such as *rösti* and Swiss-noodle *spätzle*. Although many Swiss foods were not stocked on the shelves of grocery stores in Temagami and North Bay, Vos did not feel the urgency to travel to bigger Canadian cities to purchase these foods explaining practically “you just made do.” She asked, “What’s the point in craving, if you can’t get it?”¹⁴⁴ Pragmatism affected immigrant women’s food cravings. They conceived of food as a source of nutrition, grateful to have access to reliable sources of foods, and although they acknowledged cravings, they also moved past them, believing that wanting foods outside your reach wasted energy.

The lack of variety also affected ethnic Canadian women, including Jewish-Canadian women who had to order their kosher meat from larger cities such as Toronto and Ottawa. The

¹⁴² Lottie Frenssen, interview, 4 June 2009.

¹⁴³ Lina Karakans, interview, 22 April 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Vos, interview.

small Jewish population of North Bay meant the city could not hold on to a rabbi, let alone a kosher butcher. Gettie Brown, Brooky Robbins and Cynthia Flesher all recalled the chore of getting kosher meat for their families.¹⁴⁵ According to Flesher, “it would come packed on dry ice overnight on the train or sent by freight in a truck. Sometimes it wasn’t in such great shape when it got there.” The meat arrived every second Tuesday, and Flesher recalled, “I just hated going home because my mother... wasn’t in the best of humour because she had to deal with this meat.” Returning home, Flesher watched as her mother opened the meat packaging it into family-size portions.¹⁴⁶ Gettie Brown ordered kosher meat by phone, remembering it was her responsibility to estimate how much to order depending on whether a holiday was approaching “or when the larder or freezer were getting empty.” Brown also relied on friends and family from Ottawa and Toronto, giving them an order of kosher meat to bring with them on visits to North Bay.¹⁴⁷ To keep with their ethno-religious observances, Jewish-Canadian women looked outside of North Bay grocery stores and supermarkets. They took on extra labour, estimating the amount of kosher meat needed, calling-in orders, picking up the meat and packaging it up for consumption by their families at a later date.

The physical geography and remoteness of northern Ontario, and especially the far North, shaped women’s ability to regularly secure and purchase fresh vegetables and groceries from stores. Catherine Paterson thought North Bay grocery stores offered plenty of options for good, nutritious foods. When Paterson’s husband joined the ranks of the Canadian military, however, the family soon found themselves stationed in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. There the family often bought groceries in bulk, buying ten loaves of bread and keeping them frozen solid by storing them outside. She explained, “And you had to have that mindset, what am I going to

¹⁴⁵ Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012; Brooky Robbins, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 6 January 2008; Cynthia Flesher, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, 6 February 2008.

¹⁴⁶ Flesher, interview.

¹⁴⁷ Gettie Brown, interview.

need for the next month because maybe not everything would be in.” With the unreliable train, Paterson and her husband felt grateful they could afford to stockpile groceries.¹⁴⁸

Grocery stores were also physically smaller in remote northern communities. Living in White River, Ontario, Francis and Leon Fennel remembered a trailer housing the local grocery store.¹⁴⁹ Moving around this small store proved difficult. “You go in with your shopping cart, and there is no room to turn around so you go through the aisles. And if you forgot anything, you had to start again,” explained Leon Fennel.¹⁵⁰ This maze of a cramped store encumbered the movements of its shoppers as well as contrasting images of spacious post-1945 supermarkets. The physical size also meant the store had less shelf space to stock up on groceries. Indeed, knowing deliveries arrived on Fridays, the couple made certain to get there early before needed items sold out. Once when the store ran out of Quaker Oats, the couple journeyed twenty miles to Elliot Lake, Ontario to pick some up, where the item cost three times as much. “Unbelievable,” Leon Fennel said shaking his head. It was not just grocery stores located in the far North that experienced food shortages. Raised in North Bay, Joyce Patel recalled her family of six rarely afforded the cost of fresh fruit. As she explained, “the only orange that I had growing up for quite a few years was around Christmas time in your stocking.” “There wasn’t that much fruit in the grocery store, especially during the winter.... It was only when they were ripe off the trees in the fall that you got fresh fruits.” Patel described her family as “poor,” and like other families living in northern Ontario, much of their fruit supply came from picking choke cherries, pinch cherries, raspberries, strawberries and “lots of blueberries,” all of which they used to eat fresh and make jam.¹⁵¹ Confronted with shortages and irregular deliveries, northern women could not rely on local grocery stores to supply them with fresh and packaged

¹⁴⁸ Catherine Paterson, interview, 26 June 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Leon Fennel, interview; Francis Fennel, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Leon Fennel, interview.

¹⁵¹ Patel, interview.

foods. They turned to their labour and the help of other family members, making certain they successfully managed and secured food sources.

The remote and dispersed physical terrain of Ontario's north made it difficult for women to reach grocery stores. Many women living in North Bay walked and drove to grocery stores or, if they had husbands, waited for them to return home from work with the family vehicle. Other women found themselves isolated by their location. Annemarie Vos lived in a lumber camp just outside Temagami, Ontario for the first few years of her marriage. Taking over the cooking responsibilities, Vos estimated and ordered food for the entire month to feed sixty to seventy lumber camp workers. As she explained, the company issued a long list of "what you could buy, what you could have" and she "learned very fast" to order enough food for these lumbermen, who performed heavy, physical labour everyday. The poor quality of meat and the form in which it arrived also created extra work for Vos, as she took responsibility for butchering, cooking and making this meat edible for exhausted and hungry workers.¹⁵² Trudy Nelson also faced difficulties getting fresh groceries living on the outskirts of North Bay. Nelson never learned to drive. When her husband died in a tragic car accident at the age of fifty-two, she decided not to replace the vehicle having little usage for it and besides, she told me, she needed the "cash" from the insurance company as her family's primary breadwinner was now gone. This presented a problem for Nelson, in regards to getting groceries to feed her and her young son. Sometimes she relied on the public transportation system that ran "twice a day" from their more rural location into the city. Other times she worked out a barter system with friends, sewing a few items such as pants in exchange for them picking up a few groceries.¹⁵³ Physical geography isolated women, making it hard to reach grocery stores. They took on extra labour to obtain groceries and to make do with the groceries that they were able to secure.

¹⁵² Vos, interview.

¹⁵³ Trudy Nelson, interview, 29 August 2012.

For the Indigenous women interviewed, it was a “big deal” for their families to have store bought foods. These Métis and Anishinaabe women stressed their families’ usage and dependence on wild game, fish and wild berries. Métis Nicole Petrant-Rennie reminisced that the children in her family were “a lot older before we ever got to experience some of the fruits that aren’t indigenous to our areas. So that would be a big thing, the first time you ever got to have cherries or anything like that.” Not regularly exposed to store bought foods, Petrant-Rennie assumed this was “normal” for herself and many peers because wild foods claimed such a prominent spot in their diets.¹⁵⁴ Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman, largely agreed with these sentiments, saying, “It was a big deal to have store bought meat, store bought bread.” She recalled at Christmas the children woke up at five in the morning, and took turns opening up gifts. “It wasn’t grandiose, our folks couldn’t afford much,” said Couchie. “But stockings, we loved the stocking because we actually got fruit, real fruit,” she emphasized.¹⁵⁵ Darlene McIsaac, a Métis woman, laughingly remembered that “baloney was big!” For her family, it “was the big thing, even just to get to go for a trip when the groceries were going to be bought...and look for the baloney. They bologna was important to me.”¹⁵⁶ These women repeatedly used the language of “big” and “big deal” to describe the role of store bought foods in their households. Their families relied predominantly on gardened and wild food sources, representing readily accessible, economical and nutritious way of eating. For their Métis and Anishinaabe families, gardened and wild foods also symbolized a traditional way of eating and using the land. When store bought foods made its way onto their plates, these women noticed because it signaled a deviation from their typical food habits. Living in northern Ontario, women created strategies to deal with under stocked and expensive grocery stores, which often did not carry the foods they truly wanted.

¹⁵⁴ Petrant-Rennie, interview.

¹⁵⁵ Couchie, interview.

¹⁵⁶ McIsaac, interview.

“You never bought any canned goods, that was just unheard of”: Cultivating Gardens in Northern Ontario

The difficulty of purchasing foods from grocery stores in northern Ontario meant that women turned to alternative food sources to make up large parts of their diets. Women took up gardening, picking berries, fishing and hunting in order to acquire food. Historically Garden Village, a Nipissing First Nation community, was named so because the Nipissing gathered to practice agricultural and to grow gardens there. This certainly continued in the post-1945 period.¹⁵⁷ These food resources represented regional, economical and nutritious choices as well as requiring women, and often children’s, unpaid labour. For many of the women interviewed, vegetable gardens represented an important part of their family food economy. Cultivating large gardens in their backyards ensured fresh vegetable produce for women and their families. It also required much work as women prepared an area for growing, planted vegetables and watered and tended to them until ready for harvest. Women then served these vegetables right out of the garden as well as preserving and storing them in cold cellars to provide food resources throughout the long winter months.¹⁵⁸ In northern Ontario, a rocky, infertile terrain and a shorter growing season further complicated gardening efforts with the average frost-free period numbering 125 to 145 days.¹⁵⁹

For many immigrant women, gardening in northern Ontario was a practice learned in their European homelands. Swiss-born Annemarie Vos picked up gardening skills from her mother, who cultivated a substantial family garden growing mostly root vegetables as well as

¹⁵⁷ Couchie, interview.

¹⁵⁸ Zembrzycki, “Ukrainians and Their Depression-Era Food Memories,” 132-133; Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 163-168; “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival among Montreal Families, 1861-91,” *Labour/Le Travail* 14 (Fall 1984): 9-46; Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), see esp. chap. 5, “Victory Gardening and Canning: Men, Women and Home Front Family Food Production,” 114-141.

¹⁵⁹ This is based on “Zone E” averages calculated by the Canadian government, which includes cities such as North Bay and Sudbury. Statistics state that the average date for last spring frost is May 17 and the average date for first frost is September 26. See “Climate Zones and Planning Dates for Vegetables in Ontario.” Accessed: <http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/climzoneveg.htm>. Last accessed: 3 January 2014.

beans, cabbage, rhubarb and summer lettuce. Her mother staggered the planting of vegetables, guaranteeing their family access to fresh produce well into the late fall months. To keep garden vegetables over the winter, her mother stored them in the cool attic and root cellar, and strung beans on a line to dry them out. Vos's familiarity with garden fresh foods explains her shock at the availability of canned foods in northern Ontario. Shaking her head, Vos said, "You never bought any canned goods, that was just unheard of. [Before] I came here in the bush, I never ever in my life used a can opener everyday in my life to eat."¹⁶⁰ With little access to fresh foods from the garden or the grocery store at the lumber camp, canned foods became a necessity in her day-to-day cooking. Canned foods also signaled an inconsistency in pre- and post-migration lives. Eventually with time, Vos used her learned knowledge and started her own garden.

European immigrant women continued to grow gardens in Ontario's north engendering their feelings of food security. For women living in Europe during the Second World War, garden grown fruits and vegetable comprised a substantial component of their diets. Describing her family as "impoverished," Latvian-born Lina Karakans spent the war years living in the countryside with her grandparents while her single mother worked as a live-in domestic worker. They predominately lived off food grown in the garden. As she explained, "My grandparents had to garden for all the vegetables, the potatoes, the cabbages and carrots." Adding, "You see we mainly lived on soup because we were poor." The family could not afford to purchase foods for consumption and instead, their diet consisted primarily of soups with garden grown ingredients. They fished for pike as well as kept a pig, which would be slaughtered to provide their main source of meat protein for the entire year. When Karakans, her mother and new stepfather decided to flee Latvia out of fear of the Soviet Union, they became refugees

¹⁶⁰ Vos, interview.

eventually reaching a displaced persons camp in Germany.¹⁶¹ There, the family “lived on water and *kohlrabi*, *kohlrabi* and water.” Her stepfather even “sold my mother’s wedding ring for a sack of potatoes.” Reflecting on these earlier, formative experiences with food, Karakans said, “when you come out of it and you can eat normally, food is only important as a source of nourishment.” Living in North Bay with her own family by 1954, Karakans never took much interest in cooking, learning to prepare a few dishes but primarily allowing her husband to perform this role. What was important and of interest to her, was gardening. When asked whether she had a garden, she responded enthusiastically, “Oh God I did! I confiscated half of the back yard to grow something in it.” Karakans created a large garden in their backyard, growing vegetables such as carrots, peas, potatoes and tomatoes.¹⁶² Her gardening built on her knowledge, but it also had to do with her premigration experiences with food scarcity and insecurity. By growing vegetables, Karakans ensured her husband and children had a stable and reliable source of nutritious food.

In growing gardens, immigrant women formed an attachment to their new northern settings. Much like Karakans, Italian-born Rosa Valentti planted a large garden in her North Bay backyard. Valentti grew up in the small, southern Italian village of Carpinone. Her family, impoverished, usually managed to cook and eat Italian foods. Similar to the postwar Italian immigrants interviewed by Franca Iacovetta, this family lived off the produce and grains grown on small, scattered plots of land they owned, baking breads, making pastas and preserving tomatoes, corns and beans; they only really needed to purchase oil and salt, which they did by selling off some of their wheat.¹⁶³ Moving to North Bay with her husband and five year old son, the family initially shared a small apartment in a house owned by her father. Although she

¹⁶¹ From July 1941 to 1944, German forces occupied Latvia. By mid-July 1944, the Soviet Army had again crossed Latvia’s eastern border and by October, they had re-captured Riga. Many Latvians fled the region, and approximately 150,000 Latvians ended up in western Europe and North America.

¹⁶² Karakans, interview.

¹⁶³ Rosa Valentti, interview, 30 April 2009. For a discussion about this subsistence lifestyle in Italy, see Iacovetta, *Such Hard Working People*, 11-14.

appreciated the rent-free space as they saved for the purchase of their own home, it was difficult not having access to a green space that would allow her to grow vegetables. Pointing to herself and laughing, Valentti described herself as “really fussy” in regards to food. She detested the canned foods she relied on in those years without a garden. With both Valentti and her husband finding paid work in the city, they purchased their first home in 1961. Immediately she began the work of creating a garden in their new backyard. She grew “everything” including beets, carrots, cauliflower, corn, lettuce, radishes, tomatoes and “two or three kinds of beans.”¹⁶⁴ The fresh quality and taste of her homegrown foods connected Valentti to life in Italy. Her ability to cultivate a garden and prepare fresh foods was central to creating a continuity and sense of place—that is, establish a new home to which she felt she belonged—in North Bay. It also connoted her identity not simply as an immigrant woman but as a wife, mother and family-food provider.

For those immigrant women who had grown up in urban areas, they remembered their sheer amazement at the amount of unused physical space in northern Ontario. During the Second World War, Parisian-born Charlotte Aimes recalled that people living in rural regions had the advantage of green space to grow vegetables, whereas “in Paris, in the city, we had no way.” When Aimes moved with her English-Canadian husband to North Bay, she tried to utilize their newfound space to create a vegetable garden. Having little background knowledge of gardening, her efforts to grow vegetables such as asparagus and tomatoes ultimately failed. For example, unused to the shortened growing season, her “tomatoes never ripened before the first frost came.” She soon refocused her efforts on flowers.¹⁶⁵ British-born Pamela Handley discussed her astonishment at the sprawling green lawns in Canada. With her mother and sister, Handley survived the war in the small town of Brixton, England at her grandparents’ home.

¹⁶⁴ Valentti, interview.

¹⁶⁵ Aimes, interview.

There, “every spare bit of garden would be used” as her grandfather kept vegetables such as carrots, peas and potatoes as well as fruit trees to preserve and use as an important part of the family’s diet. Any spare room in the garden was occupied by their air raid shelter. Nearly every night the family woke up to the shrill sound of the air raid siren, and headed out to the shelter and protection it offered from a potential bombing. In Canada, the empty backyards and green lawns created a stark juxtaposition to the more familiar, well-used yards. As Handley supposed, “it was certainly different, everything was big, there was much more space, all the houses weren’t close together. And there would be grass.” Soon the family rectified the situation. Saving enough money after a few years, the family purchased two lots of land. And, as Handley remembered, “this whole second lot we turned into a vegetable garden. And my parents just went crazy—talk about canning, my mother was just gah! But you know, vegetables—tomatoes and potatoes—it just takes up the whole damn lot.”¹⁶⁶ Green lawns represented an anomaly to Handley and her family. They transformed their physical space to create a garden that resembled the one they left behind. The amount of land offered in northern Ontario and Canada astounded new immigrants. It gave them opportunities to experiment and continue foodways.

Gardens afforded women and families a source of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially in winter months when northern Ontario grocery stores experienced shortages. Similar to Handley, Nora Stewart and her family cultivated vegetable and flower gardens by seizing nearby empty land. Vegetable gardening had always been important to her family, but perhaps none more so than when they lived in Kirkland Lake, Ontario. As Stewart explained, “very seldom did you have salad in those days because up in Kirkland Lake after Thanksgiving, all of the vegetables you saw were carrots, turnips, onions and potatoes.” Clarifying she said, “there wasn’t the kind of refrigerated trucks that there are now.” Her mother and father shared in the labour growing vegetables such as brussel sprouts, carrots, corn, lettuce, potatoes, squash,

¹⁶⁶ Pamela Handley, interview, 8 May 2009.

tomatoes and turnips, and fruits such as gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries and red and black currants. Her mother started growing brussel sprouts and tomatoes in the house because of the short growing season, only moving the plants outside after the final frost. By taking these steps as well as preserving and cold storing fruits and vegetables, this family ensured a yearlong supply of fresh and nutritious foods in their diets. Years later when Stewart's mother had been widowed, the two women found themselves both living in North Bay. The two continued the pattern of vegetable gardening in their new setting, dividing the labour between mother and daughter now instead of mother, father and daughter. For Stewart, the intense flavour and fresh quality of homegrown fruits and vegetables made the effort well worth it.¹⁶⁷ Women used vegetable and fruit gardens to serve practical purposes, compensating for understocked, northern grocery stores.

For large and poor families, growing fruits and vegetables provided a vital source of food and income. Barbara Reid recalled the significance of her parents' unpaid garden work in order to feed their family of nine. As the family travelled around to different northern communities, often in her father's search for a well-paying job, she said, "we always had a garden no matter where we went. That was lucky, that kept you going, you know?"¹⁶⁸ While many poor and working-class families kept a garden to supply their family with nutritious foods, some also sold their efforts to gain an extra source of income. Catherine Paterson's family struggled to get by, as her foster mother earned a modest salary as an artist and her foster father as a school custodian. Her foster mother grew "practically everything" in the garden and after harvest, sent Paterson out with "the noisiest, little, orange wagon" to sell their vegetables door-

¹⁶⁷ Stewart, interview.

¹⁶⁸ Reid, interview.

to-door for extra income.¹⁶⁹ Vegetable and fruit gardens filled a needed source of food and income for many poor and working-class families in northern Ontario.

Other women discussed neither having the time nor physical space to keep a garden. Living in North Bay, Eva Wardlaw recalled her mother “always had a big garden, a lot of strawberries around and everything.” The family also made salads with dandelions, remarking that the dandelion leaves tasted “just like spinach” especially when dressed with “lemon and olive oil.” Wardlaw, however, showed little interest in cultivating her own garden. Raising three children as a widow and working full-time as a teacher, she “never” had extra time and instead simplified her life by purchasing fruits and vegetables from the grocery store.¹⁷⁰ Francis and Leon Fennel responded that it would have been “impossible” for them to keep a garden when they lived in White River, Ontario, and besides, added Leon Fennel, “Why would I mess around with a garden, when I can make \$2.60 in the mine?”¹⁷¹ For this male breadwinner, the wages he earned in the mine outweighed the benefits of a garden with the added labour and energy it required. Many of the women interviewed, working in both paid and unpaid labour, responded in kind that they simply did not have the time and energy needed to cultivate a vegetable garden.

Poor and working-class women also did not own the physical space to grow gardens. With all its open and uncultivated lands, northern Ontario supposedly offered empty physical spaces just waiting to be planted and civilized.¹⁷² And for many families, the northern region did allow them to purchase larger lots of land than they would have been able to afford in southern cities. Yet this was not always the case, especially for poor and working-class families or for those families just starting out or starting over. Working-class women like Rosa Valenti and Trudy Nelson initially lived in apartments when they moved to the city of North Bay with little

¹⁶⁹ Paterson, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Wardlaw, interview.

¹⁷¹ Leon Fennel, interview; Francis Fennel, interview.

¹⁷² Kerry Abel and Kenneth Coates, eds., “Introduction: The North and the Nation,” in *Northern Visions: New Perspectives of the North in Canadian History* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2001), 10-12.

to no access to green spaces.¹⁷³ Catherine Paterson recalled that she and her husband often rented homes when first married and that “renting you didn’t really have that accessibility” to the necessary physical spaces.¹⁷⁴ Growing up, Ione Barré noted her family could not afford “a great, big piece of property.” Luckily for Barré, most gardeners “planted an extra row of carrots or peas, so we kids could sneak around and help ourselves.”¹⁷⁵ When Elisabeth Meier, her husband and children moved to North Bay, they also initially lived in a rented apartment. Meier, however, wanted a vegetable garden so desperately she rented a plot of land near present-day Nipissing University giving her and her children the experience of growing cabbages, potatoes and tomatoes. “It was full of weeds,” Meier said of her initial disappointment on seeing the plot, “and we had to weed everything and as the things grew, the weeds grew back too.” The family also “pray[ed] for rain” because without a connection to a hose, they had to haul heavy buckets in order to properly water their garden. There were years where they also found their garden vandalized or their vegetable crops stolen. Despite these frustrations, Meier believed growing their own garden taught valuable life lessons, reflecting that “it was not maybe that much, but it was good for the kids to pick things you know, and to weed and water.”¹⁷⁶ Growing gardens required access to green space—a luxury not always available to poor and working-class women. Still families living in northern Ontario invented strategies to grow fruit and vegetable gardens, finding time to spend together and generating needed sources of food and income.

“Oh they are just so sweet”: Wild Food Sources in Northern Ontario

Picking wild berries offered an occasion for social activity in northern Ontario, a chance for families and siblings to spend time together, talking and strengthening their relationships. Poor and working-class families used wild berries as an inexpensive treat and a source of food

¹⁷³ Valenti, interview; Nelson, interview.

¹⁷⁴ Paterson, interview.

¹⁷⁵ Ione Barré, interview, 26 June 2012.

¹⁷⁶ Elisabeth Meier, interview, 9 April 2009.

as well as income in cash hard times.¹⁷⁷ For middle- and upper-class families, as Holly Everett describes, picking and eating wild berries presented a “low risk culinary departure,” an opportunity to try local folk foodways while avoiding unpleasant and messy preparations.¹⁷⁸ An activity synonymous with the North, wild berry picking also required knowledge of the region and where berries could be found in the brush, along railways lines and back roads or even at the local dump. An article in the *North Bay Nugget* rendered blueberries “the North’s favourite delicacy” and, in the late weeks of July, sent “enthusiasts scrambling to the back concessions, armed with pails and baskets for the collection of luscious berries.” The article supposed, “There is something about blueberry pie so distinctively northern and delectable that it is small wonder that so many people brave scratched legs and mosquito bites to go in search of the berry bushes.”¹⁷⁹ An activity emblematic of living in the region, northerners braved the rough brush displaying their knowledge of the area and discovering still unpicked berry bush, full of this delicious treat.

Women discussed berry picking as a common activity among families in northern Ontario. Studying court records, Karen Dubinsky notes that berry picking provided families with summer recreation and couples a rare space for sexual privacy. Dubinsky also states that because women and young children frequented berry patches, they also provided a site for a number of sexual assaults.¹⁸⁰ Women’s oral histories do not mention their concerns for their safety, focusing instead on the nostalgia of berry picking, a tranquil and fun space to spend with their families. Ruth Gauthier recalled going out all morning with her father and siblings picking

¹⁷⁷ Bruce E. Baker, “‘A recourse that could be depended upon’: Picking Blackberries and Getting By after the Civil War,” *Southern Cultures* 16, no. 4 (2010): 26; 36.

¹⁷⁸ Holly Everett, “A Welcoming Wilderness: The Role of Wild Berries in the Construction of Newfoundland and Labrador as a Tourist Destination,” *Ethnologies* 29, no. 1-2 (2008): 49-80; Lenore Newman, “Blackberries: Canadian Cuisine and Marginal Foods,” *Cuizine* 5, no. 1 (2014); Atsuko Hashimoto and David Telfer, “Selling Canadian Culinary Tourism: Branding the Global and Regional Product,” *Tourism Geographies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 31-55.

¹⁷⁹ “A Warning to Berry Pickers,” *North Bay Nugget*, 25 July 1947; see also “Blueberry Pie Feed Old Home Week Feature,” *North Bay Nugget*, 6 April 1948; “It’s Berry Time Again!” *North Bay Nugget*, 27 June 1953.

¹⁸⁰ Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 38.

berries near their home in Warren, Ontario. This was a special time since her father so often found himself traveling for his job as a salesman.¹⁸¹ A favourite summertime activity, Germaine Perron picked berries with her three siblings and the family dog. Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman, always picked wild blueberries with her family on their way to an annual community fish fry at Doekis Bay. Making their way to this neighbouring Nipissing First Nation community, her parents stopped the car and sent Couchie and her siblings “into the bush to pick blueberries.”¹⁸² Framed as a family activity in northern Ontario, women remembered the nostalgia of picking wild berries; it offered a space for parents and children to spend time together and form bonds.

The fresh taste of wild berries remained prominent in women’s memories. Barbara Reid’s family picked “wild berries all the time.” As she said of this activity, “Oh they are just so sweet when they come right off. I usually ate more than I put in the bucket. I had lunch, before we had lunch.” What berries did make it home, her mother used to bake blueberry dumplings and muffins.¹⁸³ Catherine Paterson recalled her foster family always went out “picking strawberries, blueberries [and] raspberries. And it wasn’t picking a little, it was picking lots!” Paterson noted the difference in size and taste between these wild berries and the berries purchased today in grocery stores. As she explained, the mindset now is “we want things bigger,” “but the blueberries you pick in the bush...are sweet. And the strawberries we used to go out and pick, they’re wild strawberries, they’re really tiny. But there is a sweetness to them.” She reasoned that “now when you buy berries, you have to add sugar” to achieve that same sweet taste.¹⁸⁴ Nora Stewart largely agreed with Paterson, complaining that berries purchased at

¹⁸¹ Ruth Gauthier, interview, 29 August 2012.

¹⁸² Couchie, interview.

¹⁸³ Reid, interview.

¹⁸⁴ Paterson, interview.

the grocery store today tasted like “cardboard.”¹⁸⁵ On the topic of sensory history, David Sutton argues that local food knowledge shapes how our foods taste and our memories of sensory experiences.¹⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, for these women, their physical closeness to the source of food and active involvement in the harvest process enhanced their memories of fresh and sweet flavours. They knew where to find the most plentiful berry bushes in their local communities, they handpicked the berries from bushes and they tried their best to avoid the temptation of putting them in their mouth straightaway. Women also tightly connected their memories of berry-picking to the nostalgia of spending time with their families, enhancing their memories of how these berries tasted. And in reality, these were not the “tasteless” berries Canadians now eat all year long—and that so many of the women admonished.¹⁸⁷

Wild berries also provided a cheap source of food. A large part of the reason Catherine Paterson’s working-class family picked so many berries was to make preserves that lasted them throughout the winter. Irene Martin reminisced about berry picking with her children in North Bay. She recalled discovering berry patches “everywhere” in the city, but especially along the railroad tracks. Careful to wear “long things and high collars because of scratchy things,” Martin and her two children “would pick raspberries like you wouldn’t believe,” and coming home they would “have enough raspberries to really pig out.” But after having their “fill,” they used the rest to make raspberry jam that lasted them the rest of the year. As she estimated, “So for labour, twenty dollars in sugar and a dollar in hydro, we had sixty bottles of raspberry jam.” For a single mother of two, berry picking provided an affordable outdoor activity and source of food. Especially important to Martin, was her knowledge that the berries and preserves were “fresh and good for you” and that her children had the opportunity to enjoy the “intense flavour” of

¹⁸⁵ Stewart, interview.

¹⁸⁶ David E. Sutton, “Synesthesia, Memory and the Taste of Home,” in *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (New York: Berg, 2005), 270.

¹⁸⁷ Dan Charles, “The Secret Life of California’s World-Class Strawberries,” NPR, 17 May 2012.

(<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2012/05/17/152522900/the-secret-life-of-californias-world-class-strawberries>) last accessed 13 February 2014.

wild berries.¹⁸⁸ Berry picking afforded poor and working-class families an affordable source of food as well as the opportunity to enjoy the taste of an inexpensive yet sweet luxury.

Picking wild berries generated a source of revenue for women in northern Ontario. Nora Stewart remembered berry picking at Crystal Beach in Kirkland Lake, Ontario. Since this area had seen a forest fire in the late 1920s, there were plenty of wild blueberries for Stewart to pick there. In high school, Stewart “got an independent streak” and “picked enough blueberries in the summertime to buy my clothes and my books for school.” She sold the wild blueberries “for fifty cents for a six quart basket, and a dollar for an eleven quart basket.” When I asked where her need for independence came from, she said “my mother was always an independent lady” working “a long, long time before she married.”¹⁸⁹ By picking wild berries, a teenaged Stewart gained a sense of financial independence. Sisters Ione Barré and Irene Martin surmised that berry picking produced a significant source of income and food for their poor family.¹⁹⁰ After leaving her father, their mother raised seven children by herself. The children often headed out to the dump near Larder Lake, Ontario. “We’d come back with six quarts of blueberries. And we’d sell them for two dollars a basket. Two dollars went a long way,” as Martin explained. Not owning a fridge, the family only kept “maybe two baskets and eat them, and then the rest we would sell and give the money to mom, of course.” The children sold the wild berries to neighbours or elderly community members, contributing to their family economy. Of the berries the family saved for themselves, Martin described how their mother stretched them out among her children. “A bowl with fifty blueberries, is fifty blueberries,” calculated Martin. “But put some water in it, and some sugar to sweeten it a little bit, and that fifty blueberries now becomes enough for two people instead of one.” The strategy of stretching-out food resources hampered feelings of deprivation and poverty because “you don’t feel that you’re getting less because the

¹⁸⁸ Irene Martin, interview, 25 June 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Stewart, interview.

¹⁹⁰ Barré, interview; Martin, interview.

sauce is what made it so delicious, it was liquidy [sic] and it soaked into the homemade cake.”¹⁹¹ Wild berry picking provided a source of income to cash strapped families, selling the berries picked during a day of outside labour. Mothers also invented strategies to share berries among hungry children, giving their children a sweet moment of respite from their bleak circumstances.

The lakes and wilderness of northern Ontario offered women a setting to participate in fishing and hunting. The outskirts of North Bay granted hunters a source for wild game such as bear, deer and partridge, and for those interested in fishing, they found bass, perch, pickerel, pike, speckled trout, sturgeon and whitefish stocked in Lake Nipissing and Trout Lake.¹⁹² “As the wife of one enthusiastic hunter and the mother of another I am used to cooking whatever is brought home,” wrote Ruth Millet in her column in the *North Bay Nugget*. “I confess most of what the hunters brought home from the hill has made good eating. There were pheasants, duck, venison, wild turkey, elk, rabbits and squirrels. Through the years I’ve cooked them all and usually gladly.” The problem now facing Millet was that she had a freezer chocked full of bear meat and “the darn thing has to be eaten,” but every recipe she tried it tasted “like either old bear or an old hunting boot.”¹⁹³ A “cry for help,” her column asked women and hunters to send in their recipes for bear meat to the newspaper. Her column also attached little stigma to eating bear or even apparently, squirrel. Like Millet suggests with her column, the women interviewed recalled that wild foods presented cooking challenges. Ruth Gauthier ate “lots” of moose, partridge and venison in her family’s home. Although she never hunted herself, her father and brothers often enjoyed the sport. Her father also took out duck and partridge hunting parties, made up of his fellow salesmen. Returning home with their kill from a successful afternoon,

¹⁹¹ Martin, interview.

¹⁹² “Great Fishing Spots!” North Bay, Ontario <http://www.cityofnorthbay.ca/living/recreation/fishing> (last accessed 27 January 2014); “Gateway to North, And Happy Holidays, *North Bay Nugget*, 30 June 1950.

¹⁹³ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 13 December 1955.

these salesmen and pseudo hunters handed them over to her mother to be pan-fried for dinner. Her mother took great pains to prepare the wild birds, especially the partridge. As Gauthier said, “She would fry the bacon, the meat and then she would put the cabbage on top with water and everything. It would just simmer there for quite a while, and it was very good.”¹⁹⁴ This recipe ensured the partridge, a notoriously dry and lean meat, had fat and moisture to add extra flavour. Women sought out and invented recipes to successfully prepare wild game for their family and friends.

While women satisfied gender roles by cooking fish and wild meats, women living in northern Ontario also challenged those same roles by participating in the pursuit and killing of these wildlife food sources. Hunting and fishing were considered masculine pastimes. It symbolized masculinity to confront the wilderness, bonding with other men to track, kill and then slaughter animals, ultimately, providing a food source for your family and a trophy for your mantel. This discourse took on new connotations in the post-1945 context. As Andrea Smalley highlights in her examination of hunting periodicals, a new formulation of masculinity “revolved around militarism and close, emotional bonds between men.” The presence of female hunters was believed to undercut these ties, threatening the gendered significance of the sport.¹⁹⁵ In northern Ontario, newspapers celebrated women’s participation in hunting and fishing and depicted their participation in ways that did not challenge constructions of femininity or domesticity. A columnist in the *North Bay Nugget* speculated that women “are now enthusiastic fisherman and hunters simply because they had the choice of either going along with their

¹⁹⁴ Gauthier, interview.

¹⁹⁵ Andrea L. Smalley, “‘I Just Like to Kill Things’: Women, Men and the Gender of Sport Hunting in the United States, 1940-1973,” *Gender & History* 17, no. 1 (April 2005): 183-187; See also Tina Loo, “Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 297-319; Amanda Richardson, “‘Riding like Alexander, Hunting like Diana’: Gendered Aspects of the Medieval Hunt and its Landscape Settings in England and France,” *Gender & History* 24, no. 12 (August 2012): 253-270.

husbands on hunting and fishing trips or sitting at home.”¹⁹⁶ Women did not have a real interest in the sport, only wanting the opportunity to spend more time with their husbands. Participating in hunting and fishing was a part of a companionate marriage, a sign of being a good and supportive wife. Other stories and images talked about young women’s hunting and fishing in ways that left their feminine gender identities intact. A story recounted a “rifle totin’ grandma” who was known throughout Blind River, Ontario for “her prowess in killing wolves.” Her gender identity was left unchallenged by this pursuit as her husband was proud of his wife’s accomplishments and she still managed to keep up with her “housekeeping and farm chores.”¹⁹⁷ The young woman crowned Queen of the West Ferris Fishing Derby also “had her line in the water as soon as the derby officially opened ... and she fished persistently throughout the week when the North Bay district had its coldest weather of the whole winter.”¹⁹⁸ This woman avidly fished (was even fêted for it), all the while maintaining her polished femininity. A photograph also depicts a young woman carefully holding her rifle with her hair tidily tucked under her cap (figure 3). The caption “All Dressed Up” does not describe this young woman as a serious, knowledgeable hunter; instead, she owns the right hunting outfit. In northern Ontario, women enthusiastically and regularly participated in hunting and fishing. Their efforts, however, were depicted in unthreatening ways. They shot guns and cast fishing lines, all the while maintaining their heterosexual and feminine gender identity.

The women interviewed also enjoyed fishing and hunting in northern Ontario. Lillian Harris and Sister Norah Murphy recalled fishing for pickerel in Lake Nipissing; Marianna

¹⁹⁶ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, February 1958.

¹⁹⁷ “Rifle-Totin’ Grandma Bane of Algoma Wolves,” *North Bay Nugget*, 3 December 1953.

¹⁹⁸ “Crown Queen of West Ferris Fishing Derby,” *North Bay Nugget*, February 1958; see also “Lady Angler,” *North Bay Nugget*, February 1958; “Chit Chat: Fishing’s Fun,” *North Bay Nugget*, 7 May 1945.



All Dressed Up . . . and a Week to Go

Figure 3: “All Dressed Up...and a Week to Go,” *North Bay Nugget*, 22 September 1956. Printed with permission of the *North Bay Nugget*.

Couchie remembered the cold trek to go ice fishing with her siblings.¹⁹⁹ Nora Stewart enjoyed the quiet of hunting partridge and fishing as well as the special alone time it afforded with her father. Indeed, Stewart loved fishing so much that she got together with female friends to cast their lines off nearby local docks.²⁰⁰ Nicole Petrant-Rennie described how she “was always around hunting” and “even the girls, we all took hunting courses and we all had our gun licenses

¹⁹⁹ Lillian Harris, interview, 9 May 2012; Murphy, interview; Couchie, interview.

²⁰⁰ Stewart, interview.

and we would practice.” Petrant-Rennie always found herself invited when “there was hunting done.”²⁰¹ Although gendered a masculine activity, women living in northern Ontario not only cooked fish and wild meats, but they captured and killed them too. These women did not see their outdoor pursuits as outwardly challenging their assumed feminine gender roles. Rather, fishing and hunting provided a space to spend time with family and friends as well as a source of food and recreation. It also made great sense to these women, given that they found themselves surrounded by wildlife and the outdoors. These activities were part of being a northern woman or, as Murphy explained, it was all part of living in northern Ontario.²⁰²

Hunting and fishing were accessible, and often necessary, sources of food in northern Ontario. The Huron-Robinson Treaty of 1850 gave Nipissing First Nation (NFN) members the right “to hunt and fish in territory they ceded to the white man ‘for as long as the grass grows and the water flows.’”²⁰³ Increasingly, NFN members found their treaty rights ignored as they faced jail and fines for failing to pay for hunting and fishing licenses as well as hunting and fishing outside the timeline of government mandated seasons.²⁰⁴ One NFN member described the impact of these changes to the *North Bay Nugget* in 1940: “In many instances the Indians are suffering from very poor living conditions, having little or no money with which to live. ... At the same time, the Indians are expected to buy licenses and abide by the white man’s game laws, which are making their natural search for a living hard.” If the federal government failed to live up to the promises of the Huron-Robinson Treaty, he believed “suffering from starvation will be

²⁰¹ Petrant-Rennie, interview.

²⁰² Murphy, interview.

²⁰³ “Claims Indians Could Win in Treaty Appeal,” *North Bay Nugget*, 23 February 1940.

²⁰⁴ “Ask Supreme Court Rule on Indian Hunting Rights,” *North Bay Nugget*, 21 February 1938; “Deprive Indian of Last Rights Under 1850 Pact,” *North Bay Nugget*, 19 February 1940; “Indians Possess Fund of \$100, 000 to Hold Rights,” *North Bay Nugget*, 21 February 1940; “Claims Indians Are Due Redress For Pact Breach,” *North Bay Nugget*, 26 February 1940; “Young Chieftain Says Indians to Protect Rights,” *North Bay Nugget*, 28 February 1940; “Indian Defends Moose Shooting,” *North Bay Nugget*, 25 July 1947; “Take Most Moose Meat Away from Reserve. Indians Face Fine,” *North Bay Nugget*, 19 March 1951; Josephine Boldt, “Garden Village chief sees no need for new laws on hunting, fishing,” *North Bay Nugget*, 1 April 1971.

the only thing left for them.”²⁰⁵ In the post-1945 context, this dispute over Huron-Robinson Treaty rights caused many NFN members to face criminal charges for hunting out of season. And it was within this context that Marianna Couchie and her family found themselves, living in the Duchesnay Creek community on NFN territory. As she explained, “My father did a good job, he hunted, he set the net for fish. So we always had deer, moose and fish. And then in the fall they would set the net for the white fish.” Even though she had a family of ten, Couchie recalled: “It was always shared. Everything was always shared amongst the immediate family. So we knew about hunting, and we ate. We grew up on wild meats. And when we went berry picking, we would go berry picking as families.”²⁰⁶ Family bonds and the sharing of time and resources were most definitely connected to Couchie’s memories of wild food. And while her father might very well have found it increasingly difficult to continue his traditional hunting practices and provide food for his family as treaty rights were ignored and renegotiated, for Couchie the wild food sources he brought home provided a source of sustenance, and importantly, family togetherness. As women stressed in recollections, searching, fishing and hunting for wild foods created an important space for families and friends to share time and conversations together in the outdoors of northern Ontario.

Conclusions

Women’s memories of living in northern Ontario reveal how their physical environment shaped their identities and ideas about food resources. Women from northern Ontario thought of themselves as hardy, northern women who had grown up surrounded by the rocks, lakes and pines of the region. They saw themselves as part of this landscape, different and more adventurous than their contemporaries living in southern Ontario. These women had knowledge of wild foods, scratching their arms and legs after spending an afternoon picking berries with

²⁰⁵ “Ask Supreme Court Rule on Indian Hunting Rights.”

²⁰⁶ Couchie, interview.

their families in the bush. They cast fishing lines and fired off their guns, bringing their families home inexpensive and nutritious sources of wild food. And when these women hunted, fished and searched outside for wild food sources, they did not perceive this as an overt challenge to their feminine gender identity. Rather, these women lived in northern Ontario and saw these activities as part of their regional gender identity.

The accessibility and affordability of garden grown and wild foods was an important food and financial resource for their poor and working-class families, supplementing both diets and family incomes. Not all poor and working-class families afforded the extra green space needed to grow fruit and vegetables. Although many middle-class women could afford the cost of growing a garden, they could not afford the time it took away from their families. These women, already busy with balancing work and family schedules, made decisions about their priorities. It simplified their lives by purchasing fruits and vegetables from grocery stores.

Immigrant women were not exactly thrilled at the prospect of living in the cold, remote and often snow-filled communities of northern Ontario. When they found themselves there, they adjusted, sometimes voicing frustration and complaint, but they also found ways to maintain connections with their homelands often through their efforts at continuing foodways by gardening or shopping for ethnic ingredients outside their northern communities. They invented strategies to satisfy their cravings for a taste, and somewhat subtle reminder, of home. They also took advantage of the larger sized spaces the North offered, planting large gardens in their pursuit of nutritious and secure foods. For European immigrant women, their perceptions of northern Ontario were undoubtedly shaped by their premigration experiences. Many were grateful to have a reliable source of nutritious food, having survived severe food deprivation and insecurity of Second World War; others still felt hemmed in by the constraints and limitations of northern Ontario, a perspective no doubt informed by their knowledge of global geography.

Indigenous women also had their experiences shaped by their physical contexts. The white colonizing population affixed heavily racialized and sexualized labels to Indigenous communities. The discrimination and hardships these women faced were so hurtful that women often hid their Indigenous identity when they were able to racially “pass” as white. The Métis and Anishinaabe women interviewed recalled continuing traditional foodways, gardening, hunting and gathering wild foods. It was considered a special treat when store bought foods made its way onto their tables. Their stories also relate how important it was to share traditional and nontraditional foods among family and community members, especially as many were struggling to secure necessary food and financial resources.

Women’s food resources—gardens, wild foods and grocery stores and supermarkets—were also spaces impacted by their northern physical setting. A shortened growing season, the perceived greater availability of land (for those who could afford it) and the terrain, all impacted how and when women grew vegetables and fruits in their gardens. The North was also synonymous with berry picking and living there, women and their families gained access to a sweet yet inexpensive luxury. Of course, women had to possess the knowledge of the land and where berries could be found in the region. The northern setting also impacted the supplies in grocery stores and supermarkets. Unlike larger southern cities, most northern communities neither had the demand for nor the supply of ethnic ingredients. The physical location made it more difficult to deliver fresh fruit and vegetables, especially in winter months. What has most clearly come into focus in this chapter, was that it was women’s extra, unpaid labour that took advantage of food sources available in their physical contexts. These were women living in the North, who did their best to provide food for their families using the resources available to them.

Chapter 2

Reading Cookbooks, Creating Real and Imaginary Spaces

In the closing chapter of *Kate Aitken's Cook Book*, the renowned Canadian columnist and radio host outlined cooking lessons mothers should teach their daughters in preparing them for their “second trade—homemaking.” After going to grade school and “quite probably through university,” mothers were told their daughters will meet a young man, “fall in love and marry” and then “ten chances to one this highly qualified, well trained daughter of yours will continue working for two or three years after marriage.” Reminding readers simply, “That’s the modern trend.” To ensure daughters “launched” properly and balanced the duties of work and home, Aitken recommended following her guide to “teach” and “train” daughters.²⁰⁷ The rest of the chapter follows a series of markers, beginning at age four and generally set along two-year intervals, starting with daughters learning to clean dishes and polish silverware.²⁰⁸ If mothers followed these lessons carefully, they laid a “firm and solid” foundation for their daughters in “kitchen management,” “conserv[ing] movement” and “food budgeting.” “Equally important,” the cookbook notes, “she had been taught how to set a decorative table and put on it well prepared, attractive meals.” With a congratulatory tone, the chapter ends “From you, her second trade of homemaking has been well and truly learned.”²⁰⁹

Kate Aitken was a familiar name in Canadian households, and certainly to the women interviewed. Aitken received no formal culinary training, but succeeded in publishing numerous cookbooks, pamphlets and etiquette guides, along with hosting food-focused radio programs and holding cooking demonstrations across Canada.²¹⁰ At the height of her popularity, Aitken

²⁰⁷ Kate Aitken, *Kate Aitken's Cookbook* (Toronto: A White Circle Book, 1964), 293.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 294-299.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

²¹⁰ A selection of the over fifty cooking and lifestyle books Aitken's wrote include: Kate Aitken, *Kate Aitken's Canadian Cook Book* (Toronto: A White Circle Book, 1950); Kate Aitken, *Canadian Etiquette Guide for Daily Living* (Toronto: W.M. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1953); Kate Aitken, *Never A Day So Bright* (Toronto: Longmans Green, 1956); Kate Aitken, *Making Your Living if Fun* (Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959); Kate Aitken, *It's Fun Raising A Family* (Toronto: Collins Tambllyn, 1955); Aitken's *Globe and Mail* column “In Your Mirror” ran

received 260, 000 letters per year that she answered with the help of her twenty-one secretaries.²¹¹ The 1964 version of *Kate Aitken's Canadian Cook Book* included a new last chapter: "Your Daughter's Second Trade—Homemaking." Aitken used the word "trade" throughout, conveying her belief about the demanding and learned work women must undertake to put meals on the table for their families. Interestingly, even though she herself was a working mother with two daughters and celebrated in her *Globe and Mail* obituary as a "self-liberated woman" and "crusader in the cause of women's emancipation," her published cookbooks did little to challenge the post-1945 Canadian and American ideals that women's natural role was inside the home.²¹² It did not question whether young women would eventually take primary responsibility for shopping, cooking and serving their families food.²¹³ The chapter's central message was that mothers had a duty to successfully "launch" or "equip" daughters for their adult roles by carefully "training" and "educating" them in domestic and cooking skills, in other words, gendered behaviours. And of course, this could be achieved by fastidiously following Aitken's guide.

Many of the women interviewed recalled reading Aitken's cookbooks or listening to her radio program. Lillian Harris not only had a copy of one of Aitken's cookbooks to share in our 2012 interview, but also described in great detail winning a dryer by successfully calling into

from 1957-1962. She worked as a broadcaster for the CFRB from 1938-1957, broadcasting 9,500 shows. In addition, Aitken was named director of the Canadian National Exhibition's women's activities and education work from 1938 to 1952; See, "Kate Aitken: One of Canada's best-known radio voices and a traveller who covered more than 200 miles," *Globe and Mail*, 13 December 1971.

²¹¹ "From Her Family," in *Kate Aitken's Canadian Cook Book*, introduction by Elizabeth Driver (North Vancouver: Whitecap, 2004), xiii; Kate Aitken, *Kate Aitken's Cookbook* (Toronto: A White Circle Book, 1964), 274; 280; There were five editions published of her *Kate Aitken's Canadian Cook Book* in 1945, 1950, 1953, 1964 and most recently, in 2004. The 1964 version discussed in the introduction to this chapter, contained two new chapters including "Canadian Provincial Recipes," providing recipes from across Canada's ten provinces such as British Columbia's "Caribou Short Ribs" and New Brunswick's "Fredericton Party Potatoes".

²¹² "Kate Aitken," *Globe and Mail*, 14 December 1971.

²¹³ Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 37-38; 44-46.

Aitken's radio program.²¹⁴ This chapter focuses on how women living in northern Ontario learned their cooking and kitchen skills. To do so, it combines women's memories with a selection of ten Canadian- and community-produced cookbooks. These were the well-used cookbooks that lined interviewees' kitchen shelves and cluttered their drawers, had pages sticking together from a spilt ingredient, newspaper clippings crammed between bound pages and print smudged from a well buttered finger turning to the next page. Northern women interacted with these written food sources, playing a role in teaching women to cook by providing practical information about ingredient substitutions, oven temperatures and converting measurements. But as scholars have well established, this body of cooking literature is far from a static source. Women responded to messages about the health and welfare of their family, what exactly constituted Canadian national cuisine and the lifestyle they could aspire to have for themselves and their families; they contradicted, ignored and adapted the recipes and images in cookbooks to satisfy their own purposes.²¹⁵ This chapter explores how identity, memory, familial relationships and geographical spaces shaped the ways women learned to cook. It argues women learned to cook, not necessarily in the demarcated stages laid out so neatly by Aitken. But rather how they learned to cook and what dishes they learned, reflected their individual identities and the realities of their lives as daughters, single and divorced women,

²¹⁴ Lillian Harris, interview with author, North Bay, Ontario, 9 May 2012. Unless otherwise indicated all interviews were conducted by the author and took place in North Bay, Ontario.

²¹⁵ See Anne L. Bower, "Romanced by Cookbooks," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 4, no. 2 (May 2004): 35-42; Anne L. Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Marlene Epp, "More than 'Just' Recipes: Mennonite Cookbooks in Mid-Twentieth Century North America," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 173-188; Inness, *Dinner Roles*; Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Andrea Eidinger, "Gefilte Fish and Roast Duck with Orange Slices: *A Treasures for My Daughter* and the Creation of a Jewish Cultural Orthodoxy in Postwar Montreal," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 189-208; Jill Nussel, "Heating Up the Sources: Using Community Cookbooks in Historical Inquiry," *Historical Compass* 4/5 (2006): 956-961; Sian Supski, "Aunt Sylvie's Sponge: Foodmaking, Cookbooks and Nostalgia," *Cultural Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (March 2013): 28-49; Elizabeth Driver, "Cookbooks as Primary Sources for Writing History: A Bibliographer's View," *Food, Culture & Society: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 12, no. 3 (Sept. 2009): 257-274.

mothers and wives. It argues women read, shared and used cookbooks creating a space for themselves that reflected their practical efforts to learn how to cook a particular dish or style of cooking, but also in imaginative and healing ways that took them outside of the realities of their past and current lives.

As historical sources, there are different approaches to reading cookbooks. To understand the impact of a specific cookbook, Elizabeth Driver believes we need to study how many copies were printed, how they were advertised and sold and the number and distribution of a specific edition.²¹⁶ Others read cookbooks as stories, analyzing recipes and cookbook commentary for the messages and values depicted.²¹⁷ In her study of American cookbooks spanning three hundred years, Janet Theopano states, “despite or perhaps because of their ordinariness, because cooking is so basic to and so entangled in daily life, cookbooks... served women as meditations, memories, diaries, journals, scrapbooks and guides.”²¹⁸ Cookbooks act as powerful markers of gender, class and ethnic identities, taking us inside women’s kitchens to witness their attempts to preserve ethnic and familial traditions, balance the food desires of family members and to the everyday routines of their lives.²¹⁹ As Anne Bower, Kristin Hoganson, Myrna Goldenberg and others discuss, cookbooks also tell us about desire, what women wanted to cook as well as their yearnings for a certain type of food and lifestyle.²²⁰ Comparing cookbooks to romance novels, Bower suggests reading cookbooks “creates a time or space within which a woman can be entirely on her own, preoccupied with her personal needs,

²¹⁶ Driver, “Cookbooks as Primary Sources for Writing History,” 258-260.

²¹⁷ Epp, 174-175.

²¹⁸ Janet Theopano, *Eat My Words: Readings Women’s Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 6.

²¹⁹ Epp, 180.

²²⁰ Bower, “Romanced by Cookbooks”; Kristin Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2007), see esp. chap. 3 “Entertaining Difference: Popular Geography in Various Guises,” 105-151; Myrna Goldenberg, “Food Talk: Gendered Responses to Hunger in the Concentration Camp,” in *Experiences and Expressions: Women, the Nazis and the Holocaust*, eds. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 161-179; Nicola Humble, “Little Swans with Luxette and Loved Boy Pudding,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 13, no. 3 (Nov. 2002): 322-338.

desires, and pleasures.” Adding, “It is also a means of transportation or escape to the exotic or, again, to that which is different.”²²¹ For cookbook readers, recipes and images provided an imaginative space, where they envisioned new material and familial possibilities and a life outside of their own.

In post-1945 Canada and the United States, women read cookbooks learning messages about identity as well as cultural and political ideologies. Taking note of an upward trend in cookbooks during this time period, *The Globe and Mail* remarked, “Take an affluent society, mix it with jet age travel, add a liberal dash of immigration, spice with a new crop of gourmet restaurants and you have a boom in cookbooks that is sweeping North America like a tidal wave of *bouillabaisse*.” It ended with a prediction: “In all probability Canadian publishers will continue to add more and more products and important exotics to their catalogues each year until Canadian women finally cry: “Stop the lazy Susan, I want to get off!”²²² The “boom” in cookbooks exemplified Canadians and Americans willingness, even eagerness, to partake in postwar affluence, modernity and democracy. After years of physical deprivation and emotional strain that so marked the years of the Depression and the Second World War, women read cookbooks to learn how to cook new, rich, healthy and fatty foods from cookbooks (using new technologies) and embraced symbols of what it meant to “live the good life.”²²³ The surge in cookbooks also represented the renewed emphasis on women in the home. The ideology of domesticity, expressed in cookbooks and other cultural mediums, stressed women’s moral

²²¹ Bower, “Romanced by Cookbooks,” 36.

²²² “The booming cookbook trade: Recipes for novice or gourmet cook range from standard to exotic”, *Globe and Mail*, 10 October 1963. See also, Ann Adam, “Today’s Food: Three New Lookbooks Will Add to Kitchen Shelves,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 September 1956; Joan Walker, “Cookbooks Recommended as Good Gifts for Gorgeous Girls,” *Globe and Mail*, 26 November 1964.

²²³ Neuhaus, 164-172; Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, revised ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), see esp. chap. 8, “The Best-fed People the World Has Ever Seen?” 119-143; Franca Iacovetta and Valerie J. Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food,” in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 192-194; 200-201; Michael Moss, *Sugar, Salt, Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2013), 63-65.

imperative to provide their families with nutritious meals ensuring their health, safety and normality in a nerve-wracking, Cold War world.²²⁴ New Canadian immigrant women were especially beset by these gender ideals, as reform campaigns looked to introduce immigrant women to modern shopping, menu planning and more stringent health standards with the added (and desired) benefit of combatting communism.²²⁵ As Carol Gold summarizes, reading “cookbooks, one can learn about changes in the economy, in the social makeup of society, in women’s roles, and in what it means to be a nation state and to be a member of that nation state.”²²⁶ Even though the women interviewed did not explicitly discuss postwar gender and familial ideals, their stories tell us about the pressures and anxieties they confronted in their attempt to satisfy these idealized images. Their stories also tell us about the disparity between the lives presented in the cookbook, the implied reader and the reality of women’s lives.

By considering the written sources women cooked with, this chapter picks up on the concept of cooking and cookbook reading as a “time and space” women created, consisting of both real and imaginative elements. On the topic of cookbook usage, Jessamyn Neuhaus states, “their function in individual homes may differ as much as the individual owners themselves” adding, “only those in the kitchen can really say how someone read and interpreted a recipe.”²²⁷ By bringing together women’s memories with the cookbooks they used, this chapter looks to understand how women created a food and cooking space unique to their own realities, needs and desires. The women interviewed often combined their learned knowledge about food fundamentals and cooking techniques with the recipes they read in Canadian- and community-produced cookbooks along with those they clipped out of newspapers and magazines. Their

²²⁴ Neuhaus, 219-226; Iacovetta and Korinek, 191-194; Humble, 334-335.

²²⁵ Iacovetta and Korinek, 195-198; Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2006), see esp. chap. 6, “Culinary Containment? Cooking for the Family, Democracy, and the Nation,” 137-169.

²²⁶ Carol Gold, *Danish Cookbooks: Domesticity and National Identity, 1616-1901* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 176.

²²⁷ Neuhaus, 3.

cookbook reading served practical needs because women used recipes to expand their knowledge, producing meals for themselves and their families. It was a social space where women shared recipes with each other informally as well as more formally in community-produced cookbooks. It offered a space that contained elements of the imaginary because women could not always afford the cost or time to produce the foods and meals they read about. Indeed, reading recipes allowed women to picture alternatives to their life, gaining a form of escapism when confronted with the realities of poverty and abusive relationships. And when women produced the recipes they dreamed about in cookbooks, it offered them a type of healing, a symbol they had moved forward from their previous desperate conditions.

Learning to Cook: Females Role Models, Gendered Lessons

To ensure daughters transitioned from girlhood to womanhood, as Kate Aitken's suggested in the opening narrative, mothers were tasked with teaching their daughters gendered skills such as cooking. Rather than a natural progression, young women had to be taught proper gendered skills in order to achieve future success as a wife and mother.²²⁸ Daughters spent time in kitchens with their mothers and other female figures in their lives, learning how to cook through observation, reading and hands-on tutorials. Growing up in a French-Canadian home, Germaine Perron recited from memory her mother's recipe for *cipaille*. Her mother first prepared a meat mixture of beef, chicken, pork and onions, seasoned simply with salt and pepper. Getting out the big cast iron pot, her mother started with a layer of the meat mixture; adding the first crust, she then placed another layer of the meat mixture on top and finally affixed the top crust. At an age so young she could barely peek over the kitchen table, Perron recalled watching with fascination as her mother cooked traditional French-Canadian foods.

²²⁸ Sherene Razack, "Schools For Happiness: Instituts Familiaux and the Education of Ideal Wives and Mothers," in *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, eds. Katherine Arnup, André Lévesque and Ruth Roach Pierson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 211-237; Eiding, 189-208; See also "Your Daughter's Second Trade—Homemaking," in Kate Aitken, *Kate Aitken's Cookbook* (Toronto: A White Circle Book, 1964), 293-299.

Learning in this way, was a right of passage for female family members. Indeed, like her mother before her, Perron first learned to cook from observation.²²⁹ Women, particularly members of ethnically distinct communities, took responsibility to continue (and pass on) cultural traditions. They imparted knowledge across generations about familial and ethnic distinctiveness including traditions, customs and language.²³⁰ An example of this generational exchange, Perron's memory shows how food recipes passed from grandmother, to mother, to daughter and continued the practice of French-Canadian cooking within this family. Her mother purposefully or not, let Perron watch her skillfully produce this dish, undoubtedly giving Perron her first cooking lessons about seasoning, measuring ingredients and French-Canadian cuisine.

Other women from ethnically-distinct communities learned new dishes from friends after their arrival in Canada. Lina Karakans spent the war years hungry in the countryside outside of Riga, Latvia. Telling me she was born out of “wedlock” in 1930, Karakans lived with her grandparents as her single mother worked in the nearby city as a live-in housekeeper. Impoverished, her family lived off food grown in their garden and soup, which on special occasions contained a bit of pike caught by her grandfather. It was only when Karakans immigrated to Canada she learned to cook, and cook Latvian food. After repeatedly enjoying dinner with another Latvian family, Karakans purchased a cookbook to look up and learn how to prepare these Latvian dishes.²³¹ In Canada, Karakans afforded the cost of making complex and multi-ingredient Latvian dishes. Parisian-born Charlotte Aimes also learned new French-Canadian dishes. In North Bay, Aimes recalled, “there were not many French people from France,” but she did “make some good French-Canadian friends.” Hearing about *tourtière* or meat pie from these newly made friends in North Bay, she stated it was a French-Canadian dish she “never made in France.” Aimes found the recipe “amusing because the *tourtière* in French is

²²⁹ Germaine Perron, interview, 26 June 2012.

²³⁰ Epp, 174-175.

²³¹ Lina Karakans, interview, 22 April 2009.

the dish itself, the plate.... It is the thing in which you make the meat pie.” No longer able to surround herself with Parisian- or French-born friends in North Bay, Aimes extended her French-language identity to include French-Canadians. Although at times she experienced linguistic barriers—unable to comprehend a few idiosyncrasies of the French-Canadian dialect, she adopted *tourtière* preparing it every Christmas.²³² By sharing meals and recipes, immigrant women formed relationships with new friends and maintained relationships with their families and homeland they had seemingly left behind. They also integrated new recipes and traditions into their family holiday rituals, revealing links to their new country and the neighbours and friends who surrounded them.

It was not always mothers giving their daughters food and cooking lessons. The majority of the women interviewed had stay-at-home mothers, some who entered the paid workforce intermittently depending on the age of their children and financial need.²³³ Others had mothers who worked full-time struggling to achieve a balance between career and family and turning to female kin for help. Both Lina Karakans and Elizabeth Meier lived with their grandmothers, seeing their single, working mothers on weekends when they had time-off. These women learned the majority of their cooking skills from their grandmothers.²³⁴ Nora Stewart’s mother worked as a nurse on night shifts; with her hectic schedule and irregular sleeping routine, Stewart’s mother often did not possess the “patience” needed to teach her daughter to bake. Thus, every Saturday morning an eight-year old Stewart traveled by bus to her Aunt Ellen’s home to learn how to cook Scottish classics like steak and kidney pie—a particular favourite. After using the pressure cooker to tenderize stewing beef, Stewart recalled her Aunt then added the beef to a mixture of gravy, spices and floured kidney in a deep pie dish. To finish it off, she

²³² Charlotte Aimes, interview, 27 April 2009.

²³³ Bettina Bradbury, “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival among Montreal Families, 1861-91,” *Labour/Le Travail* 14 (1984): 9-46.

²³⁴ Elisabeth Meier, interview, 9 April 2009; Karakans, interview.

placed a crust “only on the top” and made “little holes in the top to let the steam out.” Clapping her hands together, Stewart said of the recipe, “I just love it!”²³⁵ Stewart cherished this time spent cooking with her Aunt and it was mutual, as her Aunt had seen her own daughter recently move out and Stewart’s presence helped to fill this void. Family networks reminded working mothers they had help. Despite what Kate Aitken’s cookbook and other cultural norms suggested, it was not their “duty” (or even always possible) to pass on gendered life lessons about food and cooking. Mothers asked for and received help.

Family economies also dictated the form and meaning of cooking lessons. The oldest of seven children Ione Barré walked to her grandparents’ farm to receive baking lessons from her grandmother. Growing up, Barré’s family was poor and their dietary staples consisted of “a lot of rice and macaroni.” On entering her grandmother’s kitchen, however, she found a space to freely experiment with food and cooking. Even though Barré experienced quite a few blunders such as when she attempted a pie shell and ended up with “a puddle of lard,” she felt safe to experiment within the confines of her “patient” grandmother’s kitchen.²³⁶ This space was largely separated from her home life, where her mistakes did not determine how well or what her siblings ate for dinner that night. She also relished the freedom there to experiment, be creative and learn new cooking skills. Irene Martin, Barré’s younger sister, also spoke about the imaginative aspects of cooking. In vivid detail, Martin described learning to cook by watching her mother prepare recipes like the Lazy Daisy or one egg cake, a recipe Martin still recites “by heart because it was very tasty and very easy to make.” To Martin’s delight, this simple cake transformed into an “exotic” dessert when her mother drizzled over top brown sugar fudge sauce. As Martin said, “The beauty of that cake is that you can do to it whatever you want to.

²³⁵ Nora Stewart, interview, 25 June 2012.

²³⁶ Ione Barré, interview, 26 June 2012.

You can dress it up, you can make it look and taste fantastic.”²³⁷ For two sisters, learning to cook allowed them to access creativity and artistry largely denied to them by their family’s financial circumstances. They experimented with ingredients, experiencing surprise and occasionally disappointment when ingredients came together. They received lessons about food and cooking that transported them beyond their family’s real income and status.

For young women dealing with the realities of poverty, abuse, addiction and death, learning to cook became a refuge, a means to transport themselves away from the harsh reality of their family lives.²³⁸ Dora Pitt’s mother passed away when she was eight years old; her father was a physically abusive alcoholic, who once strangled Pitt so violently that he permanently damaged her vocal chords. To this day, she speaks in a hushed whisper. For Pitt, an afternoon spent in her grandmother’s kitchen learning to bake offered a moment of reprieve from these vicious circumstances. While learning to bake dark Christmas fruitcake, she held the knowledge she was safe from her father’s torment.²³⁹ Helen Duquette recalled a childhood of fear and uncertainty, as her mother struggled to feed five children while her father would “go to the pub all day.” Her mother, attempting to gain a modicum of control over her life, turned to religion and sent Duquette and her sister to a boarding house so they could attend a Catholic high school. It was there that Duquette learned to cook. While her mother afforded to cook only “the cheapest, plain dishes,” the “darling, lovely little lady” who the sisters boarded with introduced them to the possibilities of food and a “totally different life.”²⁴⁰ These lessons taught Duquette about food and cooking, but they were also made meaningful because they presented her with another way of life. Placed with a foster care family, Charlotte Paterson entered into a home with an extremely controlling foster mother and, where Paterson says, she and her sister were

²³⁷ Irene Martin, interview, 25 June 2012.

²³⁸ Bower, “Romanced by Cookbooks,” 36-37.

²³⁹ Dora Pitt, interview, 22 February 2012.

²⁴⁰ Helen Duquette, interview, 24 February 2012.

treated as though “we were servants.”²⁴¹ Although her foster mother taught Paterson how to make certain dishes, it was only when she started working at a resort in Muskoka that she learned about “new varieties of foods.” Her mother-in-law continued these lessons, teaching Paterson to bake peach pies, apple pies and Chelsea buns.²⁴² For Paterson, learning to bake and cook epitomized freedom of choice. She had options as well as the ability to make the foods she desired. Learning to cook provided women with a heightened self-image; they discovered alternatives to unhealthy family situations and feelings of comfort, accomplishment and other ways of living.²⁴³ The realities of their family lives and the ways they viewed cooking also offered a contrast to the happy, white, middle-class, two-parent families presented in cookbooks.

While Kate Aitken suggested teaching daughters to cook by having them follow her steps and recipes, often women learned to cook by relying on their tactile senses. Francis Fennel, for example, knew by sight and touch the right consistency for pie crust dough. She did not need a recipe, explaining, “You just kind of did it.”²⁴⁴ Greek-born Eva Wardlaw watched her mother prepare phyllo pastry for *baklava*. “She never had a recipe,” Wardlaw remembered, “she would just [go] by how it felt, and she could see if it needed a little more this or a little more of that, just feel it.”²⁴⁵ In making *stollen* or a German Christmas cake, Lottie Frenssen recalled her mother never measured out the various ingredients “just always going by the texture.” According to Frenssen, her mother also taught her daughters to cook this way as she came to “know exactly...the texture of it and it worked beautifully.”²⁴⁶ These women learned to cook by relying on their senses, determining missing ingredients or what ingredient they needed more of. In these cases, it was not a matter of following a recipe to the tee, but rather women used

²⁴¹ Catherine Paterson, interview, 26 June 2012. For more on Canada’s foster care system, see Veronica Strong-Boag, *Fostering Nation? Canada Confronts Its History of Childhood Disadvantage* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011).

²⁴² Paterson, interview.

²⁴³ Bower, “Romanced by Cookbooks,” 38.

²⁴⁴ Francis Fennel, interview, 14 November 2012.

²⁴⁵ Eva Wardlaw, interview, 27 August 2012.

²⁴⁶ Lottie Frenssen, interview, 2 June 2009.

previous knowledge and adapted based on how foods felt, tasted and looked. This pattern largely confirms the findings of Mark Smith in *Sensing the Past*. Although visual senses gained import with the invention of the printing press, Smith argues its gains were uneven and “not always at the expense of other non-visual senses.”²⁴⁷ Even though it might be an imprecise art, women learned to put confidence in their skills and senses of touch and sight.

As we discussed the foods and dishes they cooked, women recited familiar and well used recipes from memory (albeit with imprecise measurements)—not needing the aid of cookbooks. Women committed these recipes to memory through repeated practice and observation: they saw female family members cooking, they helped in the kitchen under a watchful eye and guiding hand, they made first attempts to prepare family dishes and then, they carried on these food traditions for their own families. They had been taught to cook through rote learning. On the topic of recipes, Frieda Kendall said matter-of-factly “Most of the cooking is done out of your head. . . . I never had a recipe, I just watched my mother or my grandmother make them and then I made them.” Stressing her point, she said, “You just sort of pick it up, you don’t write it down.”²⁴⁸ Even though her grandmother assigned her the task of washing lettuce, Elisabeth Meier “learned a lot by watching.” She learned, for instance, that *spätzle* had to be the right doughy texture before you scraped it off the wooden cutting board and into the water.²⁴⁹ This informal modeling taught young women by example how to cook and prepare food. They watched, they learned and they “pick[ed] it up” as they went along.

Material circumstances informed decisions to learn from observation rather than from hands-on lessons. This was especially true for immigrant women like Kendall and Meier who grew up amidst the deprivations of the Second World War; for these women, their families

²⁴⁷ Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 2-3; 22-24.

²⁴⁸ Frieda Kendall, interview, 21 April 2009.

²⁴⁹ Meier, interview.

struggled to feed all the hungry mouths seated at their dinner tables, let alone possess the extra food needed to help teach young daughters to cook. Indeed, Lina Karakans, who survived the war years living with her grandparents outside of Riga, Latvia, thought “it wasn’t unusual for mother’s to do that, to not have girls doing cooking.” With so little food to be had, she surmised, “you didn’t want to mess around with it, you have to be so [careful].”²⁵⁰ During the Second World War, food historian Lizzie Collingham estimates that at least 20 million people died in Europe from starvation, malnutrition and other linked medical issues. Even in comparably well-served countries like Britain and German, notes Collingham, the lack of fat in diets, along with extremely limited amounts of animal protein from sources such as meat, eggs or cheese, meant most experienced the ongoing sensation of hunger even when their food contained enough calories.²⁵¹ For many European daughters growing up within this context, there were simply not the resources to give them the extra space to experiment with food and make mistakes. In this environment, daughters received cooking lessons through observing the practices of older female figures stretching out food resources in their home and hoping they could replicate what they saw when the time came for them to perform these food and cooking tasks.

Roles assigned to (and assumed by) family members also influenced whether women learned to cook. As a young girl, Lillian Harris “didn’t do a lot of cooking.” While Harris and her sister helped with cleanup and preparation, she said, “My mother was head of the kitchen. That was her domain.” Harris’s mother took charge of the food and cooking, this was her space and she no desire to relinquish her role to her daughters.²⁵² Eva Wardlaw admitted, “I’ve never been one to cook.” When asked if she helped her mother in the kitchen, she responded, “No it would always be my older sister. So I was just the one that was the freeloader you know, which

²⁵⁰ Karakans, interview.

²⁵¹ Lizzie Collingham, *Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (London, Eng: Penguins Books Ltd., 2012), 6-14.

²⁵² Lillian Harris, interview, 9 May 2012.

is great!” Older siblings assumed the burden of responsibility, helping overworked mothers by preparing meals and caring for younger siblings. For Wardlaw, this arrangement was ideal because she had no desire to learn about food and cooking. As they grew older and hosted their own holiday meals, her sister continued to take charge of food and cooking for the family. When Wardlaw hosted her parents and siblings for the first time in her new home, it was her sister who prepared the turkey and also came beforehand to make certain everything was in order. Her sister, a stay-at-home mother herself, also became a regular fixture in her household helping out with the children and cooking responsibilities.²⁵³ As a full-time teacher raising three children by herself, Wardlaw appreciated this sisterly help. Indeed, she did not construe this extra help as an intrusion or negative comment about her cooking abilities. It was needed, and it was done out of familial love and generosity.

While most women were introduced to cooking and baking through informal lessons within the walls of female relatives’ kitchens, women also learned in more formal contexts such as during domestic sciences or home economics classes. Lottie Frenssen and Elfredie Bremermann still had their cookbooks from their home economics classes back in Germany; Barbara Reid remembered the drudgery of spending hours learning to make basic cream soups in home economics class at North Bay Collegiate and Vocational Institute.²⁵⁴ She would have much preferred to still be in shop class learning lessons about wood-working, household repair and how to use tools. Entering into the Ontario high school curriculum and into higher education by the turn of the twentieth-century, home economics stressed not just sewing and cooking skills, but rather was designed to “haul the sentimental, ignorant ways of mother’s kitchen into the scientific age.”²⁵⁵ When I referred to “home economics classes” in our interview, Frieda

²⁵³ Wardlaw, interview.

²⁵⁴ Frenssen, interview; Elfredie Bremermann, interview, 10 June 2009; Barbara Reid, interview, 12 May 2012.

²⁵⁵ Mary Margaret Wilson, “Cooking the books: Curriculum and Subjectivity at the MacDonald Institute of Domestic Science, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, 1903-1920,” University of Toronto, PhD Dissertation, 2007, 2-3;

Kendall quickly corrected me saying, “Domestic sciences, please.” Kendall perceived a difference, especially as these lessons stressed how to obtain maximum vitamin and nutrient value from foods. For example, Kendall learned to steam vegetables, rather than use boiling water to cook vegetables the way her mother had. As she surmised, this method ensured “you are not throwing most of the goodness of the vegetables down the drain.” Kendall became so fascinated by food sciences she later found a job researching which citrus fruits produced the best pectin, or the solidifying agent in most jams and jellies.²⁵⁶ Domestic science or home economics classes, emphasized women not just learn to cook, but also cook nutrient rich foods.

For European-born women, their domestic training could be extensive. Swiss-born Annemarie Vos completed a rigorous apprenticeship program in home economics. According to Swiss law, all young women had to take home economics. At seventeen-years old, Vos completed this program by apprenticing with a family over a two-year period as well as going to school twice a week. As Vos explained, “you learn[ed] how to cook, how to manage money for a household, do laundry, the whole bit.” Attending cooking school as part of the apprenticeship, Vos recalled, “the very first meal we had to cook was very much like a *pot-au-feu*, Swiss steak.” This multistep dish required Vos and her classmates to learn how to tenderize the beef, properly season it and braise the meat. The rigorous exam at the end of this apprenticeship “tried to trick you with silly things,” Vos noted. For instance, they handed Vos a bunch of curtains rolled up in a ball and asked her to show them how to wash “a fancy curtain.” The secret, according to Vos, was in knowing that “you don’t dare put it in water. You had to go outside first and shake it and then put it in the water.” If you missed this step, you failed the exam. After completing this program, Vos apprenticed with a *schlächter* or butcher, and then went onto work as a household

Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1986), 9; For a fascinating discussion on the racial and colonial dimensions of these home economics lessons, see Mary Leah de Zwart, “White Sauce and Chinese Chews: Recipes as Postcolonial Metaphors,” in *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women’s History*, edited by Sarah Carter et al. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 129-147.

²⁵⁶ Kendall, interview.

cook for families in England and Paris before finally immigrating to Canada.²⁵⁷ Vos received professional training well before she arrived in Canada. She had been expertly trained in food and cooking throughout her work and schooling experiences in Europe and carried these lessons with her on her arrival in Canada.

Educational efforts surrounding food and cooking also contained healing power. For Indigenous women, efforts to re-educate themselves about food and cooking were grounded in colonial discourses. Mary Ellen Kelm, Ian Mosby and Krista Walters all discuss the efforts of federal policy-makers to re-make the apparently unhealthy food and eating habits of Indigenous peoples living in western Canada.²⁵⁸ As part of their continuing efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples and reform their food and cooking practices in the 1960s and 1970s, notes Walters, educational pamphlets “constructed Aboriginal women as bad mothers and the bodies of their family members as inherently weak and diseased.”²⁵⁹ Recent community-driven efforts have focused on the revitalization of cultural knowledge such as learning about traditional Indigenous foodways, an important step in healing from the traumas of colonialism.²⁶⁰ Gerald Laronde, a member of Nipissing First Nation, recalled his involvement with the Native Classroom Assistant Programs (NCAP) in the late 1970s. NCAP was a federally-run program designed to address the shortage of Indigenous teachers in the classroom.²⁶¹ Held at Nipissing University in North Bay, this program drew students from as many as fifty-seven different Indigenous communities from

²⁵⁷ Annemarie Vos, interview, 8 May 2012.

²⁵⁸ Mary Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), see esp. chap. 2, “‘My People Are Sick. My Young Men Are Angry’: The Impact of Colonization on Aboriginal Diet and Nutrition,” 19-37; Ian Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952,” *Social History/ Historie Sociale* 46, no. 91 (May 2013): 145-172; Krista Walters, “‘A National Priority’: Nutrition Canada’s *Survey* and the Disciplining of Aboriginal Bodies, 1964-1975,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 433-451.

²⁵⁹ Walters, 445.

²⁶⁰ Monica Bodirsky and Jon Johnson, “Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous foodways,” *Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures* 1, no. 1 (2008).

²⁶¹ In this program, Indigenous students would begin as teaching assistants with the design that some would go on to become teachers through the Aboriginal Teacher Certification Program.

all over Ontario. In efforts to welcome students, faculty prepared traditional foods and students walked from one residence house to the next with their plates tasting “moose stew, moose chili [and] bannock.” One of the faculty members from Six Nations “would make Three Sister’s Soup, which [was] corn, squash [and beans].... A great soup.” On talent night, Laronde recalled that for a number of years they served Kentucky Fried Chicken. “That was always a joke when we had it because it’s a very stereotypical thing.... The First Nations always liked Kentucky Fried Chicken.” But, Laronde continued, “then we changed it” as a member of the Nipissing First Nation now put on a more traditional fish fry for students.²⁶² Although there to become teachers, these Indigenous students also learned cultural lessons about reclaiming traditional food practices. Just like their presence in classrooms, learning about and eating traditional foods contributed to the recovery of Indigenous peoples from colonial and assimilationist measures.²⁶³ It represented a form of healing.

‘Food is our business’: Lining Shelves with Cookbooks in Post-1945 Canada

Although the majority of women learned to cook in informal ways, cookbooks also contained information and ideological messages that informed their cooking practices. In doing so, they participated in a widespread cultural trend as well as receiving lessons about nutrition, the latest food fashions, gendered expectations and familial roles. Explaining her rationale for publishing her cookbook, Kate Aitken said: “In the hand of Canadian women lies the health of the people of Canada. Food is our business. It’s an intelligent business and its dividends are paid daily in the health and happiness of the members of our family.”²⁶⁴ Whether implicitly or explicitly, post-1945 cookbooks were designed for female readers. *The All New Purity Flour Cook Book: A Complete Book of Canadian Cooking* and *Five Roses* cookbooks did not

²⁶² Gerald Laronde, interview with Amy Brandon, 27 November 2003, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

²⁶³ Bodirsky and Johnson.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

specifically address a female audience. Others like the *Chatelaine Cookbook* dealt with problems facing modern wives and mothers such as balancing work and home schedules.²⁶⁵ In her cookbook, Jehane Benoît used feminine pronouns and female hands with finely painted red fingernails to demonstrate the proper way to cut green beans in the “French Style.”²⁶⁶ The front-page image of the cookbook produced by the *North Bay Nugget* depicted a mother looking lovingly down on her daughter (figure 4). Standing in a neatly arranged kitchen, wearing their dresses and aprons, this mother and daughter carefully whisked ingredients together. Undoubtedly, this image picked up on themes of a mother teaching her daughter to cook. Both wear smiles, enjoying this time bonding together while they made recipes from this newspaper insert like “Queen Elizabeth Cake” and “Chinese Chews”.²⁶⁷ The recipes, language and images in these cookbooks presumed a white, middle-class, female readership. As prescriptive literature, it expressed the expectation that women assume the majority of cooking responsibilities in their households, as well as suggesting what types of dishes they cook and how much time they spend in the kitchen to ensure a happy, healthy and well-fed family.

Cookbooks offered women affordable and accessible information regardless of their budget, skillset and timeframe. Compared to other cookbooks of the day, Kate Aitken offered a rather plain guide with no colour photographs and few illustrations with the exception of animal diagrams outlining various cuts of meat. Its design reflected an effort to keep costs down for cookbook buyers. By 1964, now on its fourth edition the book still only cost one dollar, while the *Chatelaine Cookbook* published a year later cost nearly seven dollars if purchased in

²⁶⁵ Elaine Collett, *The Chatelaine Cookbook* (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Publishing Company Ltd., 1965), 9-10; 72.

²⁶⁶ Jehane Benoît, *Encyclopaedia of Canadian Cuisine* (Montreal: Messageries du Saint-Laurent, 1964), 15; 273; 1005.

²⁶⁷ “North Bay Nugget Cookbook,” *North Bay Nugget*, 25 February 1958.



Figure 4: "The Daily Nugget Cook Book," *North Bay Nugget*, 25 February 1958.
Printed with permission of the *North Bay Nugget*.

stores.²⁶⁸ Aitken published an inexpensive cookbook, which took little room in women's kitchen with its pocket-guide appearance. Other cookbooks sent this approachable message in their selection of recipes. In the *Chatelaine Cookbook*, readers discovered Chatelaine Institute Recipes guaranteed to be "authentic, workable and delicious." This cookbook responded to reader's cooking needs: "We have been guided in our planning by your letters, your questions and by the recipes you have shared with us year by year in our Family Favourites Recipe Contests." Drawing an audience from its magazine readers, this cookbook was chocked-full of readers' suggestions, prize-winning recipes and dishes designed for any ability-level.²⁶⁹ It communicated that they heard their readers and this cookbook answered their readers' needs. In addition to published cookbooks, cooking columns in newspapers also tried to answer the needs of its readers. The "Questions Box" column in the *North Bay Nugget* invited readers to anonymously write-in and receive responses from home economics experts. For example, Mrs. C.T. asked, "What can you do with home canned string beans which are too salty?" The quick response, "Cook with potatoes or another vegetable. Add a cream sauce, omitting additional salt."²⁷⁰ These cookbooks and newspaper columns sent similar messages to their audience: they responded to a request for information about food and cooking from Canadian women. Designed to offer affordable and accessible spaces, these sources encouraged women to share their recipes, ideas and questions.

In the face of daunting gendered and familial messages, women gained confidence in their cooking abilities through purchasing and using cookbooks from trusted authors and magazines. Elisabeth Meier watched Jehane Benoît during her regular appearances on *Take 30 a*

²⁶⁸ Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It In the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 182; *The Chatelaine Cook Book* was \$6.95 in store, and \$5.50 if ordered through the magazine.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 66; 180-181; By 1968, *Chatelaine* had 1,851,000 female readers and 641,000 male readers.

²⁷⁰ "The Questions Box," *The North Bay Nugget*, 5 October 1946.

Canadian Broadcast Corporation television program.²⁷¹ Watching her on television, Meier perceived Benoît to be “very knowledgeable” and purchased her cookbook “to learn more about her.” Meier used the English-language version of Benoît’s *L’Encyclopédie de la Cuisine Canadienne* so often, she found herself combing through second hand shops searching for a replacement copy in better shape. As she explained, “It got very dirty, it got very stained from using it. You know from putting down a page and trying to make the recipe.”²⁷² Other women shared similar memories of cookbooks. Trudy Nelson could no longer name her favourite cookbook because the title had worn off and the pages yellowed from use and time.²⁷³ Nora Stewart recalled that her copy of *Better Homes and Garden Cookbook* was so well used that “the poor thing is falling apart.” She laughed describing how “it’s used so often, and it’s had so many reinforcements that the reinforcements don’t even hold it anymore!”²⁷⁴ Cookbooks provided women with a reliable and trusted source of information. It boosted their confidence in their cooking skills as they followed step-by-step instructions, sometimes even accompanied by step-by-step photographs supposedly making it even easier to follow along.²⁷⁵ As women propped up their cookbooks to read directions as they cooked, ingredients spilt on pages smudging the print rendering recipes unreadable. These signs on the pages of recipe books left fragmentary evidence about the popularity of a particular recipe within a household and marked memories about the time spent in the kitchen preparing the dish and the reward of serving it to an appreciative family.²⁷⁶

The gift of a cookbook also contained subtle criticisms about women’s cooking skills and their failure to satisfy the homemaker image. Barbara Reid remembered her husband picked

²⁷¹ “Cooking with Clarkson,” CBC Archives. Accessed: <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/lifestyle/food/food-general/cooking-with-clarkson.html>. Last Accessed: 23 October 2013.

²⁷² Meier, interview.

²⁷³ Trudy Nelson, interview, 29 August 2012.

²⁷⁴ Stewart, interview.

²⁷⁵ See for example *Five Roses: A Guide to Canadian Cooking* (North Vancouver, B.C.: Whitecap Books, 2003), 14-18. This cookbook was originally published in 1967; Benoît, 446-447, 718-720.

²⁷⁶ Neuhaus, 186.

her up cookbooks because he purchased anything to help her improve in the kitchen. Reid finally spoke up, saying “come on, cut it out!”²⁷⁷ Both Annemarie Vos and Elisabeth Meier turned to their mother-in-law for recipes, after they had tried and failed to make a dish requested by their husbands. These husbands wanted specific dishes prepared just like their mothers, and the comforting reminders of home life.²⁷⁸ When Eva Wardlaw received cookbooks as gifts, she perceived it as a snide remark on her cooking skills and the amount of time she devoted to the kitchen. Initially hesitant about participating in this research project, Wardlaw adamantly explained, “I hated cooking then, and I hate cooking now!” After her husband died of a heart attack at thirty-six years old, Wardlaw worked hard as a single mother to provide for her three children as a teacher and later a principal. Working full-time and caring for three children under the age of five years old, Wardlaw hired local women to help her with cooking and cleaning during the week. One domestic worker arrived at eight o’clock every morning and as Wardlaw left for her workday, she took comfort knowing her children were served a hearty breakfast of porridge as well as having a nutritious brown-bag lunch packed and help getting off to school. But at the end of her workday, Wardlaw faced the dilemma of what to make her family for dinner. Many of the foods she prepared came from fellow teachers’ recommendations. Others came from cookbooks. A cutting comment on her cooking skills, Wardlaw remembered receiving many cookbooks as gifts and laughingly surmised, “I wonder why? It’s not for me!”²⁷⁹ An observation about her cooking skills and lack of interest in cooking, friends and colleagues looked to help Wardlaw improve with written advice. This was a slight against Wardlaw; as she struggled to satisfy the emotional and material needs of her single-parent family, people gifted her cookbooks and subtly told her she could do better. Certainly, they also saw that Wardlaw did not satisfy gender and familial norms presented in cookbooks; she was not a stay-at-home

²⁷⁷ Reid, interview.

²⁷⁸ Meier, interview; Vos, interview.

²⁷⁹ Wardlaw, interview.

mother and did not enjoy spending time in the kitchen. Wardlaw took pride in achieving a balance between being a good mother and establishing her career. Although many women purchased cookbooks seeking out ideas and information about food and cooking, for others the advice contained in these books was unwanted and unsolicited.

Authors of cookbooks touted a vision of health and nutrition for growing Canadian families including advice from health experts about the benefits of a diet packed with vitamins and minerals. “Canada’s Food Guide” published in 1961, replaced and somewhat softened the messages of its early incarnation “Canada’s Food Rules” through language and its usage of bright colours. It continued to promote a specific vision of healthy eating to the Canadian public as defined by nutrition experts.²⁸⁰ *Chatelaine’s Adventures in Cooking* published in 1968 contained a copy of “Canada’s Food Guide,” reminding readers that if they followed the recommended foods “you can be sure that your family is receiving all the nutrients necessary for a complete and well-balanced meal.”²⁸¹ The *Kate Aitken’s Cook Book* answered nutrition related questions, under headings such as “What vitamins are necessary?” and “What should we eat daily?”²⁸² Jehane Benoît defined different vitamins and minerals and the food sources where home cooks could find them. For example, readers learned phosphorus helps “[build] strong bones and teeth and is important to all life.”²⁸³ She suggested readers’ obtain this mineral by eating foods such as grapes, kidneys, pumpkins, turnips and different nut varieties. Food editors and nutrition experts focused on teaching Canadians, and newly arrived immigrants, nutritional and healthy cooking habits. Indeed, nutritional campaigns especially targeted European immigrant women touting their need to modernize the health standards and food habits of their

²⁸⁰ 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 J. Korinek, Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 409-432; See also Health Canada, “Canada’s Food Guides from 1942 to 1992.” Accessed: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/context/fg_history-histoire_ga-eng.php#a1961. Last Accessed: 31 October 2013.

²⁸¹ Editors of *Chatelaine*, *Chatelaine’s Adventures in Cooking* (Toronto: MacLean-Hunter Ltd., 1968), 1.

²⁸² *Kate Aitken’s Cook Book* (1964), 12-13.

²⁸³ Benoît, 846-858; 851.

backward domestic practices.²⁸⁴ Mothers who prepared vitamin-rich diets improved their children's growth, school successes and immunity to disease and medical issues; those who prepared a poor diet, set their children up for failure and the development of adult vices.²⁸⁵ As Kate Aitken wrote in her introductory chapter, seemingly capturing the sentiment of the time period, "A well-fed family is usually a happy family. With an attractive, properly cooked meal on the table 'cares and troubles fade away.'"²⁸⁶

While dietary messages from cookbooks and other sources adopted a didactic tone, women who grew up with deficient diets embraced these messages. Raised in impoverished circumstances in Port Loring, Ontario, Helen Duquette's diet consisted of canned milk mixed with water, boxed foods and "free stuff" such as pickerel, frogs and dandelion leaves. Stressing there "was no fresh stuff," Duquette and her four siblings sorely lacked vitamins like iron and B12 because "we didn't get eggs, we didn't get red meat." Still incredulous after all of these years, Duquette revealed her diet was so poor that by twenty-one years old all of her teeth needed to be removed: "Imagine losing all of your teeth at twenty-one years old? That was dreadful!" The reality for poor mothers and families contrasted starkly with images of healthy, well-fed, middle-class families presented in cookbooks. When Duquette had her own two children, she stressed the important role nutrition played in her meal planning and her desire to learn more about food and cooking. "I worried about them," she explained. "I tried to make sure they had liver, beef and eggs. And lots of vegetables and fruits." Indeed, she even planted a garden with "every veggie we could think of."²⁸⁷ Duquette learned about health and nutrition to protect the present and future health of her children. And for women like Duquette who lived

²⁸⁴ Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 145-147.

²⁸⁵ Iacovetta and Korinek, 198.

²⁸⁶ *Kate Aitken's Cook Book* (1964), 7.

²⁸⁷ Duquette, interview.

with food deprivation, the nutritional knowledge gained from cookbooks provided a useful and reassuring tool when they cooked for their own families.

As some women relished in the choices that cookbooks offered, others found them overwhelming. While Duquette called *Joy of Cooking: America's All-Purpose Cook Book* a “marvelous cookbook,” Pamela Handley found it intimidating. Handley owned a large collection of cookbooks, as she put it, “I’ve got cookbooks up the ying-yang.” Receiving a copy of the *Joy of Cooking* as a wedding present, she thought, “it was just the most terrible thing.” Newly married and cooking many dishes for the first time, she said, “I mean it is a good book, but it is intimidating.” “When you have six different ways you make custard, I mean you are sunk right there.”²⁸⁸ Her impressions of the *Joy of Cooking*, an American “kitchen bible” or all-purpose cookbook, came from being overwhelmed with the choices available. It was no wonder. In comparable Canadian versions such as *The Chatelaine Cookbook* readers found three different version of potato salad, four takes on liverwurst as well as an entire chapter devoted to sandwiches including fillings, eleven ways to cut bread and suggestions about how to present them to guests.²⁸⁹ Even the more succinct *Kate Aitken's Cook Book* contained three different types of chocolate cakes, three variations of egg sandwiches and recipes for “Crepe Suzettes (Plain)” and “Crepe Suzette (Fancy)”.²⁹⁰ The number of choices continued the user-friendly tone of cookbooks. They offered an abundance of recipes promising female home cooks that they would find one that suited their desires as well as their families’ needs and palates. For women such as Handley though, who were unused to cooking, the number of choices presented in these cookbooks seemed staggering. They had little knowledge about how to navigate the excess of recipes available for a single dish in order to ensure they found one that had the desired

²⁸⁸ Pamela Handley, interview, 8 May 2009.

²⁸⁹ *The Chatelaine Cookbook*, 411; 49; 61-69.

²⁹⁰ *Kate Aitken's Cook Book* (1964), 58; 250; 38.

outcome. At the same time, it was surely less intimidating than entering a kitchen on their own with few recipes and little know-how.

With so many recipes and variations, cookbooks also looked to introduce women to new quick-and-easy foods as well as the conveniences of modern technology. Some even commented on the trend of working mothers. *The Chatelaine Cookbook* titled their first chapter, “Quick and Easy.” It reminded readers that “time is the most elusive and unpredictable of all cooking staples.” Recognizing a working mothers’ busy schedule, it outlined how women could accomplish a home-cooked meal by the end of the day: “By 8 a.m., before leaving with her husband for downtown, she has allowed 5 minutes for rolling a wet pot roast in dry onion-soup mix, placing it on foil, adding remaining mix stirred in a cup of water, then sealing airtight, and setting in the oven.” It reassured female readers, writing “with the automatic timer set at 350F to start at 2 p.m., she steps out confidently, knowing there will be a delicious tender meat course ready at 5:30.”²⁹¹ Served with instant potatoes and frozen mixed vegetables, women would supposedly have dinner on the table within twenty minutes of walking in the front door. The chapter also provided menus for “30-Minute Dinners,” advice about which supplies women should stock up on for last minute guests and reminders about the importance of freezer meals.²⁹² Other cookbooks like *The All New Purity Flour Cook Book* incorporated canned foods into their recipes to help ease the time burden of cooking.²⁹³ These quick and easy meal ideas were designed to offer women an accessible space with “no-fail” recipes. And undoubtedly they were helpful for women like Eva Wardlaw. A teacher and mother of three children, Wardlaw admitted she often turned to takeout food such as Kentucky Fried Chicken. But recipes quickly prepared such as casseroles or pork chops with “a can of mushroom soup on top,” were also

²⁹¹ *The Chatelaine Cookbook*, 9-10.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁹³ Neuhaus, 235.

practical, easily prepared and useful for her everyday routine. As Wardlaw explained, “anybody could put some onion and hamburger together, mix it around and stick it in a casserole.”²⁹⁴

Real and Imaginative Responses to Cookbooks

As women purchased cookbooks, they read, used and responded to the recipes and messages they contained. They might not have read all of the pages, looking instead for specific dishes or recipes recommended by friends, but they left marks on their pages. With sharpened pencils, they scribbled notes in cookbooks. They also dreamily read recipes, thinking about culinary possibilities, trips outside of northern Ontario and alternatives to their lives.²⁹⁵ Women used various means to collect recipes, actively framing their food preferences, needs and longings. In the *North Bay Nugget*, Anne Allan suggested Canadian women clip out household hints and recipes from newspapers and paste them on index cards. She then provided directions about how to make your own recipe box at home, organizing it alphabetically such as “N-1” for night snacks, “R-1” for refrigerator rules and cleaning tips and “O-1” for outdoor meats.²⁹⁶ If women followed Allan’s advice collecting her columns in a recipe box or scrapbook, they also tailored a personalized cookbook to satisfy their own need for information and desire for food creativity.²⁹⁷ Women also employed professionally produced cookbooks for their own purposes: a makeshift means to keep recipes together. Margo Oliver left fourteen pages intentionally blank in her *Weekend Magazine Cook Book* for readers to “Add new Weekend Magazine Tested Recipes here.”²⁹⁸ Undoubtedly women also wrote in the marginalia about what recipes worked or did not, extra ingredients they added, information about cooking times and techniques as well inserting magazine and newspaper clippings to supplement the knowledge of their bound

²⁹⁴ Wardlaw, interview.

²⁹⁵ Neuhaus, 189.

²⁹⁶ Anne Allan, “The Mixing Bowl,” *The North Bay Nugget*, 17 February 1947.

²⁹⁷ Anne L. Bower, ed., “Introduction,” in *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 4.

²⁹⁸ Margo Oliver, *Margo Oliver’s Weekend Magazine Cook Book* (Montreal: The Montreal Standard, 1967), 24-27; 138-143; 162-165.

cookbook. Joyce Patel's mother recorded recipes from friends in her cookbook.²⁹⁹ When Annemarie Vos retrieved her copy of *Five Roses: A Guide to Good Cooking* during our interview, extra recipe clippings from newspapers and magazines went flying across the floor.³⁰⁰ An easily at-hand source, women added to cookbooks writing beside recipes as well as adding clippings. Cookbooks were not static sources of information, as women added to them based on their own needs, desires and cooking methods. In her foreword to the cookbook that started this discussion, Kate Aitken offered her thoughts on why women looked to so many different sources for food and cooking ideas: "We often laugh at ourselves for clipping and copying recipes, for saving those bits of paper long after they're torn and creased, for hoping that eventually we will get round to trying the recipes." Aitken noted this was understandable since "Three times a day and 365 days a year our first question is, 'What shall we eat?'"³⁰¹ With mothers and wives relied on for food shopping, preparation and cooking, they looked to a variety of sources to successfully fulfill this role. They also did so in ways that fulfilled personal food fantasies and needs.

A primary reason women opened the pages of a cookbook was to move their skills beyond food and cooking basics, making new and different meals for their families. Lottie Frenssen said pointedly, "I mean I follow the art of the recipe if I want to do something different." When it came to making a dish such as German *stollen* or Christmas cake, Frenssen did not require this reference guide because she was so familiar with the texture and appearance after years of seeing her mother prepare it for their family.³⁰² Pamela Handley repeatedly said the majority of meals she cooked for her family followed the premise of "meat and two veg and that would mean meat, potatoes and a vegetable." Her cooking was "very basic," and only when

²⁹⁹ Joyce Patel, interview, 20 August 2012.

³⁰⁰ Vos, interview.

³⁰¹ Kate Aitken, *Kate Aitken's Canadian Cook Book*, introduction by Elizabeth Driver (North Vancouver: Whitecap, 2004), 3.

³⁰² Frenssen, interview.

looking to be more bold would she consult a cookbook.³⁰³ Elisabeth Meier remembered her husband “discouraged” her from experimenting too much with cooking because “he likes his meat and potato. It could be steak, hamburger, chicken or stew.” She started to experiment with her cooking though, joining a cookbook-of-the-month club because “I thought that would be great to learn how to cook more interesting things and try and venture out.”³⁰⁴ Others consulted cookbooks when asked to make a specific, but unfamiliar dishes. Following the Second World War, Swiss-born Annemarie Vos worked as a cook for the President of *Good Housekeeping Magazine* in London, England. Her English boss and his family considered themselves gourmets and often requested specific and finicky dishes that Vos had to look up in cookbooks. A moment of great laughter came after her boss requested egg custard. Instead of making this delicate dessert from scratch and watching carefully to make sure “it doesn’t get runny,” Vos opted for a shortcut and prepared the dish from a premade mix. She laughed with another worker because her boss raved, “this is the best egg custard ever!” In amazement, Vos said, “Can you believe that? And he says he’s a gourmet.”³⁰⁵ In their everyday routines, women—faced with budgets, time constraints and picky children—cooked dishes that they knew. When they looked to be more daring with their cooking, they turned to cookbooks challenging their skills, impressing their families and satisfying the gourmet appetites of bosses.

In the lives of poor and working class women, the purchase of cookbooks and making of recipes inside their pages, represented financial stability, achievement and comfort. Raised in impoverished circumstances, Helen Duquette recalled her mother struggled to provide enough food for her and her four siblings. Her mother never owned a cookbook and prepared “everything off the cuff.” When she was twelve years old, Duquette recalled she wanted to cook a cake for her family but hesitated because “an egg was so precious then.” Walking to a nearby

³⁰³ Handley, interview.

³⁰⁴ Meier, interview.

³⁰⁵ Vos, interview.

neighbour, Duquette asked the neighbour to borrow an egg and cookbook because “she was afraid to make it without a book.” In making the cake, she recalled “My biggest fear was ruining it when I broke it and that I wouldn’t be able to have it in the cake. Food was precious!”

Thankfully the cake “turned out fine”, and Duquette and her family enjoyed her “plain, little white cake” decorated with freshly picked berries. By following the recipe in the borrowed cookbook, Duquette received reassurance about not wasting food and took every precaution to ensure the success of the dish. Later in life, Duquette beamed noting she afforded the cost of eight cookbooks.³⁰⁶ These cookbooks opened up new and different varieties of foods. Duquette still valued food, but her ability to open up the pages of a cookbook, turn to any recipe and cook it for her family marked an accomplishment and sense of food and financial security. Irene Martin had similar memories about her mother. With seven children, Martin’s single mother struggled to stretch out basic food recipes and took on extra work as a housekeeper to supplement the family income. As she cleaned houses, employers offered her old magazines and, consequently, a moment of reprieve. As Martin’s mother read food recipes, she discovered “entertainment” and “relaxation”—a space to escape from the stress of her everyday family life. Much later on Martin recalled her mother was in more comfortable financial circumstances and “one of her favourite things was to find a new recipe, make it and invite someone over for dinner.”³⁰⁷ The purchase of a new cookbook by women from poor or working-class backgrounds held greater meaning than just a collection of recipes and cooking techniques. They represented food and financial security in their lives.

Ethnicity and nationality also played a role in how women responded to cookbooks. Parisian-born Charlotte Aimes claimed it was a Canadian and American trend to have “oodles of recipe books.” Before Aimes immigrated, she carefully copied down her mother’s dessert

³⁰⁶ Duquette, interview.

³⁰⁷ Martin, interview.

recipes. However, her energies were largely wasted because she “never used them.” More of a safety net, these recipes symbolized to Aimes a commitment to carry on ethnic traditions despite no longer living in her homeland.³⁰⁸ When Germaine Perron left her childhood home in Verner, Ontario to start her teaching career, she wrote down a collection of her mother’s French-Canadian recipes and still consulted them even though she “knew [them] by heart.”³⁰⁹ She wanted to make certain to carry on with these familial and ethnic food traditions. Perron and Aimes compiled their own recipe books based on the foods they had grown up eating. Even though they might not have used them, these books provided a symbolic statement about their commitment to preserving their ethnic and cultural identity and maintained connections to family members and familial memories.³¹⁰

For immigrant women, translation and literacy impacted whether or not they read and used cookbooks. Swiss-born Annemarie Vos and German-born Elisabeth Meier both recalled the problems with using the cookbooks brought from their homelands; the printed recipes provided measurements in the metric system, while Canadians only made the decision to convert to this system of measurement in 1970. Both women encountered troubles locating correct measuring tools in order to make dishes from these recipes. Eventually Vos purchased a scale, weighing out the ingredients and discovering a conversion method that allowed her to continue her Swiss foodways.³¹¹ Other immigrant women experienced problems with literacy. Rosa Valentti, like many other postwar Italian immigrants in Toronto, received little formal education in Italy and never attended school after she came to Canada as a twenty-four year old wife and mother in 1959.³¹² Reading and writing continue to be a challenge for her, especially

³⁰⁸ Aimes, interview.

³⁰⁹ Perron, interview.

³¹⁰ Epp, 174.

³¹¹ Vos, interview; Meier, interview. In 1970, the Canadian government produced the “White Paper on Metric Conversion in Canada.” This would be implemented by 1973.

³¹² Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 73. According to Iacovetta, statistics show that many young Italian men

with seven English-speaking grandchildren. Her limited literacy skills also meant she relied on her keen skills of observation to learn about food and cooking. Recalling the gender division of labour in their home in Carpinone, Italy, Valentti described how she and her mother only joined her father and brother in fieldwork after they finished preparing the family meal for that evening. This was where Valentti learned to cook. Valentti said “you watch and you learn” from your mother, “your aunt, your neighbour or whoever.” When asked about recipes and cookbooks, she laughed and tapped her head replying, “No such thing as recipes, recipes are here!”³¹³ For Valentti and other immigrant women who struggled with literacy, they learned to cook not by reading recipes but by assiduously watching the female figures in their lives cook and bake. In doing so, they learned from knowledgeable and skilled women who cooked for years for their families. Immigrant women found strategies to use the written, verbal and learned recipes they brought with them when they crossed international borders.

At a time when Canada looked to define and establish its national identity, cookbook authors compiled regional and ethnic recipes with accompanying descriptions to reassure readers about the existence of a Canadian national cuisine. Kate Aitken provided a chapter dedicated to teaching Canadians about their national cuisine. Discussing the varied climates that produced distinctive regional food crops, Aitkens claimed, “there is not one typical Canadian food—there are a dozen.” Writing romantic descriptions of each region, Aitken told readers that Alberta, for example, was home to the “Calgary Stampede, prime beef and dashing cowboys” and, following this logic, gave the recipe for “Calgary Stampede Hot Roast Beef Sandwich.”³¹⁴ *The Chatelaine Cookbook* offered a chapter called “Canadiana” giving recipes for regional dishes such as “Winning Goldeneye” and New Brunswick’s “Fiddleheads” as well as recipes

and women closed off educational opportunities and career options in Canada to help contribute to the family economy.

³¹³ Rosa Valentti, interview, 30 April 2009.

³¹⁴ *Kate Aitken Cook Book* (1964), 273; 275.

drawn from history books and prized by early Canadian settlers such as “Cranberry Suet Pudding” and “Dried Apple Brown Betty.”³¹⁵ *The Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book* was produced in 1966 through a partnership between the Laura Secord Candy Shops and the Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) as part of their efforts to commemorate the Canadian centennial the following year.³¹⁶ In their introduction to this cookbook, the CHEA wrote that after “scouring every province to find recipes distinct to different regions” they had proven “conclusively” that “there *is* a Canadian cuisine, and it is unique in all the world.”³¹⁷ Short histories accompanied the recipes in the book, explaining where the recipe came from and who was most likely to have prepared it. For example, “Hugger-in-Bluff” was a fish, pork and potato dish evolved from the East Coast tradition of using “foods that could be stored for the long cold winter.” The cookbook also included “Canadian Menus” telling readers “the way that these foods are grouped together... completes the story of our national cuisine.”³¹⁸ As Canada looked to define its national identity, *The Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book* assured its readers with recipes and descriptions that food had a long history in their country and represented another tangible symbol of national identity. Writing about the construction of a national food heritage, Arjun Appaduri warns us about the selection of recipes that sees “whole regional idioms... represented by a few ‘characteristic’ dishes.”³¹⁹ Cookbook authors depicted Canadian foodways as a collection of regional and ethnic food heritages. Doing so, they reduced complex regional cuisines to three or four selected recipes and diluted regional specialties, in the process

³¹⁵ *The Chatelaine Cookbook*, 695; 697; 704-705.

³¹⁶ Elisabeth Driver, *The Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book* (Toronto: Whitecap Books, 2011), inside front cover. This is a republishing of the original cookbook, which was published in 1966.

³¹⁷ Sally Henry, Lorraine Swirsky and Carol Taylor, “Introduction,” in *The Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book* (Toronto: Whitecap Books, 2011), 9.

³¹⁸ *The Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book*, 85; 181-183.

³¹⁹ Arjun Appaduri, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (Jan. 1988): 17; Rhona Richman Kenneally, “‘There *is* a Canadian cuisine, and it is unique in all the world’: Crafting National Food Culture during the Long 1960s,” in *What’s to Eat? Entrées in Canadian Food History*, ed. Nathalie Cooke (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 174-175; 186-187.

of nationalizing them.³²⁰ They created a picture of an all-encompassing Canadian national cuisine grounded in history, regional identity, weather and food availability.

Although cookbooks contained definite ideas about Canadian cuisine, women cooking in their kitchens were left less certain. A preset question I asked in interviews was “Did you cook Canadian foods?” The most common response was “What is Canadian food?” Women also discussed boxed or premixed foods, wild meats and berries and French-Canadian dishes. Women expressed indifference about the ethnic and national identity of their food, more concerned about weekly budgeting and serving healthy and nutritious meals to their families. Other women saw the lines between Canadian and American cuisine blurring or unlike other ethnic cuisines, there was no obvious dish or ingredient to easily point to as being distinctly Canadian. As one interviewee pointedly described, “there is no such thing as Canadian foods, it’s all borrowed from other countries.”³²¹ When women shared ideas about Canadian foods, it was most often immigrant women. German-born Lottie Frenssen worked as a domestic in North Bay on her arrival in 1954. Responding to requests for Canadian food by her employers, she looked up recipes in Canadian cookbooks for dishes like meatloaf, hamburgers and pot roast.³²² German-born Elisabeth Meier embraced lessons on Canadian foods. Wanting to distance herself from her German identity, Meier decided to embrace everything Canadian in her attempts to become Canadian. It should be of little surprise that after marriage, Meier carefully read cookbooks like *Discovering Canadian Cuisine* and Jehane Benoit’s *L’Encyclopédie* to teach herself Canadian style cooking.³²³ She wanted to cook her family Canadian foods that reflected not only her food preferences, but also her sense of national identity and belonging. Few of the

³²⁰ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 117.

³²¹ Meier, interview.

³²² Frenssen, interview.

³²³ Meier, interview.

women interviewed defined a Canadian national cuisine; for only a select few it symbolized their objective to adopt a Canadian identity and leave their pasts behind.

Cookbooks offered women an opportunity to leave North Bay, and imagine global travel. As Kristin Hoganson argues, “by alluding to the distant origins of particular foodstuffs and preparations,” food writings like cookbooks “infused daily life with geographic consciousness.” The foreignness of foods also held a certain social cachet, evoking luxury and the “cosmopolitanism of high society.”³²⁴ *The Chatelaine Cookbook* offered readers an “International Cooking” chapter writing, “here is cookery excitement such as seldom experienced with the family’s once-a-week meat loaf.”³²⁵ It offered recipes identified by their countries of origins such as “Borscht (Slavic),” “Tempura (Japanese),” “She-Crab Soup (Southern U.S.A),” “Bokkepootjes (Dutch macaroons)” and “Estofado de Carnes Variadas (Spanish)”.³²⁶ Authors of *Chatelaine’s Adventures in Cooking* wrote a chapter titled “An Introduction to Gourmet Cooking.” They defined gourmet as someone who “evaluates cooking critically and is an epicure, or lover of good eating.” They warned readers, somewhat forebodingly to try these recipes out beforehand as “gourmet cooking more than any other improves with practice.” The chapter then defined more advanced cooking terms and techniques, how to cook with different wines and herbs as well as describing gourmet cuisines from around the globe and providing recipes to try at home.³²⁷ Indeed, readers took a global culinary trip as they learned about “French gourmet cooking, exotic dishes from Spain, lively Italian cuisine...dishes from the land of pilaf and kebab, curries of India, foods from the Far Pacific, Oriental meals [and] Mexico’s spicy theme.”³²⁸ Women were encouraged to cook new

³²⁴ Hoganson, 111; 113; 151.

³²⁵ *The Chatelaine Cookbook*, 711.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 713-714; 717; 724.

³²⁷ *Chatelaine’s Adventure in Cooking*, 218-278.

³²⁸ The Editors of *Chatelaine*, “Introduction,” in *Chatelaine’s Adventure in Cooking* (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter, Ltd., 1968), 2.

recipes, opening up the discoveries of new geographies and distancing them from their real physical location in northern Ontario.

In seeking out feelings of adventure with their food and cooking, women found it by experimenting and going outside the bounds of written recipes. Cookbooks even encouraged them to do so. Many of the cookbooks discussed laid out the basic principles such as cooking techniques, how to use herbs as well as terminology. Jehane Benoît described how this information guaranteed that “once you have a sure hold on the basic principles involved,” “you can let your imagination go and practice what I like to call ‘culinary wit.’”³²⁹ *The Chatelaine Cookbook* explained that “Cooking should be fun, and creative cooking is much more than mere nourishment for the body.”³³⁰ Cooking was framed not as a chore, but rather as a creative and imaginative process. This was especially the case for Catherine Paterson. Growing up with her foster family, the motto in the household was “eat your food, don’t waste it.” Her foster mother was not only “very frugal” with food, but also used food deprivation as a form of punishment. After getting married, Paterson recalled, “I finally got my own food and it was exciting” mainly because “I [could] buy the things I like and I [could] learn and experiment.” When it came to following cookbooks, Paterson confided she did not always follow them precisely: “There might be a little bit of individuality or rebellion.” Paterson explained that cookbooks tell you to “do it this way, do it that way and I am thinking can’t I make it just the way I like it and if I make a flop, I make a flop.” In her married life, Paterson fully embraced cooking by trial-and-error. She knew she would not be accused of wasting food and face punishment if she strayed from the recipe and it did not turn out as expected. When her foster mother visited, Paterson decided to try out one of her cooking experiments making her version of steak and kidney pie. Her foster mother criticized this dish pointing out, ““you don’t put vegetables in it.”” Paterson, however,

³²⁹ Benoît, 15.

³³⁰ Elaine Collett, *The Chatelaine Cookbook*, 7.

believed by not strictly following the recipe she provided a well-balanced meal for her family that included meat and vegetables. She also finally realized, “Whether my mother liked it or not was not important. I thought I had a really good meal.” Women were encouraged to learn the basics so they could stray from recipes and be inventive and artistic with their food. For women like Paterson, accepting these creative aspects of food symbolized food and physical security. Food and cooking provided a space of positive creative energy, as Paterson put it, “just to experiment, that’s the joy.”³³¹

The imaginative aspects of cookbooks came not just from preparing the recipes, but also from simply looking at their pages. Raised largely by her grandmother, Elisabeth Meier recalled most of the food at their dinner table was basic German cuisine. Her grandmother faced pressure to stay within their limited food budget and used accessible food resources. As a younger woman though, her grandmother took a culinary arts course and “learned how to make these fancy things.” She never afforded the cost or time to make them for Meier, “but she had pictures of those fancy hors d’oeuvres” and looking at these cookbook images transported her back to a time when preparing and consuming these “fancy” foods.³³² With seven children to feed, Irene Martin’s mother concentrated her efforts on stretching out their extremely limited resources. Impoverished her mother faced the task of stretching out a pound of beef for two or three meals. Despite these real financial circumstances, Martin said, “My mother was meant to be born into royalty. She had that natural air about her.” When her mother received old magazines from employers whom she cleaned for, Martin believed she dreamt of another life for herself and her family—one that was more reflective of the lives depicted in the photographs with overflowing buffets of food and neatly set dinner tables illuminated by candlelight. It was also the recipes that stirred her imagination: “She could see from those magazines, that women were cooking

³³¹ Paterson, interview.

³³² Meier, interview.

with wine and it represented exotic stuff to her.” Martin continued, “She always dreamed of being able to cook like they do in the recipe books or in the magazine, using a table spoon of wine and two tablespoons of balsamic vinegar.”³³³ The recipes in cookbooks called for women to use expensive ingredients, exemplifying a luxurious and comfortable life. This life went beyond the reach and limited budgets of impoverished women; the images spoke to a middle- and upper-class lifestyle and formed the daydreams of poor and working-class women. The recipes also provided a contrast to the images of northern Ontario discussed in chapter 1. The lavish recipes and elegant dinner parties conflicted with ideas about hardy northerners hunting and fishing for food in the rough outdoors. For poor and working-class women, cookbooks opened up their imagination as they thought up alternatives to their financial realities.

The Sharing of Recipes as a Source of Community

In formal and informal ways, women shared recipes from cookbooks, magazines and other food-related sources. Doing so, they created spaces for support and socializing among women. Ruth Gauthier and her sister often passed back and forth a copy of Jehane Benoît’s *L’Encyclopédie*—it was a favourite book among their family.³³⁴ Rosa Valentti recalled verbally exchanging recipes with neighbours in North Bay, pointing to her head she said “Yes, with this. We told each other.”³³⁵ In the teachers’ lounge, Eva Wardlaw noted colleagues regularly shared magazine recipes they successfully made.³³⁶ Ione Barré recalled her group of friends in Larder Lake, Ontario nicknamed themselves the “So-Sew Girls”. Leaving their children at home, the young mothers got together once a month to knit, gossip, eat and give each other perms to update their looks. The women even weighed and measured themselves, keeping track of the numbers in a log to decide whether they needed to go on a calorie-restricted diet. Part of their

³³³ Martin, interview.

³³⁴ Ruth Gauthier, interview, 29 August 2012.

³³⁵ Valentti, interview.

³³⁶ Wardlaw, interview.

activities also included sharing recipes among one another. Never purchasing copies of *Chatelaine* or *Good Housekeeping*, Barré explained the So-Sew Girls swapped magazines and recipes. They kept magazines fully intact, carefully writing down recipes from their pages so other members of their clique “could copy them too”. When Barré moved from Larder Lake to North Bay in 1955, it was the companionship of these women she missed the most. This had been a group of young women, who came together to support one another as they navigated their way through marriage and motherhood, commiserating in their missteps, reveling in their accomplishments and sharing tips as well as a few recipes.³³⁷ Sharing recipes created a network of support among women and a reminder that there were other mothers and wives dealing with the same concerns about the health and well-being of their family and trying to find strategies.

Community-produced cookbooks were a more formal outlet for women to share their recipes. Charlotte Aimes refused to contribute recipes to a community cookbook, explaining, “I don’t think I have any special recipes to share.”³³⁸ Gettie Brown took a lead role in producing “Our Favourite Recipes,” a cookbook produced by the Edith Sylvia Chapter of Hadassah in North Bay, Ontario. By 1971, the Jewish population numbered one hundred and ninety in North Bay. Brown recalled with pride that at the height of the Jewish population in the city, they attracted as many as forty women to their chapter of Hadassah—many who were married to prominent men. As the numbers grew larger, meetings moved from the living rooms of members to the Sons of St. Jacob Synagogue. To fundraise for their projects, Brown proudly recalled that the female members of Hadassah compiled a community cookbook because they “got to talking about how good all these people were with their recipes.”³³⁹ The women demonstrated their organizational and administrative abilities, dedicating their voluntary labour to compiling and organizing the recipes, typing them out and drawing sponsors for the

³³⁷ Barré, interview.

³³⁸ Aimes, interview.

³³⁹ Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012.

cookbook.³⁴⁰ The sponsors, Brown quickly noted, were drawn from both Jewish- and non-Jewish-owned business throughout the city. The cookbook itself drew attention to its Jewish origins displaying a lit menorah on the front cover and devoting an entire chapter to Passover recipes. Although the foods could be prepared in keeping with kosher guidelines, the majority of recipes in the book were decidedly not Jewish including “Tomato Soup Cake,” “Veal and Spaghetti” as well as an entire chapter devoted to “Chinese Style Cooking.”³⁴¹ As Marlene Epp has noted, these women made a statement about “cultural survival” in the act of sharing their recipes with the larger North Bay community, drawing attention to their Jewish identity in safe and unthreatening ways; this may have been especially important given the small population of their ethno-religious community.³⁴² In other ways, this community cookbook also established they were an integrated ethno-religious community in this northern city. They garnered support from businesses across the city; they presented recipes that could be used by both Jewish and non-Jewish home cooks. Women’s more formal efforts to share recipes made a statement about how they saw their place in the community, their efforts to be full members and yet also culturally distinct.

Community cookbooks also spoke to attempts to retain or regain community knowledge. Recently, the Nipissing First Nation (NFN) Health Centre produced a cookbook filled with traditional recipes. This cookbook discussed foods in terms of the four cardinal directions as well as the colour and energy linked with the specific direction. For example, the West connects to blue, the colour for *Noojmowin* or healing. As the recipe book states, “the gifts from the West help build body tissue, fight infection by building up antibodies: meat from wild game, nuts and eggs.” The section on the West, then goes onto give recipes for meat-based dishes such as

³⁴⁰ Epp, 176.

³⁴¹ Edith Sylvia Chapter of Hadassah, “Our Favourite Recipes,” 108-114; 70; 33; 34-35.

³⁴² Epp, 174.

“Partridge Casserole,” “Venison Shepherd’s Pie,” and “Moose Steak with Mushroom Sauce.”³⁴³

These lean, meat-based dishes can be made with wild foods found (and hunted) in northern Ontario. In addition, this cookbook provides information about portion and serving size to create a healthy, well-balanced meal.³⁴⁴ This cookbook outlines a holistic approach to food, discussing the energy, colour and directional properties attached to food. It also speaks to larger, ongoing efforts within this community to return to and reclaim Indigenous knowledge and practices.

Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman and member of the NFN, recalled there was going to “be a traditional wedding here for the first time in many, many years. In my lifetime. But I do know there are more people who are being married in the traditional way.”³⁴⁵ During research trips to Garden Village in 2012, I witnessed this firsthand participating in a women’s drum circle as well as a teaching by an elder on the smudging ceremony. There has been a movement by this Indigenous community to regain traditional knowledge and practices. As scholars Monica Bodirsky and Jon Johnson argue, cultural resurgence and healing from the traumas of colonialism often involve the relearning of cultural knowledge and practices as well as oral traditions. Community-produced cookbooks are a part of this push because they help to heal from colonial assimilationist measures by providing foods and recipes to “combat the problem of forgetting traditional foods and food knowledge.”³⁴⁶ In this instance, a community-produced cookbook was a part of larger efforts to revitalize cultural knowledge within this Indigenous community. It represented a way to pass on cultural knowledge.

Conclusions

Women read cookbooks and created a real and imaginative space for themselves. They read commercially-produced cookbooks filled with ideologies about domesticity, nutrition and

³⁴³ Rosella M. Kinoshameg, *A Collection of Traditional Recipes* (Garden Village, ON: Nipissing First Nation Health Services, 2007), 6-9.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, ii.

³⁴⁵ Marianna Couchie, interview with Françoise Noël, 27 July 2005, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

³⁴⁶ Bodirsky and Johnson.

health, time and household management and family happiness. Ranging from convenience foods designed to help busy mothers save time to those gourmet and global dishes designed to impress guests and family members, cookbooks introduced women to new fare and expected them to learn skills in order to prepare it. The books also conveyed national and political messages about health and nutrition standards, the welfare of families and food as a source of Canadian national identity. In her interview Catherine Paterson, spoke about cookbooks in the post-1945 context: “If you look at the cookbooks from that era, you’ll see the woman with the apron on, having the pinafores and having hors d’oeuvres.” Today, Paterson mused, Canadians purchase readymade and fast food and “don’t comprehend...the beauty in the creation of what we’re given and that’s sad.”³⁴⁷ Images, prefaces and recipes from these written sources depicted a specific set of values and morals to women about life.

As women read cookbooks, they created a food and cooking space that reflected their multiple identities, memories, familial circumstances and geographical contexts. This space was not just about food, but rather what food, cooking and mealtime represented in their lives. For poor and working-class women, the opportunity to read advice from nutrition and health experts reassured them that they were taking the necessary precautions to ensure the well-being of their children. Women working in the paid labour force read cookbooks for quick meal solutions, but also encountered judgmental messages about their priorities, inabilities (and sometimes unwillingness) to satisfy cultural ideals and their abilities to balance their work in the home and outside of it. Women also read cookbooks looking for new meal ideas, whether this stemmed from their desire to learn Canadian foods or travel to far-flung places through their palates. This was a real space because it addressed women’s real concerns about food, time management, how to create innovative dishes, ways to use new ingredients and how to ensure nutrient-rich and well-balanced meals. It was also an imaginative and artistic space for women. Women read

³⁴⁷ Paterson, interview.

about gourmet and global cuisines, and while finding them intimidating and sometimes pretentious, found themselves invited to temporarily visit places many of them could never afford to visit due to financial circumstances. In their minds, they were able to attend elegant dinner parties that served multiple courses including exotic hors d'oeuvres and main dishes prepared with expensive ingredients. The imaginative components of cookbooks transported women outside of abusive relationships, impoverished circumstances and the pressing demands of their children. Later in life, women now able to afford these books and to make the recipes presented within them discovered a sense of financial stability, food security and accomplishment. Cookbooks also shaped a social space for women, a space for interactions with female relatives and friends in both positive and negative ways. They shared recipes and recipe books, cutting down the cost of this pastime. As women did so, they also imparted helpful advice and tips, gossiped and commiserated about their home lives. They created a network of support for themselves. This network of support could also extend to their communities. As women volunteered their time and efforts to produce cookbooks, they also helped to ensure the cultural survival of their communities as well as healing deep cultural wounds left from the legacies of colonialism. Women read, created and used commercially- and community-produced cooks learning about far more than the printed recipes they contained. They adapted them to their own purposes, inspiring a real and imaginative space.

Chapter 3 Intimate Lives, Intimate Food Spaces

“M-A-U-L-T-A-S-C-H-E-N, *maultaschen*,” spelled Elisabeth Meier during our 2009 interview in North Bay, Ontario. *Maultaschen* was Meier’s favourite German food. “What it is, is ravioli,” she explained, but “you didn’t eat it with tomato sauce... like in the Italian way.” Rather, “you fried it with butter.” Meier was born in Rastapp, Germany in 1945. In an apologetic tone, she explained that she had not grown up in a so-called normal family with a mother and a father. Instead her parents divorced, and afterwards Meier’s father “was with another family.” Since her mother worked late nights to provide financial support for their family, her grandmother moved in and took care of the cooking, household cleaning and childcare. When her mother immigrated to Montreal in 1953 to search for better paying work, she left her daughter in the care of her grandmother sending money each month. It took her mother two years, and working two jobs, to save enough to bring them both to Canada. And in this instance, Meier’s grandmother had little choice. Her grandmother did not want to leave Germany, but “she came because my mother would be at work all day and who would I have?” As her grandmother adapted to life in Canada, Meier surmised that cooking became “the part that was hardest for her.” Shaking her head, Meier often heard her grandmother say “I can’t get it” expressing her dissatisfaction with the ingredients she had to work with. The flour, shortening and eggs often got blamed when her recipes for dishes like *maultaschen* turned out differently than they had in Germany. According to Meier, her grandmother was often upset “in how the meal turned out, it wouldn’t taste the same.”³⁴⁸ Meier’s grandmother was indeed frustrated with the new ingredients—this was not the authentic cuisine she believed she cooked back home. But it was

³⁴⁸ Elisabeth Meier, interview with author, North Bay, Ontario, 8 April 2009. Unless otherwise indicated all interviews were conducted by the author and took place in North Bay, Ontario. Parts of this chapter were first published in *Ontario History*. Please see Jennifer Hough Evans, “Turning ‘Space’ into ‘Place’ with Food: Immigrant Women’s Food Narratives in Post-1945 North Bay, Ontario,” *Ontario History* (fall 2014): 214-234.

also because her self-identity was very much linked to her ability to cook nutritious food for her granddaughter; this was a large part of her rationale for immigration.

Elisabeth Meier's story is a gendered narrative of family, food and migration. The strategy of moving-in or living with parents, especially after the break up of a marriage was not distinct to immigrants—as it provided a financial and childcare strategy for many of the non-immigrant women interviewed as well.³⁴⁹ What was distinctive, however, was the interruption in foodways experienced by Meier's grandmother due to her relocation across national boundaries. Her disappointment with ingredients came to symbolize her unhappiness living in Canada and the challenges to her ability to provide continuity to her granddaughter's life through food and cooking.

This chapter examines the relationships between women, food and family. As women cooked meals, they brought family members together for major life events, holidays and even during the routine of the everyday. Food and cooking created close connections between family members and extended kin as they helped one another, sympathized in struggle and succeeded in fulfilling their material and domestic obligations. Women performed this work not always out of personal enjoyment but also out of gendered and familial expectations. Meals shared and eaten around the dinner table every night exemplified an important facet of the heterosexual nuclear family, where there was a breadwinner husband and homemaker wife. The work of cooking and preparing meals placed considerable pressure on women to ensure a wholesome family life for themselves and their children and to project this image to others outside their family. Yet as women discussed their family relationships and food practices—deeply personal and intimate spaces in their lives, they also shared memories of different family configurations as well as of loss, poverty, neglect and abuse. Their memories remind us that women do not

³⁴⁹ Nora Stewart, interview, 25 June 2012; Helen Duquette, interview, 24 February 2012; Ruth Gauthier, interview, 29 August 2012; Joyce Patel, interview, 30 August 2012; Germaine Perron, interview, 26 June 2012; Catherine Paterson, interview, 26 June 2012.

keep painful and traumatic family episodes separate from experiences of family happiness and togetherness. They are connected by the familial and household contexts in which they took place. In studying the relationship between women, food and their families, this chapter argues that women found themselves coping and working within the image of the white, wholesome nuclear family. An image that more often than not, did not match the complexity of their family configurations or the reality of their lives.

The renewed emphasis on family in the post-1945 context ignored the complexity of familial relationships. With mass migration, the threat of communism and the return from wartime to peace, the ability of Canadians and newcomers to build happy and well-adjusted families was seen as essential to their life success, citizenship and return to normalcy. The Canadian state (and its programs) envisioned marriages to be egalitarian and companionate relationships, yet paradoxically they also promoted a patriarchal and conservative vision with a breadwinner husband and a dependent, stay-at-home wife. Financially providing for their families, husbands and fathers felt the weight of this obligation and remembered it being “unthinkable” if their wives worked after their first child. Children were to be well-adjusted and obedient. Wives were not to challenge this cookie-cutter domestic arrangement, but rather find ways to manage and work within it. This image privileged a white, middle-class and heterosexual nuclear family.³⁵⁰ Feminists have paid considerable attention to the family given that it was a central historical and social force in organizing gender inequity. As antiracist scholars have established, however, race matters and among Indigenous, immigrant and working-class peoples the “struggle has not been to escape the constraints of the nuclear family,

³⁵⁰ Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2006), 171-177; Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 16-18; 21; Cynthia Comacchio, “Another Brick in the Wall: Toward a History of the Welfare State in Canada,” *left history* 1, no. 1 (1993): 105-106; Laura Madokoro, “‘Slotting’ Chinese Families and Refugees, 1947-1967,” *Canadian Historical Review* 93, no. 1 (March 2012): 27-30; Robert Rutherford, “Fatherhood and the Social Construction of Memory: Breadwinnings and Male Parenting on a Job Frontier,” in *Gender and History in Canada*, eds. Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996), 362.

but the ability to participate in a nuclear family.”³⁵¹ The nuclear family model also linked heterosexuality with normality, while gay men and lesbian women were depicted as deviant others making it tough, as Cameron Duder argues, to live fully and openly.³⁵² Like Elisabeth Meier in our opening narrative, many of the women interviewed expressed their feelings of inadequacy and regret when comparing their families to the unattainable nuclear family model. Women found themselves coping and working within the image of the nuclear family, chafing against its restraints and exclusions.

There are multiple configurations and definitions of family. Social historians have well documented the many types of family units, demonstrating how the linkages of identity, place and state apparatus have given us complex and contested notions of the family.³⁵³ As Cynthia Comacchio notes, there remains a difference in “what family means and what family is” noting the inherent tensions between the ideal and material reality.³⁵⁴ On the level of the individual, women’s memories reveal the multiple and unique meanings of family affected by lived experiences, age as well as geographical and temporal contexts. Indeed, historians of the Depression Lara Campbell, Katrina Srigley and Stacey Zembrzycki have variously studied

³⁵¹ Enakshi Dua, “Beyond Diversity: Exploring the Ways in Which the Discourse of Race has Shaped the Institution of the Nuclear Family,” in *Scratching the Surface: Canadian, anti-racist, feminist thought*, eds. Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1999), 238-242; See also Tania Das Gupta, “Families of Native Peoples, Immigrants, and People of Colour,” in *Canadian Families: Diversity, Conflict and Change*, eds. Nancy Mandell and Ann Duffy (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 141-174.

³⁵² Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Elise Chenier, *Strangers in Our Midst: Sexual Deviance in Postwar Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); None of the women interviewed self-identified as lesbian. The topic of sex and sexuality rarely came up in interviews. This is due to my age, their comfort level with the topic and the questions asked.

³⁵³ Bettina Bradbury, “Feminist Historians and Family History in Canada in the 1990s,” *Journal of Family History* 25, no. 3 (July 2000): 362-383; Cynthia Comacchio, “‘The History of Us’: Social Science, History and the Relations of Family in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* (Fall 2000): 167-220; *Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Ellen Ross, *Love & Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nara Milanich, “Whither Family History? A Road Map from Latin America,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (April 2007): 439-456; Katrina Srigley and Stacey Zembrzycki, “Remembering Family, Analyzing Home: Oral History and the Family,” *Oral History Forum/d’histoire orale* (2009): 1-19.

³⁵⁴ Cynthia R. Comacchio, “Beneath the ‘Sentimental Veil’: Families and Family History in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 33 (Spring 1994): 280.

women's memories of family as they dealt with the changing shapes of households and invented work, domestic and political strategies when confronted with moments of stress and uncertainty.³⁵⁵ As daughters, the women interviewed belonged to single- and two-parent households; they also lived with extended kin and foster care families. When they formed their own households and families, these took on a variety of arrangements as they lived as single, religious, married, divorced and widowed women. These women also dealt with voluntary and forced migration, state intervention, dysfunction and abuse as well as cultural and racial discrimination—strong forces that impacted the perception and realities of their family lives.

Families were not always spaces of positive memories or healthy relationships. Family relations became strained and damaged under the weight of personality conflicts, death, traumatic incidents, financial crisis and abuse. As Annette Kuhn describes, “Most of us imagine the family as a place of safety, closeness, intimacy; a place where we can comfortably belong and be accepted just as we are.” But as she notes it is not always so simple as there remain family secrets or the “characters and happenings that do not slot neatly into the flow of the family narrative [and] are ruthlessly edited out.”³⁵⁶ Linda Gordon's classic study on the history of family violence exposed the disparity between the image of the harmonious and loving home and the response to deny or even suppress evidence when that image was far from the abusive reality.³⁵⁷ In their work with memory sources, Marlene Epp and Pamela Sugiman have also shown us the complexity of family dynamics and the willingness to share, wrongly remember,

³⁵⁵ Campbell, *Respectable Citizens*; Katrina Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters: Young Working Women in a Depression-Era City, 1929-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); “Stories of Strife? Remembering the Great Depression,” *Oral History Forum/ d’histoire orale* (2009): 1-20; Stacy Zembrzycki, “‘We Didn’t Have a Lot of Money, but We Had Food’: Ukrainians and Their Depression-Era Food Memories,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 131-139; “‘There Were Always Men in Our House’: Gender and the Childhood Memories of Working-Class Ukrainians in Depression-era Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 60 (Fall 2007): 77-105.

³⁵⁶ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (New York: Verso, 2002), 1-2.

³⁵⁷ Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

hide and forget those stories in our families' pasts that might bring pain to oneself or to others.³⁵⁸ This is a project about food. But over the course of interviews, women revealed family episodes of food deprivation and hunger, conflict, poverty, neglect as well as mental and physical abuse. Our discussions took on a life review format, and the "non-interfering focus" of this technique allowed these women to share deeply personal stories, stories that are often difficult to share given their connections to feelings of hurt, shame and guilt. As Gadi BenEzer states, "traumatic events never happen in a social vacuum. They are connected to the social context in which they take place."³⁵⁹ The family is a personal and intimate space where fears and secrets are shared and kept and the front presented to the public is often different from the realities of family life. In a moment of life review, female interviewees found a catharsis in sharing stories, it was part of their healing from old wounds. Women also shared with me traumatic episodes because they had lasting reverberations on how their lives played out, their views on family relationships and how they saw themselves as women, sisters, mothers and wives. Their stories of abuse, deprivation and loss profoundly impacted their lives and their views of family life and relationships.

Family and food are also tightly connected because our everyday interactions surround mealtime. The everyday acts of cooking and eating expresses the relationships between the individual and the family. For example, Marjorie DeVault explores how women living in 1980s Chicago saw feeding families as a critical activity and embedded in family roles and relations.

³⁵⁸ Marlene Epp, "The Memory of Violence: Soviet and East European Mennonite Refugees and Rape in the Second World War," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 58-87; *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Pamela Sugiman, "'Life is Sweet': Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians," *Journal of Canadian History* 43, no. 1 (2009): 186-216; "Passing Time, Moving Memories: Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadian Women," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 37, no. 73 (2004): 51-79; See also Srigley, "Stories of Strife?"; Paula J. Draper, "Surviving the Survival: Women, Memory and the Holocaust," in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 399-414.

³⁵⁹ Gadi BenEzer, "Trauma Signals and Life Stories," in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, eds. Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff and Graham Dawson (New York: Routledge, 1999), 29-30.

Since it represented part of women's work of care, it also created inequality because it maintained women's financial dependence on their husbands and fathers.³⁶⁰ Indeed, Diane Tye reveals in her *Baking as Biography* that not all women enjoyed the work of preparing foods for their families or had reputations as fine cooks but they performed this work in response to family needs.³⁶¹ There is also the notion of comfort foods or foods that connect and sustain an individual's feeling of family, culture and self-identity. As Julie Locher and others explain, "consuming food items intimately linked with one's past, may repair such fractures by maintaining a continuity of the self in unfamiliar surroundings."³⁶² Comfort foods are not always positive though, as interviewees Ione Barré and Catherine Paterson both recalled overeating as a coping mechanism for stress and unhappiness in their family lives. Food is closely connected to families and women's role within those families. The introductory narrative reminds us of this, as we read about a grandmother attempting to reestablish family connections and cultural foodways for her granddaughter in a new context.

'We were just the two of us, we were not a traditional family': Food and Family Dynamics

In post-1945 North Bay as elsewhere in Canada, family mealtime was very much a gendered responsibility; women were tasked with preparing nutritious food, ensuring everyone sat down at the table and enjoyed their meal. To keep positive family relationships, social commentators encouraged women to spend more time dedicated to cooking and household work. For example, as a weekly columnist in the *North Bay Nugget*, Ruth Millet offered her own version of the homemaker ideology when she scolded "bored" women for making home

³⁶⁰ Marjorie L. DeVault, *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10-11; 137.

³⁶¹ Diane Tye, *Baking As Biography: A Life Story in Recipes* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 4-5.

³⁶² Julie L. Locher et al., "Comfort Foods: An Exploratory Journey Into the Social and Emotional Significance of Food," *Food and Foodways* 13, no. 4 (2005): 274; 280. See also Marlene Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 314-40; Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

life tedious for their children and husbands. As an antidote, she recommended her column (an “eye-opener”) and admonished them to use meal-planning schedules to ensure life “isn’t dull or uninspired.”³⁶³ In another column Millet expanded on this line of rationale, telling women that all of their efforts will “pay off...in making a home a happier, more inviting place for her husband and children.” She urged women to continuously improve their cooking skills “by varying [their] menus enough and trying new recipes often enough to make eating at home the kind of pleasure it can be at the best restaurants.”³⁶⁴ Staying on top of these domestic responsibilities, and even getting ahead by learning new skills and dishes, supposedly made sure families wanted to spend time together at the dinner table. At the same time, women also felt discouraged. A woman writing into Millet’s column recounted her efforts to “please” her husband, by making “a really delicious meal” and baking and frosting a cake for her mother-in-law. Yet these were all “forgotten” when she neglected to pick up cream for his breakfast: “My husband was furious and slammed out of the house without his breakfast.”³⁶⁵ These ideas about the postwar Canadian home, promoted family models with a breadwinning husband and a devoted stay-at-home wife, who apparently had all day to invent new meal ideas and prepare them.³⁶⁶ It ignored real gender inequities such as a wife working all day to make her family happy, only to have a door slammed in her face when she forgot to pick an item up at the grocery store.

Family mealtimes were designed to create bonds among members, as they sat around the table, shared a meal and engaged in conversation. In this family dinner scenario, the actual food was secondary, the priority being the time family spent together discussing their day at work,

³⁶³ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 13 February 1956.

³⁶⁴ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 2 October 1951.

³⁶⁵ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 20 March 1953.

³⁶⁶ Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 186-191; Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 171; 176. As Korinek explains, there was great complaint when *Chatelaine* omitted “The Meals of the Month” menu page, as readers wrote in to explain how helpful this source was to their meal planning.

home and school, upcoming events as well as came to resolutions about pressing issues. Family members crammed around the sometimes too small dinner table, bringing in extra chairs from other rooms and hitting elbows with one another. This family space also marked respectability, as manners and etiquette were learned and rehearsed. The dinner table was designed as a space for family sharing and togetherness.³⁶⁷ Francis Fennel recalled the importance of family members spending time around the dinner table. Fennel and her husband raised their three children in a mobile home. This home created continuity for their children because their home stayed the same as her husband travelled to different northern Ontario communities searching for mining work. Mealtime also formed part of this consistency. As Fennel described, “We had a long table with a lift up leaf, and the three kids sat on one side and we sat on the other side. We had conversation, and really enjoyed the conversation.”³⁶⁸ With so much movement and change, the same home and the routine of mealtime created stability in the lives of this family. For Rosa Valentti, it was not only about the conversations her family shared but also about the act of sharing food. She remembered her family often had a meal of polenta sitting around their dinner table in Carpinone, Italy. She described this dish as being “like lasagna,” where her mother repeated layers of “polenta, then sauce and cheese” until “you filled up the pan.” Setting this meal down in the middle of the table, the family did not use separate plates but took bites with their utensils from the shared container. As Valentti described, “That was a good meal for us, it was the best one.”³⁶⁹ The family worked together all day on the small, scattered plots of land they owned, living off the produce and grains grown baking breads, making pastas and preserving tomatoes, corns and beans.³⁷⁰ Meat was a rare occurrence in their diet.³⁷¹ The sharing

³⁶⁷ Steven Gdula, *The Warmest Room in the House: How the Kitchen Became the Heart of the Twentieth-Century American Home* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), xii-xiv.

³⁶⁸ Francis Fennel, interview, 14 November 2012.

³⁶⁹ Rosa Valentti, interview, 30 April 2009.

³⁷⁰ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 10-14.

³⁷¹ Valentti, interview.

of this polenta dish was a satisfying meal, marking a break from the strain of work where they could enjoy each other's company over food. Enjoying a meal with family members offered an opportunity for eating and togetherness.

While designed as spaces for conversation, families also ate meals separately due to conflicting and busy schedules. Recalling her family's mealtime, Annemarie Vos explained, "We always had dinner together. It was on the table, not in the kitchen." She compared it to today, saying, "It's not like now, where you have a microwave and anybody can come at anytime."³⁷² A single mealtime was important not only for family connection, but also helped to save domestic labour as there was not the modern technology of microwaves to easily warm up leftovers. The timing for a singular family mealtime did not work out for everyone, as Lillian Harris attested. Harris's husband worked as a contractor in the city of North Bay. She remembered that starting out "[money] was tight," and the family prioritized their monthly fifty-dollar mortgage payment. She explained with three children, "I don't remember skimping on food, we always had pretty good meals. But clothes and stuff like that." Since this family was just starting off, her husband worked long hours to ensure they met their monthly bills often leaving at seven in the morning and not returning until well past seven at night. This schedule often required Harris to put on two dinner times, with her children fed earlier and her husband later on. For Harris, it was especially crucial to serve her husband a good meal because he had "worked hard and didn't eat too much in the morning when he was building."³⁷³ Separate mealtimes created extra work for women like Harris as they organized schedules, heated up leftovers and sometimes, cooked separate meals depending on appetites and tastes. It also meant that family members were not always together during mealtimes, and conversation and catching up had to be done in another time and space.

³⁷² Annemarie Vos, interview, 8 May 2012.

³⁷³ Lillian Harris, interview, 9 May 2012.

Mealtimes were not always spaces intended for conversations. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie were a religious congregation based in North Bay; as nurses and teachers, this community of women religious were seen as fulfilling an impetus for “women of the North, to minister in the North.”³⁷⁴ In the years before Vatican II, young women entering this community found themselves in a highly ordered world designed to ensure they met and finished the requirements of their vocation. These young women undertook many years of prayer, study and work as a postulant and then a novitiate before becoming a full sister. It was during these initial years of training that the Sisters remembered the separation of sacred and secular spaces. This division was designed to give young women space for quiet reflection as they contemplated religious life.³⁷⁵ The women had little contact with their families, and in one instance a young woman’s decision to enter broke her Protestant grandmother’s heart and they never spoke again.³⁷⁶ In another example, young women went to the North Bay Normal School to receive their teacher training. During lunchtime and breaks, Sister Doreen Campbell remembered they had a special “room there for us, just Sisters because we didn’t socialize with the rest of the students.”³⁷⁷ There was a fear that allowing young women to participate in secular spaces reminded them of the family, friends and lives they left behind, raising questions and making them uncertain about their decision to enter into religious life. Even among the young postulants and novitiates, there were few spaces for interactions. Meals were eaten in silence. As Sister Jackie O’Brien explained, the young women ate breakfasts and dinners in silence and they “couldn’t speak to anyone for anything.” O’Brien said how “terrible” this silence was to experience: “You’re silent before you go [to work], you’re silent when you’re there, you’re

³⁷⁴ Sister Jackie O’Brien, interview, 14 August 2007.

³⁷⁵ Jennifer Hough Evans and Katrina Srigley, “‘Women of the North, Ministering in the North’: Understanding the Sisters of St. Joseph Through Memory and Space, 1940-1980,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 47, no. 93 (May 2014): 46-48.

³⁷⁶ Sister Rosemary Carroll, interview, 5 July 2007.

³⁷⁷ Doreen Campbell, interview, 21 March 2008.

silent when you come home.”³⁷⁸ For this religious community, mealtime was a space intended for silence and reflection. It was not a space to talk with other young women about your day or your questions and doubts about life as a vowed woman.

Mealtimes involved work, tension and stress. Annemarie Vos worked as a cook for a lumber camp in Temagami, Ontario. The lumber camp had no hydro and no running water. Getting up at five o’clock in the morning to prepare breakfast for the lumber workers, Vos recalled that on frigidly cold mornings in the depth of winter everything was “frozen stiff” until a fire got started on the woodstove. After making breakfast, she quickly laid out the fixings for the men’s lunches usually consisting of cold meats, cheddar cheese, freshly baked bread “and you had to bake cookies, *collettes*”; once they left for their day of work, Vos got to the work of making the men’s supper. Shaking her head in laughter and disbelief, she said “I don’t know how I did it all.” When I followed up and asked how she had managed it all, she thought, “Well I was young. You did what you had to do.” With all of this work and effort, we can sympathize with Vos when she had to deal with the complaints of one particular Italian worker. The rules around mealtime at the lumber camp dictated that men sat down at the table, ate and there was to be no conversation. One night the worker who “always had complaints,” sent a note to the kitchen in order to voice his criticism about the “nice stew” dinner Vos had prepared. Fed up, Vos said to him, ““You don’t like the food, you don’t have to eat it.’ And then I took the whole bowl of stew and just poured it over him.” The other male workers were shocked by Vos’s confrontational actions. When she came back after the birth of her first son to cook again, they still remembered and talked about the incident.³⁷⁹ These male lumber workers encountered strict structures around mealtimes. This was an orderly space to eat food, not a space to form bonds and make conversation. Vos’s memory also demonstrates the tensions surrounding mealtime. A

³⁷⁸ O’Brien, interview.

³⁷⁹ Annemarie Vos, interview, 8 May 2012.

woman did her best to put a meal on the table to satisfy the appetites of 60 to 70 lumber workers with very little help and technology. When her efforts were routinely criticized, she reached her breaking point. Challenging gender codes of polite femininity and shocking the male workers, Vos stood up for herself clearly outlining behaviours that would and would not be tolerated.

A break from the routine of sitting at the table marked a bit of fun in family lives. Lillian Harris recalled her children loved Fridays, for the chance to eat TV dinners in front of the television. “They thought they were wonderful with little sections, a little bit of mashed potatoes, a little bit of gravy and chicken or something,” said Harris. For the children, the best part was that “it was just different” because they ate their meals in front of the television, a space where they were not as concerned with manners and decorum. Even though “there wasn’t much on,” invariably excitement also surrounded watching the black and white television, a still novel innovation.³⁸⁰ Trudy Nelson recalled her Friday night routine with her youngest son. Although uncertain if the meals she served her family were tasty, she did know for certain they stayed within her budget. In a record book, Nelson kept track of the prices paid for items such as bread for eight cents, helping to stay within her weekly allotment for groceries. She also knew that her family appreciated her efforts. Turning to their four children, her husband would say after dinner “now thank your mother for that nice meal.” Nelson thought, “They had to thank me whether they liked it or not.” When her husband died in a car accident at 52 years old, three of her sons had already reached an age where they had moved out of the house. Having a child later in life, Nelson was left to raise her nine-year old son on her own. As she described it, “We were just the two of us, we were not a traditional family.” After shopping on Friday night, she recalled how all of the groceries were nice and fresh. She made up a special plate of these foods for her son, including split peas, a peeled orange, dates—“everything so that we didn’t have to cook.” This soon became their Friday routine, and as Nelson said “we would call it ‘mom, can I

³⁸⁰ Harris, interview.

have my plate of odds and ends.”³⁸¹ The family and food dynamics for Nelson changed with age, the moving out of children and the death of her husband. As mother and son, Nelson did not see them as living in a traditional or typical family model. She created rituals for the two of them in some ways compensating, but in other ways creating spaces for mother-son bonding and fun.

The style and design of meals provided opportunities to reinforce class status to friends and family. Gettie Brown clarified that her family ate meals around the kitchen table, “and if we had company it was on the dining room table.”³⁸² The Brown’s afforded the space and furnishings for two separate eating areas; undoubtedly this signified their middle-class status. It was a space to celebrate special guests, meals and occasions, separating them from the everyday practices of mealtime in the kitchen. This marking of status, importance and difference could also be accomplished through dinnerware.³⁸³ Many of the women remembered purchasing plain and patterned china to be used on special occasions. T.M. Palmer, a jewelry and fine china retailer in North Bay, advertised a 32 piece service set for six starting at nearly eight dollars as well as a 66 piece service set for eight starting at nearly thirty dollars.³⁸⁴ The prices were certainly set to appeal to a range of customers. The type of china, number of pieces, where it was purchased and when it was used were also details women noted in interviews conveying their class status as well as memories of family. Near the end of our interview, Dora Pitt stood up and guided me over to her bookshelf. Tucked among photographs of her family, she picked up a delicate cup and saucer painted with pink roses and rimmed in gold. Although unable to afford an entire set of fine china, Pitt’s husband bought her this cup and saucer as an anniversary gift. It remained in a place of pride, a reminder of her relationship with her husband and their

³⁸¹ Trudy Nelson, interview, 29 August 2012.

³⁸² Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012.

³⁸³ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 110-113.

³⁸⁴ T.M. Palmer advertisement, *North Bay Nugget*, 17 October 1945.

marriage.³⁸⁵ Nora Stewart recalled her parents' discussion about their good, Spode china. When her father asked why the family did not use the good dishes everyday, her mother responded that the set was to be saved for special occasions. As Stewart animatedly recounted, "he looked around, he looked at her and he looked at me. And he finally said, who is more important in this house, the people that are here everyday or someone who comes once in a while." Summing up, Stewart said, "After that, we used the good dishes for supper every night."³⁸⁶ Women used mealtime spaces and utensils to mark class identity, family relationships and memories. Where they ate and the tools they ate with, sent messages to family members and outsiders about the significance of the occasion and those seated around the table.

The sharing of food also marked religious identity, a way to both observe religious practices and push back against perceived restraints. For instance, Gettie Brown still observes Shabbat on Friday evenings with her husband. Brown practiced this observance when raising her two children, blessing the candles and challah bread as well as drinking wine.³⁸⁷ In their home, religion, food and family were strongly interconnected. It also signified a special reminder and reaffirmation of their Jewishness, while living in a largely Anglo-Protestant and Franco-Catholic community. Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman, was brought up Catholic and sent to a Catholic school. On her first day at her new school, Couchie remembered sitting on the bus and being "taunted" by non-Indigenous students because "they didn't want us at their school." As Couchie described, "There was out and out racism going on." She thought if it had not been for her mother insisting they acknowledge their Indigeneity, it might have been easier to assimilate and try to pass as other white students "because some of us were very fair skinned." This racial prejudice also extended into their lunchtime. On Fridays, many Catholics abstain from eating meat to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Good Friday.

³⁸⁵ Dora Pitt, interview, 16 January 2012.

³⁸⁶ Stewart, interview.

³⁸⁷ Gettie Brown, interview.

Normally, Couchie's mother sent her children to school with economical peanut butter and jam sandwiches. But "every now and then on a Friday," Couchie said she subtly challenged these religious dictates and "she would send meat, you know a little hot dog for our lunch." Since meat purchased at the grocery store was such a rare occurrence in their diet, Couchie explained, "We would be so excited that we would have meat sandwiches." This created a problem, however. On Fridays, the Sister and lay teachers sat children on benches around the gymnasium to inspect their lunch "and if there were any meat on it, they'd take it away." Couchie saw a difference in how these teachers responded if they were dealing with Indigenous or non-Indigenous students: "For the non-Native students, if they came with a meat sandwich the nuns and teachers made them another sandwich. But for us no, they just wouldn't bother." There was a difference in treatment based on perceived racial identity. Couchie, nevertheless, devised a plan to allow her to enjoy her special hot dog sandwich. "I got to the point, where I knew they would take the meat and so I would open up my lunch and hide the meat," she said. "And they'd come along and I'd open up my sandwich or hot dog bun and it would be empty, no meat in it." As soon as this inspection finished, Couchie carefully slipped the meat back in undetected. Unfortunately "my poor brothers and sisters never caught on," always losing their meat.³⁸⁸ Family, food and religion came together to mark special occasions and religious observances. When mothers and daughters felt the limitations of their religious identities, they pushed back using food to subtly challenge religious constraints and racial discrimination.

Mealtimes were also a space for tension and conflict, as there were generational and cultural disagreements over taste and food preferences. German-born Elisabeth Meier recalled her increasing desire for her mother and grandmother to cook Canadian foods. Witnessing her longing to blend in with her new Canadian friends, Meier's mother and grandmother did their

³⁸⁸ Marianna Couchie, interview with Françoise Noël, 2005, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

best to make so-called Canadian foods using their established knowledge of recipes such as white sauce.³⁸⁹ When her children were younger, Annemarie Vos remembered sticking to her Swiss-based recipes. But as her children grew older they requested Canadian foods such as hamburger and hot dogs. While she tried to respond to their demands, she also still made them her traditional Swiss fare including tongue sandwiches. As Vos explained laughing, “And my children still tell me, especially the boys, they say mom, those were the most awful lunches. We never could trade with anyone, who the heck wants to eat a tongue sandwich?”³⁹⁰ Despite her children’s preferences and desire to fit in with friends, Vos continued to use her Swiss cooking knowledge and economical recipes. This should be of little surprise given that after her husband went back to university, Vos was often left to raise their four children on her own and took on a part time job at a jewelry store to help financially support their family. Vos neither had the time, nor could she afford the expense of learning new Canadian based recipes. Children of immigrants wanted to blend-in with their peers including in the foods they ate. Their mothers did their best to accommodate their desires, but still employed economical and well-proven recipes.

Stories of Family Struggles, Stories of Hunger

Women, especially immigrant and poor women, shared vivid memories of food deprivation. Such memories provide a stark contrast to the real and idealized food circumstances in post-1945 Canada, even serving to structure in part their memories of healthy and unhealthy family relationships as well as pre- and post-migration experiences.³⁹¹ The economics of purchasing food created moments of stress and uncertainty in women’s lives. As her father developed a dependency on alcohol, Helen Duquette recalled that her mother “was very crabby,

³⁸⁹ Meier, interview.

³⁹⁰ Vos, interview.

³⁹¹ Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback,” 314-40; Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, see esp. chap. 6; Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Diner, *Hungering for America*.

cross and irritable.” It was no wonder, said Duquette, she faced “worry, always the worry.” Their family home was filled with “a lot of tenseness” as the children went cold and hungry. Her mother rationed out food among six children, giving “very small” servings and “no second helpings.” Once her mother had so little food to serve her children, she sent Duquette to school with a cooked date sandwich. Making gestures of vomiting, Duquette explained that even though sickeningly sweet, she forced herself to eat the sandwich because there was simply nothing else. To cope with all of her problems and worries, Duquette described that her mother became “neurotic when it came to religion.” After supper every night, the family said rosaries and litanies. They also fasted from midnight until noon the next day, and were “very strict” about this Catholic observance not even being allowed “a drop of water.” Their mother also had her “own ideas of sin, [where] everything was a sin” and the children had to carefully monitor their behaviours or face harsh censure. Eventually a teenaged Duquette and her sister moved to a boarding house to attend a Catholic high school. Staying with a “darling, lovely little lady,” the sisters enjoyed “the most wonderful meals ever” and learned to make “tarts, roasts and everything.”³⁹² This was a happy time in Duquette’s life. She experienced food security at the boarding house, since mealtime was no longer stress-filled where her mother strained to divide food evenly among many hungry children.

Poor women also gained feelings of relief from consuming small food luxuries and treats. Irene Martin remembered her mother did “everything she could” to support herself and her seven children. According to Martin, her father “was a violent man” who “drank his money,” and “eventually he left and stayed gone, which was very good for us.” Living in poverty, Martin explained “we did not have a lot of variety in our home. It was very common to have macaroni pasta in our house for dinner and nothing else.” “One of the thrills” Martin and her siblings received was cream skimmed from the top of the milk bottle. The family had milk

³⁹² Duquette, interview.

delivered to their home when things were financially stable. When the milk set and the cream rose to the top of the bottle, Martin said, “mom would give us each about a half a teaspoon of just the cream and we would just savour that. It was like receiving the MOST delicious treat you could ever imagine.”³⁹³ This rich and fatty treat represented a small luxury something to look forward to; it was also a mother’s attempt to provide a momentary reprieve for her children from their harsh living conditions. Catherine Paterson’s childhood was marked by memories of hunger, as her foster care mother was frugal, struggling to provide food for the children she took into her home and making strict rules to avoid waste. This greatly affected how Paterson raised her own children as well as her relationship with food. For example, “We had to eat our crusts and if we didn’t, you know. So I don’t eat my crusts anymore—it may sound really stupid.” As a little girl, Paterson also dreamed of a homemade, frosted birthday cake instead of the economical jelly roll she was usually served for the occasion. In direct response, Paterson always made certain to bake her own children elaborate birthday cakes. These cakes had rich butter-based icing, were decorated with “so many colours” and had been cut into different shapes so that they resembled things such as superheroes, butterflies and southern belles. Reflecting on this, Paterson said, “we often give our children what we want.”³⁹⁴ And this was the case for her. Small treats and luxuries marked memories of mothers doing their best to provide for their children, giving them a momentary reprieve from their impoverished circumstances. They also marked something that was denied to them as children, as a part of a larger pattern of economic uncertainty and poverty. Women not only remembered these moments, but also strove to correct them as they grew older and had their own families.

Age and family dynamics also sheltered children from experiencing the realities of hunger and food deprivation. Elfredie Bremmerman and her family of eight travelled by horse

³⁹³ Irene Martin, interview, 25 June 2012.

³⁹⁴ Paterson, interview.

and wagon for ten weeks, fleeing from the Soviet soldiers and eventually making their way just outside of Bremen, Germany. On 21 January 1945, Bremmerman said, still recalling the exact date, the family received orders to evacuate because the Soviets were fast approaching. Leaving their home during the brutally cold winter months, Bremmerman remembered that their two horses, which pulled the wagon, were often “up to their bellies in snow” and ultimately had to be shot; they all feared for the health of her sister’s eight month old infant as well as her mother who had become gravely ill. Bremmerman herself suffered from hearing loss for several weeks due to the piercing sounds of a bomb going off in a nearby field. While they made their hurried migration westward, Bremmerman recalled quite pointedly, “We didn’t have much food.” The family had little time to prepare any food in their hasty retreat, forcing them to rely on food given to them by the local farmers they passed along the journey but, as Bremmerman noted understandingly, “they didn’t have much themselves.” When we discussed the topic of hunger during this time, she said, “It is very strange, it is very weak in my mind that I was hungry. Maybe at the end you don’t know you are hungry.” Still, why was it that although Bremmerman was certain her family and friends had experienced hunger, she herself could not remember having gone hungry? It might be, she thought out loud trying to grapple with this inconsistency in her memory, that “maybe I blocked it out. I think this is maybe what I did.”³⁹⁵ During her interview, Bremmerman shared a photograph of her and her siblings taken just at the beginning of the Second World War. It helps to add context to her memory of hunger. As Marianne Hirsch argues about the “familial gaze,” family photographs are an “inscription of family life and its perpetuation of family ideology.”³⁹⁶ Family photographs link private moments of domestic unity

³⁹⁵ Elfredie Bremmerman, interview, 10 June 2009.

³⁹⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 6-11.

to public thoughts of social conformity.³⁹⁷ In many ways, this photo kept with the conventions of family photography: the oldest and tallest children stood at the back, the daughters had been grouped together and the sons flank them, the daughters wore dresses and the sons suits.³⁹⁸ It was a carefully thought out and structured snapshot of this family. It is also revealing about the seriousness of this time in their lives. They did not have their arms lovingly draped around each other like we might expect among close brothers and sisters, but rather they were held rigidly down at their sides. Bremmerman, standing upfront and surrounded by her older siblings, is the only one who dared a smile. Her coyly tilted head seemed oblivious to the sombre expressions worn by her siblings. The family dynamics in this photograph give us some insight into her lack of memories surrounding hunger. As the youngest child, Bremmerman did not grasp the reality of the family's situation or her family, wanting to shelter her from their tumultuous circumstances, made sure she never went without food.³⁹⁹ To understand her memory or lack thereof, we might also turn to her life stage as well as her community and class status now in North Bay. At seventy-six years old, Bremmerman was most eager to get a copy of her interview transcript to begin recording her life story for her grandchildren. Throughout the interview, she told stories about the comfortable, middle-class lifestyle she and her husband afforded in North Bay: she once worked as a kindergarten teacher and her husband as a civil engineer, the couple owned a motel along Lake Nipissing and she eventually purchased and operated her own lunch diner. They are firmly positioned as members of the middle-class.⁴⁰⁰ Her memories of hunger, as Katrina Srigley has said in a case study of a Depression-era family, did not fit with the story she was constructing for herself (and her grandchildren) about their

³⁹⁷ Kuhn, 13; Catherine Zuromskis, *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

³⁹⁸ Kuhn, 16; 22.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-18.

⁴⁰⁰ Bremmerman, interview.

family's prosperity.⁴⁰¹ On the other hand, she might have also chosen to put a difficult memory of migration and food deprivation behind her.⁴⁰² There are multiple readings of the silence in Bremmerman's narrative. Her memory or lack thereof points to the complex ways immigrant women deal with trauma, hunger and migration.

Hunger also shaped generational memories and the dynamics of mother and daughter relationships. As mother and daughter, I interviewed British-born Eileen Wield and Pamela Handley separately. With her husband enlisted as a soldier in the Second World War, Wield recalled the pressure she felt to secure food for herself and her two daughters. "Oh, you probably spent all morning just waiting in line, you know, for groceries," Wield said. The lines, she emphasized, "weren't just short lines they were long lines" and "if the shop had something special in, the lines were even longer." For all her effort and time spent queuing up in lines, the rations Wield secured were still insufficient prompting her to turn to other means to get the food her family needed. In one particular shop where she purchased eggs, Wield whispered quietly that if she let "the little old man" who ran the shop hold her hand for a few minutes she got a few more eggs for that week. This somewhat disturbing scene shows us the lengths this mother was willing to go to secure extra food for her family.⁴⁰³ From the standpoint of Handley, her mother's persistent and, at times, desperate efforts were largely successful recalling, "We weren't starving by any means." Pausing she added, "Now my mother claims that often she went to bed hungry and maybe she did. But I don't ever remember being hungry. There was always a slice of bread and dripping, there was always something to fill up the holes."⁴⁰⁴ As a mother trying to fill her caregiving role, serve enough food and protect her daughters from

⁴⁰¹ Srigley, "Stories of Strife?", 7-8.

⁴⁰² Pamela Sugiman, "Passing Time, Moving Memories," 54; Eviatar Zerubavel, "Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past," *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 3 (1996): 286; See in particular the story of hunger told by "Clara" in Selma Leydesdorff, "A Shattered Silence: The Life Stories of Survivors of the Jewish Proletariat of Amsterdam," in *Memory and Totalitarianism*, 3rd ed., ed. Luisa Passerini, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 150-152.

⁴⁰³ Eileen Wield, interview, 22 March 2007.

⁴⁰⁴ Pamela Handley, interview, 8 May 2009.

knowing real hunger, the reality was much bleaker. From Wield's perspective, her daughter did not know any different and "what we didn't have to eat, or if we had to go without anything, it was just part of living to her." It was also, according to Wield, due to her own success as a mother: she made smart and thrifty decisions to stretch out food rations; she devoted much of her day to attaining food for the family; and she sacrificed her share of food to her daughters when there was not enough to go around.⁴⁰⁵ The struggle over memory, or the disparity in how food rationing was experienced and remembered by this mother and her daughter, reveals the dynamics of their relationship as well as their different relationships with food. As a young daughter, Handley did not have to deal directly with getting food to feed her family—this was the responsibility of her mother. For her part, Wield, in her related roles as mother and family food provider, had to find ways to satisfy the hunger of her two young daughters and, as she recalled, her struggles and sacrifices were all part of successfully fulfilling those roles.

Mother and daughter relationships were laden with tension over important decisions such as marriage and immigration. After Charlotte Aimes met her would-be husband in 1945, a Canadian soldier on-leave in Paris, she invited him to lunch with her family. Her family saved their ration tickets for two weeks in anticipation of this lunch as Aimes recalled, and were "so proud" they had managed to secure a piece of *tripe* for the occasion. Smiling at the memory, she said her family never found out that her husband thought the *tripe* "was just awful to eat" because he forced himself to eat it, knowing full well the effort put into the meal as well as the significance it held to her family. Indeed, for her family, the sharing of a meal represented a means to introduce themselves to their daughter's date and in some ways, retain their proud middle-class status because they demonstrated that they could still obtain this delicacy even

⁴⁰⁵ Wield, interview.

during conditions of food scarcity.⁴⁰⁶ The relationship between cooking and family took on all together different meanings when Aimes decided to marry her Canadian soldier and immigrate to Canada. With frustration even now in her voice, Aimes remembered that after she married and left Paris, “my mother never forgave me and let me know.” Wasn’t her aunt lucky, her mother asked, because she had a daughter who never married but stayed in Paris to look after her mother?⁴⁰⁷ As oral historian Hilary Kaiser has recorded in her collection *French War Brides in America*, this reaction of disapproval was not only common among French parents, but was often so strong that even when marriages failed, women stayed rather than return back home to France and face their families’ rapprochement.⁴⁰⁸ Aimes’ marriage lasted and, despite her mother’s concern, Aimes travelled every other year to see her family and her mother even came to see her on rare occasion. During her mother’s first trip to North Bay in 1957, Aimes remembered her feelings of anxiety especially surrounding her cooking. To try and impress her mother, she made all the French foods she had grown up eating as well as a few new recipes she had learned since coming to Canada. As Aimes recalled, it did not necessarily go as planned seeing as one afternoon, “my little girl said to her grandmother ‘isn’t mommy a good cook?’ And my mother said ‘it’s no [wonder], you get everything from a can here.’” Whereas in France her mother cleaned vegetables in order to use fresh ingredients in her cooking, in Canada, Aimes conveniently took a can out of her pantry to recreate the same French dishes.⁴⁰⁹ These canned substitutions lacked ethnic validity in her mother’s eyes, and as such the French food her

⁴⁰⁶ Charlotte Aimes, interview, 27 April 2009; Andrea Petö, “Food-talk: Markers of Identity and Imaginary Belonging,” in *Women Migrants from East to West: Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Luisa Passerini et al. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 154-155.

⁴⁰⁷ Aimes, interview.

⁴⁰⁸ Hilary Kaiser, *French War Brides in America: An Oral History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2008), li; See esp. the stories titled “Hi Red!” and “Ma Petite France.”

⁴⁰⁹ Aimes, interview. For an interesting discussion on the cooking customs of women living in France, see Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, “The Nourishing Arts,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), 67-77.

daughter made “wasn’t French.”⁴¹⁰ There was more underlying her mother’s reaction. In many ways, the canned food signified her daughter’s changing ethnic identity because she blended Canadian and French food practices. Food here symbolized strains within a family; a daughter tried to maintain a connection with the homeland and family she left behind through her cooking but was told her efforts were not good or French enough.

It was not just immigrant women who felt tensions in mother and daughter relationships over the subject of food. English-Canadian Catherine Paterson’s biological mother was left with seven children after ending her relationship with Paterson’s biological father. Her biological mother was unable to raise them on her own and thus, most of the children were split up and placed into foster care homes. Paterson and her younger sister managed to stay together, and by the ages of five and six found a permanent home with a foster family. In her interview, Paterson expressed her still conflicted feelings about her foster mother. She realized her foster mother “had to be frugal,” and “didn’t have much time” because she took in foster children. But at times it felt too demanding and restrictive. If the children slept-in past nine thirty in the morning, they went without breakfast. If they did not eat their meal, they had to sit there until finished or, as Paterson described, “if we didn’t finish, we would have to the next morning.” Her foster mother used food as a source of punishment, something to be given and taken away in response to children’s behaviours. Struggling to fit in within this family, religion came to occupy a significant role in Paterson’s life as she regularly attended church from the age of five years old. Discussing her relationship with religious figures and quoting scripture throughout our interview, it became clear that Paterson not only had strong religious convictions but that those convictions had been an important source of help and guidance during this difficult time in her childhood. Her environment growing up also impacted her relationship with food. Paterson confessed that she now tends to hoard food. On top of her refrigerator during our interview, she

⁴¹⁰ Aimes, interview.

stashed four boxes of maple flavoured cookies. Paterson explained it was not only about seeking out savings through sales but also about food security.⁴¹¹ Having prepared foods stored in the freezer or a full pantry, provided Paterson with a sense of food security and reassurance. She no longer worried about hunger or that food would be taken away to reprimand her behaviours.

Women also recalled fights over food and cooking, perhaps mirroring internal struggles they were having within their families. Helen Duquette, Eva Wardlaw and Frieda Kendall were divorced and widowed mothers, who also worked as full-time teachers in North Bay. They all discussed the inner turmoil they experienced negotiating their work obligations with their desires to be good and present mothers.⁴¹² In the case of Wardlaw, she hired a domestic to help alleviate some of her housework.⁴¹³ Others like Kendall were unable to afford the cost of this extra help. Indeed, Welsh-born Kendall recalled with a sense of bitterness still evident in her voice all these years later, her feeling of being “stuck” in North Bay. In 1964, she had followed her husband, who had been stationed at Canadian Forces Base North Bay. But after he died, unexpectedly, two years later, she could not afford to move and had to find a job to support herself and her two children. She did not have the kin support that many Canadian and even immigrant women enjoyed. As she put herself through college and later became a full-time teacher, it was often her children who would “start the meal at night” and “get things going” until she arrived home. This too was problematic for Kendall, especially in regards to her son’s role in the kitchen. Positing strict gender roles, she explained, “I thought it was just the girl who should cook, not the boy, and he was always in the kitchen.” Believing that her son was “not supposed to cook,” she added: “I used to kick him out, I used to get annoyed.”⁴¹⁴ Kendall considered life in North Bay a struggle in part because her family situation did not conform to

⁴¹¹ Paterson, interview.

⁴¹² Duquette, interview; Eva Wardlaw, interview, 27 August 2012; Frieda Kendall, interview, 21 April 2009.

⁴¹³ Wardlaw, interview.

⁴¹⁴ Kendall, interview.

normative expectations: she was a single mother in the 1960s. Like other working women, Kendall encountered messages delivered by popular publications such as *Chatelaine* and even the *North Bay Nugget*, which may have lauded women who had jobs and outside interests, but nevertheless reminded them—through the expert advice of nutritionists and fashion food makers—that at the end of the workday, their priority still needed to be meal planning and preparation. Letting your children (and especially son) satisfy this food role, even partly, the experts suggested, could lead to delinquent and deviant children—undermining a mother’s confidence in her ability to both raise her children and hold down a job.⁴¹⁵ Kendall’s story also suggests how family dynamics shaped perceptions of her home life and North Bay. Supporting a family of three on a teacher’s modest salary, she saw her son’s presence in the kitchen as further evidence of the strain under which she lived.⁴¹⁶ Highlighting contradictions between gender prescriptions and reality, Kendall’s memories of food, and especially the labour involved to produce it, were further reminders that life in this northern Ontario city had not worked out as expected.

The Extensions and Limitations of Family

The heterosexual, nuclear family promoted images where husbands were primary breadwinners, and women took responsibility for domestic work as well as caregiving for children. Despite this purported image of normality, many women remembered far more complex family arrangements.⁴¹⁷ These women welcomed the role of extended kin in their family lives, made vital financial contributions to their families and reached difficult decisions

⁴¹⁵ Sherrie A. Inness, “‘The Enchantment of Mixing Spoons’: Cooking Lessons for Girls and Boys,” in *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender and Race*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 128-133; Adams, 25-32; Franca Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food,” in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 197-200.

⁴¹⁶ See esp. “Introduction” in Sherrie Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 1-16.

⁴¹⁷ Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters*, 37-38; Dua, 237-239.

to leave unhealthy (and sometimes unsafe) family situations. Extended family members played prominent roles in the lives of Métis and Anishinaabe women. Nicole Petrant-Rennie, a Métis woman, recalled, “Grandparents were very big in our lives.... They were as big as parents in terms of you saw them on a daily basis, they helped feed you, they helped clothe you, they helped raised you, you slept there.”⁴¹⁸ Asked who played a strong role in her childhood, Darlene McIsaac responded, “My grandmother.” As she explained, it was often the women who took charge of family responsibilities “because the men were out doing things...[and] a lot of times they weren’t there.” Grandmothers, aunts and sisters played significant roles, and as McIsaac said, “there was no such thing as saying: ‘I don’t have to listen to you; you’re not my mother.’ You didn’t dare say that. No, you did what you were told and you did it quickly.”⁴¹⁹ Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman, did not recall the gender division among families. In her Duchesnay Creek home on Nipissing First Nation territory, extended family members lived in close proximity, often as next-door neighbours. Aunts and uncles surrounded them, and “if we were in their yard, and if we were doing anything wrong—we were told and we were disciplined.” Rather than feeling hemmed in by all of these parental figures, Couchie remembered “you had the nice feeling all around here, you had aunts, uncles and grandparents.” At Christmas time, they ran back and forth between family members’ houses. “It wasn’t grandiose, our folks couldn’t afford much,” but they wanted to share their excitement.⁴²⁰ Extended family members played meaningful roles in young women’s everyday lives; they took part in disciplining, feeding and raising these women, creating feelings of safety and support. More so, the Indigenous women interviewed respected the role of extended family members in

⁴¹⁸ Nicole Petrant-Rennie, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

⁴¹⁹ Darlene McIsaac, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

⁴²⁰ Couchie, interview.

their lives, listening to their voices, acknowledging and accepting their discipline as well as being grateful for their guidance and presence.

Non-Indigenous women also lived with extended relatives, creating strategies and sharing in the responsibilities of preparing meals every night. For the first few months of her marriage, Gettie Brown lived with her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law performed the majority of the cooking and Brown acted as her “assistant”.⁴²¹ Other women used this strategy to escape abusive relationships with their husbands. Nora Stewart recalled she was married for two years when she decided to divorce her physically abusive husband. One night, Stewart described, her husband arrived home intoxicated and asked “to bring his girlfriend home to live with us.” When Stewart adamantly refused, he threw her down a set of stairs in their home. Waking up the next morning bruised and with a broken shoulder, Stewart said, “I picked up my car keys, picked up my cat and left.” She later served him with divorce papers while he was still locked up in jail on domestic violence charges. Incredibly proud that she had taken the steps to press legal charges against her husband, Stewart noted that few women at that time sought redress through the courts. As Annalee Golz argues, women like Stewart who pressed charges against the violent men in their lives defended their right to physical safety and asserted their right to legal protection.⁴²² Stewart rebuilt her life away from her husband, continuing to “cook a proper dinner every night.” Her grandmother and later her mother eventually moved in with Stewart, and the women divided the cooking responsibilities among themselves. This was especially helpful because Stewart worked full-time as a medical secretary at a psychiatric hospital outside of North Bay.⁴²³ In this instance, the strategy of female relatives moving in helped to share the cooking responsibilities as well as the everyday labour and costs of running a

⁴²¹ Gettie Brown, interview.

⁴²² Annalee Golz, “Uncovering and Reconstructing Family Violence: Ontario Case Files,” in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 300.

⁴²³ Stewart, interview.

home. It also provided Stewart with a safe and secure environment surrounded with loving female figures in her life. Women like Stewart did not live in a nuclear family arrangement, finding instead a healthy and satisfying life with their female kin.

Poor and working-class daughters made vital contributions to the food and financial responsibilities of their families' homes. Rather than challenging their assigned gendered roles, their contributions were seen as fulfilling their roles as dutiful daughters.⁴²⁴ When attending high school, Ione Barré recalled going for lunch at her grandmother's home in Kirkland Lake, Ontario. Her grandmother's home was usually filled with savoury smells of onion and meat frying in the pan. She enjoyed this meal but also felt pangs of guilt, as she said, "I felt very bad about it, because I thought I am having a good meal and the kids back home may not be having a very good one." At the age of sixteen years old, Barré dropped out of high school to take a job as a telephone operator. As the oldest of seven children, Barré was expected to contribute her entire wage to the family economy. It was also assumed that no longer in school she would take more responsibilities at home, helping to care for her younger siblings as well as preparing their meals.⁴²⁵ Dora Pitt found herself in a similar situation. Her mother passed away when Pitt was eight years old, leaving Pitt and her three siblings with their father who was a physically abusive alcoholic. Her childhood was marked with "a lot of beatings" and not a time in her life she likes to revisit often. Pitt left school in grade seven; as her older sister got a job in the paid labour force, it was Pitt's turn to take over the cooking, house cleaning and caring for her younger brothers. Eventually Pitt came to an age where she entered the paid workforce, getting hired in the nurse's dining room at a local hospital. She lived and ate meals at the hospital, finding a partial respite from her father's abuse. She continued to return to the family home preparing meals for her brothers and cleaning their laundry. Pitt also contributed financially giving her

⁴²⁴ Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters*, see esp. chap. 2, "Breadwinning Girls and Substitute Mothers: Negotiating Family Responsibilities."

⁴²⁵ Ione Barré, interview, 26 June 2012.

father sixteen dollars from her twenty dollars a month pay cheque. When she asked to keep a bit more from her pay, explaining, “I can’t manage on four dollars a month,” Pitt’s father exploded. Throwing her pay in her face, he yelled “you greedy little bitch, what do you want the whole thing?” Ultimately her brothers were taken away from her father, with the family court judge explaining, “any father that would take as much as you did from your daughters, and they weren’t even living at home—doesn’t deserve a family.”⁴²⁶ Daughters brought home wages essential to their family well-being and survival. In some instances they helped out of a sense of obligation to their parents, but it was also out of feelings of love and concern for their younger siblings. Doing so, daughters sacrificed their education as well as jeopardized their physical wellbeing.

At times, the sacrifices asked of daughters became too much and they made difficult decisions to leave their families. After being evacuated from their home, Lottie Frenssen and her family found themselves living in a cramped apartment in Hof, Bavaria. With a pain still evident all these years later, Frenssen recalled, “my father unfortunately could not take it and get used to all the problems.” To numb himself, Frenssen explained, “He started drinking and needless to say he ended up an alcoholic and died as such.” With Frenssen’s father abusing alcohol as a means of escaping their living conditions and all they had lost, and her two older siblings already out on their own, her mother then turned to her and said “Lottie, you’ve got to help out.” Out of obligation to her family, Frenssen made the difficult choice to drop out of nursing school, and she and her younger sister found work weaving fabric in a factory, where they often did not return home until eleven o’clock at night. As she described their demanding schedule, she said, “You couldn’t slack off because mother did not have the money to feed us just for the love of it, although I am sure she wanted to. But you see, you had to be sensible and go out into the [work] world.” Her mother depended on their wages to get by and feed their family. Ultimately though,

⁴²⁶ Pitt, interview.

the constant sacrifices became too much. “And by the time I was nineteen, I was just fed up with everything,” she said carefully selecting her words. “Not having an extra mark, a German mark, to go to a movie because Mom said it would buy a loaf for the other ones.”⁴²⁷ This was her ‘last straw’ and it was then that she decided to join the 25, 000 other single German women who had become domestics and immigrated to Canada.⁴²⁸ For some daughters, years of obligations and sacrifice for their families wore on them and they actively looked for an escape.

Mothers also entered the paid workforce, taking on extra domestic work and educating themselves in order to support their families. Ione Barré took in two to three boarders. Responsible for making boarders breakfast and dinner, Barré carried out much of the work for breakfast the night beforehand since she was not a morning person. The extra income from boarders became particularly helpful (and needed) when Barré and her husband divorced.⁴²⁹ Helen Duquette also took boarders into her home. Duquette was raised in a home with an alcoholic father. When her own husband developed the symptoms of alcoholism, she recognized “the drinking pattern that was happening in our family, in my own home.” Indeed, Duquette was grateful that she had took steps to become a qualified teacher since her husband was “off drinking, and we didn’t know where he would be half the time.” As she summed up, “you can tell when you need to make a move forward.”⁴³⁰ Married women who stayed at home, had to weigh their economic survival against their longing for personal and familial safety.⁴³¹ When women like Duquette decided to leave their husbands, they also had to find ways to financially support themselves and their children. Duquette achieved this self-sufficiency by leaving their family home in Port Loring, Ontario and moving with her two daughters to North Bay. She supported her family by teaching, as well as taking in boarders who were usually fellow teachers

⁴²⁷ Lottie Frenssen, interview, 2 June 2009.

⁴²⁸ Alexander Freund, “A Canadian Family Talks About Oma’s Life in Nazi Germany: Three Generational Interviews and Communicative Memory,” *Oral History Forum/ d’histoire orale* 29 (2009): 9.

⁴²⁹ Barré, interview.

⁴³⁰ Duquette, interview.

⁴³¹ Golz, “Uncovering and Reconstructing Family Violence,” 292.

or students attending the city's Normal School. Waking up at five-thirty in the morning, Duquette prepared breakfast and packed lunches for her daughters and the boarders. She did her best to prepare for the week ahead by cooking as much as possible on weekends, but there were still foods like bread, pasta and potatoes that needed to be cooked fresh daily. And it was not just food, as Duquette was also responsible for the washing, ironing and cleaning or as she put it "I had to do everything." This was an extremely busy time in her life balancing the work of running a boarding house, teaching school full-time and being a single parent to two daughters. But for her this work was well worth the effort as she finally felt her family was "in a safe place. I felt safe." Her ex-husband challenged those boundaries showing up at their home unannounced. She would call her brother as well as the police to help remove him from their home. As Duquette said, "They get to that point with drinking they're not normal, they're like a time bomb. I don't think he'd ever hurt them, but you don't know. You couldn't take a chance. Plus the girls didn't know."⁴³² Contrasting the image of a dependent, stay-at-home mother, Duquette took steps to financially provide for her family finding paid work as a teacher as well as running a boarding house. Duquette did her best to give emotional stability to her daughters, creating a safe environment for herself and her daughters away from their unpredictable father. When she felt this was threatened, she asked for help from trusted sources.

Conclusions

At the end of our interview, Italian-born Maria Battaglia and her son joked about her secrecy surrounding her recipes. Battaglia refused to share some of her son's favourite recipes with his wife. In some ways this was a bit of family fun, teasing. But in other ways it speaks to an elderly mother's desire to ensure her son and his family still came to her dinner table every Sunday night for a family dinner.⁴³³ Many family interactions were centered on food: sharing

⁴³² Duquette, interview.

⁴³³ Maria Battaglia, interview, 16 July 2009.

meals around a table, observing religious traditions and struggling to put nutritious dishes on the table. Women's memories of these food-focused interactions reveal their complexity and emotional tone.

Women's memories also reveal the ways they coped and worked within the image of the nuclear family. Women's food-centered memories tell us that families could be loving, helpful and supportive. For example, families responded when help was needed to prepare a meal or to acquire food needed for hungry children. But memories of families could also be filled with neglect, deprivation as well as mental and physical abuse. Interview questions were not focused on stories of abuse, family turmoil or financial need. But when discussing food, women overwhelmingly recalled these memories. Sometimes these experiences were beyond a family's control because they found themselves confronted with an unexpected death, unemployment or global political events such as the Second World War. In other instances, it was the responsibility of individuals and the dynamics of family relationships that affected those dysfunctional and cruel experiences. Food played a significant role in these intimate family spaces. Wives sought ways to leave abusive husbands, rebuild their lives and continue to feed themselves and their children within a new and safe environment. Daughters looked for ways to separate themselves from unhealthy family situations, and recognize the ghosts that haunted their parents, hopefully ensuring they would not their repeat mistakes. In doing so, women found a type of healing through creating healthy and loving family situations where they had a secure source of food and nourishment.

Chapter 4

Designing Women: Filling Up Home and Kitchen Spaces

As our interview started, English-Canadian Barbara Reid looked into the lens of the camera, fluffed up her short grey hair and laughingly said, “I’m a movie star, Lady Di.” After spending her formative years in northern Ontario communities such as New Liskard, North Bay and Timmins, a seventeen-year old Reid had travelled south to Hamilton to find well paying work in a munitions factory in 1939. She soon started dating a male coworker and, after two years of dating, the couple married. Since factory policy dictated that married couples could not work together, Reid explained, “I ended up not working and just being a housewife. I loved it, I thought it was just wonderful.” The early years of their married life were tight financially as they budgeted to pay rent for an apartment on the third story of a home, for the costs of a newborn son as well as their basic necessities. Unable to afford much in the way of kitchen technology, Reid prepared the majority of their meals on a two-burner hotplate and once a week in an oven when their landlady gave Reid access to the full kitchen downstairs. In talking about this time in her life, Reid remembered the challenge of finding dishes to cook, dealing with wartime rationing and lacking the equipment and adequate physical space to prepare foods.⁴³⁴

The couple returned to North Bay following the end of the Second World War and Reid recalled that after a few years, they managed to eke out a financially comfortable life for themselves and their eventual five sons. One way her husband expressed their new affluence was through purchasing new kitchen equipment and technologies. As Reid remembered, “My husband was very good at buying me kitchen stuff. If it was new and out, I got that. It was a way of keeping me in the kitchen. I got a dishwasher, a stove, a rotisserie....” Her husband’s plan to keep Reid in the kitchen was largely successful, as Reid said “I used to get into the kitchen in the morning, and I used to wonder how come I wasn’t getting out until after supper. But I just

⁴³⁴ Barbara Reid, interview with interview with author, North Bay, Ontario, 12 May 2012. Unless otherwise indicated all interviews were conducted by the author and took place in North Bay, Ontario.

got doing things because I liked doing it, I loved doing it!” And as she rationalized, her husband recognized her enjoyment of cooking and spending time in their home: “I think that he knew that I liked to do that, so he got things for me.” One afternoon though, her husband came home from work and declared “I’ve decided to not buy anymore kitchen things for you because you’ve got enough.” Eight months pregnant at the time, Reid explained he had instead bought her “beautiful black lingerie.” She laughingly recalled her reaction, saying, “I could have killed him! I cried! I said, ‘I can’t wear that! And when I do wear it, you’re not coming near me!’”⁴³⁵

In many respects, Barbara Reid’s narrative highlights wartime and postwar consumption patterns as her young, working-class family moved from a period of thrift to relative prosperity. In moving away from kitchen equipment, her gift served as reminder of her sexuality—an important component of a healthy marriage—even though she certainly struggled with body self-image at this late stage in her pregnancy. Her husband’s gift tells us not only about postwar purchasing power within their family unit, but also about the deeper meanings attached to newly purchased kitchen technologies and equipment. Repeatedly in her interview, Reid stated the great personal satisfaction she derived from preparing foods in the kitchen because her life was very much centered around the home and caring for five sons. In some ways she was speaking back to me, validating her decision to stay-at-home to a young woman she saw as a career-oriented feminist.⁴³⁶ Undoubtedly, Reid also felt surprised at receiving black lingerie because this purchase was seen as a comment not only on her pregnant body, but as well on the value placed on her kitchen and household work that was such an important and encompassing part of her life. This chapter examines the design of home and kitchen spaces as well as the consumption of technology and serving ware to fill those spaces. It seeks to expand our

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Joan Sangster, “Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 87-100; Shayfali Saujani, “Empathy and Authority in Oral Testimony: Feminist Debates, Multicultural Mandates, and Reassessing the Interviewer and her ‘Disagreeable’ Subjects,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 45, no. 90 (November 2012): 361-391.

understanding of women's kitchen consumerism—how they consumed, the items they saw as important purchases and the reasons why and the ways they used them. Rather than static objects of consumption, these everyday objects carried much weight, desire and meaning. Women used, arranged and transformed these objects in ways that reflected their identities, tastes, priorities and daily life activities.

This chapter looks at the food-related items women purchased and filled their kitchen spaces with, and the decisions, opinions and meanings behind such purchases. Classic histories of consumerism by William Leach, Charles McGovern and Susan Strasser laid out the development of a mass consumer culture from the 1880s to the 1930s, whereby advertisers promoted a series of symbols, images and designs of what constituted a good or desirable life. In doing so, advertisers encouraged the consumer to develop an identity of the desiring-self, achieving a sense of individuality, liberty and freedom from their purchase of goods.⁴³⁷ It should not be surprising given the gender division of household labour that women quickly found themselves navigating this consumer terrain.⁴³⁸ In both Canadian and American contexts, feminist readings have looked at female shoppers in this time period not as easily exploitable victims of consumer messaging, but rather as complex consumers with agency, tastes, creativity, financial constraints and desires of their own, who were also not impervious to the powerful messaging contained within advertisements.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

⁴³⁸ Victoria de Grazia, ed., "Introduction," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7-8.

⁴³⁹ Cynthia Wright, "'Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance': Writing Gender into the History of Consumption," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 229–260; "Rewriting the Modern: Reflections on Race, Nation, and the Death of a Department Store," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 33, no. 65 (2000): 153–167; Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Victoria de Grazia, ed., with Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley:

Among women's and gender historians interested in categories of identity, studies of women's consumerism have highlighted the meanings attached to purchases. As Cynthia Wright's important study reminds us, consumption is not merely a series of completed acts as we mentally consume goods through window-shopping and consumer desire.⁴⁴⁰ Elements of desire, imagination and status shape the meanings behind the consumption of goods. In late nineteenth-century British Columbia, for example, white, middle-class women purchased hand woven baskets from Indigenous women, displaying them in their front parlours as souvenirs of authentic "Indian" culture and confirmation of their own class and racial identities.⁴⁴¹ These, and other women like them, did not simply use purchased goods for practical and intended purposes, but rather they attached social and cultural significance to goods, remade them to satisfy their design aesthetics and saw them as reflections of their self-defined identities.⁴⁴² An analysis of women's real and imagined consumption, which is highly attentive to categories of gender, class and race, helps us to understand the purchases women made and did not make and the identities and meanings attached to such decisions.

Research on women's consumer styles or habits also demonstrates the labour involved in the purchase and usage of domestic goods. Praise of women's consumerism was ubiquitous in the post-1945 context. After years of delay, women living in Canada and the United States supposedly found themselves in a context of abundance that offered choice of product,

University of California Press, 1996); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Katrina Srigley, "Clothing Stories: Consumption, Identity, and Desire in Depression-Era Toronto," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 82-104; Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2011); "Negotiating Paternalism: Women and Canada's Largest Department Stores, 1890-1960," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 58-81; Susan Levine, "The Culture of Consumption Reconsidered: Essays in Tribute to Susan Porter Benson," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 10-16.

⁴⁴⁰ Wright, "Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance," 232-233. See also Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴⁴¹ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 88-94; 97. See also Hoganson, *Consumer Imperium*.

⁴⁴² See esp. Joy Parr, chap. 8, "Domesticating Objects," in *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 165-195; Shelley Nickles, "More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America," *America Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Dec. 2002): 581-622.

affordability and the sheer pleasure of shopping. New affluence and modern domestic technologies were framed as “easing the burdens of the home” and freeing up women for more leisure time.⁴⁴³ With the threat of the Korean War and the Cold War, consuming goods to decorate and fill up new, modern households also provided proof of capitalism’s success.⁴⁴⁴ The reality of course, was much different. In their studies of consumerism, Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Joy Parr and Tracey Deutsch show that there was much work, budgeting and deliberation involved in shopping for groceries and household goods. Even new labour-saving strategies and devices were accompanied by rising standards of cleanliness, food preparation and childcare.⁴⁴⁵ Fathers and husbands too faced pressures, as advertisers connected masculinity with a man’s ability to participate in and provide for “household formation and consumption.”⁴⁴⁶ Indigenous, immigrant and poor women found themselves especially targeted by these new modern homemaking practices; their knowledge and strategies were routinely dismissed as backward, unhealthy and inappropriate by social workers and other members of the receiving society.⁴⁴⁷ In

⁴⁴³ Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *The Food Axis: Cooking, Eating and the Architecture of American Homes* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 189-192; Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 183-185; Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 4-10; Franca Iacovetta and Valerie J. Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food,” in *Sisters of Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 198-203; Steve Penfold, *The Donut: A Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 9-13.

⁴⁴⁴ Veronica Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1991): 474.

⁴⁴⁵ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: the Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Parr, *Domestic Goods*; Victoria de Grazia, ed., “Establishing the Modern Consumer Household,” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 151-158; See esp. Deutsch, chap. 7, “Babes in Consumerland,” 183-217.

⁴⁴⁶ Robert Rutherford, “Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Good Life During Canada’s Bay Boom, 1945-1965,” *Journal of Family History* 24, no. 3 (July 1999): 351-353.

⁴⁴⁷ Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 138-148; Krista Walters, “‘A National Priority’: Nutrition Canada’s *Survey* and the Disciplining of Aboriginal Bodies, 1964-75,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 433-451; Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta, “Making Aboriginal People ‘Immigrants Too’: A Comparison of Citizenship Programs for Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples in Postwar Canada, 1940s-1960s,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90:3 (2009): 439; 449-451; Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and*

filling kitchen spaces with food-related items, women engaged new forms of shopping, technology and household practices. The women interviewed designed homes and kitchens, shopped for food-related items and used technology and equipment in ways that satisfied their identities, desires and priorities.

“13 feet of unruffled freedom”: Designing Modern Homes and Kitchens in Northern Ontario

In the post-1945 context, new housing satisfied many Canadians desire for a better familial and material life after years of delay. The overcrowding and lack of money that characterized the Depression, along with the scarcities in skilled labour and building materials during the Second World War, created a huge backlog in demand for new housing and contributed to the deterioration of many homes.⁴⁴⁸ Housing soon developed into a main priority as couples married at younger ages and waited less time to have first and second children and newly arrived immigrants looked to fulfill promises of renewed family life. Veterans especially demanded homes of their own, after years of loneliness and sacrifice in service for their country.⁴⁴⁹ The magnitude of the housing shortage prompted the creation of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 1945, signaling a departure as the federal government became involved in providing mortgages and managing the construction of new suburban developments.⁴⁵⁰ Although largely leaving aside the needs of the poor, the federal preference for subsidizing the construction of single-family dwellings and the efforts of private contractors and mortgage lenders largely addressed the housing problems of a broad cross-section of

Healing in British Columbia, 1900-1950 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), see esp. chap. 2, “‘My People Are Sick. My Young Men are Angry’: The Impact of Colonization Aboriginal Diet and Nutrition,” 19-37.

⁴⁴⁸ Jill Wade, “Wartime Housing Limited, 1941-1947: Canadian Housing Policy at the Crossroads,” *Urban History Review* 15, no. 1 (1986): 42-44. This overcrowding was augmented by war workers moving to industrial centres and servicemen and their families moving near military bases.

⁴⁴⁹ Strong-Boag, 474-475; Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 129-130; John Bacher, “W.C. Clark and the Politics of Canadian Housing Policy, 1935-1952,” *Urban History Review* 17, no. 1 (1988): 11.

⁴⁵⁰ Barbara Wake Carroll, “Post-War Trends in Canadian Housing Policy,” *Urban History Review* 18, no. 1 (1989): 64.

Canadians.⁴⁵¹ By 1949, the *North Bay Nugget* asked its readers “Do you remember all those pitiful ‘house or apartment wanted’ ads that ran in your local paper in which advertisers promised they didn’t drink or smoke...? They seem to be missing from the want ad section these days.”⁴⁵² Indeed, in North Bay alone, the amount of new construction climbed from \$408, 195 in 1945 to \$2.1 million in 1952 reaching \$23 million by 1975.⁴⁵³ In northern Ontario like elsewhere in Canada, postwar prosperity resulted in the construction of new homes and community infrastructure.

The homes women lived in symbolized far more than their participation in postwar prosperity. Houses tended to be Cape Cod-style, and more and more, bungalows and split levels. Developers built homes with little difference between models; most had three bedrooms, a combined living room and dining room and eat-in kitchens. Canadian buyers had an inclination to be more conservative than Americans, more concerned with resale value than experimenting with elements of design.⁴⁵⁴ A weekly feature in the *North Bay Nugget*, “The Home Builder’s Page” provided readers with mock-ups and floor plans for homes (figure 5). A typical plan, showed a split level designed by a professional architect outlining to readers the dimensions of each room, perspectives from each side of the home as well as what type of lot the home would be ideally suited for. Readers could obtain this plan at “minimum cost,” by sending away to the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).⁴⁵⁵ Facing a shortage of skilled tradesman after 1945, the CMHC encouraged “build your own home” schemes. The CMHC provided homebuilders with financing, courses in design and construction, advice on materials as well as

⁴⁵¹ Strong-Boag, 484-485.

⁴⁵² Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 25 March 1949.

⁴⁵³ Kurt Johnson, “North Bay—a rocky site to 81,210 acres,” *North Bay Nugget*, August 1975.

⁴⁵⁴ Strong-Boag, 492; Harris, 144.

⁴⁵⁵ “The Home Builder’s Page,” *North Bay Nugget*, October 1957.

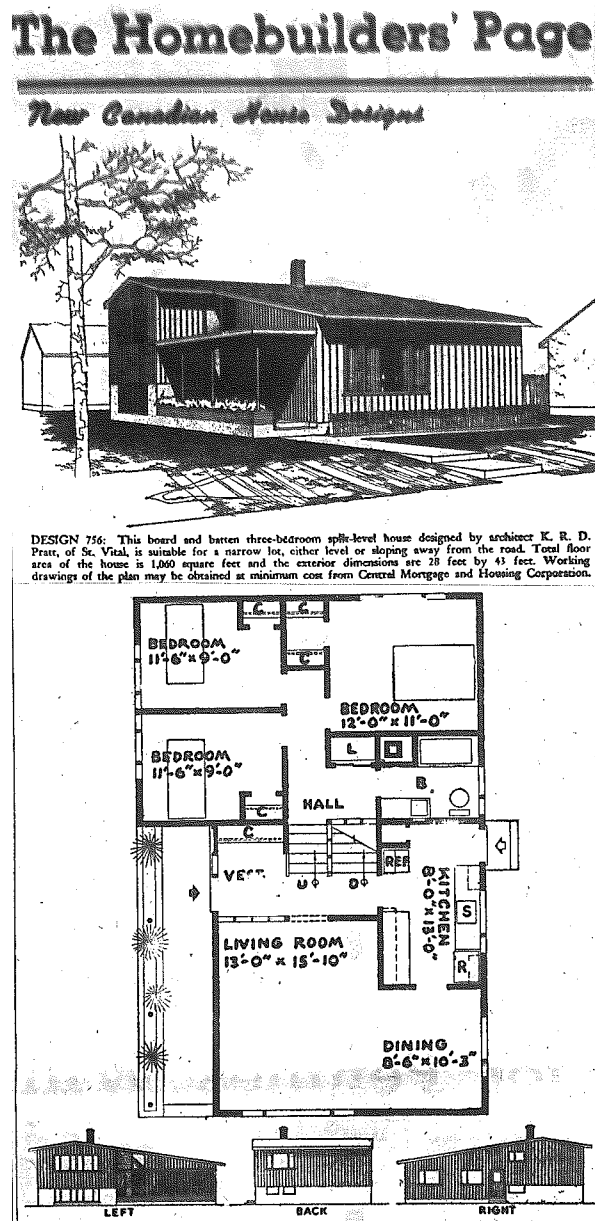


Figure 5: "Home Builders' Page," *North Bay Nugget*, October 1957.
Printed with permission of the *North Bay Nugget*.

onsite instruction and help.⁴⁵⁶ In another example, the description of a bungalow emphasized the potential to customize homes to individual tastes and aesthetics. Displaying the "true advantages of professional design," the kitchen offered "13 feet of unruffled freedom for the housewife" and a rectangular shaped living room "eager for the small touches that make homes sparkle with individual beauty." The blueprints for this home could be purchased for \$9.75 by sending away

⁴⁵⁶ Harris, 117; 148.

to Standard Builders in Toronto.⁴⁵⁷ Although blueprints for homes featured similar design plans and layouts, they offered couples the opportunity to remake this space to suit their tastes and separate themselves from their neighbours. These plans also inferred a gendered division of labour, as men built homes and women decorated them.

Even though newly built suburban home were similar in design, the women interviewed discussed the multiple meanings derived from home ownership as well as their household organization and design. As Alison Blunt and Ann Varley have observed, “As a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life.”⁴⁵⁸ Women attached deeper meanings to their homes, made changes to homes based on the needs, challenges and priorities of their everyday lives and, within their homes, found a setting to play out family, social and cultural relationships.⁴⁵⁹ In the middle of our interview, Gettie Brown abruptly stood up out of her chair to give me a tour of her kosher kitchen. All of her kitchen cupboards and drawers were neatly labeled either meat or dairy, a system she borrowed from a new family member who had converted to Judaism. Brown also carefully pointed out to me the kosher symbol printed on boxed foods, more specifically, her husband’s favourite brand of macaroni and cheese. In giving me a tour of her kitchen, Brown educated a non-Jewish woman about the work she performed to keep her household kosher. As she explained on the subject of keeping kosher, “I am far too old to change. I wouldn’t feel comfortable either.”⁴⁶⁰ Brown’s husband is still a prominent member of the North Bay community, as well as the city’s dwindling Jewish community. Before the start of our interview, her husband brought out a thick,

⁴⁵⁷ “Home of the Week,” *North Bay Nugget*, May 1960.

⁴⁵⁸ Alison Blunt and Ann Varley, “Geographies of Home,” *Cultural Geographies* 11 (2004): 3.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.; K.H. Adler, “Gendering Histories of Homes and Homecoming,” *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 455-456; Alison Blunt, “Cultural Geography: Cultural Geographies of Home,” *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 4 (2005): 507; Mark Llewellyn, “Designed by women and designing women: gender, planning and the geographies of the kitchen in Britain, 1917-1946,” *Cultural Geographies* 11 (2004): 44.

⁴⁶⁰ Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012.

three-inch scrapbook filled with newspaper cutouts and literature reporting on his accomplishments throughout the years. Plunking his binder down on their dining room table, Brown remarked to her husband that the interview aimed to discuss her achievements—it was finally her moment to be interviewed and recognized. Brown felt proud of her accomplishments outside of their family home with Hadassah as well as being President of the Canadian Club in North Bay. But there was also a sense she took the greatest pleasure from raising her two children and maintaining her family's kosher diet (not an easy feat in a small, northern city), while her husband kept busy in the community. Her work and design in the home allowed her husband the time to create a successful business, fundraise for the construction of the local Sons of St. Jacob Synagogue and help to make plans for Nipissing University.

Transformations in kitchens, larger working areas and new equipment signified achievement and success in women's lives. In our opening narrative, for example, Barbara Reid's husband lavished her with kitchen equipment as a signifier of their more comfortable economic circumstances. Gettie Brown shared similar memories about the impact of improved economic circumstances. When Herb and Gettie Brown first married in 1946, they lived for the first few months of their marriage with his mother before purchasing their first bungalow. Just starting out in their first home, Brown recalled, "I didn't have a fridge. I didn't have a washing machine or dryer." It was a welcome reprieve when her mother-in-law came to live with the couple during the winter months because she brought with her a washing machine, a much-coveted labour saver. In 1953, the couple purchased a larger home and, although their new kitchen fit a dishwasher, they still faced spatial constraints. Brown made design changes to their small kitchen to ensure it satisfied their needs and utilized the space they did have. For example, she asked a carpenter to affix a leg to the end of an ironing board that folded up into the wall, figuring "it could drop down and be a little kitchen table for us." As Brown explained, this modification was a quick and practical fix because there was "no room" for a full kitchen

table.⁴⁶¹ This modest kitchen space represented a contrast to the large kitchen, with neatly labeled drawers that I observed on my tour of her current home. Her narrative of starting with very little and working their way up also informed her sense of accomplishment. Indeed, their spacious home and kitchen resulted from years of her unpaid labour and her husband's paid labour.

Women voiced their opinions about the design and layout of kitchen spaces. Lillian Harris and her husband moved from Toronto to North Bay in 1957, allowing her husband to grow his contracting business. In North Bay, the couple first purchased a "little frame house" with no basement. With three children and starting up a new business, Harris vividly remembered their cramped living quarters and tight budget. By 1971, the couple saved enough money to build their dream home on Lake Nipissing, where Harris still resides and our interview took place. For Harris, the most important feature of their new home was a kitchen large enough to accommodate her entire family seated around a table. As the couple worked out a design and drafted plans, her mother chimed in asking if they had considered putting a partition between the kitchen and eating area and the living room area. Harris strongly disagreed with her mother, instead envisioning an open-concept floor plan for her home allowing for greater connections between rooms and one, which would also not see her isolated in the kitchen. Pointing to the areas in her home, Harris noted, "I like the idea that people can do things out here, and they can watch in there."⁴⁶² In this post-1945 context, middle-class women like Harris reassessed their use of eating spaces as separate, formal dining rooms signaled an old-fashioned and older generations' aesthetic. Although it had long been the case for the working-class, members of the middle-class now desired multi-purpose kitchens and eating spaces providing extra room for

⁴⁶¹ Gettie Brown, interview.

⁴⁶² Lillian Harris, interview, 9 May 2012.

children's homework, family recreation and entertaining.⁴⁶³ In talking about her input into the home, Harris demonstrated her design acumen and achievements.

Women also took satisfaction from the compact design of their homes. Francis and Leon Fennel felt very proud of their mobile home. When I mistakenly referred to it as a trailer, Leon Fennel corrected me saying, "People associate a trailer with a mobile home, they are not the same. A mobile home is a home."⁴⁶⁴ The Fennel's mobile home included lots of cupboard space, and a long expandable table that seated all of their family members. According to Francis Fennel, "When you're moving, all you did was put your glasses and dishes in the cupboards, tape the doors, push a pillow in and that was it."⁴⁶⁵ This system worked so well that when the family travelled from Manitouwadge, Ontario to North Bay—a distance of about 875 kilometres—they suffered "not even a broken dish."⁴⁶⁶ Since Leon Fennel's work in northern Ontario mines required frequent travel, the family's mobile home also created a sense of consistency. As Francis Fennel recounted, "It was good, as my little boy said, no matter where we are we are always home."⁴⁶⁷ Added Leon Fennel, "It made a big, big difference to the children. Their toys were in the same place. So it didn't matter if I moved with a job, they moved with me. It sure didn't hurt them."⁴⁶⁸ Although a source of continuity in their lives, they did experience complications with living in a mobile home. For example, when the family moved to White River, Ontario, they found themselves without easy access to water or a washing machine. Undertaking the grueling work of washing her son's cloth diapers in wintertime, Francis Fennel took the diapers down to the stream, breaking through the ice and washing them there.⁴⁶⁹ As Leon Fennel summed up, "and which ever came first clean diaper or

⁴⁶³ Collins Cromley, 177-188; Harris, 144.

⁴⁶⁴ Leon Fennel, interview, 14 November 2012.

⁴⁶⁵ Francis Fennel, interview, 14 November 2012.

⁴⁶⁶ Leon Fennel, interview.

⁴⁶⁷ Francis Fennel, interview.

⁴⁶⁸ Leon Fennel, interview.

⁴⁶⁹ Francis Fennel, interview.

frozen hands, that was it.”⁴⁷⁰ Francis and Leon Fennel maintained a defensive attitude about the mobile home they resided in for the majority of their lives. Theirs was not a traditional, sedentary home.

The amount of space and modern features in new homes also took getting used to, especially for immigrant women. German-born Lottie Frenssen and her family of eight had become refugees at the end of the Second World War leaving behind their home and all their belongings to escape to Hof, Bavaria. As the family got set up in their crowded two-room apartment, Frenssen and her sister begged for food because the rations “only went so long.” The two young sisters went to farms begging, sometimes with their litre can to ask for a bit of milk and other times asking for one potato from one farmer, and a second potato from another farmer until they had collected a small bag of potatoes. When the girls met success, the family ate. Other times, they felt the shame of slammed doors in their faces from farmers who had already given food to other beggars. When we hear Frenssen’s story of begging to try and obtain food, we better understand her amazement at the fully-stocked pantry she encountered at the Millen’s home where she worked as a domestic in North Bay, Ontario. “I was so surprised,” she recounted, when she said that the Millen’s “had a little cupboard in their little pantry.” “Little pantry,” she corrected herself, saying “it was a big pantry” in fact. And “when I open[ed] it up there was tomato soup and you name it and it was in there.” Her awe was only augmented when she realized how easily the pantry was refilled, noting “And whenever you ran out, you made a list. Whatever I could write down it would come the next week and it would be there again.”⁴⁷¹ The pantry in this middle-class household shocked Frenssen. It was a room dedicated to the stockpiling of food, which could effortlessly be replaced and restocked when Mrs. Millen made

⁴⁷⁰ Leon Fennel, interview.

⁴⁷¹ Lottie Frenssen, interview, 4 June 2009.

a shopping trip to the supermarket. The pantry represented a stark contrast between pre- and post-migration food and housing conditions.

For immigrant women, home ownership symbolized a contrast from the contexts of deprivation they had left behind in their European homelands. Although Frenssen moved to North Bay in 1954 (taking an opportunity to escape their difficult circumstances), it was not until 1969, two years after the death of her father, that her mother finally came to visit her daughter and her new son-in-law for the first time in North Bay. After seeing her daughter's home, Frenssen described how her mother "couldn't believe that I was able to live like a millionaire!" As she elaborated, "We have a simple three bedroom bungalow, but to my mother this was a mansion. She just couldn't believe it that her daughter left Germany, and lives in what as far as she was concerned—luxury." When they treated her mother to a cook out on Sagan's Beach, her mother was determined to clean the pot that had been blackened from being on an open fire. Although she told her mother they had cleaning products such as Ajax back at their house, her mother still took the pot down to the lake and put a little sand on it to scrub off the black bottom. As Frenssen explained, her mother "didn't waste any of this stuff." And although her daughter reassured her that "we are now in Canada" where presumably cleaning products were more ample and affordable, Frenssen still could not get that mentality of thriftiness "out of her" as it had been so crucial to their family's survival back in Germany.⁴⁷² Compared against the desperate living conditions and struggles the family encountered in their homeland, Frenssen's mother saw her daughter as living in luxury. At the same time, her experiences with getting by on very little carried over to her new context and she made sure her daughter would not waste anything.

Homes, much like physical geographies discussed in chapter 1, represented racialized stereotypes. Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman, laughingly recalled an encounter with a

⁴⁷² Frenssen, interview.

public school teacher. The teacher was “curious about us, how we lived, and she asked me ‘When you go home, do you live in a teepee?’” She responded to the teacher’s question frankly, saying, “Nooooooo, we live in a house!” This teacher asked questions based on broad, anti-modern stereotypes about Indigenous lifestyles. Couchie explained that “it wasn’t so bad” in the public and private school systems, “but there was the odd thing, when I reflect on them now, I think that was not right, that was not fair.” For instance, “at lunch hour, we were always rounded up and they would check, make sure everyone’s hands were clean.” She remembered there were a few boys, who “lived without electricity and running water and they weren’t always the cleanest.” Couchie continued, “And they would make them go into the washroom and scrub their ears, and scrub their faces and their hands. But I guess that’s hygiene.”⁴⁷³ As Mary Ellen Kelm argues in *Colonizing Bodies*, early twentieth century social commentators saw Indigenous bodies as “naturally inured to filth.” Rather than look at underlying causes such as overcrowding, poverty and malnutrition on reserves, they saw the spread of disease and poor hygiene as the result of “nature” and Indigenous women’s unwillingness to improve their household skills. Although larger environmental issues were recognized by the 1940s, among Couchie’s young classmates it still remained difficult to improve personal hygiene without the aid of running water at home.⁴⁷⁴ White, middle-class teachers asked questions and made assumptions about Indigenous students’ housing and standards of cleanliness.

Home and kitchen spaces could also be settings for welcome and unwelcome guests. Darlene McIsaac, a Métis woman, was uncertain if it was an Indigenous tradition but “anytime anybody came to the house, it didn’t matter how little food you had, you sat them down and made them a cup of tea and you gave them something to eat.” McIsaac and her family lived in a

⁴⁷³ Marianna Couchie, interview with Françoise Noël, 2005, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

⁴⁷⁴ See Mary Ellen Kelm, chap. 3. “‘Running Out of Spaces’: Sanitation and Environment in Aboriginal Habitations,” in *Colonizing Bodies*, 38-56.

Mattawa, Ontario neighbourhood, which was heavily populated by other Indigenous peoples. Although her family was poor, she recalled hospitality remained important to them so when a visitor came to “your house, they were going to be greeted with warmth and food. And then they’d chit-chat. And you may not want their company, but you sure greeted them nicely.”⁴⁷⁵

Marianna Couchie had similar memories in that her family constantly shared food resources and visited with neighbours in their Duchesnay Creek community on Nipissing First Nation territory. Her memories, however, were also different in that she recalled the unwelcome presence of the Indian Agent. As she described, “I remember when the Indian Agent came onto the Reserve, some of them just acted like they had every right just to walk into our house, and look through everything” adding, they “never even knocked on the door.” Of their presence, Couchie surmised, “you could feel that anger about the Indian Agent” and taking the hint from her parents’ reaction, she and her siblings “usually disappeared because we knew that was not a welcome person in our house.” Couchie believed that the Indian Agent searched for alcohol in her parents’ home, but never discovered the whiskey her father hid in a stovepipe by attaching a string to the neck of the bottle.⁴⁷⁶ An agent of colonialism entered this family’s personal space, with an attitude of little respect and judgment.⁴⁷⁷ A little subterfuge challenged this agent’s authority within their domestic space. The kitchen and the home represented emotionally charged spaces, where guests entered both wanted and unwanted.

“Keeping Up with the Jones”: Modern Kitchen Technologies and Equipment

With the construction of new homes that looked similar in size, shape and layout, social commentators encouraged women to make them their own through design, decoration and organization; a woman’s choice of furniture, serving ware and appliances—the items that filled

⁴⁷⁵ Darlene McIsaac, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

⁴⁷⁶ Couchie, interview.

⁴⁷⁷ For more on the relationships between Indigenous people in Canada and Indian Agents, see Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2003).

her home—“transform[ed] the identical into the distinguishable, in the process confirming housewives’ skills and status.”⁴⁷⁸ As the *North Bay Nugget* described, “Few men realize: When they see a beautifully decorated, neatly kept and livable home, how much thought, effort and home-making skill some woman has put into it.”⁴⁷⁹ Another column noted the thought and deliberation women put into the purchases for their home: “Putting comfort and convenience first in every bit of furniture and piece of equipment she buys for her house.”⁴⁸⁰ Women devoted considerable time to their work in the kitchen. Preparing meals and feeding others represented a main component of female identity, a way to demonstrate skill, concern for family and to carry on ethnic and familial traditions.⁴⁸¹ The technologies and appliances women purchased for their kitchens demonstrated not only their skills to make a comfortable home for their families, but also the meaning, needs and priorities of their everyday lives.

Social commentators in local newspapers discussed the class status and social competitions surrounding the purchase of new technologies for the home. These commentators discussed the burden faced by modern consumers: to keep up with the material success of their friends and neighbours (and gain social acceptance) they needed to consistently purchase the latest domestic technologies. The *North Bay Nugget* featured articles and advertisements about new kitchen and home innovations.⁴⁸² For example, it featured a report from the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, providing its northern Ontario readership with the latest information about irons, food choppers, graters, washing machines, electric clothes dryers and

⁴⁷⁸ Strong-Boag, 492.

⁴⁷⁹ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, January 1957.

⁴⁸⁰ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 2 October 1951.

⁴⁸¹ Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp, eds., “Introduction,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 14-16; Psyche Williams-Forsen, “Other Women Cooked for My Husband: Negotiating Gender, Food and Identities in an African American/Ghanaian Household,” *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 458; 437-438; Joy Parr, “Modern Kitchen, Good Home, Strong Nation,” *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2002): 660.

⁴⁸² “Chit Chat: Oven Companions,” *North Bay Nugget*, 20 May 1945; “WI Sponsors Course in Frozen Foods,” *North Bay Nugget*, 17 August 1950; “Interesting Filmstrips Shown on Frozen Foods,” *North Bay Nugget*, 17 August 1950; “Freezing is Popular Way to Preserve Garden Produce,” *North Bay Nugget*, 11 August 1949.

electric ranges—which “are again the envy of every bride-to-be.”⁴⁸³ Many articles in the newspaper also recorded the social and financial pressures attached to purchasing these new technologies. As a weekly columnist in the *Nugget*, Ruth Millet noted that “‘keeping up with the Jones’ is a race many couples slide into without quite knowing what they are doing.” She continued, “All they know is that they always want more than they have and nothing they get satisfies them for long.” To stay out of this race, Millet recommended keeping friends in the same income bracket, stop desiring what others want or possess and “enjoy life as it is and the things you have.”⁴⁸⁴ Another Millet column hinted that women, who did not own “modern day essentials” such as an automatic washer and dryer, a television set and home freezer, could be socially isolated and most likely considered “underprivileged by many of her friends.” She warned that “too often today people are judged as successful or not successful by the number of things they own.”⁴⁸⁵ Although we will recall from chapter 1 that northern Ontario was seen as a cold, cultural backwater, especially by immigrant women, ideas about technology as time-savers and status symbols most definitely reached northern Ontario. Women and men encountered social and cultural pressure to purchase new technologies and the trappings of a modern lifestyle.⁴⁸⁶ If they could not afford these items, they faced social isolation as well as being judged less successful.

In discussing the purchase of new kitchen technologies, women recalled their feelings of relief. When Ione Barré and her husband first married in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, the couple purchased a set of furniture and received a bonus set of dishes and blankets. Although unable to afford an icebox or refrigerator, Barré saw these pieces of equipment as unnecessary because it was cold enough in their three-room apartment to keep food. When the couple moved with their

⁴⁸³ Anne Allan, “The Mixing Bowl,” *North Bay Nugget*, 21 August 1947.

⁴⁸⁴ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 23 March 1949.

⁴⁸⁵ Ruth Millet, “We, the Women,” *North Bay Nugget*, 7 January 1955; See also “Chit Chat: The Modern Home,” *North Bay Nugget*, 3 February 1947.

⁴⁸⁶ Rutherforddale, 351-353.

two small children to North Bay in 1955, they purchased a home that allowed them to put up two to three boarders at a time and collect a necessary source of extra income. This living arrangement had its challenges, especially as their kitchen only came equipped with a rangette that had two stovetop burners. As Barré reflected, “I don’t know how I could make meals for all of those people on that!” When her husband came home with an electric frying pan given to him by a coworker, Barré expressed gratitude because she had another heat element to cook on. Laughing Barré noted, “I enjoyed it even more when he got a big range, a whole big range with everything working at one time. I felt like I could bake for a month!”⁴⁸⁷ For Barré, this new technology symbolized a source of relief because it eased constraints and aided her cooking work. She no longer had to cook for seven people on a two-burner stove-top.

Women often used the nostalgic refrain of “I don’t know I did it all” when discussing their home and kitchen work. Looking at the technologies available to consumers today, these women saw themselves as getting by with very little help from kitchen technology in the post-1945 context. They saw their ability to prepare and serve meals without technology as evidence of their identities and success as wives and mothers. This line of thinking also contributed to community identity. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Saulte Ste. Marie established their religious congregation in 1936.⁴⁸⁸ Just inside the city of North Bay, this new religious congregation built a Motherhouse and adjoining St. Joseph’s College, a school designed for “advanced secular education with religious culture to the young ladies of northern Ontario.”⁴⁸⁹ In these early years of their community, the Sisters recalled the need to pitch in and help out where they could because, as Sister Jackie O’Brien explained, “we were very hard up yet...for enough Sisters to run the Motherhouse.” For example, O’Brien, whose only qualification was her cook’s badge

⁴⁸⁷ Ione Barré, interview, 26 June 2012.

⁴⁸⁸ Jennifer Hough Evans and Katrina Srigley, “‘Women of the North, Ministering in the North’: Understanding the Sisters of St. Joseph Through Memory and Space, 1940-1980,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 47, no. 93 (May 2014): 42.

⁴⁸⁹ Sisters of St. Joseph Archives, Sisters of St. Joseph, *Community History, 1650--1967*, 33.

from Girl Guides, found herself in charge of the kitchen and cooking for 150 boarders and 50 day students from the College. The kitchen had rudimentary equipment including a “coal stove that didn’t have enough heat to boil potatoes.” Shaking her head and saying, “I can’t imagine how I did it,” O’Brien used this temperamental and inefficient coal stove to cook a cheese soufflé in a big roasting pan. “I don’t know if you’ve ever made a soufflé,” asked O’Brien, “but you generally make them very carefully in a little casserole.” In another humorous incident, O’Brien lost track of beans she had cooking on the coal stove while attending a lecture given by a Jesuit. When she returned to the kitchen, “the beans were all over the stove and all over the floor.” Afraid that the Jesuit who was now touring the Motherhouse would stumble upon this chaotic scene, O’Brien enlisted other Sisters to help with “shoveling up the beans.” O’Brien surmised that if she had not filled this kitchen role, they would have pulled another Sister away from a hospital job where she was “really needed.”⁴⁹⁰ So instead, O’Brien coped with rudimentary equipment and managed to get by with her little cooking knowledge or experience. Her story fits with the image of a start up community straining to get by with not enough Sisters and too few resources. Both individual and community identities were connected with ideas about making do and getting by with very little technological help.

Paradoxically new technologies created labour for women, at the same time as they saved labour. Feminist readings have shown that although post-1945 advertisements portrayed new technologies as “labour saving devices and strategies,” women were still required to devote considerable time and effort to the household as they learned new skills to operate equipment and faced rising standards surrounding cleanliness and mealtime.⁴⁹¹ Women shared memories of their mother’s efforts, and later their own efforts, to preserve and store vegetables without the

⁴⁹⁰ Sister Jackie O’Brien, interview, 14 August 2007.

⁴⁹¹ Collins Cromley, 189-192; Schwartz Cowan, 192-193; 199-201; Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 204-205; Nicole Rudolph, “‘Who Should Be the Author of a Dwelling?’ Architects versus Housewives in 1950s France,” *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 543.

aid of a refrigerator. The icebox (an insulated box in which you literally placed a block of ice) was a technology familiar to many women, as they talked about the work of having ice delivered or cutting blocks of ice.⁴⁹² Nicole Petrant-Rennie, recalled her grandfather used to “cut huge blocks of ice out of the lake to put in the ice shed, and that was all kept for the summer.” Covering the ice with sawdust, family members “would bring in big chunks of ice and that would be put in the icebox to keep our...food refrigerated.”⁴⁹³ Petrant-Rennie’s family used natural resources surrounding them, finding an inexpensive means to keep their icebox stocked with fresh ice even during summer months. When she and her husband first moved to North Bay in 1947, Charlotte Aimes also remembered—somewhat embarrassed—that they could only afford to purchase an icebox. Every week the couple had “big blocks of ice” delivered to their home, which would be placed in the top section of their icebox keeping the food underneath chilled. The trick, according to Aimes, was to remember to check the drip tray “at the bottom that caught the water” from the melting ice—making sure it did not overflow and create a huge, watery mess. The extra hassles and implications about her class status (members of the middle-class supposedly afforded an electric refrigerator) meant that within four months of their initial purchase, Aimes replaced their icebox with a new white refrigerator.⁴⁹⁴ The icebox kept food chilled as well as creating extra work as women and men had to find ways to keep it stocked with ice. It also symbolized class status; with new and innovative technologies like the refrigerator, the icebox quickly became outdated in the post-1945 context.

New sources of technology still required women’s labour. Trudy Nelson lived in Hamilton, Ontario during the Second World War and the immediate postwar period. After her husband returned from the War, Nelson recalled the difficulty they had finding an apartment for

⁴⁹² Nicole Petrant-Rennie, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario; Gettie Brown, interview; Trudy Nelson, interview, 29 August 2012; Charlotte Aimes, interview, 27 April 2009.

⁴⁹³ Petrant-Rennie, interview.

⁴⁹⁴ Aimes, interview.

rent. It was only due to family connections that they secured an apartment, and even then it was “terrible” because there were “hundreds of stairs to walk up.” It got even harder when Nelson quickly became pregnant. With an icebox as one of their only pieces of kitchen equipment, Nelson explained the chore of grocery shopping on a regular basis and having to climb up all those stairs balancing grocery bags and her increasing size. No wonder Nelson was “thrilled to death” when she finally afforded the purchase of a refrigerator and washing machine. The washing machine, in particular, was seen as a stroke of good luck. Working at Eaton’s department store, Nelson had put her name down on a waiting list for an automatic washing machine. When Nelson finally received the call that her name appeared next on the list, she was thankful because it saved her from washing cloth diapers by hand with a scrub board. But even then the washing machine required much labour. Nelson described her typical washing day, saying, “You had to pull it from where it was located to the sink, and then you had to fill it, then drain it, then fill it again for rinsing. It was an all day job.”⁴⁹⁵ Even with all of this labour required, Nelson added emphatically “I was thrilled to death! Amazing now that young people start with all of that.”⁴⁹⁶ Among Canadian women, Nelson was atypical in her praise for the automatic washing machines. Well into the 1960s, Canadian women remained skeptical about new automatics, preferring durable, “built to last” wringer washers. They also wanted to control the washing process, avoiding the cost and wasted water that accompanied automatics.⁴⁹⁷ For Nelson though, the automatic machine represented a bit of luxury within the confines of her modest apartment.

Women learned lessons from watching their mother’s work, prioritizing the purchase of specific kitchen technologies. Helen Duquette had grown up impoverished. Her mother was

⁴⁹⁵ Nelson, interview; The wringer washer outsold automatic models by a ratio of three to one in Canada. It was the opposite in the United States, where the automatic technology was purchased as soon as it became available. See Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 218.

⁴⁹⁶ Nelson, interview.

⁴⁹⁷ For a full discussion see Parr, *Domestic Goods*, chap. 10 “What Makes Washday Less Blue?” 218-242.

bitter having once lived in a “gorgeous home, with paid help” to only find herself in reduced circumstances due to her husband’s alcoholism and his loss of job. As Duquette said, her mother “was very crabby and cross and irritable. No wonder, she had it terrible.” Her mother preserved fruits and vegetables from the garden and, as Duquette, explained, “we would be using ordinary jars, we didn’t have special preserving jars.” By using an emptied peanut butter jar, for instance, Duquette learned that “everything had to be used and reused, and we learned to be very economical.”⁴⁹⁸ Germaine Perron also shared memories of her mother’s efforts preserving and storing foods. Her family lived in comfortable circumstances on a farm in Verner, Ontario, and it was her mother’s seemingly endless work that resulted in them getting the most from their garden having shelves and shelves of preserves to last them through the winter months. Perron’s mother also buried vegetables like carrots, parsnips and celery underneath sawdust to keep them from spoiling. Even though the celery changed colour from green to white, Perron said it was always delicious and very tender. When Perron married in 1949, she made sure to save money from her job as a teacher to afford the purchase of a bedroom suite and refrigerator. The refrigerator was “very important” to Perron because she had witnessed all of the labour involved with an icebox and preserving. And, unlike her mother, she added, “I had to go to the store to buy [groceries].”⁴⁹⁹ Unlike the advice of newspaper columnists like Ruth Millet, women learned lessons from observing their mothers and other female kin. They made decisions and listed priorities based on these learned observations and their real needs.

In discussions about technology and setting up their own homes, women discussed themes of economy, thrift and saving up for purchases. There was a belief that young people today often extend lines of credit in order to purchase what those living in the postwar period had saved up for years to afford or paid for by installments. Certainly their views were informed

⁴⁹⁸ Helen Duquette, interview, 24 February 2012.

⁴⁹⁹ Germaine Perron, interview, 26 June 2012.

by the economic climate of today, and the downturn beginning in 2008. As Nelson explained, “I always lived on a budget from the time that I was married.” She made sure her family only borrowed money for big purchases, such as a car, and that “no matter how long we took it out for at the bank, it was always paid back way ahead.” Reflecting on the recent financial crisis, she said, “Today we are in such dire straights because there is too much credit. People can’t understand what they are doing to the economy. They don’t think it affects anyone else, but it affects the whole country.”⁵⁰⁰ Many of the women echoed these sentiments, discussing with a sense of pride the months of budgeting, saving and installment payments that it took to purchase items such as a refrigerator or a set of fine china. As Joy Parr pointed out in 1999 in her excellent *Domestic Goods*, although Canadians borrowed and spent more in the 1950s and 1960s many of the women she interviewed felt that cash represented the only safe and prudent way to buy goods.⁵⁰¹ In my sample of interviews conducted between 2007 and 2012, the ramifications and memories of the economic collapse pushed concerns about credit to the forefront of women’s minds. These women felt the effects of the financial downturn, read and watched stories about consumer debt and spending and ultimately, saw what they believed was a stark contrast to their economically responsible experiences in the postwar period. They did not start with all new technologies and furnishings, they saw themselves as waiting and saving.

Women also remembered going without technology either because they could not afford it or it was seen as unnecessary. In her 1964 *L'Encyclopédie de la Cuisine Canadienne*, Jehane Benoît featured a section detailing the “basic principles of successful freezing.” The home freezer was depicted as “more than just a means of food storage” helping women with their budget, the variety of foods they served their families and time management as women would

⁵⁰⁰ Nelson, interview.

⁵⁰¹ Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 101-104; 113; As Parr also points out it was not until the 1960s that banks were increasing the amount they were willing to loan. Until that time, Canadians often sought lines of credit from life insurance companies or a arrange financing with a retailer.

never again be caught unprepared as “something from the freezer can be quickly served up.”⁵⁰²

In 1950, the North Star Women’s Institute sponsored a course on frozen foods in North Bay. Showing two filmstrips and providing booklets with the “latest information,” this course taught women the fundamentals of freezing foods such as preparation, blanching, packing, labeling and freezing. Like the home economics classes discussed in chapter 2, this course looked to move women away from the freezing methods of their grandmothers that “[weren’t] very scientific” as they had stored food on the “back porches packed in snow” to teach them about “the scientific research and advances in freezing.”⁵⁰³ The freezer was a new technology in the post-1945 context, a technology the majority of women interviewed did not own. As Ione Barré surmised, “none of us had freezers in those days. Unless you count the back shed in the winter time—which I did for a while!” As Barré said with a humorous tone, “I used to have the biggest deep freeze in town. I used to make pizzas and hundreds of things and freeze them out there in the winter. Because the weather wasn’t going up and down all the time, it was remaining at a certain temperature for a long time.”⁵⁰⁴ In the wintertime, women used the outdoor shed as a makeshift freezer a benefit perhaps to living in the cold temperatures of northern Ontario. Even though her freezing methods were cast as unscientific by food commentators, for Barré the back shed became a reliable, accessible and affordable means of storing food.

Other women recalled their families renting freezer drawers or lockers.⁵⁰⁵ For Jewish Canadian women living in North Bay freezer drawers and lockers were especially important, as they purchased and shipped their kosher meat from larger urban centres such as Toronto and Ottawa. Cynthia Flesher’s parents used the deep freeze in North Bay. As she explained, “On the way home from Hebrew school I always had the instructions on what to pick up for dinner

⁵⁰² Jehane Benoît, *Encyclopedia of Canadian Cuisine* (Montreal: Messageries du Saint-Laurent, 1964), 859-863.

⁵⁰³ “WI Sponsors Course in Frozen Foods,” *North Bay Nugget*, 17 August 1950; “Interesting Filmstrips Shown on Frozen Foods,” *North Bay Nugget*, 17 August 1950.

⁵⁰⁴ Barré, interview.

⁵⁰⁵ Nora Stewart, interview, 25 June 2012.

tomorrow night and I'd go into the locker—I'd forgotten about that—bring home brisket or steaks or whatever she had chosen to cook the next day." In describing this storage facility, Flesher said, "it was a great big, cold place, obviously. But we were well dressed—North Bay, you wore warm clothes." The locker had "a fairly good depth" permitting her mother to store wild berries as well as kosher meat. It was the family's desire to maintain a kosher diet that prompted them to rent the storage facility. Her mother "wouldn't have had one of those lockers if it wasn't for the meat. She could get it two weeks at a time, instead of every week."⁵⁰⁶ The freezer storage created extra work as women packaged, stored and retrieved foods; it also saved work because women stockpiled extra foods, especially out of season or hard-to-get foods, keeping them for longer and saving a trip or a phone call to the grocers. For Jewish Canadian women living in North Bay, freezer access helped to facilitate this component of their ethno-religious identity. Back porches as well as publically shared and rented freezers represented an economical solution for women to store food.

For Anishinaabe families living on Nipissing First Nation territory, the lack of kitchen technology resulted from the lack of electricity. In December 1955, Ontario Hydro finally installed electrical lines in Garden Village and were in negotiations to put hydro lines in the Dokis Bay Reserve near French River. As the *North Bay Nugget* reported, the lack of electricity especially impacted the diets of Anishinaabe people in the summertime:

To supplement their treaty pay these Indians must hunt and fish. Lack of refrigeration, in the summer months, forced them to live on cooked and smoked meats when the fishing or hunting was bad. Now, they will be able to eat fresh meat whenever they want it. The problem of keeping fresh milk was also one which forced them to go without it or use powdered products.⁵⁰⁷

The article continues, stating that talk in Garden Village centered on "TV sets, radios, electric stoves, refrigerators and electric appliances." Betty Goulais, a much praised young swimmer

⁵⁰⁶ Cynthia Flesher, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 6 February 2008.

⁵⁰⁷ "Coloured Lights on Christmas Trees for Garden Village Indians this Year," *North Bay Nugget*, 3 December 1955.

from Garden Village, planned to now shop for a “special gift” for her parents—perhaps an electric iron. Others in the community looked forward to having “coloured lights on their Christmas tree for the first time in the Village’s history.” Electricity provided a bit of fantasy and whimsy, as families looked forward to seeing trees all lit up and imagined watching television programs.⁵⁰⁸ The installation of electricity was also heralded as improving Anishinaabe diets keeping meat, vegetable and dairy products fresh during warm summer months. At the same time, bringing electricity to the community failed to address real and underlying concerns and inequalities. As an oral history interview make clear, few families afforded the purchase of store bought foods as an orange was considered a special Christmas-time treat.⁵⁰⁹ The perception that now as electricity arrived Anishinaabe families could “eat fresh meat whenever they want it” was much removed from the reality of these families’ economic circumstances.

The modern kitchen technologies represented a change, but also required learning new skills: an act as seemingly simple as turning on the kitchen radio while preparing dinner involved some form of adjustment.⁵¹⁰ In March 1946, the *North Bay Nugget* reported that British war brides arriving in Canada were “captivated by the countries [sic] household conveniences, such as electric washing machines, toasters, irons, vacuum cleaners, central heating and refrigerators.”⁵¹¹ Having lived in conditions of war and migration, most of the immigrant women featured here had to abandon their homes and suffered severe deprivation, lacking fuel, electricity and food. This was also true of Anishinaabe women and women who had grown up without electricity in rural northern Ontario and recalled their mother cooking on

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Couchie, interview.

⁵¹⁰ Frenssen, interview.

⁵¹¹ “Most Brides Happy Over Homes in Canada,” *North Bay Nugget*, 2 March 1946.

hard-to-control and “extremely hot” wood-burning stoves that also served to heat the kitchen.⁵¹² Arriving to North Bay in 1954, Lottie Frenssen certainly welcomed the conveniences of new kitchen technologies as she took over the cooking responsibilities in the Millen’s home where she worked as a domestic. In her case, she had learned the basics of cooking while taking home economics class back in Germany, where she was taught to prepare recipes out of her Dr. Oetker cookbook using fresh ingredients. It quickly became apparent to her that Mrs. Millen lacked these skills; she vividly recalled a story of Millen using five different mixing bowls to prepare a cake mix. As Frenssen put it, “It didn’t take long that I took the cooking, I took it over.” Pulling out her Dr. Oetker cookbook—her “little German cookbook” as she called it—Frenssen was soon preparing lemon cake, goulash, and cabbage rolls for this family. She also learned to make a few new Canadian-style dishes, such as meatloaf. As she recalled, what most struck her about preparing these meals was the “modern kitchen, everything just turned on.” Whereas in Hof, Bavaria she had to deal with the temperamental coal-burning stove in her family’s small two-bedroom apartment, in North Bay she turned on the stove with a simple flick of a switch.⁵¹³ This kitchen was a setting for interaction; Frenssen consulted German- and English-language cookbooks to prepare recipes using the conveniences of American modern technology. In many ways, this kitchen was also a space of identity-marking: she introduced this English-Canadian family to a German-born woman who was a capable and skilled domestic worker.

The modern kitchen technologies many immigrant women found in Canadian homes, or eventually purchased for themselves after months of saving up, also signified shifts in their self-identity. Charlotte Aimes’ curio-cabinet was littered with knickknacks she had brought from Paris. After her husband’s death in 1974, she noted, many friends expected her to return to Paris, but she did not because, as she put it, “I am more Canadian than French,” adding: “I enjoy

⁵¹² Perron, interview; Duquette, interview; Frenssen, interview; Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 150-153.

⁵¹³ Frenssen, interview.

visiting, but my home is here.” Her willingness to adopt a Canadian identity and leave Paris with her Canadian-born husband in 1947 had produced tension in her relationship with her mother.⁵¹⁴ The strain in this particular mother-daughter relationship often played out in the kitchen, and decisions about whether to use frozen and canned ingredients or fresh, or whether to embrace the conveniences of modern kitchen technology such as the icebox and refrigerator. As Aimes recalled, in Paris it was “*faire les provisions*, the shopping, you went every morning.” There, “you went to the butcher, you went to the bakers, you went to the vegetable, to the creamy, and went to at least four stores everyday.” But in North Bay, she picked up her groceries for the entire week at the local Dominion (like many other women at the time), storing them in an icebox and, eventually a refrigerator, ultimately allowing her to cut-down on time devoted to shopping. With two young children in the 1950s and 1960s, Aimes was grateful for these modern conveniences and wondered how her mother had managed her family and household all those years without one. Yet when she offered to purchase a refrigerator for her mother, her mother refused explaining “she didn’t want one, said she didn’t need one.”⁵¹⁵ Her mother enjoyed the everyday routine of shopping, and the extra effort made certain she had fresh foods to serve her family—a key feature of French cuisine.⁵¹⁶ Her mother’s refusal to adopt a kitchen with new technologies also epitomized disapproval over her daughter’s changing identity, one indicated by her willingness, even eagerness, to embrace Canada and Canadian food practices.

New kitchen technologies also represented a source of intimidation for both Canadian-born and immigrant women. When Ruth Gauthier’s mother received a pressure cooker in 1946, her mother decided to try it out by making plum pudding. As Gauthier recalled, it created a mess

⁵¹⁴ Aimes, interview; Hilary Kaiser, *French War Brides in America: An Oral History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2008), li.

⁵¹⁵ Aimes, interview.

⁵¹⁶ For an interesting discussion on the cooking customs of women living in France, see Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, “The Nourishing Arts,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), 67-77.

when it “went pop” and the lid went flying across the room. “You should have seen the raisin and the curd on the curtains!” Despite these early experiences with the pressure cooker, Gauthier like many other women used the pressure cooker with great success often to cook and tenderize cheap cuts of meat.⁵¹⁷ Technology allowed women to stay within budget and provide delicious foods to their families. Eileen Wield and her family said good-bye to England in 1957 when Canadian friends offered her husband a job and their family a place to live.⁵¹⁸ Her daughter, Pamela Handley, recalled her amazement at the meat-and-potatoes meal they were served on the night of their arrival: “My God, you had ... so much meat that it would have been a week’s ration in England—for a family.”⁵¹⁹ The large portions of meat differed most markedly from their rationed diet back home. Her mother’s reaction, although similar in that she too was surprised by the amount of food, also differed from her daughter’s. As the family food provider, shopping for and especially preparing and cooking meals represented sources of anxiety for her because she was inexperienced with Canadian foodways. One afternoon, for instance, Wield was left on her own in the kitchen to prepare a large turkey to feed both families. Never having cooked one before, she was deeply frustrated by her unfamiliarity with North American foods and kitchen technologies. Indeed, as she told her story, it was clear that the incident undercut her identity as a wife and mother because she, too, had assumed that she ought to have possessed all of the requisite cooking knowledge.⁵²⁰ Women felt overwhelmed in the face of kitchen technologies, making missteps and learning new cooking skills and methods.

“We lived in the Bush”: Fine China, Silver and Glass in Northern Ontario

Much as technology was remembered with reference to the present, so too were women’s memories of fine china, silver and glassware. The majority of women voiced concerns

⁵¹⁷ Ruth Gauthier, interview, 29 August 2012; See also Vos, interview; Stewart, interview.

⁵¹⁸ Eileen Wield, interview, 22 March 2007.

⁵¹⁹ Pamela Handley, interview, 8 May 2009.

⁵²⁰ Wield, interview; Handley, interview.

about what they were going to do with these collections as they had little room for storing it, their children expressed disinterest in keeping it and all it did now was “collect dust bunnies.”⁵²¹ Irene Martin offered to give me her collection of fine china—afraid they would only remain stacked in the corner accumulating dust because her children did not want her smattering of bright blue and orange plates as well as cups and saucers.⁵²² Getting up from the chair in her sunroom and walking over to her dining room, Eva Wardlaw called out to me: “Come over here, and you can see Shelly.” Shelly was the name of Wardlaw’s fine china pattern, purchased from T.M. Palmer in North Bay because of its “dainty blue” colour palette. As Wardlaw explained, “I used to have a lovely dining room that matched this china cabinet, but I didn’t have any room here. So I gave it all to my daughter.... Shelly is very expensive and beautiful.” Wardlaw collected her fine china, silver and crystal stemware from wedding showers as well her own weekly purchases buying “a plate or two every payday... till we got it all together.” As Wardlaw said, the goal was “to have them all, like we’d have everything that size up, up and up. And you get eight of each.” Working fulltime as a teacher, Wardlaw budgeted setting aside part of every pay cheque to purchase these pieces of eating and drink ware. Collecting all of these pieces and displaying them in her curio cabinet expressed this widowed mother’s class status to visiting family and guests. In her interview, Wardlaw discussed how hard she worked as a teacher, principal and sole provider for her three children. Her display of serving ware undoubtedly conveyed to others her success in these roles as well as rewarding herself for her hard work with a bit of frivolity and visual delight. Now downsized living in a smaller apartment, she gifted much to her daughter but still has “crystal coming out of my ears. I don’t know what to do with it.”⁵²³ In the post-1945 period, women saved for months to purchase their china, silver and crystal stemware, bringing it out on special occasions such as to mark a holiday

⁵²¹ Catherine Paterson, interview, 26 June 2012.

⁵²² Irene Martin, interview, 25 June 2012.

⁵²³ Eva Wardlaw, interview, 27 August 2012.

or dinner with an out-of-town guest. With such value, effort and memories attached to its collection, it can be of little surprise that women voiced concern about what would eventually happen to it. These items represented success, powerful reminders of social status, familial togetherness and financial stability in their lives.

Table settings held much symbolic value in women's lives. In many ways, women's collections of china, glass and silver went against themes of thrift and economy so prevalent in their memories. Technologies as well as housing and kitchen design looked to ease the burdens of the household, as families supposedly shared casual meals around the kitchen table.⁵²⁴ If women owned everyday sets of dinnerware, what purpose did they have for these extra, formal sets? The fears of the Cold War promoted cultural conservatism, as conventional institutions such as marriage, family and home comforted Canadians and Americans alike. By collecting pieces of serving ware, women called on traditional ideas about setting up a familial home. They also held symbolic value. As Regina Blaszczyk notes, these "durable, yet fragile, artifacts symbolized blood ties, anchored memories and expressed private longings."⁵²⁵ They offered women symbolic connections to family members and places as well as visual delight and social status. Parisian-born Charlotte Aimes brought "everything I thought I would need" when she immigrated to Canada including her collection of fine china.⁵²⁶ Ione Barré remembered not having much extra money to spend on dishes, but the pieces she had managed to collect contained much sentimental value.⁵²⁷ As Barré remarked, "We didn't have a lot of that stuff... My husband's mother gave me some Chinese cups and saucers, which I loved because I was always interested in the Orient and their art."⁵²⁸ The consumption of foreign household goods

⁵²⁴ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 249.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2; 257.

⁵²⁶ Aimes, interview.

⁵²⁷ Dora Pitt, interview, 16 January 2012; Barré, interview.

⁵²⁸ Barré, interview.

such as these represented a means of fantasy fulfillment; a chance for Barré to interact with the wider world around her, asserting her cultured and refined identity.⁵²⁹

Living in North Bay, fine china also continued families' connections to ethno-religious identities and rituals. Asked about serving ware, Gettie Brown turned around in her seat to take appraisal of her large collection displayed prominently in her curio cabinet. As she explained pointing to her collection, "Some were gifts, some were hand-me-downs, but some we bought a setting at a time." Of all of her dishes, Brown noted her Passover dishes—not on display, but carefully stored away in a cupboard—held the most meaning. A gift from her aunt and uncle, these dishes only came out of storage on Passover Seder, a significant ritual on the Jewish religious calendar. The Seder plate is divided into six sections, each filled with food to symbolize the story of the Exodus from Egypt.⁵³⁰ In the post-1945 context as more Jewish families moved to the suburbs, the significance of Seder meal rituals shifted from maintaining the Jewish family to educating Jewish children and ensuring their ethno-religious training and identity.⁵³¹ Undoubtedly, Brown saw the importance of these lessons in Jewish identity because the family lived in North Bay with a small Jewish community. The Seder plates represented her ethno-religious identity, but also her efforts as a mother to pass on cultural and religious traditions to her children. For women the collection of table settlings, symbolized gender identities, connections to distant homelands, the celebration of religious observations as well as fantasy fulfillment. Women made decisions about what pieces to display, giving impressions to others about their feminine and refined gender identity as well as their class status. Their collections also marked generational divides, a reminder of different aesthetics and priorities.

⁵²⁹ Hoganson, 102-104.

⁵³⁰ Isaiah Shachar, *The Jewish Year* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 20-21.

⁵³¹ Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 108-110.

Women also shopped smartly to afford the purchase of serving ware. Although many interviewees purchased goods by installment payments, British-born Gisela Commanda combed secondhand shops collecting pieces of silverware. Commanda heard Grey Owl or Archie Belaney—a white, self-fashioned expert on Indigenous culture—give a lecture about Canada’s Indigenous people most likely during his first British tour between 1935 and 1936.⁵³² Inspired to learn more, Commanda travelled to an Indigenous reservation located in the United States in 1939 and then onto Canada the following year. In her desire to learn the Ojibwa language, she reached out to Antoine Commanda, a member of the Nipissing First Nation (NFN) and Grey Owl’s canoe man. The couple shortly married in 1942 and, as a result of their marriage under Bill C-31, Commanda became a Status Indian allowing her to collect annuity payments and live on a series of reserves including eight years spent living in NFN communities. Although the couple soon separated, and eventually divorced, Commanda dressed in traditional Indigenous clothing, prepared three manuscripts “about Indian life” and called herself an “expert in Indian crafts and lore.”⁵³³ Her personal papers reveal a woman very much conscious of her perceived historical contributions, trying and failing to donate her personal papers to multiple archives and museums including the National Museum of Man, Université de Montréal, the Woodland Cultural Centre, Gray’s Publishing and the National Museum Collection of Canada.⁵³⁴ Her

⁵³² For more on Grey Owl or Archie Belaney, see David Chapin, “Gender and Indian Masquerade in the Life of Grey Owl,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2000): 91-109; Jane Billingham, *Grey Owl: the Many Faces of Archie Belaney* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1999).

⁵³³ “Gisela Commanda,” The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. Accessed: <https://library.mcmaster.ca/archives/findaids/fonds/c/commanda.htm>. Last accessed: 17 March 2014; “Says Indians Overlooked as Big Tourist Attraction,” *North Bay Nugget*, 12 April 1949; “English Artist—Wife of Indian Shuns Life as White Woman,” *London Free Press*, 2 April 1957; Under Bill C-31, a white woman who married an Indigenous man gained Indian Status, whereas an Indigenous woman who married a white man lost her Indian Status. On Bill C-31, see Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 169-171; Katrina Srigley, “‘I am a proud Anishinaabekwe’: Issues of Identity and Status in Northern Ontario after Bill C-31,” in *Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writing on Aboriginal and Women’s History in Canada*, eds. Robin Jarvis Brownlie and Valerie J. Korinek (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 241-266.

⁵³⁴ In her correspondence with friends Nellie and Phoebe, she often asked them to return her sent letters, which were often over twenty-pages long. See also “Letter from Woodland Cultural Centre,” Corresp., Box 2, Gisela Commanda fonds, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 28 May 1993; “Letter from Université de Montréal,”

papers also demonstrate a woman handling her budget and wondering, “how I am going to manage,” as she lived off of a pension cheque, an annuity payment of thirty-six dollars a month and donations from friends.⁵³⁵ Commanda detailed her attempts to stretch her budget, as well as her finds at secondhand stores including a five-inch frying pan, saucepans and an electric plate to cook on. On one particular trip to the Salvation Army, Commanda recorded her delight as “their truck was just being unloaded with wonderful kitchen things that get immediately snapped up. So I was able to do the snapping myself.” In this letter to her friend Phoebe, she detailed her purchases and drew intricate sketches of two of her prized kitchen finds—a jam spoon with a curved handle and a knife. These items were very much treasured by Commanda as she took the time to draw the ornate work on the handles of these implements.⁵³⁶ Most fascinating is the contrast created between her love for this ornate eating ware and her self-fashioned Indigenous identity. On a strict budget, women like Commanda invented strategies to collect treasured pieces for their kitchens.

Dinnerware items played a role in stories of rebuilding. After she separated from her second husband, Helen Duquette recalled, “He wouldn’t let me have any of it.... I could leave but I couldn’t take anything.” The couple married in 1973 and, according to Duquette, friends and family gifted them “everything in dishes.” Duquette described in hushed tones, the flower pattern she picked out for her china “in lovely powder blues and white.” Her new husband’s mother even “made us take her cutlery, which was very beautiful, very heavy and awkward, but very beautiful.” Duquette grew up impoverished, and her first marriage had been to an unstable,

1970-76, Corresp., Box 2, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 5 January 1970; “Letter from National Museum of Man,” 1970-76, Corresp., Box 2, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 19 May 1970; “Letter from National Museums Canada,” 1970-76, Corresp., Box 2, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 4 February 1975.

⁵³⁵ “Letter to Dear Nellie,” Personal Corresp. 1961, Box 3, Gisela Commanda fonds, Autobiographical Journal notes, 1960-61, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, November, 1961.

⁵³⁶ “Letter to Dear Phoebe,” Corresp. 60-61, Box 1, Gisela Commanda fonds Correspondence, 1950s-1964, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1 January 1961; “Letter to Dear Nellie,” Personal Corresp. 1961, Box 3, Gisela Commanda fonds, Autobiographical Journal notes, 1960-61, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, November, 1961.

alcoholic. She worked hard as a single mother to provide for her two daughters taking in borders and going back to school to earn her teaching degree. Given all she endured in her lifetime, it should come as little surprise that Duquette remarked, “Dishes [were] not that important to me, but they [were] to him.”⁵³⁷ Still it was evident in our interview that Duquette very much cherished these gifts seeing them as representative of friendship and family as well as financial stability. In order to separate from her husband though and start her life anew, she left these material items behind.

The majority of women collected their good serving ware during bridal trousseaus or showers. With the renewed focus on the family home, manufacturers, retailers and popular publications tutored women about all of the items they would need to set up a home properly. These commentators steered women towards holding bridal showers and registering, assembling all of the things they needed to successfully establish their new homes and family lives.⁵³⁸ The *North Bay Nugget* featured a column called “Chit Chat” that regularly detailed the themes of bridal trousseaus, the foods served and the gifts received. Jehane Benoît’s *L’Encyclopédie de la Cuisine Canadienne* included a section titled “Bride’s Kitchen and Dining-Room Trousseau.” Benoît reminded readers, “A woman’s culture and taste are reflected, not only in the foods she cooks, but also in the way she sets up her kitchen.” It detailed “essential” items such as eight to sixteen dinner plates, and “superfluous but nice” items such as ramekins and *petits pots à crème*.⁵³⁹ Although Benoît’s list was clearly geared towards middle- and upper-class audiences, a shower or trousseau was seen a social and cultural norm for soon-to-be married women. At her wedding shower, Eva Wardlaw recalled that fellow teachers and members of the Greek community in North Bay “gave me all kinds of brilliant stuff”—much of which she still

⁵³⁷ Duquette, interview.

⁵³⁸ Błaszczyk, 257-258.

⁵³⁹ Benoît, 1005.

displayed in her curio cabinet.⁵⁴⁰ Ione Barré who left high school early to financially help her family recalled receiving a lamp, a few tablecloths and dishes at her wedding shower.⁵⁴¹ To celebrate her forthcoming marriage in 1949, Germaine Perron remembered having a small wedding shower where close family members brought gifts like “a little crystal ball or some glasses.” Adding, “In those days, it was not big.”⁵⁴² Members of the poor, working- and middle-class recalled having bridal showers to celebrate upcoming nuptials, although they were not to the scale imagined by Benoît and others. These gatherings brought together female kin and friends to help prepare women for the responsibilities of marriage and setting up her household. This was a gendered, coming-of-age ritual shared with other women.

Bridal showers also marked memories of hurt and confusion in women’s lives. Catherine Paterson still expressed anger over not have a wedding shower: “I was promised a trousseau tea, I was promised china, I was promised silver, I was promised everything and it never happened.” And for her, this lack of wedding shower was just another disappointment caused by her foster family, explaining, “I’ve been promised so much by so many people over the years.” Luckily after Paterson married and moved with her new husband to Sioux Lookout, Ontario, she attained a job at a jewelry store that also offered her a discount on store items. There, she afforded the purchase of “Waterford Crystal—the very best.” Telling me that while she “never did get” her fine china, Paterson bought “six different styles of six” of expensive crystal glassware as well as silverware emblazoned with a lily of the valley pattern. Paterson saw her ability to purchase these items as “coming from God’s hand”—the belief that she trusted in God and he provided. Paterson often quoted scripture from the *Holy Bible* and discussed her relationship with religious figures during the course of our interview. Her biological mother left her biological father, after he had been accused of abusing their children. Paterson carefully noted she had not

⁵⁴⁰ Wardlaw, interview.

⁵⁴¹ Barré, interview.

⁵⁴² Perron, interview.

been victim to her biological father. Her biological mother was unable to support her seven children on her own and, consequently, Paterson and her siblings found themselves separated and placed in different foster homes. Paterson and her sister, who was eleven months younger, stayed together and by the ages of five and six, they had moved into a permanent foster home. Wood described her difficult life with her foster family suffering from emotional withdrawal and food deprivation. Her discussion about scripture and relationship with God provided not only evidence of her strong religious convictions, but it represented a coping mechanism for Paterson to deal with these early childhood experiences. As she explained going to church and Sunday school from an early age, was “my saving grace, you know. I knew Jesus was always with me.”⁵⁴³ For Paterson, her crystal and silverware purchases symbolized her strong religious connections and beliefs. These items were evidence of God providing for her and her family.

Not all women expressed interest in collecting silver, crystal glasses and fine china. Many women, especially members of the working-class and poor, saw little appeal in collecting this formal serving ware, having no room to store all these items and no money to purchase it with their tight budgets. When Annemarie Vos’s husband went back to university to earn a degree as a forest engineer, she remembered their tight budget, explaining, “there wasn’t much left for extras, I can tell you that.” Living in Temagami, Ontario, Vos made sure her children had “everything they needed” carefully budgeting as well as sewing clothes and growing a vegetable garden. When her husband finished school and the family became financially more comfortable, Vos and her husband built a wooden home on an island in Temagami. Vos appreciated the location of her home because it allowed her family to easily participate in northern activities, putting the canoe in the water during the summer, and creating a trail in the winter to “ski all through the bush.” Given the rustic aesthetic of their home, it is understandable that Vos did not much care for collecting silver or fine china. The first time she and her husband

⁵⁴³ Paterson, interview.

travelled to Indonesia—a place where her husband spent time in his youth, Vos recalled he wanted to buy her a silver tea set or silverware. She thought about it, and responded, “that doesn’t really go with our style, we had a wooden house you know? My table [was] all pine, one board. . . . I never wanted stuff like that.” As wedding gifts, Vos received crystal glasses, cups and saucers as well as “plain old Athena, white china” but as she said shaking her head it never quite fit because “we lived in the bush.”⁵⁴⁴ It was far more important to fill their wooden home with art and items that kept with their personal style. Reflective of their northern exterior, Vos developed her own sense of taste and home design regardless of cultural norms at the time. While many women placed great symbolic and material value in purchasing and displaying formal serving ware, other women did not see the purpose of it all.

Conclusions

In the post-1945 context, the women interviewed devoted much time to kitchen and household spaces. They purchased and accumulated serving ware as well as kitchen technology and equipment to fill these spaces. In doing so, they created spaces that reflected their family obligations, class status and financial restraints, religious observations as well as satisfied their desires for fantasy and creativity. Women were not merely successful consumers because they returned home with their purchases happy and with unthinking smiles on their faces. Rather, in their consumption of kitchen-related goods they negotiated a host of personal, work and familial responsibilities—often responsibilities that were in conflict with one another. At times, women even saw consumption as unnecessary, making decisions to go without as they used their own inventions and substitutions. Other times women went without new equipment and technologies because they could not afford items or they did not have room for them in their kitchens.

Everyday kitchen and household items also held much symbolic value to women. Most of the women still had their fine china, silverware and crystal proudly displayed in curio

⁵⁴⁴ Vos, interview.

cabinets and bookshelves, making sure to draw my attention to them during the course of our interviews. Their memories and views of past consumption were also heavily influenced by present-day trends and experiences. These women actively organized, designed and shopped to ensure their kitchens and homes echoed their tastes, desires and daily needs. They imagined their own design aesthetic for their kitchens and homes consuming goods that sometimes reflected their northern physical contexts, other times of their class status or their desire to reach above that status. In addition, their kitchen consumerism also represented months of their paid and unpaid labour as women saved, shopped smartly and paid for by installment to afford the purchase of goods. It was also work as women altered purchased items to suit their tastes and needs, learned how-to use items and incorporated them into their daily kitchen and household routines. Women's memories reveal how their food and food-related purchases symbolized their healing from painful past histories of poverty, abuse, hunger and deprivations. These items of consumption were heavily laden with meaning, reflecting women's self-identities, priorities and fantasies.

Chapter 5 Community Bonds, Community Divides

As a member of the Jewish community in North Bay, Brooky Robbins “went to the Synagogue everyday, everyday after school I went.” Her family actively participated in Jewish life, attending the Sons of St. Jacob Synagogue and Robbins herself travelled to attend Young Judaea conventions to nurture relationships with other Jewish youth. For Robbins and other members of their ethno-religious community, keeping a kosher diet represented an especially important facet of their identity: “We were all kosher in a small town, even if you weren’t religious, you were kosher because it gave you a link to your Jewishness.” Although Robbins and her family were firmly connected to the Jewish community, she also made meaningful non-Jewish friendships. Every Christmas, for example, Robbins attended mass with friends at the Pro-Cathedral of the Assumption Catholic Church in North Bay. As she stated, “as kids...your friends were going to mass or something, so you went to mass with them at Christmas time.”

Friendships crossed lines of religion in North Bay, especially given that the city supported a small non-Jewish population and few age appropriate friends for a young woman like Robbins. Still there were limits on these Jewish and non-Jewish relationships. For example, while Robbins recalled not experiencing much anti-Semitism in the city, by the time she was a teenager and beginning to think about dating it became more pronounced. “And by the time you got to be a teenager,” explained Robbins, “the gentile boys at school...were not going out with you probably because of their parents.” Robbins overheard a friend asking, “‘Why don’t you take my friend Brooky out?’ And he said, ‘No, I couldn’t take her out, she’s Jewish.’” Robbins concluded from this experience that “it wasn’t so hurtful, you just sort of knew your place. You knew at a certain time in your life that you weren’t going to go out with someone who wasn’t Jewish when you grew up in that small town.” Interestingly, when Robbins moved to Toronto to attend university “the hardest thing for me to adjust to...was living with only people who

were Jewish. I had a really hard time doing that because all my life I had been with so many people who were not Jewish and I liked that. I loved that a lot.”⁵⁴⁵ Robbins thrived in a community made up of Jewish and non-Jewish friends, neighbours and family members.

Even though Robbins experienced acceptance and created close bonds of friendships with her non-Jewish peers, she also experienced moments of intolerance. As a young woman, she experienced romantic rejection due to her ethno-religious identity. This chapter explores women’s community lives and spaces, focusing on episodes where they gathered to make food, shared food knowledge or socialized over food. In their interviews, women like Robbins shared the belief that northern Ontario was friendlier, and somehow, more inclusive than southern Ontario. With a smaller population and fewer ethnically segregated neighbourhoods, there was a real belief in togetherness, inclusivity and caring that ignored perceived categories of difference such as ethnicity, race and religion. But despite this idea of an all-encompassing community in the North, there were people excluded from participation based on those very same categories of identity. There was racism and religious intolerance. And there were also women—both foreign- and Canadian-born—who chose not to participate instead enjoying northern Ontario for its quietness and solitude.

This chapter examines women’s feelings of community belonging and identity, centered on their making, eating and sharing of food. There are numerous approaches to writing about community life. Works on immigrant women who were East European Jewish, Finnish, Italian, Soviet Mennonite and Ukrainian focus on the experiences of single ethnic-immigrant groups, understanding the ways they built and rebuilt their communities in their new Canadian contexts. These works look at women’s community organizing and support, their daily interactions in shared neighbourhoods as well as their struggles to cope with discrimination and hostility from

⁵⁴⁵ Brooky Robbins, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 6 January 2008. Unless otherwise cited all interviews have been conducted by author.

the host population.⁵⁴⁶ Community histories also study the development and growth of a particular region, examining who was attracted to the area, what industries contributed to its build up as well as the development of infrastructure and organizations.⁵⁴⁷ And other approaches examine community reactions to an event at a particular time and place, such as a workers' strike or a citywide outbreak of influenza.⁵⁴⁸ These various approaches to community life allow us to explore the processes of everyday life, the series of interactions, routines and strategies that occur within families, neighbours and physical environments, and that are entangled with issues of identity and social power.

There are many definitions of community from which to draw on. Our feelings of community are deeply connected with our ability to form relationships with others living there, our sense of sharing interests, outlooks and experiences and creating networks of support.

Summing up definitions of community, Kerry Abel notes,

“Community is not a ‘thing’; it is an ongoing historical process that incorporates imagined ideals, economic, political and social structures inherited from other times and places, individual responses to the unanticipated or accidental, the unexpected consequences of human interaction, and relationships with the physical environment, both real and imagined.”⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶ Varpu Lindström-Best, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988); Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hard Working People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Stacey Zembrzycki, *According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014). See also Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁵⁴⁷ Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Françoise Noël, *Family and Community Life in Northeastern Ontario: The Interwar Years* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

⁵⁴⁸ Nancy Hewitt, “‘The Voice of Virile Labor’: Labor Militancy, Community Solidarity, and Gender Identity among Tampa's Latin Workers, 1880-1921,” in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Priscilla Long, “The Women of the Colorado Iron and Fuel Strike, 1913-1914,” in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of US Women's Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Mass 1860-1922* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Esyllt W. Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

⁵⁴⁹ Kerry Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), xxi-xxii.

Our community interactions and relationships are not always positive, supportive or inclusive because they are also sources of pain, prejudice and exclusion. Indeed, Benedict Anderson is well-known for pointing out this paradox in *Imagined Communities*, where he defines the national community as imagined because, among other historical processes, we continue to envision camaraderie with fellow members despite real and deep inequalities and exploitations.⁵⁵⁰ And certainly, the women interviewed shared nostalgic memories of close friendships and their sense of harmony with others living in post-1945 North Bay, Ontario. They portrayed their belief that northern Ontario was different, more tolerant and friendlier than southern Ontario and, in doing so, minimized their real encounters with religious prejudice and racism. By studying women's experiences and recollections, we can consider their everyday exchanges and reactions expanding our understandings of community life and belonging in northern Ontario.

'It is not like in a big city': Nostalgic Memories of Community in Ontario's North

Nostalgia was wrapped up with women's feelings about community in Ontario's north. The concept of nostalgia is a common theme in oral history literature. It is a tendency of interviewees, in a moment of life review, to romantically exaggerate an episode from their past sometimes creating "only a shadowy distinction between the imaginary and the real."⁵⁵¹ And certainly the interviewees for this research project crafted an image of northern Ontario, as friendlier, supportive and more inclusive, talking about northern Ontario as a space tucked away from the chaos of the urban south, and seemingly away from complicated racial and religious dynamics. For Uva Hartman this friendliness was linked with the pace of life. Hartman, who also lived in Toronto and Hamilton at different points in his life, recalled that "down south"

⁵⁵⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 5-7.

⁵⁵¹ Ruth Finnegan, "Family Myths, Memories and Interviewing," *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 179.

“you hardly knew your neighbour. Everything is rush, rush, rush and get out of my way.” As he explained, it also had to do with an element of trust: “Here, if your lawnmower is broken, you ask your neighbour, can I borrow yours and he says, ‘yeah, okay fine.’ Whereas you do that down south and you have to go get another one.... It’s an entirely different life here.”⁵⁵²

Elisabeth Meier reflected that what she “liked about North Bay” was getting “to meet people.” She explained, “It is not like in a big city, you might know your neighbours but here you meet people and get to know people more than in a big city. So I was quite impressed at how friendly the people were in North Bay.”⁵⁵³ Sister Betty Mitchell thought growing up in northern Ontario gave her a familiarity with the region: “And still I can go around North Bay..., and I can almost pick out all the houses where people lived. Whereas if you live in a big city, you are kind of confined to a small area and you really never get to know beyond that.” Mitchell also believed it taught her familiarity with outlying northern communities such as Bonfield, Cash Bay and Sturgeon Falls, giving her a “broader look at life.”⁵⁵⁴ There was a sense that living in this smaller northern city, individuals were not segregated to their particular neighbourhood. It gave a feeling of belonging to and familiarity with the entire city and the people living there. This region also framed a quieter, slower pace of life where residents talked and trusted each other.

Women recalled their support networks, gained from living in a smaller sized community. When Trudy Nelson’s husband died tragically in a car accident, she had no mode of transportation and lived on the outskirts of North Bay. She leaned on a nearby neighbour, as the two friends worked out a barter system where Nelson sewed in exchange for having groceries delivered.⁵⁵⁵ In January 1970, Germaine Perron recalled a fire destroyed her family’s apartment and everything they owned in Verner, Ontario. Her friends and sister-in-law, recognizing what

⁵⁵² Uva Hartman, interview, 25 June 2012.

⁵⁵³ Elisabeth Meier, interview, 9 April 2009.

⁵⁵⁴ Sister Betty Mitchell, interview, 17 August 2007.

⁵⁵⁵ Trudy Nelson, interview, 29 August 2012.

this family had lost, “got together” and held a community-wide shower. As Perron described, “I had the biggest shower, there must have been a hundred people and everything you could imagine, they had it. Dishes, pots and pans, blankets and towels and everything.” To Perron, this shower proved memorable not only because it helped her family rebuild, but also because it symbolized life in a small community. As Perron explained, living “where everybody knows you,” “you’re there to help them in their need and they’re there to help us.”⁵⁵⁶ Women believed that living in smaller communities in the North created a real sense of knowing your neighbour, a closeness and kinship. This closeness led to help and support when individuals and families found themselves in difficult circumstances.

Although women felt a sense of camaraderie among those living in the North, this was not something experienced by all or something everyone looked to participate in. Nora Stewart, who lived in Kirkland Lake and North Bay, thought northern Ontario offered “a different way of life,” explaining “it’s quiet, I think it’s friendlier because you make friends.... It’s nicer, it’s nicer.” At the same time, Stewart admitted that when moving from Kirkland Lake to North Bay in 1962, she found the transition difficult because it was “not an easy place to make friends.” Finding the city a bit closed off at first, it was only when she became friends with coworkers that her circle of friends grew larger.⁵⁵⁷ Remembering her move from Larder Lake to North Bay, Ione Barré also found it challenging to make new friends. Part of it was the close bonds she had formed in Larder Lake, as her group of friends there had “[grown] into young women” together. As she put it, “I never made friends like that since.... I made some good friends, but it’s not the same.” Growing up with a group of young women, Barré went through important life stages and struggles together creating strong bonds of friendship and trust.⁵⁵⁸ On the subject of forming friendships, Joyce Patel explained very bluntly that she “didn’t have much time for it.” Patel

⁵⁵⁶ Germaine Perron, interview, 26 June 2012.

⁵⁵⁷ Nora Stewart, interview, 25 June 2012.

⁵⁵⁸ Ione Barré, interview, 26 June 2012.

dedicated herself to working full-time as a nurse, having little leisure time.⁵⁵⁹ Schedules and moving to new areas complicated friendships. It was not always guaranteed or easy to create meaningful friendships and bonds in northern Ontario.

Other women valued their independence and alone time. Lillian Harris loved her neighbourhood, living on the shores of Lake Nipissing. In this neighbourhood there were a number of families with young children close in age to her own children. Not only would the children play together, but mothers also got together having “coffee klatches at different houses.” Going to one of these get togethers, Harris discovered a chaotic scene with kids running around and sometimes scrapping: “I went over once and it was all these kids running around and she asked me if I would like to join and I said, ‘I don’t think so.’ It was a little too much, it was sometimes one big noise.” Having grown up in a rural area, Harris admitted that although she had physical space between her and her North Bay neighbours, she still encountered an unfamiliar (and uncomfortable) type of busyness and loudness. And while she loved her home in North Bay, she continued to prefer the retreat and solitude of her more isolated and rural cottage.⁵⁶⁰ Growing up in Port Loring, Ontario, Helen Duquette believed that “living in a small community, everybody knows everybody, so you have that support—family support, church support.” But at the same time, Duquette felt the need to leave the community to achieve a sense of safety for herself and her children. It was too easy, she explained, for her alcoholic and abusive ex-husband to find them and re-enter their lives in this small community.⁵⁶¹ Even family and community support could not protect Duquette and her children from her husband. Moving away to North Bay, Duquette found a means to reclaim a sense of safety and maintain her sense of community support. Not everyone wanted to be involved with

⁵⁵⁹ Joyce Patel, interview, 20 August 2012.

⁵⁶⁰ Lillian Harris, interview, 9 May 2012.

⁵⁶¹ Helen Duquette, interview, 24 February 2012.

community, opting in some instances for quietness, solitude and safety. Women made decisions to be involved in or opt out of community, based on their upbringings, needs and personalities.

‘If I have to eat the bread I want to go home, I want to go back to Italy!’: Immigrant-Ethnic Communities in Northern Ontario

Unlike English- and French-Canadian women who had been born in northern Ontario, immigrant women found themselves unfamiliar with the region and the people living there. These women did not share automatic feelings of belonging and support because they had immigrated, and found themselves (often by circumstance) living in northern Ontario. Between 1951 and 1971, the foreign-born population of North Bay, Ontario had more than doubled, from 1, 856 to 4,720. Mirroring national patterns, the numerically largest groups came from Britain (38 per cent), Europe (37 per cent), and the United States (10 per cent) with the Italians and Germans the largest groups, representing 14 per cent and 9 per cent respectively of North Bay’s immigrant population in 1971.⁵⁶² Within this setting, women’s stories too tell us about the complicated social and cultural politics behind feelings of belonging and acceptance. After an eight-day trip aboard the *Raphaela*, Rosa Valentti and her family finally arrived in Halifax. On land, the family looked for something to eat, especially Valentti, who had suffered seasickness and been unable to keep food down for eight days. But as she remembered, “We didn’t have no money, so I went to the store and I went to buy some bread.” Arriving with very little money and only one suitcase, the family could not afford a full meal. And unfortunately, their purchased loaf of white bread was not the type of bread Valentti wanted. “I didn’t like it at all,” she said with laughter. “I told my husband, if I have to eat the bread I want to go home, I want to go back to Italy!” Valentti craved the crusty, dense Italian bread as well as the comforting

⁵⁶² See Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, “Table 48, Population by birthplace for sex, for incorporated cities, towns and villages of 10,000 and over, 1951,” (Ottawa 1951); Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, part III, “Table 37, Population by birthplace and sex, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971,” (Ottawa 1971).

reminder of home it would have brought, as she found herself and her family in a disorienting space where they knew very few people and did not speak the language. Luckily, in North Bay she went “to the Italian store and find Italian bread and other things.”⁵⁶³ As she gestured circling her hands together, she slowly started to get familiar with a small space, finding bread and other ingredients from her homeland in North Bay.

The large Italian population in North Bay supported Italian restaurants, groceries and community organizations. By 1971, the Italian population in the city numbered 2,175—the largest ethnic group outside those identifying as British or English- and French-Canadians.⁵⁶⁴ Many Italian women living in the city belonged to the Women’s Auxiliary of the Davedi Club, a club formed in 1953 to bring together those of Italian ancestry and “to preserve their heritage and culture and to share these with all citizens.”⁵⁶⁵ The Women’s Auxiliary formed an important facet of this Club, recognized as “the most productive and stabilizing factor within the club.” In financially hard times, the Auxiliary helped the Club through “sponsored socials, dances, spaghetti suppers, bake sales, fashion shows and many other events too numerous to mention.” Food-related activities gave these Italian women the most pride, as they had a “completely equipped kitchen” that would be used to successfully host “banquets up to 400 people.”⁵⁶⁶ Images of women in the Davedi kitchen depict perfectly coifed women with pristine white aprons, working together in the kitchen as they prepared dishes and ladled food out onto men’s

⁵⁶³ Valentti, interview.

⁵⁶⁴ Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, part III, “Table 5, Population by ethnic group and sex, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971,” (Ottawa 1971).

⁵⁶⁵ Davedi Club, “Davedi Club, North Bay Ontario: The First 25 Years, 1953-1978,” Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, 1.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3; 15; 17.



Figure 6: “Davedi Kitchen in Action,” “Davedi Club, North Bay Ontario: The First 25 Years, 1953-1978,” Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, p. 19.

Printed with permission of The Ladies Auxiliary, Davedi Club, North Bay, Ontario.

plates (figure 6). Their kitchen was well organized, with equipment lined up against the walls, neatly hung curtains and a clean butcher block centering all of the activity and also doubling as a serving banquet. This space also continued to satisfy traditional gender roles, as men dressed in their suits lined up with plates in hand to be served by women, who undoubtedly had cooked all day.⁵⁶⁷ The Women’s Auxiliary kitchen epitomized a respectable space where women shared recipes, preparation and cooking techniques and most likely a few stories and laughs. These

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

women also served Italian foods to Italian and non-Italian community members in North Bay, introducing them to a food culture, which they might be unfamiliar with.

The German and Greek populations also had community organizations. In her interview, Elfredie Bremermann remembered socializing with other members of the Germania Club in North Bay where she spoke German with others, sung German songs and ate German foods.⁵⁶⁸ A proud member of the Greek community, Eva Wardlaw recalled the festivities surrounding Greek Independence Day including a big parade down Main Street in North Bay. There were also unofficial activities in the Greek community as women often got together on weekends, sharing foods like *spanakorizo*—a spinach and rice dish—at each other’s homes. And during Christmas time, Wardlaw recalled women crowded in her mother’s kitchen to make *baklava*. Her mother carefully covered her “great big table in the kitchen” with a plastic tablecloth and the six or so other women used broomsticks because “the rolling pins were too small” and rolled out the phyllo dough for this sweet and sticky dessert. As Wardlaw explained, “they would make these great big pieces that were as big as the table, like rolling it all out...until it was so thin. And then they would slice it up into little bits to make *baklava*.” The next day these women would then travel to “someone else’s house...and help them with the same thing.”⁵⁶⁹ Greek and Italian women created strategies to gather together and help each other to carry on ethnic food traditions. Doing so, they cut down on the physical labour involved in rolling out the pastry for a dish like *baklava* as well as finding opportunities and spaces to socialize with one another.

In less formal contexts such as their homes, Italian women also lost connections between food production and community. In her small Italian village of Carpinone, Rosa Valenti’s sense of community with other women was most definitely connected with food production. There, women shared rapport and lent cooking tools, especially in August, when they made sauce out

⁵⁶⁸ Elfredie Bremermann, interview, 10 June 2009; “Welcoming New Year at Germania Club,” *North Bay Nugget*, 6 January 1969.

⁵⁶⁹ Eva Wardlaw, interview, 27 August 2012.

of ripened tomatoes plucked from their gardens. They dried out tomatoes on pieces of wood, allowing the juices to thicken and be jarred for sauce. This was a community effort. “And I borrow your piece of wood,” Valentti described to me, “and you do tomorrow and you borrow my piece of wood, ... four or five neighbours we used to borrow each others’.” By sharing resources and labour, women prepared greater quantities of tomato sauce. Among neighbours, women also shared secrets about how to make dishes “more tasty” and ingredients if they happened to run out. According to Valentti, this group of women was like “family.” When Valentti immigrated to North Bay, Ontario in 1959, she broke off these close relationships. She also had to change the way she made tomato sauce. Her first two years in the city, Valentti lived in an apartment and lacked the green space to grow tomatoes. When her family purchased their first home in 1961, Valentti and her husband filled their entire backyard with over a hundred tomato plants and made sauce by drying out juices as she had in Italy. Even still, the process changed because Valentti and her husband made it on their own. There was no sharing of women’s labour, good pieces of wood or ingredients. And although Valentti did form a community with other Italian women, she largely lost the relationship between community support and home food production in North Bay. Food production became an individual- and family-based activity. It was no wonder with all the work put into making tomato sauce that Valentti grimaced when I mentioned my mother had served us the mass-produced Ragu, laughingly saying “none of that, that is the easy way!”⁵⁷⁰ In North Bay, immigrant women like Valentti lost close cultural ties and found themselves surrounded by other ethnicities and cultures. Since food production and the rituals of eating meals had been so connected to women’s community in their homeland, immigrant women found themselves changing their ideas about what constituted community and the processes surrounding their food production.

⁵⁷⁰ Rosa Valentti, interview with author, 30 April 2009.

While there were larger ethno-religious groups who formed communities and their own organizations, their strength varied and there remained daily and meaningful interactions with others outside their specific ethno-religious group. Even though there were enough Greek community members to continue food traditions and hold a parade, there were never enough to support a Greek Orthodox Church. Most of the Greeks living in North Bay went to St. John's Anglican Church because, as Eva Wardlaw explained it, they were "very similar" in terms of religious tenets.⁵⁷¹ Other women did not have the population to support friendships along immigrant-ethnic lines. Parisian-born Charlotte Aimes found it difficult to grasp the French-Canadian dialect with its mixture of English and French. Her community was not made up of other French speakers, but rather of neighbours and work colleagues from Canadore College in North Bay. One night at dinner with a German couple, she recalled their realization that "he and my husband had fought each other in Italy."⁵⁷² People who had been enemies during the Second World War could develop friendships because there were not strict national or ethnic loyalties. Lina Karakans, who moved to North Bay in 1957, recalled finding about a "half dozen" other Latvians living there. Although Karakans made infrequent trips to Toronto to continue foodways and relationships along immigrant-ethnic lines, it was not a priority to have connections to a large community or network of friends. As she explained, "I can't cope with too many people because I never have."⁵⁷³ Growing up with her grandparents in a rural region outside of Riga, Latvia, Karakans was unaccustomed to being surrounded by a lot of other people. And while she made friends with her next door neighbours, she valued the privacy and quietness she discovered in North Bay. In their new postwar setting, relationships based on family or ethnic and regional identities were not always possible or necessary. Instead, relationships were born out of shared experiences as well as work and neighbourhood spaces.

⁵⁷¹ Wardlaw, interview.

⁵⁷² Charlotte Aimes, interview, 27 April 2009.

⁵⁷³ Lina Karakans, interview, 22 April 2009.

Although many women embraced the immigrant-ethnic communities they found in North Bay, others took this opportunity to create distance for themselves and remake their identities. This was particularly true for the German women interviewed. Lottie Frenssen chose to work in North Bay because she wanted to distance herself from other Germans. As she explained, she took this opportunity “to learn something different, not to fall back on the same old rut.” In some ways, it also gave her an opportunity to distance herself from the atrocities Adolf Hitler committed during the Second World War. Frenssen contended, “the things we found out after the War, with the concentration camps, the average German did not know that.” “My mother, in the first magazine we saw, said now we have to be ashamed to be a German. And that stuck with us a long time.”⁵⁷⁴ What Germans knew and did not know about the Holocaust has been a historically contested topic, but what should be taken away from Frenssen’s interview was her sense of shame about her German identity.⁵⁷⁵ In moving to North Bay, Frenssen also looked to distance herself from her ethnic-national background. Elisabeth Meier shared similar feelings. Several hours after our interview ended, Meier phoned me at home and, in a hesitant voice, she admitted that “being German wasn’t popular” in postwar Canada. As more information surfaced about the atrocities Nazis had committed during the Holocaust, she explained, “You didn’t want to stand out. You wanted to be like everyone else especially if you were German.” Meier came to Canada as a young German woman in 1955. While the Canadian government had once again welcomed German immigrants by this time, Meier still felt ashamed of her German roots because of the atrocities committed by her fellow Germans.⁵⁷⁶ In coping

⁵⁷⁴ Lottie Frenssen, interview, 4 June 2009.

⁵⁷⁵ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Teaneck, New Jersey: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1985); *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: the Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992); Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁷⁶ Meier, interview. By 1955, Meier along with many German immigrants would have found much support in Canada for their move. Until 1950, it had been difficult for German nationals to immigrate to Canada. They had been excluded from Canada due to their enemy alien status and because they were not considered statutory refugees by the International Refugee Organization. Canada’s membership in NATO and within the Western community

with this sense of shame, Meier decided to embrace everything that was Canadian and try to become Canadian herself. One way she did this was through food, cooking and eating. “I remember eating out and I loved eating out at friends houses, I could get REAL Canadian food.” Her mother and grandmother recognizing Meier’s growing preference for Canadian foods, tried to cook dishes at home they considered Canadian. In recounting her mother’s imitation of spaghetti sauce, Meier could not help but grimace at the thought of eating the red sauce again. “Well she would melt some butter and make a white sauce,” Meier described. “And then she would add either tomato soup or a can of tomato paste and that was our tomato sauce.” “Ugh!” “It was like eating paste,” she laughingly said. This was a humorous memory of Meier’s mother attempting to make spaghetti sauce. It also tells us something about the ways immigrant women tried to experiment with new dishes such as tomato sauce, by using their previous knowledge of pasta sauces such as white sauce. Indeed, when I asked Meier if this sauce was about budgeting for meals, she replied, “yes, budgetary wise, but they thought they were making a spaghetti sauce.... It looked red.”⁵⁷⁷ Meier’s mother tried to accommodate her daughter’s growing desire for Canadian foods. And while it was not quite what Meier had been expecting, it does point out why an immigrant woman might want to become Canadian and her family’s attempt to satisfy that want.

Immigrant and ethnic groups also encountered prejudice. After she first arrived in Canada, Lina Karakans remembered hearing two older, “WASP” women, gawking at her on public transit and quietly whispering about the “bloody DPs” and “damned continentals.” As she explained, this ethnocentric sentiment came out of “feeling threatened and that’s why they want

demanding that Canada declare German’s as acceptable immigrants. This was especially so as the Korean War started and the need to consolidate Western nations against the new Cold War enemy. Angelika E. Sauer, “A Matter of Domestic Policy? Canadian Immigration Policy and the Admission of Germans, 1945-50,” *Canadian Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (1993): 260-263; Reg Whitaker, *Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987), 102-119; Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1869-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Inc., 1995), 158.

⁵⁷⁷ Meier, interview.

to look down on them instead of getting to know them, how they are as a person.”⁵⁷⁸ Even a numerically larger group with community support, like Italians, faced ethnic-racial hostility. A pre-Second World War immigrant, Italian-born Antonietta Demarco and her family established a successful family-run grocery and deli that sold fresh fruit and vegetables to the North Bay community and operated a lunch counter that became popular with teenagers after school. But as anti-fascist sentiment increased during the War, and Italians living in Canada were denounced as fascists, people turned on the Demarcos, especially after her husband was interned in June 1942.⁵⁷⁹ Demarco shuttered as she remembered the ugly taunts, the racialized epithets written on their storefront (“boycott the Italians!”) and the strain of living in North Bay at the time.⁵⁸⁰ Sales plummeted to less than ten dollars a week most weeks. “Even Italian people” were afraid to shop there for fear of being labeled fascist. But after surviving the war years by scrimping and saving—“you didn’t waste anything”—they resumed business and it returned to “normal” after the War. Yet the tone of fear she conveyed in telling this story speaks to a more enduring impact. Her granddaughter recalled that it explains why her own parents were counseled, “to be Canadian” in order “to survive.” This influenced how she and her siblings were raised. They were taught to fit in with the English-speaking community and hence, never learned Italian-speaking skills (segregating them from newly arrived post-1945 Italian immigrants) and also developed a penchant for Canadian meals (including recipes from Betty Crocker’s cookbook).⁵⁸¹ A family-run grocery store, in this instance, became the context for mistreatment and exclusion by their local community, which they had for so long been members. It also had lasting ramifications for the ethnic and cultural identity of a family.

⁵⁷⁸ Karakans, interview.

⁵⁷⁹ Demarco family, interview, 28 August 2012. One of about 600 Italians interned, he would spend two years in Petawawa classified as an “enemy alien”. Franca Iacovetta and Roberto Perin, “Italians and Wartime Internment: Comparative Perspective on Public Policy, Historical Memory and Daily Life,” in *Enemies Within: Italians and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin and Angelo Principe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 4-5.

⁵⁸⁰ Antoinetta Demarco, Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 23 August 1973.

⁵⁸¹ Demarco family, interview.

A Case Study: Jewish and Non-Jewish Community Interactions

By 1971, the Jewish population of North Bay, Ontario had reached 190.⁵⁸² The first Jewish settler of record had arrived in the city in 1895, and by 1913, the Jewish community had grown large enough to support and build the Sons of Jacob Synagogue. This would be an Orthodox Jewish community. Although rabbis from surrounding areas visited the North Bay Synagogue, the city never attracted a permanent rabbi.⁵⁸³ As Brooky Robbins recalled, “We never had a rabbi. You always had a lay leader.... Sudbury had a rabbi, other places—not North Bay.” Unsurprisingly, the Synagogue represented a crucial space for the religious and social life of the city’s Jewish population. After school everyday, Robbins recalled the routine of walking to the Synagogue to learn Hebrew. Walking with other non-Jewish students who also had to learn languages after school like Greek and Italian, Robbins recalled “we were friendly... because we all had to go to school after school. So we all sort of commiserated with each other.” Although at the time Robbins “commiserated” with friends about more schooling, today she is “really proud” that she could recite, read and “do everything” in Hebrew.⁵⁸⁴ Robbins’ story tells us about the education Jewish children received in this small northern community, instilling in them a link to their religious identity. It also highlights the efforts of other immigrant-ethnic groups in the city to educate their children and maintain linguistic connections to their ethnic and religious heritage.

The small size of the population created close connections between community members. As Robbins remembered, “You shared, you supported the Hebrew school, you supported the Synagogue...—nobody was left out.” Robbins added, “Everybody was all

⁵⁸² Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, part III, “Table 5, Population by ethnic group and sex, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971,” (Ottawa 1971).

⁵⁸³ Jewish Association Archives, “Early Community History: First Jewish Settlers,” North Bay: Ontario’s Small Jewish Communities. Accessed here: <http://www.ontariojewisharchives.org/Exhibitions/Online/Ontarios-Small-Jewish-Communities>. Last accessed: 7 May 2014.

⁵⁸⁴ Robbins, interview.

inclusive, but that did not mean that they liked each other, that they loved each other.... But they were always there, I think, for each other.”⁵⁸⁵ When Gettie Brown moved from Ottawa to North Bay to begin her married life with her husband Herb Brown, she described her reception by the community: “We were all very closely knit people. I was very lucky, I was just like one of their children, very lucky.”⁵⁸⁶ Cynthia Flesher recalled that during the holidays, everyone who had moved away or had gone to school, returned and felt “happy to see each other.” Since her grandmother’s house was located close to the Synagogue, she always hosted an open house after the first day of Rosh Hashanah. “And everyone went over there, had a glass of wine and a piece of her honey cake. And probably other things too like herring, like a *Kiddush*, and that was sort of a tradition.” “After everyone ate this tremendous meal,” Flesher said they then went onto the house of another community member to eat more food and to continue to enjoy each other’s company.⁵⁸⁷ The small size of the Jewish community meant that everyone knew each other, spent time with one another and were included in events.

The community size also resulted in members keeping track of one another as well as their religious observations. As described in previous chapters, Jewish women made great effort in order to maintain a kosher diet for themselves and their families. Keeping kosher represented not only an important religious observation, but also an important symbol of their Jewish identity when they lacked a large Jewish population and a permanent Rabbi in this small northern city.⁵⁸⁸ Finding kosher sources of meat was particularly difficult. Herb Brown recalled that growing up his mother, a widow at twenty-nine years old, kept chickens to feed her two children and to sell to the North Bay community. The Rabbi serving the community at the time was also a *Shechita*, and as Brown explained “he would come out and kill the chickens and my

⁵⁸⁵ Robbins, interview.

⁵⁸⁶ Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012.

⁵⁸⁷ Cynthia Flesher, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 6 February 2008.

⁵⁸⁸ Robbins, interview.

mother would clean them up, and she would sell them to everybody.” This represented not only a kosher food source for community members, but also a way to help support Brown’s cash strapped mother.⁵⁸⁹ Along with buying local sources of kosher meat, women also had it shipped in from larger cities and, at one point, the larger supermarket Loblaws stocked kosher meat in their freezers. This supply, however, was short-lived. As Gettie Brown confided in hushed tones, shrugging her shoulders, “what happened was that not everyone was keeping kosher so they couldn’t maintain it.”⁵⁹⁰ When families did not maintain a kosher, other community members noticed because of the size of the Jewish population as well as it impacting their sources of foods.

The Jewish community in North Bay retold individual and intimate stories, symbolizing their connection to the wider Jewish community. As a child in hiding during the Second World War, Sandy Naiman’s story was told and retold by members of the North Bay Jewish community. Living in a small town near Lutsk, Ukraine, Naiman’s parents had left her with a non-Jewish family who worked on their family farm, hoping the separation of their family would keep their young daughter safe. Naiman adopted the identity of the non-Jewish family’s visiting Ukrainian relative, “crossing myself and did all the things.” Doing so, she aimed to hide her religious identity from German soldiers, who for a time even billeted with the family whom Naiman stayed with. Naiman never again saw her parents alive. Following the end of the War, Naiman’s aunt had heard about a child in hiding and went in search of her niece. Eventually reunited with her aunt and uncle, Naiman unburied “a little bag of jewels that her parents sent her so she wouldn’t be killed,” using the jewels to help buy “their way out” and secure passage to Canada. After two years of living in Italy, they made their way to North Bay, Ontario in 1949

⁵⁸⁹ Herb Brown, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 7 January 2008.

⁵⁹⁰ Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012.

to join family members—Naiman’s other aunt—who had earlier immigrated to the city.⁵⁹¹ Gloria Guttman, Naiman’s cousin and eventually her adopted sister, recounted the emotional welcoming scene. The night before Passover, the city’s Jewish community gathered at the railway station to welcome Naiman along with her aunt and uncle. As Guttman recalled, “and my aunt gets down off the train and she’s wearing a housecoat, a cotton housecoat—it’s snowing—because she didn’t have anything else.” She continued, “I do remember Sandra getting down too, and she’s holding onto my aunt’s skirt and she looks so frightened. It was a sight to behold.” Her aunt ran across the railway tracks as she saw Guttman’s mother, and “well she falls down and she’s holding my mother on her knees—it was a sight.” Tapping her head and crying, Guttman said, “It sits the real way in my head. It was so beautiful.” The family sat down for supper that night, and Guttman remembered observing Naiman, describing her as “frightened,” “so frail,” with “little bones and big eyes” from her lack of nourishment. Guttman watched as Naiman took a “piece of bread off the table and [put] it in her pocket, in case she wouldn’t have anymore.”⁵⁹² Naiman later chose to stay with Guttman and her family, being adopted into their family. This is a story that Naiman does not like to tell. Her own children only discovered their mother’s personal history after returning from school one day in Toronto and asking her questions.⁵⁹³ At the same time, this is a story repeated by members of the North Bay Jewish community. Members of the Jewish community asked in their interviews, if I had heard Naiman’s story or offered me details about Naiman’s personal experience.⁵⁹⁴ In the community’s retelling of this story, they are citing their personal connections to this horrific event in Jewish history and directly incorporating it into the history of their community.

⁵⁹¹ Sandy Naiman, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 19 September 2007; Gloria Guttman, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 16 January 2008.

⁵⁹² Guttman, interview.

⁵⁹³ Naiman, interview.

⁵⁹⁴ Gettie Brown, interview, 25 February 2012; Guttman, interview.

Among Jewish-Canadians living in North Bay, there were friendships that crossed ethno-religious lines. These friendships were often used as evidence of the harmony, and lack of racial and ethnic tensions in the city. For Brooky Robbins, one of her closest friends growing up in North Bay was non-Jewish. As she recalled, her friend still says to this day “the only thing I was sad about in my whole life was that I wasn’t born Jewish, Brooky.” Asked to explain what her friend loved about Jewish life, Robbins responded, “she thinks everybody is smart, she likes the sense of community, the sense of camaraderie, the way everyone looks after each other. The way we’re so forthcoming. There is a difference in that way.”⁵⁹⁵ As a young woman, Cynthia Flesher noticed that she and her non-Jewish friends went to different summer camps. She also saw that her non-Jewish friends made an effort to be inclusive. “If we went to their homes,” Flesher explained, “they tried to be sure that we would have something that would be acceptable for dinner and they LOVED to come to my place at Passover because they loved all of the food. When we would be so tired of mozza, they thought it was just great!” On her friendships in North Bay, Flesher surmised, “I had a good social life, in spite of the fact that I didn’t have any Jewish friends, I had lots of good friends.”⁵⁹⁶ The lack of a large Jewish population meant that young children and teenagers often did not have easy access to Jewish children their own age. This meant Jewish summer camps offered opportunities to socialize and network with their Jewish peers, and that most Jewish children living in North Bay had friends that crossed ethno-religious lines.

Events in the Jewish community also included non-Jewish members. In September 1956, the *North Bay Nugget* ran a series of articles on the observance of Rosh Hashanah in Jewish homes.⁵⁹⁷ These informational articles served to educate the mainly white, Protestant-Catholic

⁵⁹⁵ Robbins, interview.

⁵⁹⁶ Flesher, interview.

⁵⁹⁷ Hadassah Organization of Canada, “Jewish High Holy Days are Observed in Home,” *North Bay Nugget*, 1 September 1956; “Jewish Community Marks Beginning of Year 5718,” *North Bay Nugget*, September 1956.

community on Jewish religious traditions. Herb and Gettie Brown recalled their son's huge Bar Mitzvah, inviting family members as well as members of the city's Jewish and non-Jewish community including the mayor, nuns from the Sisters of St. Joseph and Protestant-Catholic women from the local Canadian Club. Hosting a dinner at the Empire Hotel in North Bay, the Brown's hired a kosher caterer from Toronto to feed their guests. Sending a driver down to Toronto in a station wagon to pick up the catering, the driver quickly found that there was not nearly enough room for all the food; they were then forced to rent a van to ensure the food safely made the four-hour drive back north. The day, as Herb Brown described it, was "pandemonium." The Empire Hotel allowed the Brown's to take over the kitchen, as Gettie Brown and "the rabbi who was there, did the cleaning on the stove and everything that was being used for the food" making sure it satisfied the standards of a kosher kitchen. Herb and Gettie Brown recalled that this represented a really special event in the community, as everyone "really enjoyed it" celebrating their son and learning about Jewish cultural, food and religious traditions.⁵⁹⁸ This celebration symbolized a space for intercultural learning and interactions.

Members of the Jewish community often talked about experiences of togetherness among Jewish and non-Jewish people living in North Bay, Ontario. They discussed friendships and acceptance in this city across ethno-religious lines, giving evidence of inclusiveness, acceptance and the lack of intolerance. At the same time, women's memories contradict this image of community harmony. They encountered prejudice, and struggled with their ethno-religious identity in this predominately Christian city. For Gloria Guttman, her positive feelings about growing up in North Bay only came after years of reflection. As she explained, "it was a good place to be from." She saw that her parents were "able to establish a community, within a community and intermingle. I think that is really an important thing to say, about how a Jew can

⁵⁹⁸ Herb Brown, interview; Gettie Brown, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 7 January 2008.

fit into a larger group, I really do. And without prejudice.” Guttman surmised, “We had a wonderful life.” Yet it has only been in recent years, following the death of her parents, that Guttman felt this way about the city. As a young woman, Guttman said, “it’s a strange thing to stay, to have wanted to leave so badly. I always went home of course, but it was with reluctance to the whole community.” Having experienced anti-Semitism, Guttman felt hesitant to return to North Bay. She recalled her sense that “you can’t do anything about it” and feelings of being “ashamed, ashamed, ashamed, ashamed.... I was too young then to stand up for myself, it wasn’t that I didn’t want to be Jewish, I just felt ashamed.”⁵⁹⁹ On this topic, Cynthia Flesher said frankly shaking her head, “Oh, I remember anti-Semitism. Not bad, but it would rear its head every once in a while.” She was called “a dirty Jew.” Her parents also refused to allow her to go out on Good Friday. As Flesher explained, pursing her lips together, “Just stay home, don’t go where you’re not wanted on Good Friday. No reason to be out, the stores aren’t open, the schools aren’t open, the library isn’t open, there aren’t any movies and we stayed home.”⁶⁰⁰ This Jewish Canadian family understood that there would be hostility and tough attitudes when venturing out on city streets. Even though women experienced great acceptance and intermingled with their non-Jewish peers, there were also moments of intolerance and anti-Semitism. And for some young Jewish women, at this critical stage in development, this created feelings of shame and uncertainty about their identity. It also did not align with their story of ethnic and racial harmony told by so many members of this northern community.

Non-White Communities in Northern Ontario

There were very few visible racial minorities living in postwar North Bay, Ontario. Out of the 49, 185 population in 1971, for example, recorded 35 African Canadians, 265 Chinese, 20

⁵⁹⁹ Guttman, interview.

⁶⁰⁰ Flesher, interview.

Japanese, 15 West Indian and 345 Indigenous peoples living in the city.⁶⁰¹ Despite their few numbers or maybe due to their small numbers, there were spaces for inter-racial meetings and relationships. Helen Duquette operated a boarding house while taking care of her two daughters and attending teacher's college. Finding herself overwhelmed and stretched for time, Duquette looked for assistance with the boarders and soon hired Florence, a Jamaican woman she met at church. In return for paying her passage to Canada, Florence worked for a couple in North Bay until she paid back her trip costs. Yet Florence soon found herself exploited and "her hands were just raw" from overwork. Meeting Florence in church, Duquette heard stories and saw the marks of mistreatment. Soon Duquette, maybe wanting to help a woman she related to as a survivor of domestic violence and mistreatment, took Florence into her home and paid the remaining balance owed to her employers (although it was nearly paid off). When Florence moved in with the family and boarders, Duquette recalled "nobody was happy with Florence there. And I said, 'everybody be nice, I don't care what you think.' Florence, she was different, yes, she was black and she was a character."⁶⁰² Florence helped with the work of running a boarding house, collecting a wage as she cleaned as well as prepared food and laundry. Florence also stood out in this home, and in the city of North Bay, as her black body marked her as racially different from the prevailing whiteness. Indeed, she was not initially accepted into this household.

There were also more formal settings for inter-racial interactions. The Homemakers' Club of the Nipissing First Nation (NFN) staged a picnic in August 1956, as a "money-raising venture." They invited residents from nearby Sturgeon Falls, Cache Bay, North Bay and Sudbury, even offering free transportation to help ensure people made it to this Anishinaabe

⁶⁰¹ Canada, Bureau of the Census, *Population: General Characteristics*, vol. 1, part III, "Table 37, Population by birthplace and sex, for incorporated cities, towns and other municipal subdivisions of 10,000 population and over, 1971," (Ottawa 1971).

⁶⁰² Duquette, interview.

community. They planned a full day of activities including a penny sale, a mile long swim, a morning mass in the Ojibwa language and a fastball game between NHL All-Stars and the Nipissing Braves. One of the highlights of the day was undoubtedly the performance by Princess Red Rock who “dressed in typical Indian costume sang ‘Indian Love Call,’ ‘Rose Marie,’ Schubert’s ‘Ava Maria’ and ‘Danny Boy.’” Summing up the events of the day, the *North Bay Nugget* reported that cars “jammed the village” and the while “many came out of pure curiosity, theres came with a pessimistic attitude, but all stayed to enjoy the hospitality of the Nipissing Indians.” Despite “lacking hyrdro and many other facilities,” the NFN community “put on a professional show, which received highest praise from everyone present.” The fish dinner, where the hosts served over 200 pounds of fresh fish, saw “long lines of visitors, with watering mouths waiting to taste fish as only an Indian can cook it.”⁶⁰³ This picnic introduced non-Indigenous members of surrounding communities to Indigenous culture, as traditional dress, food and culture went on full display. On the topic of self-representation in *Authentic Indians*, Paige Raibmon argues that by conforming to colonial expectations Indigenous people gained access to a public forum “where they could make dynamic assertions of identity, culture and politics to White audiences.”⁶⁰⁴ Although curiosity drew non-Indigenous people to the picnic, the newspaper betrays that most found themselves positively surprised about what they discovered. For their part, the NFN used this picnic to not only teach non-Indigenous people about their community, but also as an opportunity to fundraise for church repairs, to assist with costs of the ill and dead in the community as well as to help struggling families near Christmas time.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰³ “Nipissing Indians Plan Big Program on Sunday”; “Free Bus Service to Indian Village For Sports Day”; “Successful Community Picnic Staged by Nipissing Indians”; “At Garden Village Fish Fry”; “Priest and Princess”; *North Bay Nugget*, August 1956.

⁶⁰⁴ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.

⁶⁰⁵ “Successful Community Picnic Staged by Nipissing Indians.”

Indigenous people also faced racism in northern Ontario. Métis Nicole Petrant-Rennie recalled observing the mob-mentality of children. “If the child could be identified as coming from a poor family, if the child looked what people would consider to be stereotypically looking Native, any of these differences...they would be used against them. So if they had the look they would be teased.” Being an “eye witness” to this harassment would be one of the reasons, Petrant-Rennie considered herself fortunate that her “skin wasn’t dark” and she was able to “pass as non-Native” during these early years of her life and presumably escape the torment.⁶⁰⁶ Marianna Couchie, an Anishinaabe woman, shared similar memories. Driving on a bus to a new school with other Indigenous students, Couchie recalled pulling into the yard and “the students there were so upset that there would be a bunch of Indians were going to their school. And they were harassing us, calling us names. Like we were all sitting on the bus, and the bus driver wouldn’t let us out.” Although the Indigenous students soon found out that they would not be attending this school, the memory stuck with Couchie: “There was such—there was out and out racism going on. And for some of the kids, if it hadn’t been for my mom insisting that we always acknowledge that we are Indian because some of us were very fair skinned because we take after my mom....” This racist hostility contributed to a desire to hide Indigenous identities, but also, Couchie believed, added to Indigenous students being “pushed out of school or dropped out of school.” Indeed, Couchie would be one of the first from her community to graduate from high school.⁶⁰⁷ Interactions with outlying white, non-Indigenous communities led many of the women interviewed to have complicated relationships with their Indigenous identity. They faced racism from white children, and from an early age were made to have negative feelings about who they were, their culture and their traditions.

⁶⁰⁶ Nicole Petrant-Rennie, interview with Greg Ault, 20 January 2004, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

⁶⁰⁷ Marianna Couchie, interview with Françoise Noël, 2005, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

Indigenous women and men also felt the pain of exclusion from physical spaces, and the lasting ramifications of residential schooling. Marianna Couchie's father experience of residential schooling impacted his ability to participate in the community including shopping at grocery stores. Her father went to a residential school located just outside Spanish, Ontario.⁶⁰⁸ Wanting to learn more about this painful experience in her father's life, Couchie traveled with him to the now boarded up school to walk the grounds together. There, her father told stories about residential school, and "it was just like he was reliving the whole experience." It has only been in recent years that Couchie's father opened up about "the hard parts" including the sexual abuse that occurred. Although never sexually abused himself, Couchie's father witnessed the Priest walking through the dorms at night and "going to the boys' beds." His traumatic experiences at residential school "had a profound affect on my dad," explained Couchie. "It was negative. When he came out of there, he didn't feel good about being Indian. He felt like he didn't belong in white society." Going into Sturgeon Falls, a small town near Nipissing First Nation territory, Couchie saw her father as "he would just go to one store and he'd buy the groceries there, and he'd come straight home and not really explore the town." In later years, Couchie remembered that friends and family members wanted to take her father out for a meal. But "he always felt like he didn't belong there. Like he was concerned that they wouldn't serve him." Couchie talked to him, saying, "No dad, we have every right to be there. Our money is just as good as anybody's money, and we have the right." Eventually with the passage of time

⁶⁰⁸ On Canadian residential school experiences, see Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné, "From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools," in *Report Prepared for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008); Agnes Grant, *Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Native Women Reclaimed Their Lives After Residential School* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2004); Agnes Grant, *No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools in Canada* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Press, 1996); J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999); Brent Stonefish, *Moving Beyond: Understanding the Impacts of Residential Schools* (Owen Sound, ON: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2007).

and undoubtedly conversations with his children, “he [felt] more secure being Indian.”⁶⁰⁹ The lasting implications of residential schooling shaped how this father felt about his Indigeneity, and the ways in which he entered white-owned businesses like grocery stores and restaurants.

Within their own communities, and especially in more recent years, Indigenous people formed networks of cultural and familial support. Marianna Couchie recalled getting together for picnics, marriages and “the Christian days” like Easter and Christmas. On New Years Day she recalled their family would all get together “at somebody’s house” and the adults would have a party, where at midnight they “would go outside with their shot guns and shoot” in a traditional shooting. Funerals also offered opportunities for the NFN community to gather. Couchie recalled the “large, large funerals” because “there were some families [with] eighteen kids, twelve kids. It was not unusual to have these huge families.” On occasion, so many people attended the funerals that they “would carry the pews outside and the mass would be held outdoors.” Food represented an important facet of these funeral rituals as “people always brought food to the family who had lost because they needed to be fed and nourished during that time.” Today, episodes of community celebration are taking a greater traditional turn. The rituals surrounding death and dying, for example, have returned to Indigenous traditions. When a person “isn’t long in the world,” a teepee will be set up and people will “gather wood and they’ll go out and get the cedar bows for the floor of the teepee.” When the person does pass away, fire keepers will go and light a fire and keep it burning and family members will place tobacco, sweet grass and gifts with the deceased in the coffin “because they say it takes four days for that journey home. So there would be those things to help them on their journeys.” Family and friends will then assemble, sharing songs, prayers and “reminiscing about the person.”⁶¹⁰ The return to these traditional practices strengthened community identities and ties.

⁶⁰⁹ Couchie, interview.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

Revitalizing Indigenous cultural knowledge and practices, has also been a source of healing from the impact of racism, exclusion and colonialism.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored women's feelings of community and belonging in northern Ontario. Food did not always take a central role in women's stories. Rather, stories focus on their feelings of connection with other people and the region in which they were living in. Food was there as women shared together in the making, serving and eating of food. When I asked Irene Martin about the importance of food in her life, she reflected, "Food is the foundation of many relationships. When you break bread with people, you learn about the people you break bread with that you can't learn any other way."⁶¹¹ Indeed, it was in participating in food-related sharing and activities that women forged relationships with other women and community members learning how others work in the kitchen, gaining a sense of support and solidarity with other wives, mothers and daughters as well as sharing laughter and informal interactions.

Women's food related memories also factored into their feelings of belonging within northern Ontario. Finding foods and being able to recreate dishes, especially when women were not from this region, helped create a sense of connection. But these were not always positive memories of belonging within this region. Despite women's memories of the friendship and inclusivity in northern Ontario, there were exclusions and discrimination based on categories of ethnicity, race and religion. These painful episodes marked a contrast from the projected image of tolerance. These episodes also had lasting impacts on women's relationships to their ethnic, racial and religious identities. Some women would move away from traditional cultural or linguistic practices, trying to assimilate or blend in with the largely white, English-Canadian population. Others would move away from the region searching for new and different communities, and a sense of belonging along ethno-racial or religious lines.

⁶¹¹ Irene Martin, interview, 25 June 2012.

Conclusion

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” uses the life narratives of nearly seventy women who lived in post-1945 northern Ontario. These women claimed a range of class, ethnic, racial, religious and sexual identities. They included a mix of English- and French-speaking Canadians, European immigrants and Anishinaabe and Métis peoples. Many worked intermittently in the paid labour force to contribute to the family economy. They were also single, married, divorced, widowed and religious women. Their voices tell a collective story about the daily lives of women. In the post-1945 period, many women’s lives centered around attaining, preparing and cooking food for themselves and their families. By focusing interview questions on food, women talked about their everyday choices, happiness and struggles, family relationships and friendships as well as the physical geographies they occupied. Their memories about food allowed us to access the intimate spaces and places of their lives.

This project contributes to our knowledge of women’s identities and relationships with food and cooking. It looks at how women used food to negotiate the physical, cultural, familial and ideological spaces they inhabited. The women interviewed for this project shared how food became a critical source for identity formation and feelings of belonging, but also a source of fear, loneliness, intimidation and ignorance. Their memories confirm the findings of feminist scholars who argue against the idea that preparing and cooking food were/are women’s natural roles. Poor and working-class as well as immigrant women still held strong memories of hunger and food deprivation. Their tearful and vivid accounts point to the lasting reverberations of food shortages. They often explained their food practices in terms of a survival strategy learned at a home, a recipe that came from studiously watching female relative cook in the kitchen, a distaste for a certain dish or food because it was different from before or a psychological relief

they found from the sheer quantity of food available even when they could not always fully participate in it. For Helen Duquette, poor nutrition as a young girl caused her to lose all her teeth by the age of twenty-one. Determined to provide a well-balanced diet for her children, Duquette planted a massive garden in her North Bay backyard with every vegetable she could imagine. As a widowed mother, Eva Wardlaw expressed little interest in preparing food and cooking. Despite gifts of cookbooks and not-so-subtle-hints she could improve her skills, Wardlaw focused on her career as a teacher and financially providing for her three children. Dora Pitt sacrificed her well being by returning to the home of her physically abusive father to prepare meals and look after her younger brothers. For these women, food was not a source of happy and positive family memories. Rather, food and cooking represented a source of anxiety, isolation and mistreatment as women struggled to provide food for their families, strove to learn about nutrition and meal planning and do so in ways that satisfied the expectations of cultural and social commentators. Other women rebuffed the idea that the kitchen was their natural domain and searched for other means to attain personal fulfillment.

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” contributes a spatial perspective to food and memory studies. For European immigrant women, interviews were emotional as women recalled feelings of grief over the death of parents and children, the strain immigration put on relationships with their mothers, the unnerving feelings of not knowing where your dinner that night would come from—if it came at all—and relief. Yes, relief when they finally achieved a sense of food security. The findings in this project point out the long-term resonance of food scarcity and deprivation, migration as well as family connections in the individual identities and everyday lives of the women interviewed. Their lives reveal similar experiences such as their observation of abundance in Canada after leaving a context of deprivation in their European homelands. Or the marked role that food plays in these women’s narratives, as their pre-migration experiences with food and cooking were just as formative to

their identities and post-migration lives as their gender, class, ethnic and racial identities. But it also reveals divergences, as they responded differently and made different choices on the basis of gender ideals, family support, financial security, generational differences as well as the homelands they had left and how now, looking back, they feel about them. And by taking their memories as life narratives, we begin to understand the dynamic that developed between their wartime, migration and post-migration lives. Their narratives have shown how their responses to food were shaped by this ongoing dynamic, as well as their individual identities and attempts to rebuild meaningful lives for themselves in Canada. For immigrant women, food and cooking became a process of identity invention and renegotiation, of interplay between pre- and post-migration contexts and consequently an outlet to express who they were and what it meant to them to be a wife, mother, daughter, wage-earner and foreigner.

Along with immigrant women, English- and French-speaking, Jewish, Anishinaabe and Métis women found their memories shaped by the spaces where they lived. Jewish women discussed a vision of northern Ontario, like those of tourist promoters, where they could create close bonds and friendships that ignored perceived categories of difference such as religion, race and ethnicity. Unlike larger, southern Ontario cities with well-established ethno-religious neighbourhoods, Jewish women in particular recalled the intermingling among people in North Bay. Although they talked about being welcomed into non-Jewish women's homes and even being served foods in keeping with their kosher diets, they also experienced moments of intolerance and prejudice. The idealization of this physical geography as more tolerant, led women to downplay these stories of prejudice in their life narratives. They seemed insignificant especially when compared against racially- and religiously-charged incidents in the urban South. Anishinaabe and Métis also felt the impact of exclusion and racism within these physical spaces. These women shared memories of hearing racial slurs hurled at them from a young age as well as feeling unwelcome in physical spaces such as schools, grocery stores and even

neighbourhoods. These episodes had lasting ramifications on how these women felt about their Indigeneity and traditional practices. It has only been recently that these Indigenous women and communities have returned to their culture knowledge and practice, finding a source to heal from the impact of racism, exclusion and colonialism.

Northern Ontario and the North shaped women's identities and lived experiences. Historically this region has been cast as a rough and masculine space both for its physical landscape and male labourforce. This project has aimed to recover women's voices thinking about how their identities, relationships and communities were shaped by this region. For long periods of their lives, these women resided in North Bay, Ontario and the surrounding areas. Although not considered the far North, the women saw themselves as northerners. Part of the Canadian Shield, this region was pitched by tourism promoters as the "Gateway of the North." The location, climate and geography all worked to shape women's real and imaginary conceptualizations of this region. Women's foodways were impacted by their physical locale, as they faced food shortages, pricey costs of living and shortened growing seasons. The location also provided opportunities for alternate foodways as women afforded larger gardens, picked wild berries and hunted and fished for game. To be successful, these strategies required women's extra, unpaid labour. It also required women's knowledge of the area—where wild foods could be discovered, and willingness to disregard gender roles and participate in so-called masculine pursuits.

This dissertation has also explored women's community lives in a city, which did not always have the demographic support. The making and sharing of food provided women with informal and formal opportunities for women to gather, gossip and enjoy one another's company. By participating in food-related activities, women found spaces to forge relationships, gaining a sense of support and solidarity with other women. A large Italian population meant women found stores that sold their desired ingredients as well as community and linguistic

networks. It also supported community organizations, allowing women to host dinners and sponsor cookbooks. For women like Latvian-born Lina Karakans who belonged to smaller ethnic communities, North Bay did not offer the population to support and continue their friendships and traditional foodways. Many of these women made trips to southern Ontario in their decisions to maintain connections to their ethnic identities. Jewish women found a close-knit religious community, where other members monitored their observances, relationships and foodways. The size of their community also meant women formed meaningful, lifelong friendships that crossed religious lines in their desire to form friendships close in age. Women's everyday exchanges in and outside their ethnic and religious groups, allow us to understand their feelings about community belonging.

Although this study has found relationships that crossed ethnic, religious and racial lines, there was also prejudice and racism. City promoters promised that northern Ontario offered a space free of intolerances and where "people are judged on merit and not by what they represent."⁶¹² And despite women's positive memories of inclusivity and friendship, they also faced exclusion based on their identities. Immigrant, Indigenous and Jewish women heard racially-charged slurs on the streets of North Bay. Others found themselves feeling unwelcome by people and places due to their racial and religious identities. In one particular instance, an Italian-owned grocery store was vandalized and people, including Italians, avoided shopping there for fear of being labeled a fascist. As Jewish-Canadian Brooky Robbins explained of her life in this city, "you just sort of knew your place."⁶¹³ These painful experiences contrasted from the city's image of tolerance and acceptance. They made a lasting impact on women's feelings about their identities, and their decisions to assimilate into the largely white, Christian, English-

⁶¹² "The Gateway That Refused to Die," *North Bay Nugget*, July 1960.

⁶¹³ Brooky Robbins, interview with Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Ontario Jewish Association Archives, 6 January 2008.

speaking population. Other women moved to the urban south, searching for cultural acceptance and support as well as a sense of belonging.

“Telling Stories of Food, Community and Meaningful Lives” has also explored the variety of ways women learned to cook. Far from being women’s natural role, preparing and cooking food was learned work. Many women picked up these lessons informally, watching female relatives—mothers, grandmothers and aunts—prepare meals for their family. Learning by observation also offered families dealing with food shortages the chance to teach their daughters without fear of wasting food with beginner mistakes. They also learned to cook not by following the precise measurements of cookbooks, but by relying on their senses—taste, touch and sight—until they recognized the food being made. Others learned more formally through taking public school classes and reading the pages of cookbooks. These more formal learning contexts contained ideological messages about women’s roles in the home, the configuration of heteronormative families and the proper way to set up their households. Some women embraced these lessons, seeing them as an opportunity to learn skills and gain knowledge about nutrition absent from their upbringings. Others saw these cookbooks as a statement about their inadequacy and need to do better in their roles as mothers, wives and daughters. Women learned to cook in formal and informal contexts, taking away real and ideological lessons that were wanted and unwanted.

Food and cooking also allowed women to express their imaginings and desires. Reading cookbooks either purchased or borrowed, offered women an escape as they imagined being able to afford the cost of gourmet ingredients or to throw fancy dinner parties. For poor and working-class women especially, it offered them an alternative from the struggles and bleak circumstances they faced daily. The making of recipes from cookbooks also allowed women to dress up everyday meals, introducing and trying new ingredients they deemed exotic. Cookbooks also gave women the chance to travel leaving their northern Ontario homes, and

imagining themselves in cultured, metropolitan cities or returning to their home countries.

Opening up the pages of cookbooks, women imagined alternatives to their lives. They found moments of reprieve from daily struggles, signaled their healing from poverty and colonialism and participated in travel they would not have been otherwise able to afford.

Like cookbooks, consumption of kitchen technologies and equipment allowed women to express their longings and desires. Women designed household and kitchen spaces, satisfying their practical, everyday needs, but also participating in a bit of frivolity and echoing their sense of taste. In filling their homes with goods, women also signaled their participation in a post-1945 context that stressed consumerism as evidence of the good life and the superiority of democracy. Women who purchased fine china, crystal and the latest technologies like refrigerators and washing machines also attached symbolic value to these goods. These goods and the costs associated provided tangible evidence of their class status to others. To acquire these goods, women participated in marriage and gender rituals like bridal showers as well as took part-time jobs or made installment payments. Women took pride in being able to afford these goods, saving them to serve guests food on special occasions. New technologies also purported to save women time and labour, but required women to learn knowledge and skills. When women made decisions to consume kitchen-related items, they did so in ways to satisfy their sense of aesthetics and their designs for these spaces. Women were not unthinking consumers, as they contemplated saved and evaluated goods before making their purchases. For women, these goods also held deeper meaning as their purchases represented a form of healing from painful past histories of poverty, abuse, hunger and deprivation. A dishwasher or a set of flower-patterned plates also reflected women's self-identities, priorities and fantasies.

This project has looked to recover the voices of women who lived in post-1945 northern Ontario. In responding to questions about food, women recounted the intimate and emotional facets of their lives. They revealed their identities, as they discussed the importance, the

strategies and the meanings they attached to the dishes they prepared and ate every night. In their roles as daughters, mothers and wives, much of women's time was dedicated to procuring food for their families and making sure they did not go hungry. Since interactions with friends, neighbours and family members so often take place over a shared meal, women also shared narratives about tense, positive and changing relationships. They talked about their family configurations that—through death, divorce, adoption, migration and choosing to remain single—meant they held little resemblance to the heteronormative expectations in the post-1945 context. In having listened to women's stories throughout this project, we hear the diverse ways in which their identities, family dramas, personalities as well as painful and positive memories informed not only what they ate for dinner on any night, but as well how they saw themselves, their relationships, physical geographies and built meaningful lives for themselves.

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Oral History Interviews

List of Interviews Conducted by Author

Charlotte Aimes, North Bay, Ontario, April 27, 2009.

Sister Shirley Anderson, North Bay, Ontario, May 26, 2008.

Nancy Avery, North Bay, Ontario, January 29, 2007.

Ione Barré, North Bay, Ontario, June 26, 2012.

Sister Rose Barrett, North Bay, Ontario, July 19, 2007.

Maria Battaglia, North Bay, Ontario, July 16, 2009.

Elfredie Bremermann, North Bay, Ontario, June 10, 2009.

Gertrude Brown, North Bay, Ontario, February 25, 2012.

Sister Doreen Campbell, North Bay, Ontario, March 21, 2008.

Sister Rosemary Carroll, North Bay, Ontario, July 5, 2007.

Ida Casonato, North Bay, Ontario, November 15, 2012.

Sister Mary Comerford, North Bay, Ontario, June 20, 2007.

Anthony Demarco, North Bay, Ontario, August 28, 2012.

Gloria Demarco, North Bay, Ontario, February 23, 2012.

Joan Demarco, North Bay, Ontario, August 28, 2012.

Helen Duquette, North Bay, Ontario, February 24, 2012.

Leonard Edley, North Bay, Ontario, November 15, 2012.

Francis Fennel, North Bay, Ontario, November 14, 2012.

Leon Fennel, North Bay, Ontario, November 14, 2012.

Lottie Frenssen, North Bay, Ontario, June 3, 2009.

Ruth Gauthier, North Bay, Ontario, August 29, 2012.

Pamela Handley, North Bay, Ontario, May 8, 2009.

Lillian Harris, North Bay, Ontario, May 9, 2012.

Uva Hartman, North Bay, Ontario, June 25, 2012.

Lina Karakans, North Bay, Ontario, April 22, 2009.

Frieda Kendall, North Bay, Ontario, April 21, 2009.

Pattie Kessler, North Bay, Ontario, February 23, 2012.

Sister Aline Lavoie, North Bay, Ontario, July 3, 2007.

Irene Martin, North Bay, Ontario, June 25, 2012.

Elisabeth Meier, North Bay, Ontario, April 8, 2009.

Sister Betty Mitchell, North Bay, Ontario, August 17, 2007.

Sister Cecilia Morin, North Bay, Ontario, August 16, 2007.

Sister Norah Murphy, North Bay, Ontario, June 27, 2007.

Trudy Nelson, North Bay, Ontario, August 29, 2012.

Sister Jackie O'Brien, August 14, 2007.

Joyce Patel, North Bay, Ontario, August 30, 2012.

Charlotte Paterson, North Bay, Ontario, June 26, 2012.

Germaine Perron, North Bay, Ontario, June 26, 2012.

Dora Pitt, North Bay, Ontario, February 22, 2012.

Helen Randle, North Bay, Ontario, January 24, 2007.

Barbara Reid, North Bay, Ontario, May 12, 2012.

Sister Carolyn Schan, North Bay, Ontario, August 13, 2007.

Nora Stewart, North Bay, Ontario, June 25, 2012.

Rosa Valenti, North Bay, Ontario, April 30, 2009.

Annemarie Vos, North Bay, Ontario, May 8, 2012.

Sister Evelyn Walsh, North Bay, Ontario, August 7, 2007.

Eva Wardlaw, North Bay, Ontario, August 27, 2012.

Eileen Wield, North Bay, Ontario, March 22, 1997.

Sister Anne Williams, North Bay, Ontario, July 11, 2007.

Verna Yarlasky, North Bay, Ontario, February 21, 2012.

Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University

Marianna Couchie, interview with Françoise Noël, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, 2005.

Loretta Cundari, interview with Françoise Noël, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

John and Enid Duchame, interview with Françoise Noël, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

Judith Demarco Jessen, interview with Anne-Marie Breckon, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, December 10, 2003.

Gerald Laronde, interview with Amy Brandon, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, November 27, 2003.

Isabel Mauro, interview with Françoise Noël, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, January 27.

Darlene McIsaac, interview with Greg Ault, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, January 20, 2004.

Nicole Petrant-Rennie, interview with Greg Ault, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, January 20, 2004.

Marie Rivet, interview with Françoise Noël, Institute for Community Studies and Oral History, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

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