An Investigation into the Failure to Implement a Universal School Lunch Program during WWII and Postwar Reconstruction in Canada: The Case of Ontario

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the various social, political and economic factors that contributed to Canada’s failure to implement a universal school lunch program during the 1940s. Although Canada developed several other social welfare programs in the post-war period, it remains one of the only industrialized nations that does not provide hot meals to children in elementary or secondary schools. Data from the province of Ontario, a major site of postwar reconstruction and policy-making, has been taken up to inform the broader national discourse on school lunches from the 1940s. National, Ontario provincial and City of Toronto archival records were collected and analyzed according to common themes, in order to identify key barriers that constrained government support of a hot meal program. Archival records were identified using key words, and were limited to materials created between 1930-1952. Analysis suggests that sufficient need for a hot meal program had not been established during the 1940s. Despite misleading nutrition messages, rates of malnutrition and nutrient-related disease were at an all-time low, and many Ontario school boards did not appear to have the necessary infrastructure required to supply all pupils with hot meals. The Canadian government had already employed significant resources to improve existing social security programs by coupling them with health education. This strategy reflected a shift in understanding malnutrition as a knowledge-based problem, as opposed to income-based. This understanding was further reinforced through the moralized dissemination of nutrition information, which placed blame on women for improperly raising their children. Ultimately, the strong uptake of nutrition as a public health issue in Ontario may have
limited prospective responses to solutions already utilized in the public health domain,
and directed favour away from a universal school lunch program for Canada.
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>WWI</td>
<td>World War 1</td>
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<td>CCN</td>
<td>Canadian Council on Nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNEA</td>
<td>Canadian and Newfoundland Education Association</td>
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<td>LEAs</td>
<td>Local Educational Authorities</td>
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<td>CAS</td>
<td>Children’s Aid Society</td>
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<td>VHA</td>
<td>Visiting Homemaker’s Association</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nation’s Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
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<td>CTA</td>
<td>City of Toronto Archives</td>
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<td>LAC</td>
<td>Library and Archives Canada</td>
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<td>AO</td>
<td>Archives of Ontario</td>
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<td>UTA</td>
<td>University of Toronto Archives</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this introductory chapter, I provide a brief overview of the modern school lunch debate in Canada. Although other liberal welfare states like the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia implemented school lunch programs following WWII, there are no policies in place requiring Canadian school boards to provide children with lunch. School lunch programs have once again become a popular topic of discussion in Canada, and are often implicated within larger discourses on childhood obesity. This discourse reflects deep cultural anxieties about fatness, which are further exacerbated by the fat bodies of children. Considering the modern-day reemergence of this debate, it is important that we consult Canada’s history with respect to school lunches in order to better understand why they have never been implemented on a national or provincial level. This information will serve to fill in a missing piece of Canada’s history, as well as inform the ongoing school lunch debate.

1.1 Problem Statement

Canada is one of the only industrialized nations without a national school meal program. Although some school lunch programs were made available through Women’s Institutes prior to World War 1 (Ostry, 2006), by the beginning of World War II, the prevalence of hunger in Canada was under question, and school meal programs had somewhat receded from the political agenda. Meanwhile, in the years that followed World War II, the United States, and many countries in Europe, began taking steps
towards addressing growing concerns of childhood hunger. Both the United Kingdom and United States, liberal welfare states like Canada (Epsing-Anderson, 1990), introduced national school lunch programs shortly after the war in an effort to combat hunger and build a stronger nation (Levine, 2008; Vernon, 2005). These programs have endured until today, and still evoke a sense of pride and accomplishment for many of the citizens of these countries.

Today, the idea of implementing a national school lunch program is once again gaining steam across Canada (Food Secure Canada, 2016). However, in a time characterized by overabundance, arguments in favour of a national school lunch program no longer stem from idealist notions of protecting children from hunger and malnutrition, but instead have emerged from a burgeoning “war against fat.” School lunch programs offer a unique opportunity to reduce weight gain, by exposing children to healthful foods at an early age when eating habits are being formed (Gustafsson, 2002). The “war on fat” began to develop in the 1980s (Poppendieck, 2010) when North Americans started to notice their growing waistbands and excess consumption. By 2011, 18.3% of Canadian adults were categorized as obese, based on self-reported heights and weights (Le Petit & Berthelot, 2006; Orpana et al 2007). Even more concerning was the rise in children’s weights, with nearly one third of Canadian children classified as being overweight or obese in 2011 (Roberts et al, 2012). Historically, it was believed “…that support for school lunch programs might provide the government with opportunities to redirect the American diet…” (Levenstein, 1993, pg. 78) and similar attitudes exist in Canada today. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that discussions of implementing a national school lunch program in Canada often revolve around introducing healthier school meals and
stronger healthy eating education programs (Esmail, 2014, pg. 55) designed to reach children before their unhealthy habits have solidified.

Although there is some strong contention over the so called ‘obesity epidemic’ in Canada (Ellison, McPhail & Mitchinson, 2016; Friedman, 2012; Saguy, 2013), its uptake within the medical and public health communities has somewhat solidified its position as a major public health concern (Power, 2016). Obesity, which has been labelled a disease and associated with a wide number of health concerns ranging from mild to severe has created both a medical and moral panic throughout North America (Power, 2016). Unsurprisingly, although obesity has recently gained recognition as a medical concern, its roots remain firmly grounded in issues of morality (Saguy, 2013). Thus, much of the discussion surrounding obesity stems from problematic beliefs that obesity would be a preventable disease if only the individual would adopt a sense of agency to facilitate positive lifestyle changes and ultimately lose weight (Saguy, 2013, pg. 10). This attitude in turn establishes childhood obesity as a particularly atrocious condition because of the ongoing construction of children as dependent on adults. Given this, parents have become the focal point for blame over their children’s weight because children’s eating habits are expected to have developed early in life as a consequence of parental decision-making (Esmail, 2014).

The combination of growing health concerns and negative attitudes towards fatness have resulted in pressure on governments to intervene. Children, who are considered the future of the nation, have become a major target for intervention (Power, 2016). However, before we begin to contemplate introducing a national program, it is essential that we first reflect upon Canada’s prior relationship to school meals and
understand why Canada never implemented a school lunch program in the past. This knowledge may provide useful insights and allow current proponents of school lunch programs to strengthen their appeals by addressing known barriers.

In light of the uncertain history of school meal programs in Canada, I have gathered what I can from the historical record in order to better understand why Canadians chose to forgo implementing a national school lunch program in the years that followed World War 2 when childhood hunger was such a prominent concern in the Westernized world. The majority of discussion is concentrated on the province of Ontario, and various policies and proposals have been used to bring provincial documents into the broader national debate. In doing so, I have filled in a piece of missing information about the history of social security in Canada.

In this paper, I argue that Canada failed to capitalize on a unique opportunity in the 1940s to improve child health outcomes through the implementation of a national school lunch program. A program of this immensity would have been highly complex, because of federal-provincial/territorial jurisdictional issues, and costly, however, it would have provided an opportunity to promote equity in public schools and Canadian communities. Mothers would have been freed from their responsibility to provide healthful school meals, thus alleviating time and financial costs. This would have been especially beneficial to low-income mothers. Food may have also acted as an equalizer within schools, allowing all pupils to enjoy balanced health benefits. Finally, a program of this nature would have allowed nutritional scientists to study nutritional outcomes longitudinally, and advance scientific understandings of childhood nutrition as a predictor
of adult health. As a national school lunch program was never implemented, these progressive opportunities were lost for generations of Canadians.

1.2 Reflexive Statement

What is written as history is often mistaken as “fact”. As certain events are widely accepted to have happened, the words of historians are often taken at face value. Historians become revered as neutral and unbiased communicators of “truth” when in reality they play an undeniable role in actively shaping what comes to be called history.

The work of historians, texts, “are neither neutral or natural,” they are created (Trouillot, 1995, pg. 48). Even though most historians are likely motivated by a desire to paint as accurate and complete image of the past as they can, this task is not possible and highly problematic. In writing history, historians inevitably silence some voices, and by deciding what information to include and exclude, they insert archival power into their pages (Trouillot, 1995). This is the power to decide which voices are worth being heard, preserved, and mentioned—and which ones are excluded (Trouillot, 1995).

Archival power does not begin and end with the words of the historian, but instead can be found at four moments in historical production: “the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)” (Trouillot, 1995, pg. 26). At each of these moments, decisions are made over which voices are worthy of preservation, and which will be forgotten. Therefore, one of the historian’s tasks is to attempt to unearth the silences created throughout history—and by the process of ‘making’ history.
Prior to writing this thesis, I had hoped that I could avoid reinforcing archival power by choosing only to chronologically outline key events in history. Upon reflection, it is clear to me that even by isolating key events as “historical facts” I am actively shaping the historical context in which they occurred. Even without making any claims over what gave rise to certain events, by arranging them in a certain order, I create an illusion of how these events might be related. Furthermore, the connections that I make between historical events is not unconsciously done; instead, they act as my interpretation of what occurred in the past. Therefore, the work that follows is my personal interpretation of the historical texts that were available to me.

Making assumptions over how events might be related is also problematic and in doing so, I risk falling in to the trap of describing history as inevitable, events predicated on prior occurrences. Therefore, I would like to clarify that in instances when I describe relationships, and connections between events, I speak of them as ‘conditions of possibility’ (Foucault, 1974). In this sense, major shifts in political and ideological thought throughout history are not the direct outcomes of Canadians’ changed attitudes or desires. Instead, I suggest that certain conditions at the time made it possible for Canadians to think differently.
Chapter 2: Background

Modern social security emerged in Canada as a result of economic instability and changing social structures. Up until WWI, religious authorities played a major role in providing social security to Canadians through charitable aid; however, several recessions during the late 1800s contributed to greater demand for more stability and support. The First World War revitalized the economy, and allowed women to proliferate into the workplace to fill the empty roles of men. This dramatically changed both social and family structures, as women became less dependent on their husbands. The Depression then took the Canadian economy for a dramatic turn, producing mass unemployment, and forcing the government to increase public welfare. Fortunately, despite widespread poverty, few Canadians seemed to have gone hungry. After the trying times of the Depression, WWII inspired significant post-war planning to ensure greater prosperity in the future. WWII also served to redirect attention and resources to children as a matter of national pride and defence. Although the war produced many positive developments in social security, a school lunch program was never implemented. This is surprising, as both the United States and United Kingdom implemented national lunch programs which have persisted until today.

2.1 The rise of social security

The expansion of government to provide services supporting human welfare and well-being, commonly referred to as the emergence of the social welfare state, has largely been viewed as a 20th century phenomenon (Blake & Keshen, 1995). Prior to the early
20th century, a residual conception of welfare dominated. The residual model emphasized the responsibility of individuals for their own well-being and, for men, the well-being of their families. The model simultaneously absolved government from action, and even actively rejected government intervention into the lives of citizens. Governments were only expected to intervene in the gravest situations, and any social problems encountered were to be resolved by the individual, or within the family. Only in dire circumstances should the individual seek external help from the municipal government, which then redirected them to temporary charitable aid (Guest, 1997).

The residual model was consistent with dominant religious beliefs at the time, which also reflected moralized understandings of the individual. Many areas in Canada, had previously adopted the Elizabethan Poor Law which required Parish authorities to provide work and shelter for the impoverished (Guest, 1997). Religious charity played a critical role in mitigating the effects of poverty during the late 19th century. However, apart from providing temporary housing and employment, it is still widely unknown whether these charities were able to bring citizens out of poverty, and it is much more likely that they served as a type of ‘bandaid’ solution.

The strong religious ideologies reflected in the residual welfare model made relief inaccessible to many Canadians. By emphasizing the responsibilities of the individual over their own well-being, those who were unable to care for themselves became highly stigmatized within their own communities. Canadians who attempted to access aid from the municipality were attributed with negative qualities, such as laziness (Guest, 1997). This stigma greatly discouraged people from seeking help, and those who did were left in a particularly challenging position (Little, 1998).
Widespread support for the residual model began to decline in the late 19th century as economically trying times forced Canadians to rethink their social situations and the responsibilities of government. Recessions occurring between 1873-1879, 1884-1887, and 1893-1896 provoked unstable employment and income conditions across Canada. Furthermore, Canada in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, which introduced a rapidly growing market for technology in manufacturing, while drastically reducing the need for human labour. Canadians were often left without jobs, and began flooding local prisons in search of food and shelter (Guest, 1997). The harsh reality that so many able-bodied men were forced to go to prison to sustain themselves revealed a troubling flaw with the residual welfare system.

These economically trying times led many Canadians to question the “laissez-faire” model of government, and instead to demand greater government intervention into their lives. The Urban Reform Movement (~1890-1918) gained popularity as Canadians began to look for collectivist solutions to social and economic troubles. Meanwhile, social researchers began advocating for social reform as a multifaceted public health issue in need of attention (Guest, 1997). Support for the public provision of social legislation emerged, primarily as a demand for education (Blake & Keshen, 1995). Another key concern, unemployment, garnered attention as well and debates over the length of the workday, and minimum wage ensued. Finally, food safety legislation was brought about in the 1874 Adulteration Act, which represented the first consumer protection law in Canada (Ostry, 2006). This act was designed to protect Canadians against intentionally contaminated foods and gave rise to the Meat and Canned Foods Act of 1907, and the Dairy Industry Act in 1914.
The emergence of new forms of social legislation in several political realms, including agriculture and food production, as well as employment, reflected the transition in Canadian thinking from a residual welfare state to an institutional conceptualization of the welfare state. Economically unstable times led many Canadians to question and reject notions of individual virtuousness and search for collective solutions for social problems. This ideological movement was later strengthened by the onset of each of the World Wars, and the Depression.

2.2 World War 1: The changing roles of women in society

World War 1 marked a time of unprecedented government involvement in the lives of Canadians. The government became involved in the economy, as well as the rehabilitation of soldiers (Guest, 1997). As well, in 1917, the War Measures Act established a centralized food system in order to control rationing (Ostry, 2006). Apart from taking responsibility over aspects of certain populations’ welfare and supporting the economy, the government also began investigating social issues. Unemployment, which remained a central concern for many Canadians, received official inquiry from 1914-1915 as an effort to uncover potential causes and remedies and alleviate poverty (Guest, 1997). Towards the end of the war, there were also medical investigations into undernutrition and malnutrition which arose in response to military concerns that men were unfit to contribute to the war (Ostry, 2006).

While the responsibilities of the government certainly expanded during the First World War, so did the roles of women. Up until the onset of the First World War, women had been largely silenced in the public sphere and remained subordinate to men.
However, with so many men required to join the military, women were presented with opportunities to step out of their traditional roles in the household. Local employers began hiring women and girls to fill positions traditionally held by men in an effort to keep businesses afloat when there were so few men available to work. Women also became more involved in public life than ever, and played a crucial role in supporting wartime efforts. Between 1917-1920, after considerable struggle, most provinces in Canada granted women the right to vote, a monumental step towards gender equality.

Although women took great strides into the public sphere, their competence in their new roles likely exacerbated already emerging middle-class fears about the dissolution of the nuclear family. Already by World War 1, Canadians had felt the threat of family instability, juvenile delinquency, and impoverished maternity (Blake & Keshen, 1995). The war produced high divorce rates and increasing rates of single parenthood, which raised further concerns over child welfare (Guest, 1997). Children’s wellbeing was of particular concern because children held symbolic significance as the future of the nation (Ostry, 2006). Children, who since the 18th century had been defined as subordinate to adults, were to be “…protected from the corrupting influence of predatory adults” (Chunn, 2003, pg. 188). In 1919, the Federal Department of Health was created, and within it the Division of Child Welfare, as an attempt to alleviate such concerns and secure the votes of women (Ostry, 2006). In the years that followed the war, children remained a focal point for reform and in 1924 the United Nations released the Geneva Declaration outlining the rights of the child for the first time.

While the government seemed to be becoming involved in all aspects of Canadian life, certain marginalized populations, particularly women, received a great deal of
attention. Throughout the war, women’s roles and position within society had changed so dramatically that traditional management of women was no longer appropriate. In 1918, minimum wage legislation was created and mostly directed at women and girls to avoid their exploitation in the workplace (Guest, 1997). Furthermore, in 1920, Ontario became the fifth province to release the Mother’s Allowance Act, a direct welfare regime that provided monthly allowances to needy mothers (Little, 1998). Unfortunately, “the policy was moralistic, maternalistic, miserly, and racist,” and subjected Canadian mothers to intense government surveillance and scrutiny (Little, 1998, pg. 31). Despite major critiques, the policy change “represented a significant departure from traditional poor relief practices that had existed from colonial times” (Guest, 1997, pg. 64).

The Mother’s Allowance Act, while progressive for its day, was not without limitations. Firstly, in order to qualify to receive funds, women were required to establish themselves as both needy and deserving (Little, 1998; Blake & Keshen, 1995). Women unable to establish their moral worthiness would have been largely excluded from the program. Next, once a woman became a participant in the program, she was subject to a certain amount of home supervision. Just like the economy, the household became an area for government surveillance and was expected to be run in a way that met government expectations (Blake & Keshen, 1995, pg. 128). The Ontario Mothers’ Allowance (OMA) Act enacted in 1920 required that women be “closely supervised [regarding] at least seven distinct aspects of daily life: finances, sexuality, cleanliness, attitude, race and ethnicity, incapacitation and behavior of children” (Little, 1998, pg. 51). The OMA Act thus represented one of the many ways that the government became involved in both the public and private lives of Canadians.
The First World War was a period of immeasurable social reconstruction in Canada. It provided new insight towards the extent to which the government could permeate Canadian life, as new policies fostered greater surveillance of individuals and families (Guest, 1997). Women and children, who had gone unnoticed in the years prior to the war, gained new influence within their communities and played a role in reshaping traditional beliefs about the household and family. Unfortunately, many other marginalized populations continued to be silenced. In particular, Aboriginal children were forced out of schools where funding was limited (Janovicek & Parr, 2003), a consequence of colonialisit ideologies. Therefore, although the First World War gave rise to a number of positive social changes in Canada, the benefits were mostly limited to White settlers.

2.3 The Interwar Years: from prosperity to catastrophe

During the interwar years, Canada transitioned from a time of relative prosperity to the largest economic collapse in Canadian history. The 1929 Wall Street Crash marked the onset of a decade of trying times for the majority Canadians, characterized by mass unemployment, hunger, and government relief. The Canadian government had become reluctant to take on any new commitments following the First World War; however, nearly 1/4 of its working population was unemployed in 1933 (Guest, 1997). The majority of Canadians were forced to live below bare standards of living because of the devastating economic turn (Guest, 1997).

The Canadian government responded to the gravity of the Depression by dramatically increasing funding for public welfare (Guest, 1997). By 1939, Canada was
spending $312 million on public welfare, compared to the $99 million it had devoted in 1926. At the time, three social security programs already existed in Canada and continued to play a role in alleviating widespread poverty: worker’s compensation, mother’s allowances, and old age pensions. However, in the face of mass unemployment, where 32% of men were estimated to be out of work (Palmer, 1983 as cited in Little 1998), the government opted to introduce direct relief programs in lieu of supplying jobs (Guest, 1997). These relief programs provided minimal relief in the form of both cash, and food to unemployed families. This ‘bandaid’ solution reflected the governments’ desire to mitigate the costs of public welfare, with the goal of keeping citizens from dying. Direct relief programs, which began as a local responsibility, eventually transitioned to be provincially and then federally administered.

2.4 Hunger during the Depression

The agricultural sector was massively impacted by the Depression (Ostry, 2006). Canada saw a drastic decline in the price of foods, as well as a mostly halted international market. Although the price of foods declined substantially, food production was still high during the Depression. This may have been due to the lack of non-farm related forms of employment in Canada (Ostry, 2006). The disproportionately high levels of food production and low market resulted in large food surpluses across Canada.

Regardless of massive surpluses, the expectation among many historians was generally that hunger also rose during the 1930s as a consequence of the high rates of unemployment(Guest, 1997; Ostry, 2006). But, a lack of information on the living conditions of the poor leaves the quality of the Canadian diet during the Depression
largely unknown. Despite acknowledging that Canadian families may have struggled during the Depression, Ostry (2006) suggests that the 1930s “…likely offered better access to food than did the 1920s and that, as the decade unfolded, food availability did not deteriorate” (pg. 97). Food prices, which peaked towards the end of the First World War, plummeted during the early 1930s, reaching a low in 1933 (Ostry, 2006). Ostry (2006) postulated that the combination of low prices, high food supply, a relatively low cost of living and increased government relief likely played a large role in mitigating malnutrition among poor and unemployed Canadians.

Furthermore, when looking at the prevalence of nutrition-related diseases, such as rickets and scurvy, Ostry (2006) concluded that nutrient-related morbidity and mortality actually declined throughout the 1930s. This conclusion must remain tentative and is problematic, because there was very little inquiry into the diets of Canadians living in poverty at the time.

Even if some people may have experienced improved access to food during the Depression, this phenomenon was certainly not realized by all Canadians. Aboriginal children in particular likely experienced some of the worst hunger and malnutrition in Canadian history. Aboriginal children, who were removed from the public education system due to lack of funds were enrolled in residential schools. Residential schools were typically operated by religious authorities whose underlying goal was not education, but assimilation (Janovicek & Parr, 2003). Students who attended residential schools were taken from their families and forced to engage in mostly physical labour, with very few hours in the classroom (Janovicek & Parr, 2003). The children were subject to horrible conditions, where they were punished for speaking their own language, engaging in their
own cultural practices and communicating with family members. Their living conditions were devastating, and many schools left the children underfed and severely malnourished (Janovicek & Parr, 2003; Mosby, 2013). Hunger and malnutrition were rampant among residential schools, providing the worst examples of school meal programs in Canada.

2.5 The Emergence of Nutrition Science

The interwar years also supported a rise in the ties between nutrition and health, as well as an overall increased knowledge and acceptance of the importance of vitamins in foods. Prior to the First World War, the government had focused primarily on protecting consumers from contaminated foods, and the emergence of vitamin research allowed Canadians to see the benefits of consuming certain produce. Milk, in particular, became recognized for its ‘protective properties’ during the Depression and was embraced by the medical community. Much of nutrition research was directed towards mothers expecting children and the Division of Child Welfare created the Canadian Mother’s Book (CMB) to educate women on the subject. Between the 1920s and 1960s, breastfeeding was on the decline in Canada as women sought alternative infant feeding techniques to fit their busier lives, and the CMB aggressively promoted breastfeeding as the correct and natural choice for mothers (Ostry, 2006).

In the late 1930s, the Division of Child Welfare was eliminated and the Department of Agriculture took over the responsibilities of nutrition education. This was likely motivated by the Department’s desire to promote certain foods, primarily milk, which had become less popular among low-income Canadians (Ostry, 2006). The Department of Agriculture conducted some of the first studies on the Canadian diet, in an
effort to understand how to better market certain produce including milk, eggs and butter (Ostry, 2006). The Depression also saw an enhanced understanding of the dietary needs of Canadians that took into account the impact of sex, age, and physical activity levels. At the end of the Depression, Canada became the first nation to develop a modern national dietary standard (Ostry, 2006).

2.6 The Second World War

As I have already demonstrated, periods of economic or social turmoil often result in a surge of state activity, and World War II was no exception. These bouts of increased government intervention support the theory that “…the state exists for the well-being of its citizens, and not vice versa…” (Blake & Keshen, 1995, pg. 12). This is perhaps why throughout history we can see time and time again the Canadian government intervening in critical aspects of society. Like the First World War, World War 2 launched Canada into a period of economic prosperity and social change. With increased involvement in the war, the economy in Canada flourished, signaling the end to the devastating poverty brought during the Depression. The nation became heavily involved in postwar planning, illustrating Canadians’ optimism for the future and vision of how Canada might evolve into something better.

A significant portion of postwar plans were to be directed at children, who remained an important symbol of the future nation’s prosperity. Focusing on “the rights of children aided governments by providing an ideological detour away from harsh debates about the welfare of adults” (Marshall, 2003, pg. 258) thus essentially allowing the government to wipe the slate clean and start over. Children’s rights were further used
to promote a specific image of the individual and the family (Janovicek & Parr, 2003) that created a normalized impression of what Canadian families could and should be in the future. In 1945, Canada released the Family Allowances Act, and many believed that the main goal of the program was to serve the wellbeing of Canadian children. This program, administered by the federal government, became the first universal welfare program in Canada. Families were given money for children up to the age of 16, which was to some extent seen as a scheme to incentivize poor families to have more children (Guest, 1997). Whatever the motivation behind the Family Allowances Act, it became a comprehensive national welfare program that by 1946 provided benefits to 92% of eligible children.

The years that followed the Second World War also exacerbated lasting tension between ideological perceptions of the child as a dependent. During the war, children were encouraged to leave home at a younger age and to control more of their own spending. This was made possible for the high number of employment opportunities available at the time. The push for children’s sovereignty reflected a shift from seeing children as dependent, to greater recognition of their potential to be consumers (Janovicek & Parr, 2003). Consumerism consequently pushed children to adopt more responsibility and control over their wellbeing, a shift that was not always viewed as positive. Children who grew up during the Second World War grew up more quickly which may have aggravated notions of the ideal, happy childhood the nation wanted to preserve.

Children’s sexuality also attracted attention during the Second World War, perhaps due to the blurred boundaries between childhood and adulthood. In 1944, sexual
education became a component of the school curriculum, instructed from a highly moralized, Christian perspective. The program was used to reinforce the development of normative heterosexual standards (Adams, 2003). It also revealed growing middle class fears of “social hygiene” based on the moralized assumption of “sexual education as a form of ‘character education’ important not only because of the urgency to ‘combat the spread of social disease’ but also as an antidote to the more general ‘weakening of morals’” (Adams, 2003, pg. 293). Therefore, the introduction of sexual education reflected a desire for children to grow up happily, healthily, and most importantly, normally. This implied that children should stay “innocent” and partake in age-appropriate activities rather than sexual activity and other mature interests.

Circumstances for marginalized children also changed significantly during World War 2 and the years that followed. “Only after the Second World War did increased awareness of Aboriginal peoples lead to the creation of a Select Joint Committee…which in 1951 called for Aboriginal peoples integration into the Canadian mainstream” (Janovicek & Parr, 2003, pg. 226). Aboriginal children, who had spent more than a decade mistreated in residential schools were once again encouraged to join provincial schools. Unfortunately, this small step towards reconciliation would not be able to reverse the devastating effects of colonialism on Aboriginal culture. Even once reintegrated into provincial school boards, Aboriginal children were still subject to racist attitudes and segregated from their non-Aboriginal peers (Janovicek & Parr, 2003). Furthermore, Aboriginal culture was left so fragmented that Aboriginal families and communities would be left traumatized indefinitely. It is evident through the treatment of
Aboriginal children, that although “the rights of the child” held symbolic meaning for the future of Canada, not all children were seen as equally important.

While the state did focus a significant portion of its attention on providing social assistance for the wellbeing of its children, adults were not entirely forgotten. In 1940, Canada introduced the Unemployment Insurance Act, a long considered social assistance endeavour. The program aimed to cover 75% of wage earners, and became a reality at a “particularly favourable time in Canada - a period of rapid rise in employment opportunities and of minimal unemployment” (Guest, 1997, pg. 106). Furthermore, in 1944, Mackenzie King enacted the Charter of Veteran’s Rights, as well as an assortment of other programs for returning soldiers. Much like children, soldiers were often granted government aid due to positive perceptions of their worthiness.

Several reports on the status of social security in Canada were also introduced during the Second World War as essential components for post-war planning. The most notable report, created by Leonard Marsh, drew inspiration from the famed Beveridge Report of the United Kingdom. The report provided suggestions for improved government-operated social security programs in Canada, which included a national employment and investment program, an expanded system of social insurance protection, a comprehensive system of health insurance, and a universal system of family allowances (Guest, 1997, pg. 112). Similar reports such as the Whitton Proposals and Cassidy plan, also outlined post-war plans, but placed emphasis on a public assistance program as opposed to social insurance, and played less pivotal roles in post-war reconstruction.

The Second World War and postwar period was a period of intense optimism over the future of Canada. During the war and the years that followed, government efforts
became focused on creating comprehensive plans for the future that would benefit all citizens. Specific populations, including children and war veterans received special attention due to perceptions of their worthiness and their significance for the future of the nation. Although the war also aggravated existing fears over childhood, sexuality, and the family, it served to unite Canadians to imagine a better future for all.

2.7 National School Lunch Program - United States and United Kingdom

In the post-WWII era, the United States, United Kingdom and several other countries, introduced national school lunch programs in order to serve the needs of children, as well as the educational and agricultural sectors. In the United Kingdom, school lunch programs emerged in response to “poor and badly nourished children” (Evans & Harper, 2009). Local lunch programs emerged gradually between 1879 and 1920, and by 1941 a National School Meals Policy was introduced in the United Kingdom. This policy helped to establish nutritional standards for school meals. In 1944, the Education Act added to the complexity of the policy, and “made it a duty of all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to provide school meals for those who wanted them” (Evans & Harper, 2009).

Since their inception, school meals went in and out of favour in the UK. In 1980, school lunches were no longer deemed necessary, and the Education Act (1980) removed the obligation for LEAs to provide noon-meals, and nutritional standards were abolished. The 1986 Social Security Act then limited free meals to low-income children whose parents received supplementary benefits. These decisions to cut back on the universality of school lunches were made in an effort to reduce the costs of the program (Evans &
Harper, 2009). School meal nutritional standards were then reintroduced in England (2001), Wales (2001), Northern Ireland (2001), and Scotland (2002) and remain some of the most detailed in the world.

School lunch programs in the US initially began on an ad hoc basis during the Progressive Era (1890-1920) in the United States. Similar to Canada, school lunch programs were pioneered through local efforts, women’s organizations and charities. Up until this point, providing a school lunch was seen as a benevolent activity, because the preparation of healthful meals was considered the responsibility of the family (Levine, 2008). School lunches provided women with “…an important avenue through which they could contribute to scientific knowledge and also influence public policy” (Levine, 2008, pg. 10). This allowed them to engage more in the public sphere, and become the architects of public welfare and social policy (Levine, 2008).

With the onset of the Depression, female volunteers became overwhelmed by the number of hungry students (Levine, 2008). Nearly every state claimed that hunger was on the rise, as were rates of nutrition-related diseases (Levine, 2008). Although Canadians may also have experienced heightened levels of hunger, contrary evidence has shown that the rates of rickets and other nutrient-related diseases were actually on the decline in Canada (Ostry, 2006) thus signifying that the prevalence of hunger in the United States and Canada may have differed in extent and severity.

From the 1920s to 1930s, both Canadian and American farmers had immense food surpluses, accompanied by a sharp drop in agricultural prices (Ostry, 2006; Levine, 2008). American farmers dealt with food surpluses by disposing of extra produce by emptying it into rivers and quarries (Poppendieck, 2010); it is unclear whether Canadian
farmers also engaged in this practice. Naturally, with hunger rampant throughout the United States, disposing of food appeared nonsensical, and American farmers began to demand government relief.

The sparse school lunch programs that had sprouted up during the Depression had already drawn the attention of the state, which had allowed school boards to temporarily spend tax dollars on milk and lunches (Levine, 2008). By the time of World War 2, these programs provided a strong avenue for the government to satisfy both the demands of child welfare advocates and the agricultural sector.

During the Second World War, there was concern over soldiers who were unfit to participate in the war-time effort due to vitamin deficiencies (Levine, 2008). Vitamin deficiency was difficult, if not impossible to diagnose in the 1940s. While it sometimes manifested in the form of nutrient-related diseases like rickets, poor stature, weight, and general appearance were also used as indicators. This elevated discussions of nutrition to a matter of national security, and school lunches were seen as a way to create a healthier citizenry in the future. Therefore, the creation of a National School Lunch Program in 1946 was framed as an investment in the future security of the nation through the wellbeing of children. The National School Lunch Program became an ideal opportunity to meet the demands of the agricultural sector and child welfare advocates through a common program. It met these demands through the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which allowed the Department of Agriculture to buy surplus commodity foods and donate them to schools and welfare offices.

The National School Lunch Program offered free lunches to the poor, and subsidized lunches to all others. Although it was created on a premise of alleviating
childhood hunger, in reality it was much more of a subsidy for agriculture (Levine, 2008). In the first decade of the program, it was praised as a true testament to the democratic strength of America, even though in reality it fell very short of what it promised (Levine, 2008). As the program emerged out of a market-based surplus commodity disposal plan, it came with several problems that sparked debates among nutrition scientists and child welfare advocates. For instance, the program only provided commodity foods, which had questionable nutrition content. Furthermore, programs were run by local authorities who were free to discriminate between children, and restrict access to food. There was strong distrust of federal authority at the time, and a fear of the ‘nanny state’, which when coupled with racial and economic inequality made it challenging to develop a truly universal program (Levine, 2008).

The later years of the program continued to reveal and strengthen existing problems. The nature of the program led to intense stigma for the children who participated. The larger the program became, the more administratively cumbersome it became, and finally the introduction of privatization once again discredited the opinions of nutrition researchers who advocated for healthier school lunches. As a result of each of these immense problems, the National School Lunch Program in the United States is increasingly scrutinized today.

2.8 Conclusion

The late 19th to mid 20th century saw major expansion in the Canadian welfare state. Historical analyses of the emergence of social security in Canada seem to depict the Canadian government as behaving in a reactionary manner, responding only to key
concerns about Canadians’ welfare when it was absolutely necessary. Few advances were made in social areas that were not about to collapse.

There are few examples of published work on the history of school lunches in Canada. By comparing Canada’s history of social security with the introduction of school lunch programs in the US and UK, several possible explanations for Canada’s decision to forgo a school meal program are revealed. Firstly, due to the low food prices and high food availability during the Depression, followed by the thriving economy of the Second World War, Canadian experiences of hunger may not have been desperate enough to demand introducing school lunches. Furthermore, the agricultural sector in the United States clearly had enough power to persuade the federal government to buy commodity foods, whereas in Canada, the partnership between the federal government and agricultural sector may have been less secure. Women also played a major role in beginning school lunch programs in both the United States and Canada; however, Canadian women’s organizations receive much less credit over their contributions, and their school lunch programs seem to have died off for unknown reasons. Lastly, although children gained more social mobility and legal rights during the early 20th century, their experiences remain relatively undocumented and it is unclear the extent to which they were impacted by hunger and malnutrition. This archival work interrogates and builds upon these hypotheses to understand why Canada emerged from the war with school lunches left off the post-war reconstruction agenda.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Orientation

Even though school lunches are intended for children, women are key stakeholders in their implementation. Traditionally, feeding work has been the primary role of mothers, who have contributed nearly all unpaid domestic labour. Women, as child bearers, have been assumed to be the “obvious” choice with respect to child feeding and rearing, and have had immense pressure to do these tasks successfully and with minimal recognition. Today, more women than ever are involved in the public sphere, thus limiting their time to complete household tasks. Because of this, household structures are undergoing a period of reform, calling into question women’s abilities to serve as mothers. School lunch programs present a double-edged sword for women: they offer the opportunity to free them from a significant amount of labour, yet also introduce a veiled critique of their abilities as mothers.

3.1 Feminist Theory

Although children are the most obvious beneficiaries of a national school lunch program, in reality, systemic changes in the provision of noon-lunches are intimately connected with the family as a whole. A transition in lunch preparation from the private to public sphere is particularly meaningful for the mother of the household who traditionally completes all food preparation and provision. Thus, debates regarding school lunch programs involve a complex, often unspoken conversation about women, and their role and ability to perform as mothers.
In North America, traditional family structure positions the father as the head of the household, protecting and overseeing his wife and children. Men also dominate the public sphere as the primary, or sole wage earners for their families, while women are often confined to the home. Although both partners are co-dependent (Devault, 1991), within this structure, women are subordinate to men both inside and outside the boundaries of the home (Beneria & Sen, 1981). This is a consequence of the immense undervaluing, and at times total invisibility of women’s domestic labour (Beneria & Sen, 1981; DeVault, 1991).

Domestic labour is subject to change based on class, family structure, and cultural background; however, women nearly always complete it (DeVault, 1991). Domestic labour involves the “…production of use values through the combination of commodities bought in the market and domestic labour time” (Beneria & Sen, 1981, pg. 292). Unlike productive labour, a term defined by Marx as labour which “…creates surplus-value directly, i.e. the only productive labor is that which is directly consumed in the course of production or the valorization of the capital” (Marx, 1990, p. 1038), domestic labour indirectly creates value by maintaining and reproducing the labour force (Beneria & Sen, 1981). Therefore, although the household does not create monetary value, it is still defined by the structures of capitalism, where women’s labour is “…considered a natural resource, freely available like air and water” (Mies, 1998, pg. 110).

Feeding work constitutes the majority of domestic labour in nearly all households in North America. This work, which involves acquiring and preparing foods to be eaten, is seen alongside other domestic tasks as the natural duty of women “…obviously and originally imposed by the sex difference itself” (Boserup, 1970). Women, as the bearers
of children, become recognized as natural caregivers, an assumption that carries through childhood when women are also responsible for child rearing (Luxton, 1980).

Child feeding and rearing, while important to the immediate family, also holds enormous significance for the future of the nation, which depends on continual growth (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In many countries, women are encouraged or discouraged from having children depending on “the hegemonic discourses that construct nationalist projects at specific moments in time” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pg. 29). Except in extreme circumstances, decisions to have, or not have children rest with the woman and her husband; however, this decision is not freely made. Ultimately, “the most immediate burden of multiple pregnancies falls upon the mother” (Beneria & Sen, 1980, pg. 296) and so governments have developed a variety of tools to incentivise women to give birth. In some countries like Canada, policies like Mother’s Allowances were introduced following WWII partly for this purpose.

Framed messaging has also been used as a more subtle technique to encourage women to have children in North America. Messages in the media, advertisements, literature, and from health professionals convey ideological information to women and mothers on how to raise their children (DeVault, 1991). During the 1940s, many messages directed towards women attempted to raise awareness and cause alarm over the health of their children. These messages often took a moral stance and attempted to establish shared values (Biltekoff, 2013), sometimes shaming mothers for their ‘failed’ efforts to feed their children a nutritionally adequate diet. It is important to note that women were not simply exposed to these messages – the messages were intentionally targeted towards them. This may have been strategically done because women had the
unique ability to bear children, were most involved in child rearing, and were assumed to feel maternal love for their child. No matter what the reason for this targeting, these messages greatly constrain women’s reproductive choices by putting their individual interests at conflict with those of the collective national. Furthermore, they vilify women and families who engage in different cultural practices or are unable to provide optimal levels of care (Barker, 2015).

In light of this overview of the conflated relationship between women and feeding practices in North America, I utilized feminist theory to highlight this dynamic within my research. In Canada during the 1940s, women were expected to provide a complete, healthful lunch for their children each day. This makes them key stakeholders in the implementation of a national school lunch program. The transition of noon-meals from the home to the school would have drastically changed women’s role in domestic labour, and due to the moralized discourses at the time, would have had serious implications over women’s perceived ability to perform as mothers. In applying feminist theory to various archival texts, I hope to provide a new perspective on school lunch programs that includes, as best possible, the diverse voices of marginalized populations. Drawing on the work of various feminist scholars, I believe that “…richer political and theoretical ideas are likely to be provided by those at the margins” (Lewis, 2014, pg. 426).
Chapter 4: Methods

Chapter 4 offers a detailed account of the methods used to collect, analyze, and present research findings. I have summarized the data collection process, as well as the measures I have taken to mitigate bias. I utilized an open-coding method to unearth common themes between archival texts and demonstrate the relationship between documents. Due to the inevitable silencing that occurs during archival work, I have tried to emphasize the voices of marginalized populations, specifically: women, low-income families, immigrants, and Aboriginal peoples. Preliminary findings have been recorded and drawn from in order to uncover as much information as possible. Last, I have disclosed all known limitations of my work that have inevitably contributed to this research presenting only a partial history of school lunch programs in Canada.

4.1 Data Collection

I collected data at the National Archives in Ottawa, Ontario as well as several smaller archival collections across Ontario including: the Archives of Ontario, the City of Toronto Archives, and the University of Toronto Archives. The National Archives houses the vast majority of federal government records in Canada. All federal government decisions regarding public policy have been recorded and stored in the National Archives, making it the obvious location to gather data for this study. Data was mostly in the form of hard copy texts, which I scanned and examined off site.

In order to locate the appropriate texts within the archives, I first created a comprehensive list of relevant terms to narrow down the search (Appendix II). I then
consulted with the staff at the National Archives, and other facilities, in order to locate the documents within the vast array of stored files. This process is crucial, as many documents are stored off-site and needed to be retrieved and brought to the main building for review. I consulted the local archivists at each site in order to ensure that no important information was lost or forgotten.

Bias is an inevitable concern when working with archival data and it enters the data collection process at multiple stages. First, the very documents that are stored within the archives have already been subject to bias, as only documents deemed important by the archival staff, or government will have been preserved. I looked for municipal, provincial, and federal documentation regarding school lunch policies and programs, and I am hopeful that I was able to find the majority of these documents because I sought out archival materials from each level of government. As Canada is comprised of many provinces with unique policies, the information that I was able to find mostly portrays an illustration of school lunch programs in Ontario because I was unable to gather substantial information in other provinces.

Bias also entered the data collection process through my own beliefs and predispositions towards school lunch programs. The search terms that I came up with may ignore certain issues that may be relevant to the study, or reveal a lack of knowledge in the area. In order to mitigate these effects, I consulted with my project supervisor to decide upon search terms, and again with the archive staff to produce a comprehensive assembly of documents. Having the search terms reviewed by multiple eyes lowered the possibility that I missed relevant or important search terms.
In order to avoid dismissing relevant documents and skewing research findings, I made copies of all of the data that I assembled to the best of my ability. I took photographs of the files and documents, and stored them in unique folders on my computer. I also printed copies of the photographs and took notes on the images. After reading through the documents I was able to reorganize texts based on common themes, and remove texts that were unrelated to school lunches. In doing so, I was able to review the original documents multiple times, revealing new information and allowing my interpretations to change. I also had a copy of all documents that I had originally excluded, and was able to revisit them when necessary. At first glance, I focused only on small details of school lunches; however, each time I reviewed the documents I found that my understanding of the context had broadened and I was able to place more obscure findings within the overall discussion of my work.

4.2 Data Analysis Procedures

For each of the documents collected, I completed a thorough textual analysis. I began by reading through each text, followed by a second reading where I coded data by important themes using an open coding method. The themes I identified were discussed on multiple occasions with my supervisor in order to assure that they are appropriate and relevant to the work being done. In most cases, I reviewed the texts up to five times to ensure that I fully grasped the content. After identifying major themes, I coded the

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1 My original search produced upwards of 60 boxes of archival documents, each containing roughly 3 to 30 files. Files ranged widely in size, some with only a few sheets of paper, and others with hundreds of papers, or entire books. Ultimately, around 45 boxes with selected files were used in this analysis.

2 Broad themes were derived from the content of the documents. Examples included: morality, women’s roles in the household, the state of child health, and malnutrition.
documents by hand and entered them into a spreadsheet. No coding software was used, because the documents were all photographs thus making it impossible to highlight specific words without retyping the entire document.

This study required the combination of archival texts and existing historical literature. I required a firm knowledge of the time period, in order to combine information from archival and historical sources in a logical manner. As the main purpose of this research is to inform existing historical literature of a specific gap in knowledge, I needed to be able to make connections with how the archival data fit within the cultural context of the time period. As much as possible, data was organized chronologically, with no assumptions of causality.

As the archival documents collected in the research process were primarily in the form of official government recordings, I expected them to be highly accurate and authentic. The archival records were assumed to have been recorded correctly, and in great detail, to present a comprehensive portrayal of the issue at hand. It is unlikely that the documents would have been manipulated prior to reaching the hands of the researcher. Several of the documents had been written on in pencil. Some documents had sections crossed out with additional notes in the margins, while others had a date written at the top. In instances where the written changes altered the context or the language of the text and added valuable information, I created a footnote at the bottom of the page explaining my interpretation. When dates were written in pencil or pen at the top of the document, and fit within the range of dates of the file, I used them to provide a closer approximation of the exact date of the document. These decisions were made under the
assumption that the documents had been altered before entering the archives, as there are strict regulations to ensure that archival documents are not tampered with.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Working with archival texts requires ethical consideration both at the level of the text, and of the researcher. The texts themselves represent dominant ideologies of the time and were unquestionably involved in the process of historical silencing. As the texts were deemed important, and worthy of preservation, the researcher must also consider what information may have been excluded from them. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the researcher to consider and draw out the voices erased by the texts whenever possible.

To the best of my ability, I attempted to unearth voices of populations that I knew were marginalized during the 1940s. These populations included: children, women, immigrant or Aboriginal families, and low-income families. I found that each of these populations were included in school lunch debates to some extent, but were often spoken for by others. Therefore, I tried to understand the unique social, political and economic environments of these populations in order to represent their positions as accurately as possible.

Furthermore, archival work requires the researcher to consider the time period from which the archival texts arose, and how this influences the lasting rights of the individuals who wrote them. Fortunately, as this research relies primarily on official government or organization proceedings consent is implied by their storage. Nearly all documents I requested were open to the public, meaning that they disclosed no private
information about the individuals involved, or were from far enough in the past that private information would not cause any harm. In one case at the University of Toronto Archives, I was required to sign a researcher agreement to view certain files, however, the information within the files was not relevant to this study and was ultimately not included.

4.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations that were accounted for as best as possible during the research process. The original research proposal intended to gather information on the national history of school lunch programs; however, this was deemed unfeasible by the research committee, as it would have required data collection in each of the Canadian provinces and territories. Consequently, the scope of the study was confined mostly to the province of Ontario, and information from other provinces was included only to provide greater context. In order to gain perspective on Ontario’s relationship with school meals during the 1940s, the majority of research was conducted in the city of Toronto. This decision was influenced by prior work done by Henry and Allison (n.d.) who argued that in order to have considered a national school lunch program during the 1940s, sufficient ‘need’ for the program would have needed to have been established first in large urban centres. This is because many rural schools already had a meal program of some description in place, and in cases where there was no program, children in rural areas could more easily return home for lunch.

A second limitation of this study is that it is unlikely that all information relevant to decisions about implementing school meals during the 1940s was collected. Despite
my efforts to exhaust all reasonable sources of data, some archival materials were impossible to access. Some documents have been closed to the public for a number of reasons. I encountered this challenge at various sites, including the City of Toronto Archives, where certain documents had been affected by “vinegar syndrome” and had been frozen for preservation.³ It is also probable that open documents may have been missed during data collection due to the limitations of online search engines. Multiple visits to the archival sites revealed that search engines did not always offer all materials containing certain key words. This may be due to limited information available on the documents, or improper coding. In order to mitigate the effects of this concern, I enlisted the aid of several archivists to ensure that the most important documents were found.

A final limitation had to do with the quality of the data collected, which made it difficult at times to contextualize the ideas. Many documents, particularly reports, were missing important information, such as the date they were created. In these cases, I provided an approximate date for the document using the overall file dates. Some documents had also been adjusted, or written on using pencil or ink. When I came across a document that had been altered in a way that changed meaningful information, I made comments in the footnotes to describe the changes. I also incorporated the work of various historians to contextualize documents that lacked information, especially in cases where the documents were stored in more detail within other archival sites.

³ Vinegar syndrome, also known as acetate film base degradation, is a form of decay where film loses flexibility, curls and shrinks. The decaying process speeds up over time, and so afflicted film is placed in cool, dry places to preserve the film.
4.5 Preliminary Data Collection

Before submitting my research proposal, I completed a preliminary analysis of available archival data in Ontario in order to determine whether or not the 1940s were an appropriate time period to research school lunch programs. I began my preliminary research in December 2015, by the end of February 2016, had visited the following archival facilities: The Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, the Queen’s University Archives, City of Toronto Archives, and University of Toronto Archives. In the following few paragraphs, I will provide a brief overview of my preliminary findings from each archival location.

The Library and Archives Canada

The Library and Archives Canada is federally run facility in Ottawa, which houses the heritage of all Canadians spanning the entire history of the country. A variety of reports exist on the subject of school lunch programs from the 1930s to 1970s. During the 1940s, the Department of Agriculture collected data on the availability of school milk programs in a variety of Ontario school boards, as well as the number of students who received free milk from these programs. The Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) also created annual reports discussing the quality and availability of nutrition and education programs in elementary schools. These reports outlined infrastructural barriers and progress being made towards creating a strong nutrition program for each of the provinces. The Canadian Dietetic Association (CDA) also expressed an interest in school lunch programs, and multiple reports indicating that the organization was gathering information on the number of children who carried lunches to school. Records
from the Canadian Association of Dietetics also included a variety of newspaper clippings from between the 1930s to 1950s regarding malnutrition among children and concerns over food accessibility for low-income families. There is also evidence that the Boys ‘K’ Club in Toronto implemented a hot school lunch program and an observational report indicated that it provided diverse benefits to the children. Lastly, in the 1960s, the Department of Indian Affairs collected data from each Ontario school board on the funding provided for Aboriginal students in separate schools to receive school lunches.

**City of Toronto Archives**

The City of Toronto Archives is a large collection which maintains both municipal and Ontario provincial records. Important records within this collection include various reports from the Department of Public Health in Toronto, as well as the Department of Social Welfare. The Department of Public Health maintained both monthly and annual health prevalence data for the City of Toronto throughout the entire 20th century. This data set includes a section on child health, which reports on rates of malnutrition, dental defects and mental hygiene, among other prominent illnesses incurred by elementary and high school students. The Department of Social Welfare also collected ample data on food relief allowances with detailed information on the amount of funding provided and number of families on relief. Two major reports were created on food relief allowances during the late 1930s and early 1940s as well which provide information on services provided to low-income families in order to help them improve their spending. Finally, Mayor Conboy, the mayor of Toronto (1940-1944) wrote a relief
statement supporting the implementation of a school lunch program at both the elementary and high school levels.

University of Toronto Archives

The University of Toronto archives maintains department records as well as information on faculty, students and university affairs. Within these archives, there is an extensive collection of records on Earle McHenry, a prominent nutrition researcher during the 1940s. Earle McHenry created the welfare report which determined the food relief services that families on social assistance would receive. Furthermore, he conducted studies on the quality of nutrition children received in Toronto and surrounding areas.

Queen’s University Archives

Among the archives I visited, the Queen’s University archives holds the smallest collection of records with limited information on school lunch programs. Some original data exists on children’s health statuses during the 1940s. This data consists of cards for each student attending a Kingston school with detailed health information depicting height, weight, and prevalence of illness. Through these archives, it is also possible to access administrative records from the Kingston school board during the 1940s which may contain relevant information on lunch programs that existed at the time.
Final Data Collection

After discussing these findings with my Committee, I decided to focus my research in three main archival sites: The National Archives of Canada, The Archives of Ontario, and The City of Toronto Archives. Some small documents viewed in the University of Toronto Archives, primarily in the form of newspaper clippings.
Chapter 5: The Canadian School Lunch Debate of the 1940s

School lunch programs were not a new phenomenon in Canada during the 1940s. Certain foods, particularly milk, had been made available in various schools through the help of non-governmental organizations throughout the Depression. Some schools also offered a range of complete or incomplete (supplement) lunches. In the mid-1940s, the City of Toronto implemented a meal service for needy children through the city’s day care centres. This program was highly successful, and many families sought to extend its services to all children. This desire was not unique to the people of Toronto, and similarly, in 1944 the Canadian Council on Nutrition (CCN) and Canadian Newfoundland Education Association (CNEA) presented a joint proposal for a national school lunch program. Even though school lunch programs had a wide support network in Ontario, significant resources had already been applied to increasing cash allowances. Scientific advances meant that Canadians had a better understanding of nutritional requirements, and began to incorporate them into welfare policies. Major studies were conducted in Toronto to assess the nutritional status of the children of low-income families and produced contradictory results. Even though malnutrition was publicized as a major threat to Canadian health, rates of malnutrition, as well as other nutrient-related conditions appeared quite low. Proponents of school lunches, and of cash allowances, used the findings to support their own positions. The CCN and CNEA joint proposal was ultimately rejected, in favour of Family Allowances.
5.1 The Rise of School Lunch Programs in Canada

The possible implementation of a national school lunch program was under careful consideration by a number of governmental and non-governmental authorities from the late 1930s to the 1950s. The idea of implementing a school lunch program was borne out of the complex fears of the changing social, economic and political landscape of Canada. Proponents of school lunch programs often pointed to misguided information on childhood malnutrition suggesting that hunger was a threat to both the home, and national security. Arguments on either side of the school lunch debate were highlighted by various news outlets and were frequently raised during the meetings of a number of Red Feather Agencies. Many organizations were outspoken about their support for a school lunch program including the Canadian Dietetic Association, and Women’s Voluntary Services. Other community-based organizations, such as the Canadian Red Cross Society (Tisdall, et al, 1951), and Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs, also demonstrated interest by conducting research on the benefits of the lunches delivered through their programs. Interested groups were almost always made up of women; however, at times they were also supported by a prominent male physician or researcher.

4 Red Feather refers to a number of charitable organizations with the common goal of improving communities. Today in Canada, this organization is known as the United Way Centraide, and has been known by other names including: Community Chest, and United Appeal (United Way, n.d).
5 City of Toronto Archives[CTA], Fonds 200 Former City of Toronto, Series 361 “Mayor’s Office correspondence”, Subseries 1 “Mayor’s Office subject correspondence”, Box 146225, Folio 3, File 235, ‘Brief presented by Mrs. Britton-Foster, Chairman Committee for a School Meal Service in Toronto, October 16th, 1946’.
6 CTA, Fonds 200 Former City of Toronto, Series 361 “Mayor’s Office correspondence”, Subseries 1 “Mayor’s Office subject correspondence”, Box 146225, Folio 3, File 235, ‘Letter from Mrs. John McKee to Mr. Fuller, November 26th, 1942’.
Nearly all of the nutrition committee reports presented at organization meetings were prepared and discussed by women. Community-based organizations also brought school lunch programs to the attention of various levels of government, particularly municipalities, garnering some support and recognition.

School lunch programs were not an entirely new phenomenon in Canada during the 1940s. In May 1943, Nutrition Services in the Department of Pensions and National Health released a *Preliminary report on school feeding and milk schemes in Canada* ⁸. According to the report, “for some time past, and particularly during the Depression years, milk, or a hot milk drink has been provided at morning recess or during the noon meal by various organizations and agencies.” Payment for the milk was encouraged, but it was also supplied to children free when deemed necessary. Table 1 outlines a list of Canadian municipalities for which information on milk programs was available.⁹ The table includes information on the number of children who received milk in 1939, as well as whether or not it was subsidized. In cases where milk was offered free, this was done mostly through local or national organizations like Junior Red Cross, I.O.D.E, or the Progress Club. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and BC, the provincial government provided some funding in order to cover equipment costs (Mosby, 2014).¹⁰ The report goes on to say that “in many parts of the country, more particularly the rural areas, the provision of

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¹⁰ Five schools reported that a milk program had previously been in place but was no longer available within the city. Two of the schools noted that this was due to a discontinuation of funding. One school did not distribute milk due to the belief that it was unhealthy for the children.
at least one hot dish to accompany the child’s sandwiches, has been made possible through the help of various interested groups.”

These included local groups, such as Junior Red Cross, teachers, the school board, the health department, or pupils. Another report revealed that in the majority of cases, pupils were the most common sponsors for school lunch programs. Groups of pupils sometimes adopted roles within the school to carry out necessary tasks, and then contributed the funds they acquired to provide a meal program.

Table 1: Milk schemes of Canadian cities in 1939.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of Schools that Distributed Milk</th>
<th>Serving Size</th>
<th>Number of times per day</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Total number of ½ pints provided (1938)</th>
<th>Offered Free</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas, ON</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchener, ON</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brantford, ON</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratford, ON</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galt, ON</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Bay, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>~28,500</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2,890</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Order Code</th>
<th>Order Quantity</th>
<th>Individual Order Quantity</th>
<th>Total Order Quantity</th>
<th>Stock Available</th>
<th>Delivery Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Catharines, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>~25,460</td>
<td>Yes**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdun, Qc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trois-Rivières, Qc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Hyacinthe, Qc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax, NS</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon, MB</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,744</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary, AB</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>~157,700</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton, AB</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>~200</td>
<td>77,096</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge, AB</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshawa, ON</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guelph, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>42,446</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicoutimi, Qc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatoon, SK</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnipeg, MN</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fredericton, NB</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterborough, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>33,276</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt;700</td>
<td>130,835</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moncton, NB</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec City, Qc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarnia, ON</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2408</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria,</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>½ pint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>~130</td>
<td>~24,700</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In June 1943, Nutrition Services completed the *Survey of feeding projects in Canadian schools*, which presented the current information available on school lunches in Canada. Nutrition services sent out letters to each province with a number of questions on school lunches, and compiled the data into one document. Unfortunately, no

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13 Data was recreated using various correspondences between municipalities and Mr. W.C. Hopper.
conclusions could be drawn from the findings as not enough schools completed the questions and so data were not representative. Table 2 shows the number of schools that responded to the letter, as well as the number that had school lunch projects in place. The percent of schools that responded and had lunch programs varied substantially between provinces. Projects included any type of feeding programme, whether it include a hot ‘complete’ lunch, incomplete lunch, milk, cocoa or a supplement program. The most common type of project reported in most provinces was a cocoa program. From each of these reports, it is unclear how many children in Ontario ultimately received hot meals, and whether or not they were required to pay in order to participate in the lunch programs; however, it is estimated that in 1930 to 1931 approximately 1,800 rural schools in Ontario had a program of some type.

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15 A popular ‘incomplete’ school lunch program in the 1930s and 1940s was ‘the jar method’ where parents supplied their children with food from home in a jar. The jars were then heated in bins of water so that the children could enjoy warm lunches. This method was especially useful in small schools where equipment was limited and there was enough room for kitchen appliances.

16 LAC, RG 29, Volume 930, File 386-3-10, ‘Hot school lunch in Ontario’.
Table 2 – Number of schools as a percentage of total number, and the number with lunch projects. (1943)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>No. of schools</th>
<th>No. of forms returned</th>
<th>% returned</th>
<th>Number with projects</th>
<th>% of returns with projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.E.I</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>7726</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>5176</td>
<td>1331</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>3600</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>24252</td>
<td>4499</td>
<td></td>
<td>1516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1942, Mrs. Arthur Milner, the chairman of Women’s Voluntary Services wrote a letter to Mayor Conboy of Toronto, and offered to extend their efforts to administer a feeding program to children of families on relief in Toronto. The City of Toronto eventually adopted a plan to provide noon-meals to needy children, which began in 1946. The program was administered through the Day Care Centre Programme, and showed immense potential to add value to the community. The Committee for a School Meal Service in Toronto was founded, and in 1946 requested that City Council and the Board

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of Control endorse a school meal program for all children in Toronto.\textsuperscript{18} The committee stated that the value of the program had been demonstrated and that there was no reason to limit it to a few children. Furthermore, the committee believed that a city-wide program would help to secure Toronto as a national leader in child health. The committee was made up of 16 women, but also had a long list of prominent religious and professional sponsors. Professional sponsors spanned a diverse range of medical, educational, and labour fields including: the Health League of Canada, the University of Toronto, the Hospital for Sick Children, the Visiting Homemaker’s Association, and the Toronto Teacher’s Council. It is clear from the wide range of sponsors that a school lunch program had a strong support network within Toronto communities.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1944, the Canadian Council on Nutrition (CCN) and Canada and Newfoundland Education Association (CNEA) completed a joint proposal for a national school lunch program (Mosby, 2014).\textsuperscript{20} The proposal followed a similar plan to the US National School Lunch Program where funding was based on a federal subsidy to

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} CTA, Fonds 200 Former City of Toronto, Series 361 “Mayor’s Office correspondence”, Subseries 1 “Mayor’s Office subject correspondence”, Box 146225, Folio 3, File 235, ‘Brief presented by Mrs. Britton-Foster, Chairman Committee for a School Meal Service in Toronto, October 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1946’.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Other sponsors for the program include: the Toronto Labour Council, the Home and School Council, the Toronto General Hospital, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, the Toronto Welfare Council, the Toronto District Trades and Labour Council, Women’s College Hospital, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Neighbourhood Workers’ Association.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} LAC, RG 19, Volume 930, File 386-3-10, ‘A school lunch programme for Canada’.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
schools. The plan accommodated different resources available in schools, and proposed a yearly cost of $5.5 million to the federal government. In the report, CCN and CNEA argued that:

A school lunch programme for all Canada could be one of the most valuable of all contributions to the health and fitness of Canadians and toward school health education. No nutrition program can be fully effective without such a practical example, and without employment of such an example in teaching nutrition.

Although the report had diverse government and organization supporters, it was not well-received by federal politicians who had already made concerted efforts to address malnutrition through cash allowances (Mosby, 2014).

5.2 Addressing Hunger with Cash Relief

Around the same time that the Toronto School Lunch Program was gaining recognition and support, the Mayor of Toronto issued a relief statement stating that families on relief would be given a 10% increase in cash allowances for the purpose of

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21 The plan included a number of incomplete and complete lunch programs based on the size, financial status, and resources available in the schools. For example, schools with no existing kitchen infrastructure would be incorporated into the plan through an incomplete lunch scheme, where lunch supplements (i.e. milk or cocoa), or other smaller-scale projects, would be provided to students. Schools with appropriate kitchen equipment, and sufficient staff would be able to provide a complete, hot, meal. See LAC, RG 19, Volume 930, File 386-3-10, ‘A school lunch programme for Canada’, Page 2.


23 Mayor Frederick J. Conboy (1941-1944)
providing noon-meals to elementary and secondary school children. In his statement, he acknowledged a need to improve access to food for children; however, he intended to tackle malnutrition through increased cash allowances instead of implementing a new social program.

The decision to increase cash allowances for relief recipients was controversial in Canada for a number of social, political and economic reasons. First, providing tax dollars to the poor had long been a sensitive topic, due to perceived issues of morality. This concern reflected generally negative attitudes of Canadians towards the poor and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this paper. Increasing cash allowances as a means of improving nutrition was also recognized as a deeply flawed strategy to improve health. As the Commissioner on Public Welfare pointed out that there was no guarantee that an increase in the relief allowance would be spent on the desired diet. In order to ensure that relief allowances were properly spent on food, relief administration would also need to be improved, a burden that the Department of Public Welfare had been hesitant of.

However, even though increasing cash relief was an unpopular decision in the 1940s, existing relief policies were so out-dated that there was widespread concern that families on relief were going hungry. Prominent researchers in Toronto began studying the condition of families on relief, and multiple media outlets spread the fear that hunger was rampant among the poor. At the beginning of the 1940s, Toronto was following the

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24 The exact date of the relief statement was not listed; however, it was written in the time between 1941-1944. See CTA, “General welfare assistance: food allowance”, Series 100, Box 046624, File 634, ‘Relief statement’.
25 The Commissioner on Public Welfare was Mr. A.W. Laver. See CTA, “General welfare assistance: food allowances”, Series 100, Box 046624, File 633, ‘Letter from Mr. Laver to the Committee on Public Welfare’.

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Campbell Report for food allowances, a relief policy first published in 1932. The Campbell Report was celebrated as “the first real attempt to convert the provision of goods into cash equivalents and to standardize welfare policy and practice at the provincial level” (Stapleton & Laframboise, n.d.), yet also had severe limitations. First, by 1940 the report and policies were out-dated, and even though the recommendations were being applied with an additional 60%, changing costs of living and eating meant that families using relief needed more money to survive. Furthermore, advancements in the field of nutrition revealed that the Report did not properly account for the different food requirements of family members. For example, under the Campbell Report “a girl of 2 years receive[d] the exact same allowance as an active boy of 15 years”. Consequently, the Report was critiqued for the absence of scientific evidence. Therefore, the need for a new welfare policy in Canada was apparent.

5.3 Using ‘Science’ to Inform Policy

In 1941, Toronto City Council appointed a Special Committee, comprised of Frederick F. Tisdall (The Hospital for Sick Children), Alice C. Willard (University of Toronto), Marjorie Bell (Visiting Homemaker’s Association), and Earle McHenry (University of Toronto) to report on the nutritional value of food relief in Toronto.

26 By the 1940s, the Campbell Report was being applied with an additional 60% from original recommendations to accommodate for the increased cost of living.
McHenry declined the invitation, and later in 1941, the *Report on Study of Relief Food Allowances and Costs* was published. The report adjusted the principles outlined by the Canadian Medical Association’s *Food and Health* booklet published in 1940. Weekly food lists were outlined by nutrient breakdown and cost for children and adults. To address the scientific shortcomings of the Campbell Report, children were divided into two-year age groups. Gender did not influence children’s food allowances. Food allowances were also presented according to various family structures to provide examples of total family food allowances. The report recommended an increase in allowances from the Campbell Report plus 60%, which would cost the city or province a substantial amount of $5,500 per month. It also represented a first step towards the future of scientifically informed policy making. After months of debate, the City of Toronto adopted the relief schedules recommended by Tisdall, Willard and Bell in 1943.

In the early 1940s, the Province of Ontario was also interested in food relief payments, and unconvinced by the Tisdall, Willard, and Bell Report, appointed McHenry to create his own relief recommendations (Mosby, 2014). The *Report on Food Allowances for Relief Recipients*, also known as the McHenry Report was then released in 1944 and reflected McHenry’s more conservative political orientation. Similar to the Tisdall, Willard and Bell Report, the McHenry Report recommended an increase in cash

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28 It was speculated that McHenry’s refusal to join the special committee was due to previous disagreements with Miss Bell regarding the interpretation of earlier relief food study findings (Mosby, 2014).
29 CTA, “Report on study of relief food allowances and costs: as amended by the City Planning Board December 31, 1943”, Fonds 2, Series 60, Box 224860, Item 615, ‘Report on study of relief food allowances and costs’.
30 CTA, “General welfare assistance: food allowances”, Series 100, Box 046624, File 634, ‘Memorandum supporting city’s claim for adoption of Tisdall-Willard-Bell schedule on food allowances’.
relief on the grounds of ‘scientific evidence’; however, the increase was much more modest.\textsuperscript{31} A central, new idea that was proposed in the McHenry Report was the importance of coupling relief payments with nutrition education for mothers. In particular, McHenry suggested “housewives should be trained to spend the food allowance to the best advantage”.\textsuperscript{32} The McHenry Report’s reduced expenditure was also supported by the report of the Committee on Public Welfare which stated that “of the 505 municipalities in Ontario now receiving assistance from the Province towards unemployment relief, the City of Toronto is the only municipality requesting further assistance”.\textsuperscript{33} This suggests that welfare programs in smaller municipalities may already have been providing appropriate relief. Due to the costs saved, as well as the convincing appeal for greater education, the McHenry Report was adopted later in 1944.

The McHenry Report marked a turning point in debates on malnutrition and nutrition research throughout Canada (Mosby, 2014). Up until the McHenry Report, malnutrition was widely understood as a consequence of insufficient income; however, McHenry proposed that it could be alleviated through education instead. In challenging the influence of income on diet, McHenry also brought attention to the ‘scientific evidence’ being used in nutrition research. Both of the new welfare reports highlighted the emergence of nutrition as a legitimate ‘scientific’ field; however, there were still limitations in many, if not all, of the studies being done. For example, statistical studies at

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] CTA, “General welfare assistance: food allowances”, Series 100, Box 046624, File 636, ‘Report on food allowances for relief recipients in the province of Ontario’.
\item[33] CTA, Fonds 200 Former City of Toronto, Series 361 “Mayor’s Office correspondence”, Subseries 1 “Mayor’s office subject correspondence”, Box 146225, Folio 3, “Relief, welfare and goodwill industries: includes Tisdall report on increased cost of welfare, 1943”, ‘Report No. 21 of the committee on public welfare’, Page 2.
\end{footnotes}
times created the illusion of an “average” person or household that was not representative of the entire population.\footnote{LAC, RG 17, Volume 3434, File 1724, ‘A report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food’.} Furthermore, although preferable to individual surveys, family surveys required significant time and cooperation from the groups involved.

Progress in the field of nutrition had been rapidly expanding since the discovery of nutrients in the early 1900s, and was accelerated by wartime efforts to improve the health of soldiers. Nutritionists had also made progress in identifying ‘protective foods’ which were assumed to promote health through their nutrient composition. In the years leading up to, and after WWII, there appeared to be an intense desire among nutritionists to spread knowledge and establish nutrition as a legitimate ‘scientific’ field. Nutritionists also played a crucial role in establishing the concern of ‘hidden hunger’ among Canadians. ‘Hidden hunger’ referred to the nutrient starvation of the body resulting from a nutrient-poor diet. This contrasted with earlier understandings of hunger as ‘overt hunger’ where the individual was starving due to lack of food. The conflation of ideas about ‘hidden’ and ‘overt’ hungers may have contributed to the confusing and misleading media coverage on the rates of malnutrition in Canada. Ultimately, rates of malnutrition were grossly overestimated, and the McHenry Report caused many Canadians to question the messages they had been hearing.

5.4 The ‘Real’ Prevalence of Malnutrition

During the Great Depression and WWII, as well as the years immediately following the war, nutritionists, reporters and public health professionals were primarily concerned with the diets of children. An estimated one third, to one half of military
rejections were due to the poor physical and mental conditions of men, for which malnutrition was assumed to play a major role. Looking to avoid this challenge in the future, the health status of children was deemed a matter of national security and emphasized throughout research communities. Prominent nutrition researchers in Toronto and other parts of the country focused their efforts on studying the height, weight and stature of children to determine the short and long-term effects of nutrition. In 1939, Dr. Tisdall and Dr. Ebbs from the Hospital for Sick Children conceived and planned a nutrition survey in Toronto under the supervision and advice of Dr. Brown and Dr. Burke of the Department of Pensions and National Health. The results of the survey were published as *A Height and Weight Survey of Toronto Elementary School Children* in 1942. The survey compared the measurements of roughly 78,000 girls and boys to data collected by the Toronto Department of Public Health on 59,000 children in 1923. The study was created after Toronto passed a by-law requiring the pasteurization of all milk, and launched a “Drink More Milk” campaign. The study set out to investigate the belief that “the results of such a far-sighted and long-range policy [had] resulted in important changes in the stature of children”.  

Family income was assumed to contribute to children’s diets, therefore the survey gathered information on the relief status of the family, as well as the occupations of the parents. Occupations were divided into gainfully and non-gainfully occupied groups. Gainfully occupied adults were further divided into manual and non-manual labour, while


non-gainfully occupied adults included those on pensions, retired, unemployed or housewives. The report also considered the prosperity of the district in which the school of the child was located. The study found that between 1923-1939, children had gained an average of 1 to 2 inches, and 2 to 6 pounds for 7 year olds and 13 year olds respectively. Children with unemployed or retired parents were the shortest group, and more prosperous districts generally had children of higher stature. Despite these trends, the changes were deemed insignificant by the research team, as they did not provide any direct connection between nutrition and the development of children. Even with insignificant findings, the researchers still asserted that the environment affected children’s stature; however, the relative absence of malnutrition and other diseases among poorer children seemed to directly contradict the messages of nutritionists suggesting that malnutrition was on the rise and had harsh consequences for the population.

Other studies published in the late 1940s yielded similar results, affirming the growing scepticism towards nutrition research that had emerged following the release of the McHenry Report. In September 1945, the School of Hygiene at the University of Toronto presented the preliminary results of their nutrition investigation in the East York Township in their *Nutrition News Letter*.\(^{37}\) Five hundred and eighteen students participated in the study, which included medical examinations, 7-day food records, a questionnaire on food-likes, and home visits to learn about the participation of the mother. The researchers observed that 95% of children returned home for lunch, where they did not consume enough milk, fruit or cod liver oil. The food-likes survey revealed

that children enjoyed these food groups, and so attention was directed to the mother for not providing healthful choices. Thirty five percent of children were deemed underweight at their medical examination, and only 15% of children achieved an ‘excellent’ nutritional status. While the findings of the study seemed to confirm possible malnutrition, the researchers could not assign causation, and their recommendations followed the trend of emphasizing educational interventions over economic assistance.

The Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs of Toronto also conducted a nutritional and family income survey from March to June in 1949. The goal of the survey was “to find out if the increase in food costs had any effect on the nutrition of the boy and girl members of Trinity “K” Club”.38 The report included the complete questionnaires of 150 families with a total of 565 children. Nearly one half of the families had steady wages, with 12 families drawing on Mother’s Allowances, and 139 families receiving direct Family Allowances. Only three families were marked ‘excellent’ in nutrition, with 57 ‘good’, 68 ‘fair’ and 22 ‘poor’39. Despite suboptimal diets, only 9 children presented as underweight, and other rates of defects were also low. Once again, this study appeared to contradict concerns of widespread malnutrition among Canadians.

38 CTA, “Provincial Department of Health”, Fonds 200, Series 451, Box 146145, Subseries 1, File 2, ‘Nutritional and family income survey conducted by the Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs, March to June 1949’, Page 1.
39 Nutritional adequacy was assessed partly through the ‘family inventory method’ where food supplies are examined at the beginning and end of a week period (Hunter & Pett, 1941). They were also measured through a questionnaire based on predetermined food groups and portion sizes. See CTA, “Provincial Department of Health”, Fonds 200, Series 451, Box 146145, Subseries 1, File 2, ‘Nutritional and family income survey conducted by the Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs, March to June 1949’.

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A final, key source of child health information was the comprehensive medical records gathered by the Department of Public Health in Toronto. Monthly and annual reports highlighted health trends among residents of Toronto, providing key data on the rates of disease, dental defects, and mental hygiene concerns among children. Figure 1 provides an overview of the rates of malnutrition, paired with the total number of medical examinations completed among junior and senior school children between the years of 1936 to 1948. There was some minor fluctuation in total number of medical examinations, yet they were still relatively stable. Malnutrition was examined alongside 20 other defects, and peaked in 1941 when 5.7% of children were deemed malnourished. Over the full 13 years, malnutrition rates were stable at 3-4% of the population. This large study population exemplifies that malnutrition was not a major threat to Toronto children, and did not increase during WWII.

41 Malnutrition, as well as the other defects, was not defined in the Department of Public Health records; however, other work at the time defined it as “a condition in which an individual’s health, growth, physical or mental efficiency is impaired due to inadequate intake, absorption or utilization of one or more dietary constituents” (RG17 Vol 3434, File 1724).
42 Minor fluctuation in the rates of malnutrition may have been caused by a number of medical or social factors. Diagnoses of malnutrition were largely dependent on the opinion of the physician or nurse examining the child, and at times were made simply through observation. Furthermore, the department of public health did not include data on the number of children missing from school during medical examinations, or provide details on data collection procedures.
Figure 1: Rates of malnutrition among junior and senior public or separate school children in Toronto, contrasted with total number medical examinations, 1936-1948.

Nutritionists often directed public attention to sugar and sweet pastry consumption as a potential cause for, or indicator of, the supposedly alarming rates of malnutrition among children. This concern was presented in multiple versions of the *Ontario Nutrition Bulletin* prepared by the Ontario Interdepartmental Nutrition Committee in the late 1940s.\(^{43}\) Dental cavities and other more extreme dental defects may have been used to help estimate and diagnose cases of malnutrition. Figure 2 displays the

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combined number of primary and secondary school children with one or more dental
defects between 1936 to 1948 in Toronto. The prevalence of dental defects remained
relatively consistent throughout the years, decreasing slightly between 1942 to 1947;
however, unlike malnutrition, dental defects were much more prevalent among children.
Over the 13 years, just under 2/3 of children on average had one or more dental defect.
These incredibly high rates likely served to confirm nutritionists’ concerns that children’s
diets were filled with unhealthy amounts of sugar. This also provided evidence to
question mother’s food purchasing decisions, as they may have been purchasing sweets
instead of more nutritious foods.

**Figure 2: Primary and secondary school children in Toronto with one or more
dental defect, compared with total number of medical examinations completed by
the Department of Public Health, 1936-1948.**

![Figure 2: Primary and secondary school children in Toronto with one or more
dental defect, compared with total number of medical examinations completed by
the Department of Public Health, 1936-1948.]

CTA, Fonds 200 Former City of Toronto, Series 365 “Department of Public Health
Reports”, Box 224904, Folio 3, File 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 62, 64, 65, 67a, 71, 73, 75, 78
“Annual Statement – Year [1936-1948]: vital statistics, divisional summaries,
expenditures – [1936-1948]”, ‘Dental services’.
Due to the physical and mental basis for military rejections, some nutritionists also understood nutrition as an indicator for mental hygiene.\textsuperscript{44} While few nutrition specific surveys examined this relationship directly, the prevalence of mental defects among children were recorded in population surveys conducted by the Department of Public Health. Figure 3 highlights the percentage of children who were diagnosed as borderline or mentally defective according to individual intelligence tests conducted in Toronto schools. It is important to note that intelligence tests were only administered to a small portion of the population (~1900 children per year) and may not have been representative of overall intelligence in Toronto. According to the data, poor mental hygiene was exhibited in roughly 16-40\% of the population studied.

\textsuperscript{44} LAC, RG 17, Volume 3434, File 1724, ‘A report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food’.
5.5 Redirecting Attention to Nutrition Education

While research in the field of nutrition certainly advanced during the 1930s and 1940s, in many ways, it also served to undermine the efforts of nutritionists by calling attention to the various shortcomings of ‘scientific’ evidence. Few nutrition studies at the time yielded the same results, and even less were able to accurately support claims of malnutrition. This may have been a consequence of inconsistent understandings of malnutrition and its effect on the human body, as well as poor ability to detect malnutrition. Doctors and nurses often relied on observation to diagnose nutritional status, a medical examination impossible to standardize. Furthermore, there are few ways of conclusively identifying malnutrition due to the different ways it can manifest in the...
body. Therefore, the apparently ‘objective’ nutrition surveys of the 1940s did very little to provide an accurate depiction of the overall prevalence of malnutrition in Canada. Thus, nutritionists were forced to find new ways to secure their field of study.

Although nutrition and health surveys conducted in the Depression and post WWII did not conclusively show that malnutrition was widespread among Canadian children, findings were often used as evidence to promote a revised vision of nutritionists to provide accurate nutrition information for all Canadians. As mentioned earlier, recommendations made in the McHenry Report to introduce community nutrition education shifted the focus from malnutrition as an economic, to a knowledge-based problem. While McHenry generally advocated for training mothers to improve their food spending, other organizations that were already invested in children’s education used the shift to bolster their own mandates. For example, the Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) had long been an advocate for providing girls with the education needed to become effective homemakers. In the 1941 Report of the Nutrition Committee, members of CHEA stated that: “it is apparent that increased spread of sound nutrition knowledge is of vital importance in the interest of national well being, in war or peace time”.45 The committee also went further to recommend that boys be included in all nutrition programmes, to emphasize the importance of youth acquiring nutrition knowledge.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, home economics courses were only offered sporadically in Ontario. According to the Inspector’s Annual Reports on manual labour and home economics training in public and separate schools, only two elementary

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schools offered home economics classes for the 1938-1939 academic year.\textsuperscript{46} Manual labour classes ultimately replaced these two home economics classes by the next year. Secondary schools with students in grades 9 and 10 were significantly more likely to offer home economics classes, almost always as a feminine alternative for manual labour. Even though many secondary schools in Ontario provided home economics training for girls, the Inspector’s Report revealed that many of the schools were poorly equipped for home economics and required major new appliances. The lack of opportunities and materials available to teach home economics in Ontario made it significantly more challenging for CHEA to achieve their goals.

Even though nutrition education gained more public awareness and support during the 1940s, it seemed to minimally advance the field of home economics. By 1950, CHEA was still unsatisfied with the delivery of home economics classes, and in the 6\textsuperscript{th} Biennial General Meeting, the nutrition and homemaker’s committee reports “show[ed] it to be evident that Nutrition, though taught in elementary schools of each province, [was] being taught ineffectively”.\textsuperscript{47} The committees identified the cause of this problem to be a combination of “insufficient and ineffective presentation of methods of instruction” and a “lack of material”.

Even though nutrition education in schools was nowhere near where home economists wanted it to be at the end of the 1940s, many remained optimistic that this would change in the future. A report from CHEA’s Education Committee in 1950 pointed

\textsuperscript{46} Home Economics classes were offered in these two schools for grades 7 and 8 only. Archives of Ontario [AO], “Manual training in elementary schools inspector’s reports & one home economics report”, Container D315057, Volume RG 2-103-2, File reference code RG 2-103-2-15.

\textsuperscript{47} LAC, MG 28, I359, Volume 54, ‘Minutes of the Canadian Home Economics Association – 6\textsuperscript{th} biennial general meeting’, Page 14.
hopefully to the provincial plans for reorganizing Ontario schools into elementary, intermediate and senior divisions. The plan affirmed that all grade 7 and 8 schools in the province would be equipped for Home Economics, and that courses would be revised. These changes, which would occur over the next several years, would provide home economists with new opportunities to deliver a strong nutrition education to Canadian children.

The Vising Homemaker’s Association (VHA) also advocated for improving health outcome through nutrition education; however, it followed McHenry’s original recommendation of introducing community programs. In a statement released in the early 1950s, the VHA declared that “experience has shown that the most effective method to provide nutrition education is by personal contact of trained and sympathetic persons with the mother. The main point of emphasis at the present time should be that the health of children can be improved and that the family can save money by the proper choice of food”. The VHA had been involved in developing the Cost of Living, published in 1939 and later revised in 1944, as well as the report on relief allowances prepared by Tisdall, Willard and Bell. The VHA also helped to develop a nutrition program with budget counselling services delivered in Toronto during the 1940s, which aimed to provide mothers with a comprehensive set of tools and a support network to improve food practices.

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49 CTA, “Visiting Homemaker’s Association” Fonds 200, Series 474, Box 143142, Subseries 1, File 32, ‘Statement re nutrition program and budget counselling services of the Visiting Homemakers Association’, Page 1.
50 CTA, “Report on study of relief food allowances and costs: as amended by the City Planning Board December 31, 1943”, Fonds 2, Series 60, Box 224860, Item 615, ‘The cost of living’.
5.6 Revisiting School Lunches

Debates in the 1940s on whether nutrition was an education or income problem were not entirely polarized. Many food reformers advocated to address hunger through several different avenues in order to ensure that all vulnerable groups were accommodated. As social assistance was already in place in Canada, increasing relief payments and targeting vulnerable groups was the most obvious and simple way to address malnutrition. It was also recognized that increasing relief payments could not ensure improved food spending, and so social assistance programs needed to be accompanied by nutrition education. But, even with these measures in place, some researchers believed that Canada needed a school lunch programme as well so that children could achieve optimal health.

In May 1945, a Committee appointed by the Deputy Minister of National Health and Welfare, and Deputy Minister of Agriculture completed *A report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food*. The Committee, made up of Dr. Booth, Dr. Pett, Dr. Bates, Dr. Hopper, and Mr. McArthur used the report to provide a comprehensive overview of food consumption patterns in Canada.\(^{51}\) The Committee recommended incorporating multiple types of welfare programs in order to optimize nutritional outcomes for the population. According to the report, cash allowances, education programs and school lunch programs were all seen as important components towards achieving this end. The Family Allowance Act, which would provide cash relief and contribute to food spending, was already coming into effect in July 1945; however, the

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\(^{51}\) LAC, RG 17, Volume 3434, File 1724, ‘A report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food’.
Committee urged that a School Lunch Programme could provide a number of additional opportunities that cash relief couldn’t. For example, the School Lunch Programme would assist in the training of good food habits, improve education and attendance at schools, and foster integration with community centres. The Committee also acknowledged a number of drawbacks in providing a National School Lunch Program, and noted that special attention would need to be paid to the location of the schools. In particular, rural areas would have difficulty implementing school lunches because they lacked necessary facilities, and the program would represent additional work for teachers who already had full course loads. Similarly, urban areas were also challenged by limited facilities that could deliver the program, and would also have difficulties meeting costs. Despite these challenges, the Committee still concluded that “further development in industrial feeding and a national school lunch program offer opportunities for immediate improvement in nutrition as well as a broad field for education”.\textsuperscript{52}

Canada also had shining examples of national school milk and lunch programs that had successfully been implemented in other countries to draw on for inspiration. In the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Education handled all levels of school meal and milk services during the 1940s. The Milk in Schools Scheme was originally started in 1927, and expanded rapidly throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The school meal program in Britain did not grow as quickly, yet was introduced much earlier. It began in individual cities in 1879, and in 1941, a National School Meals Policy was introduced to standardize the program (Evans & Harper, 2009). Mary McBeth of the Canadian Department of National Health and Welfare travelled to the UK in 1945 and relayed many positive

\textsuperscript{52} LAC, RG 17, Volume 3434, File 1724, ‘A report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food’, Page 115.
messages to the Canadian Dietetics Association.\textsuperscript{53} She described the overall atmosphere of the dining facilities to be pleasant, and regarded the program as a “tremendous accomplishment”. Most importantly, she stated “it is safe to say that no child need go hungry for, if its family cannot afford to pay for the meal, the child can obtain it for free” (Page 55). Similarly, the US National School Lunch Program was also developed following WWII and was implemented in 1946 to improve child health. Both programs, as well as others in Norway and Belgium paved the way towards universally improved child nutrition, and provided Canadian organizations with an example of how a national school lunch program might successfully operate in Canada.\textsuperscript{54}

Great Britain also had a Welfare Foods program designed to improve the health of pregnant women and babies. The program provided orange juice, cod liver oil and milk at a reduced cost or free. The Nutrition Committee of the Canadian Dietetic Association (CDA) commended the program and believed that “the results of this program have been apparent especially in the improved health of the babies”.\textsuperscript{55} In 1948, the CDA sent out a questionnaire to see if a program of this type was available in Canada, and found that it had been implemented to a much smaller degree. The questionnaire found that milk or cod liver oil was provided in 16 cities free, but only to needy children and children suffering from specific illnesses. Another seven cities provided supplements at full cost, and in three cities there were no programs at all. Unfortunately, the CDA was unable to

\textsuperscript{53} LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 4, ‘Nutritional observations abroad’, Page 53.

\textsuperscript{54} LAC, RG 29, Volume 930, File 386-3-10, ‘Quotations on school lunches’.

\textsuperscript{55} LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 3, ‘Report of the Nutrition Committee to the Canadian Dietetic Association 1948’.
employ the questionnaire in all Canadian cities, but based on preliminary results recommended the development of a more well-defined policy on relief foods.

5.7 Health Priorities Following the War

While there was certainly concern over Canadian children’s wellbeing during the 1940s, other health challenges were often prioritized by organizations in Canada. Many European countries spent the latter part of the 1940s recovering from the devastating effects of the war and Canadians were quick to help. The United Nations Appeal for Children (UNICEF) held campaigns in Toronto and other cities in Canada, raising significant funds for children’s rehabilitation globally.56 Money contributed to food, clothing, shelter and medical services for children abroad. The Canadian Red Cross Society also contributed a substantial portion of their funding to helping children overseas. Through these and other organizations, Canadians were able to extend their support to reach children on a much larger scale.

A national office was also created in 1939 for the United Welfare Chest, also known as the Community Chest, as a program division of the Canadian Welfare Council. The United Welfare Chest financed a number of social services that contributed to improving the quality of life of all Canadians. In the 1940s, the Chest financed more than 65 separate Red Feather agencies that not only focused on children’s aid, but also on the

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elderly, the family, and health and recreation services.\textsuperscript{57} The Chest contributed immensely to maintaining the social services rendered by religious and local authorities.

The Canadian Red Cross Society was also a major contributor to children’s aid within Canada; however, during the 1940s, it dedicated most of its energy and funding to the armed forces. Red Cross’ main goal following the war was to implement a national free blood transfusion service. British Columbia, Alberta, and the Northwest and Yukon Territories were the first regions to achieve full operation of the service in 1947, which then spread through the provinces to Ontario, New Brunswick, Quebec and Manitoba in 1949. The program was consistently a top priority, and in 1949 consumed nearly 30\% of Red Cross’ gross annual budget of $7 million.\textsuperscript{58} The Red Cross also contributed to disaster relief, swimming and water safety lessons, and services to war veterans.

\subsection*{5.8 Research Evidence to Support School Lunches}

Proponents of a national school lunch program also conducted studies to see the benefits of existing noon-meal services in Canada. The Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club (K-Club) in Toronto had already been providing noon-meals to participating children, and in early 1942 conducted a three-month nutritional experiment through the help of the K-Club Health Committee.\textsuperscript{59} The experiment, which was completed among K-Club Toronto boys, gave the Health Committee many reasons to support large-scale school lunch

\textsuperscript{58} CTA, “Charitable Appeals, Canadian Red Cross”, Fonds 200, Series 361, Box 140523, File 795, ‘The Canadian Red Cross Society 1949 Budget’.
programs. Primarily, costs of the program were low and boys seemed to thoroughly enjoy the meals. Boys also gained weight and height throughout the three months, and were introduced to new foods which helped to improve their dietary habits. Finally, the influence of the program appeared to also carry to the home. The K-Club noon-meal experiment was a successful economic educational health program and confirmed beliefs that a school lunch program could effectively address nutritional concerns in Canada. Despite positive results, the experiment was limited by its use of observational assessment, and may not have been as convincing as more ‘scientific’ nutritional studies due to its lack of objectivity.

Also interested in the effects of noon-meals, the Canadian Red Cross Society began a prominent study in 1946 comparing children who participated in a noon-meal program in Toronto, with a group of controls. The Canadian Red Cross School Meal Study conducted by Tisdall and several colleagues was published in 1951 and had mixed results. Prior to completion the Canadian Dietetics Association shared the preliminary findings of the program. According to the report, the study appeared to be going smoothly, and most children were successfully being introduced to new foods that they grew to enjoy. Even with positive initial impressions the study ultimately failed to demonstrate the value of school lunches (Tisdall et al, 1951).

In order to compare the effects of a well-balanced meal, 400 low-income children were grouped into pairs as closely as possible according to social, medical, and economic factors, and then randomly assigned to noon-meal or control groups. Throughout the duration of the study, children completed medical examinations, blood tests and home

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dietary surveys measuring a range of possible outcomes. Unfortunately, the effects of the school lunches were not pronounced between the boys (Tisdall et al, 1951). Children began the study in good health, and there were no major changes in stature or serum vitamin levels. The study did show, however, that the families that were a part of the school lunch group significantly improved their food purchasing towards the end of the survey, buying appreciably more foods from the ‘best’ food categories than control families. The study was highly criticized for exceeding its original budget by a considerable amount (Mosby, 2014). This immense expenditure, coupled with the lack of insight that the study provided, contributed to it being regarded quite poorly in Canada.

Research done on school lunches showed that any benefits that the programs did create were minimal. The K-Club experiment yielded promising results, but they did not meet the growing demand for ‘scientific’ evidence in Canada. In contrast, The Red Cross School Meal Study used highly objective measurements to assess the value of school lunches and was widely anticipated. Despite this, it did not deliver sufficiently convincing results that would encourage policy-makers to seriously consider a national school lunch program. Furthermore, both studies had low-income children as their main experimental population, and their strong health prior to the study made achieving robust results nearly impossible. In order for the research teams to sway nutrition debates in favour of school lunches, they would have needed to demonstrate exceptional improvements to the children’s already good health. This outcome was unrealistic, and one that the Red Cross research team did not expect to find (Tisdall et al 1951).
5.9 The Changing Social Structure of Canadian Families

Even though findings on school lunch programs were unconvincing, the changing social structure of the Canadian family presented a very real need for lunch programs. During WWII, many women became increasingly involved in the public sphere and were forced to complete wage work to support their families and nation. The shift in family structure, which persisted for some women even after the war, meant that women had less time dedicated to domestic labour. Therefore, the necessity and desirability of a school lunch program largely depended on “how quickly men and women [could] be absorbed into peacetime occupations”.61 This shift unearthed concerns about what might happen to the ‘home’ if women remained in the workforce. Fears were largely centred on the short and long-term consequences on children, who might not be adequately cared for, or might grow into delinquent youth. The Children’s Aid Society capture this anxiety in their June 1940 Annual Report, stating that:

Mothers will, in a good many cases, feel the pinch of the fathers being away. The discipline in some homes will be loose and they will need outside help to preserve the home. The mothers too will need all the help and encouragement we are able to give them.62

Negative effects on children were already being observed by teachers and principals in schools, and had been brought to the attention of governmental authorities. Nutrition services of the Department of Pensions and National Health noted the challenge in their May 1943 *Preliminary Report on School Feeding and School Milk Scheme in Canada*. The report stated that: “As the number of married women in war industry increases there is a proportionate rise in the number of so-called “latch-key” children, who, because of the absence of the Mother, must fend for themselves at meal time”.63 The report also confirmed that the problem was especially pronounced in Ontario and Quebec, and undoubtedly impacted Toronto. Ultimately, the report confirmed a need for more detailed policy regarding school lunch programs, as lunches were not as readily available at home.

Upward trends in employment also drew attention to the increasing number of separated and deserted women in Ontario. This group was the most numerous and costly of all relief recipients in the 1940s. Relief for deserted or separated families was typically regarded as ‘full’ because of the absence of any contribution from the father, and ‘permanent’ until the children were able to join the workforce.64 As such, it represented an immense burden on social assistance programs.

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The problem was also particularly acute in Toronto, where there was more than ten times the number of cases in May 1940 from the next leading city. Several reasons were put forth to explain why cases were so highly concentrated in Toronto. Perhaps the most revealing reason had to do with the city size itself, where “a large centre offers greater opportunities for a man to ‘disappear’, and greater opportunities for success in a collusive separation for the purpose of obtaining relief assistance”. This explanation revealed a distrust of women claiming the support in Toronto. However, regardless of the cause, the number of cases of deserted and separated women in Ontario shows that the ‘family’ and ‘home’ were going through trying times. Consequently, it was unclear “whether or not a plan to distribute food to needy Canadian families [would] be necessary or desirable under post-war conditions” the fate of school lunches largely depended on “how quickly men and women [could] be absorbed into peacetime occupations”.

5.10 Canada’s Plan to Address Hunger: Family Allowances

Ultimately, Canada’s ‘School Lunch Debate’ in the 1940s was the product of the complex and diverse ideologies held by Canadians. The debate took place during a time when many Canadians questioned the future prosperity of the nation, and whether or not existing social policies were effective. While many sought to introduce school lunches as a new and innovative social program, others saw ways to build upon existing social assistance programs in order to meet the needs of the future. In the end, the foundation

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that had been established by cash allowances represented a simpler way to hopefully 
improve nutrition. Thus, the Family Allowances Act was established in June 1945, partly 
with the intention of improving the diets of poor Canadians. Even after the Act was 
implemented, proponents of school lunches trumpeted their cause, but their forces were 
severely diminished.

The ‘School Lunch Debate’ was also unmistakeably defined by public opinion of 
nutritionists and the emergence of nutrition as a scientific field. Most of the appeals for 
improved nutrition programs in Canada during the 1940s presented contradictory 
information on the health of Canadians. This resulted in plenty of inquiry into the factors 
that contributed to malnutrition, and moral and social factors seemed to outweigh the 
significance of income. Therefore, nearly all plans to address hunger were centred on 
education and nutritional knowledge, at times obscuring the clear financial barriers 
present. In the next chapter, I perform a discourse analysis on various media, academic 
and government documents in order to further understand how nutrition was framed as a 
moral, and not financial problem during the 1940s.
Chapter 6: Nutrition Discourse Analysis

In Chapter 6, I have analyzed systems of power and oppression through the employment of critical discourse analysis. In this chapter, I uncover the hidden messages and ideologies that were conveyed in the 1940s through the media, nutrition letters, government documents and policies. Specific attention was paid to the author’s use of language, as well as their final recommendations, in order to better understand the poor social circumstances of marginalized populations.

During the 1940s, nutrition messages were disseminated to the public in a way that conveyed highly moralized understandings of food. Eating practices were intimately tied with ideas of “good” citizenship, and Canadians were encouraged to police the feeding practices of their neighbours. Nutritionists established a clear dichotomy between “good” and “bad” foods. Low-income families that were unable to meet nutritionist’s dietary recommendations were deemed lazy and unintelligent. Although some nutritionists sought to improve support for low-income populations, many Canadians were disdainful of spending tax dollars on “non-contributing” members of society. Children were exempt from any responsibility over their own health, and emphasis was placed on their mothers to foster proper eating habits. Mothers were widely targeted by nutrition interventions, which ultimately served to further marginalize single women who lacked the time and resources to meet such high expectations. Unsurprisingly, some women championed school lunch programs, but due to cultural anxieties and stigmas, were also seen as undeserving of support.
6.1 The ‘Right’ Way to Eat

Throughout the 1940s, the field of nutrition was intimately, and powerfully connected to concerns of national defense. This was largely a consequence of the social, political and economic disruption caused by WWII, which unearthed anxieties about the future prosperity of the nation. The large number of military rejections on the basis of poor physical and mental health solidified ties between eating practices and winning the war. Organizations interested in promoting nutrition knowledge or programs often used this connection to justify their proposed initiatives and overall agendas. For example, in 1941, the CHEA Nutrition Committee stated “it is apparent that increased spread of sound nutrition knowledge is of vital importance in the interest of national well-being, in war or peace time”. The powerful connection between nutrition and national welfare was also harnessed by CCN and CNEA in their proposal for a school lunch program in Canada, which stated that “the provision of adequate nutrition for all children is essential to the welfare of Canada”. News articles also disseminated these messages and raised awareness and concern over the lowered vitality of the nation as a consequence of prolonged malnutrition. The anxieties and fears of ill-health and inadequate national defense which emerged during WWII were often presented as justification for the increased spread of nutrition information.

While the threat of war was used as a means to justify the work of nutritionists, food was also used as part of a greater nationalist project concerned with the development

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69 LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 3, ‘Malnutrition seen as grave problem’.
of ‘good’ citizens. Nutritionists frequently presented a healthful diet as a critical step towards becoming productive members of society. Eating so-called ‘protective foods’ became a simple way that every citizen could serve their country. In the United States, “the terms of good nutrition and wartime citizenship were inseparable” and educational pamphlets explicitly made reference to how poor eating would help Hitler to win the war (Bitekoff, 2013). While educational pamphlets in Canada were not as obvious, moral undertones connecting proper eating and productive citizenship were still prevalent. Canadians were encouraged to adopt healthy eating behaviours so that they could adequately contribute to the war effort and society as a whole. Canada’s Food Rules, first introduced in 1944 by the Canadian Council on Nutrition emphasized this push towards healthful eating in its opening lines: “These foods are good to eat. Eat them every day for health. Have at least three meals a day”. Canadians were also urged to spread nutrition information within their communities. In Good Food for Every Child, the Ontario Interdepartmental Nutrition Committee stated that “You are the ones who can best assess the needs of your community or group and who have the opportunity to reach each family or individual directly”. These statements show that not only were citizens asked to adopt ‘good’ eating habits, but they were also subtly encouraged to police the eating behaviours of their peers and communities.

Perhaps most important of all, Canadian parents were pressured to improve their diets in order to serve as positive role models for their children. In the 1940s, it was widely accepted by nutritionists that the home had a profound impact on the dietary

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71 CTA, “Provincial Department of Health”, Fonds 200, Series 451, Box 146145, Subseries 1, File 2, ‘Good food for every child’, Page i.
habits of children. For example, in the May 1945 *Report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food*, the Committee argued that “food habits are largely inherited as a result of family meal patterns. We tend to like those foods to which we are accustomed, consequently poor food habits once established tend to be self perpetuating”. The influence of the home on children’s eating patterns was also echoed by the Toronto Department of Public Health, and emphasized frequently in the *Ontario Nutrition Bulletin* written by the Ontario Interdepartmental Nutrition Committee.

To some extent, both fathers and mothers were encouraged to foster good eating among their children. Even though feeding work was largely carried out by women, men were also asked to become more involved towards the end of the 1940s and early 1950s. The December 1950 Ontario Nutrition Bulletin noted the influence of fathers on their children, stating that “too often father sets the meal pattern and mother prepares the foods which father will eat without objection. We need to interest fathers in helping children to be healthy and in setting a good example”.

However, changing children’s eating habits was no small feat, and success was presumed to be attributable to the particular approach of parents. The Ontario Nutrition Bulletin emphasized that a specific attitude was required by parents in order to change the habits of their children:

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A ‘must’ attitude or a moral one ‘this is good for you’ is not generally successful. Parents should not insist but should expect children to eat good foods; the difference in attitude is important. Nagging will not encourage a child to eat but will provide him with a weapon for a struggle at every meal.\(^{76}\)

These minor distinctions were used to place the responsibility of healthy eating on the parents, and also served to direct blame away from children.

Even though hunger was at the forefront of many nutrition debates, nutritionists were not as concerned with getting children to eat, so much as they wanted to teach children to eat the ‘right’ way. Nutrition information was rarely presented neutrally, and nutritionists utilized specific language in their reports and newsletters to convey moralized ideas about food. An individual’s eating habits were partly used to assess their quality and strength of character. Food habits that had been deemed ‘healthy’ by nutritionists were described as ‘good’, ‘proper’, and ‘desirable’, holding moral significance for those who possessed them. This use of language was also apparent in news articles, which disseminated nutrition knowledge to large audiences, and also in government documents, but to a much lesser degree. Even nutrition studies, which were intended to be objective, were sometimes imbued with moral significance. For example, studies done on the quality of school lunches frequently involved the ‘rating’ of lunch boxes into categories ranging from ‘excellent’ to ‘poor’.\(^{77}\) This binary language of ‘good’


\(^{77}\) LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 3, ‘Children Poorly Fed, Need Milk, Whole Grain, Fruit’.
and ‘bad’, or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ attributed deeper meaning to eating practices, marginalizing families unable or unwilling to meet Canadian dietary standards.

6.2 Us or Them: Negative Perceptions Towards Relief Recipients

Nutrition as a moral project likely emerged as a consequence of hidden anxieties over the changing structure of Canadian society. Most obviously, the Depression and WWII produced economically and emotionally trying times in the lives of many Canadian families. With so many men away on military duty, women were left behind to provide and support their children. As a result, many women joined the workforce, taking time away from their household duties. This breakdown in household structure was seen to threaten the family as a whole, especially the development of children. Working women inherently had less time to prepare meals for their children, and this lack of attention was feared to impact the moral upbringing of the child. The Toronto Director of Family Welfare wrote a letter to the Commissioner in December 1941, capturing this concern: “It is considered that the results of wrong feeding of children may have very far reaching effects on their subsequent delinquent behaviour as well as their physical health, and may eventually be a major factor in causing child neglect, and while it is recognized that this problem occurs in families who are financially independent as well as amongst relief recipients, nevertheless its existence is a matter of public concern”.

The early 1900s also saw a progressive distancing from religion, particularly Christianity, which likely raised moral objections. One Ontario branch of the Children’s Aid Society highlighted these concerns in their June 1940 Annual Report stating that “there are two

basic things effective in the lives of young people. They are: the home itself and Religion. We see both of these falling down”.  

The moral undertone of nutrition information also reflected negative attitudes towards the poor, most notably relief recipients. Miss Margaret Bell was quoted in a news article contesting negative perceptions of the poor, where she argued that malnutrition was preventing relief recipients from contributing to their full ability. She commented that relief families were being “…blamed for not going back to work, being called lazy, unambitious if, when they are offered work, they don’t take it”. People on relief were also portrayed in the media as unfit parents because they were incapable of ‘properly’ feeding their children. They were accused of using food supplies in an unwise manner creating an image of the poor as being less intelligent or savvy. Therefore, relief families, as well as immigrant families, were cast in a negative light when compared to other, more privileged Canadians.

Even though the Depression subjected many Canadian families to poorer living conditions and economic hardship, there was still contention over the idea of providing financial support to families in need. While many nutritionists and government officials sought to raise social assistance rates to allow all families to live comfortably, there was not complete agreement on the matter. Unfortunately, relief recipients were not always

80 LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 3, ‘Malnutrition seen as grave problem’.
81 University of Toronto Archives [UTA], “School of Hygiene”, Accession number A-1973-0026, ‘McGurl-McIndoo’, Box 272, 276, ‘Canada’s abundant foods are not always used wisely, Jan 31, 1950 Daily Times Journal’.
82 UTA, “Department of Graduate Records”, Accession number A73-0026, Box 471, ‘Finds families illfed through unwise buying Jan 18, 1940, Toronto Globe and Mail’. 
recognized as valuable members of society, and thus some questioned whether or not they should be afforded the same quality of life as other more ‘productive’ members. After the release of the Tisdall, Willard and Bell Report in (1941), Alderman Howell of Toronto was quoted for rejecting the implementation of the report, stating that:

I am not opposed to providing more food for our relief recipients. But before we do this, let us decide whether we intend to give them unemployment relief or provide a full and comfortable living. We realize that some of our relief recipients must be kept on the rolls as long as they live. We are ready to accept this responsibility. What I object to is an additional $193,600 on the taxpayer for relief costs, without any help from the province or Dominion.\(^3\)

McHenry adopted a similar stance in his (1945) report, and wrote:

Very little evidence exists to prove that these people suffer as a result, although it would be widely agreed that it would be advisable for the food supplied of all Canadians to attain this standard…It consequently seems unwise to recommend that all persons on relief in Ontario at present be given food supplies which are not available to all citizens. Under ideal conditions it would be splendid for all persons.\(^4\)

\(^3\) CTA, “General welfare assistance: food allowances”, Series 100, Box 046624, File 633, ‘Recommend extra food for city relief families cost set at $193,600, Feb 18, 1942’.

Both comments reveal that there was still scrutiny over whether or not relief recipients were worthy of a high quality of life.

*The Cost of Living*, published in 1939 by the Canadian Welfare Council had an immense role in determining the amount of funding to be provided to relief recipients during the 1940s. The report, which ultimately provided the groundwork for future relief allowances, clearly stated that “before an estimate can be made of the cost of living, there must be agreement as to the plane on which life is to be maintained”. Ultimately, the report presented food lists that could “as inexpensively as possible” support citizens of specific age groups. The report did not include any luxury items, “only the barest necessities” and had “no provision…made for maintenance in old age, and the savings are small when it is considered that they would have to meet all current emergencies as well as dental care” (Page 43). Ultimately, it could be argued that the cost of living put forth by the report was far from adequate, subjecting relief families to unliveable conditions.

### 6.3 The Child is Not to Blame

Even though relief families were subject to intense scrutiny by many Canadians, attitudes towards the children of relief families were significantly more positive. In fact, Canadian children in the 1940s occupied an exceptionally privileged position within society. The *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, adopted in 1924 by the League of Nations, positioned children as a top priority for international welfare.

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Children were to be cared for, protected, and given the means for a normal, healthy development. Furthermore, children were to be “the first to receive relief in times of distress” (UN, 1924). This declaration helped to direct aid towards children, making them a priority for many social programs, including those that targeted nutrition.

It is important to note that not all Canadian children were perceived as equally important, and health initiatives tended to be directed towards White, Christian, middle class children before extending support to minority groups. In particular, Aboriginal children attending separate or residential schools were likely omitted from all initial discussions of school lunch programs. Ian Mosby (2013) reported on the conditions of residential schools during the 1940s, where children often endured traumatic experiences of eating inedible food, as well as exceptionally high rates of malnutrition. As Mosby disturbingly points out: “bureaucrats, scientists, and a whole range of experts exploited their “discovery” of malnutrition in Aboriginal communities and residential schools to further their own professional and political interests rather than to address the root causes of these problems or, for that matter, the Canadian government’s complicity with them” (page 171). Mosby’s research shows that unlike the majority of Canadian children, nutrition research and programs actually served to further marginalize Aboriginal children.

In contrast, the majority of public schools in Ontario attempted to improve the health education of children by providing more accurate and comprehensive nutrition information and programs. In 1943, CNEA published a report on the educational needs in Canada where they established that “the first aim of the schools is to develop young Canadians sound in mind and body” (quoted in Phillips, The National Committee for
School Health Research, 1947). As was the case with relief recipients, health education, particularly nutrition education, appeared to have become an important strategy for developing youth with strong characters.\(^8^6\) In a June 1945 report titled *School Lunches*, school lunch programs were celebrated for a number of positive effects that reinforced good citizenship among children.\(^8^7\) These included children learning to share and cooperate with others, improving productivity and understanding of the value of work, and overcoming prejudices. Similar to relief recipients, the way in which children were brought in to nutrition discussions revealed that they were largely viewed as simpleminded, and unable to distinguish right from wrong. For example, the April 1950 *Ontario Nutrition Bulletin* stated that children could be ‘trained’ to eat well, revealing perceptions of their inferiority.\(^8^8\) This language reinforced lingering perceptions of children as dependent on adults, as well as assumptions that nutrition could produce better citizens.

As nutritionists often framed children as dependent on adults, children became exempt from any real responsibility over their own health. However, in order to suggest that nutrition education could successfully train proper eating habits, nutritionists needed to also establish that children were capable of being trained. Thus, some nutritionists made a point of showing that children were naturally predisposed to healthful eating. For example, the Ontario Interdepartmental Nutrition Committee suggested that children

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\(^8^6\) One of the measures being used to motivate health teaching in Canadian elementary schools was the “daily appraisal of individual health and cleanliness”, which took place in 66% of classrooms that reported health teachings (Phillips, 1947).

\(^8^7\) This report did not have a title page, and so the creators are unknown. See LAC, RG 29, Volume 930, File 386-3-10, ‘School lunches’.

\(^8^8\) CTA, “Provincial Department of Health”, Fonds 200, Series 451, Box 146145, Subseries 1, File 2, ‘Ontario Nutrition Bulletin – April’.
were quick to recognize an attractive meal, which communicates that a desire for healthful foods was natural. The observational report of the boys K-Club Study in Toronto also reinforced this ideal, stating that “they do not seem to expect or require much variety in the menus but show a remarkable discrimination for flavours and appreciate good cooking”.

These positive statements on the palates of children further strengthened notions that healthful eating among future generations was possible if educational programs were carried out effectively.

Despite the efforts of nutritionists to change the eating habits of children, nutrition education was not always successful. In these cases, failure was attributed to the instructor involved, and not the child. As one nutritionist from the Department of Public Health in Toronto pointed out, without proper instruction on behalf of the teacher or parents, children might be “‘conditioned’ against certain foods, or against the Health Class situation itself”. As this statement reveals, it was the sole responsibility of the adult figure to ensure that children changed their behaviours. The *Ontario Nutrition Bulletin* from April 1950 went even further, to say “food should not become an issue for daily conflict – if that happens the child is not to blame”.

As these statements reveal, immense pressure was placed on all Canadian adults to train proper eating habits among

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91 CTA, “Provincial Department of Health”, Fonds 200, Series 451, Box 146145, Subseries 1, File 2, ‘Department of public health nutrition program – 1948’.
children. Consequently, children in public schools enjoyed the benefits of improved health teachings, without any added responsibilities or expectations.

6.4 The “Natural” Role of Mothers

Women took on the vast majority of all health education in Canada during the 1940s. A significant amount of health information was delivered through home economics classes, where women were the primary instructors. In Ontario secondary schools during the 1939-1940 school year, men were typically responsible for manual labour, while women nearly always taught home economics. $^{93}$ An important component of home economics courses was nutrition and feeding work, which sometimes took form as a lunch program within the schools. Of the few Ontario schools that offered noon meals, women were hired to prepare and serve the food. $^{94}$ Even cases where school lunch programs had not yet been introduced, women were among the first to offer their services. $^{95}$ In many ways, health teaching related to food was one of the most obvious ways for women to become involved in the public sphere. This was because the majority of women were already expected to have developed these skills and employed them within the household.


$^{94}$ This report had Ontario, 1947 written in pen next to the title. The creator of the report is not listed. See LAC, RG 29, Volume 930, File 386-3-10, ‘General statement – the school lunch’.

Up until the 1940s, and for considerable time after, women completed all feeding work in the household, making them the primary target of nutrition campaigns. Low-income women in particular were focused on because they had the most difficulty securing an adequate diet for their families. Nutrition information directed at these women tended to focus upon the possible financial benefits of a properly planned diet, in order to show women that cost was not a barrier to good nutrition. For example, a report submitted to the Central Planning Committee regarding the nutrition program and budget counselling services of the Visiting Homemaker’s Association, wrote that “the main point of emphasis at the present time should be that the health of children can be improved and that the family can save money by the proper choice of food”. Women were also delivered nutrition information through recipe material provided at retail outlets. Furthermore, some cities like Ottawa developed cooking courses for low-income women with the help of interested organizations. Regardless of the type of approach, nutrition education directed at low-income women revealed paternalistic attitudes, as women were assumed to not have sufficient knowledge to successfully feed their families.

Some news articles and nutrition resources took an even more aggressive stance against women, clearly placing blame on them for children’s poor eating habits. In 1939, the Minister of Health, Gordon Jackson was quoted in an article suggesting that poor

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96 LAC, RG 17, Volume 3434, File 1724, ‘Statement re nutrition program and budget counselling services of the Visiting Homemakers Association’, Page 1.
97 LAC, RG 17, Volume 3434, File 1724, ‘A report on nutrition and the production and distribution of food’.
98 LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 3, ‘Dietitians in Ottawa give valuable assistance to those on relief’.
nutrition was due to “injudicious buying of foods” and not a lack of finances.\(^99\) The April 1950 Ontario Nutrition Bulletin also emphasized the role of women, tracing children’s “sweet tooth” to solicitous mothers.\(^100\) Christina MacLeod, the nutrition director at the BC Division of the Red Cross was also referenced in an article in 1952 critiquing the feeding practices of mothers. According to the author, MacLeod believed that “children’s eating habits are far from good…its high time their mothers did something about it”.\(^101\) These clips are some saddening examples of the ways in which low-income women were marginalized in the media.

These critiques of women were also unreasonable considering the absurd expectations of women during the 1940s. Even though more women were working in the public sphere, their duties within the household did not disappear or become redistributed. In the case of school lunches, working women often lacked time to prepare the meals, and so children were simply forced to go hungry. Yet the general attitude at the time was still that meals should be prepared in a certain way and be a “pleasure for all of the family”.\(^102\) Leading Canadian nutritionists, like McHenry also did little to shift household tasks away from women. Instead of advocating for more gender equality, he felt that “the working wife…should take her time to cook a leisurely meal in the evening

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\(^99\) UTA, “Department of Graduate Records”, Accession number A73-0026, Box 471, ‘Finds families illfed through unwise buying Jan 18, 1940, *Toronto Globe and Mail*’.
\(^100\) CTA, “Provincial Department of Health”, Fonds 200, Series 451, Box 146145, Subseries 1, File 2, ‘Ontario Nutrition Bulletin – April’.
\(^101\) LAC, MG 28, I207, Volume 3, ‘B.C. Children poorly fed, need milk, whole grain, fruit’.
instead of rushing to hustle something up in a hurry." Even though women may have been busier than ever, especially low-income women, they were still expected to complete the majority of household tasks, with little lenience for inadequacy.

Low-income women were not only critiqued for their feeding practices during the 1940s, they were also met with general distrust when it came to social assistance programs. This distrust was further exacerbated when women were single parents. In 1921, Ontario passed legislation to help unwed mothers secure financial support for themselves and their children from the father. This legislation was known as *An Act for the Protection of Children of Unmarried Parents*. However, even with this legislation in place, single mothers “continued to be viewed as culpable in the creation of [their] own misfortune” (Chambers, 2007). Considering the negative perception towards single mothers at the time, it was challenging for them to secure the promised financial support. The Children’s Aid Society (CAS) was responsible for carrying out the Act, and in the June 1940 Annual Report for Waterloo, CAS noted that according to the Act “the word of the woman is not enough”, and that the mother’s claim must be supported by further evidence. A similar scepticism towards the word of women also occurred in the case of deserted or separated women seeking financial support, as it was believed that some women colluded with their husbands to secure basic needs without charging the man’s

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103 This information was provided by the author of the article, Helen Parmelee, and is not a direct quote of Earle McHenry. See UTA, “School of Hygiene”, Accession number A-1973-0026, ‘McGuirl-McIndoo’, Box 272, 276, ‘Modern living’s habit of skipping breakfast’.
As these examples reveal, the words of women, particularly low-income, single mothers, were not held with the same regard as the words of men (Little, 1998).

6.5 Summary

As this chapter demonstrates, nutrition messages during the 1940s were imbued with moral significance. Food served as a nationalist project to create ‘good’ citizens, and those who failed to meet dietary standards were intensely scrutinized. Low-income families were expected to comply with nutrition guidelines, and many Canadians were reluctant to provide them with adequate funding to do so. Furthermore, children, as the most important population of Canadians were in a privileged position because their health was of the utmost concern, yet they were given no responsibility over it. This resulted in the majority of blame for poor nutrition being placed upon women and mothers, who were still expected to complete caring labour to the same level as before they joined the workforce. Thus, the promotion of nutrition information during the 1940s served to further marginalize low-income families, and more specifically low-income mothers. These women, who would likely greatly benefit from a school lunch program because of the reduced costs and labour, were seen as undeserving, and therefore, did not provide enough motivation for a program to be put in place.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The history of school lunch programs in Canada sheds light on different ideological approaches to social security programs. The school lunch debate of the 1940s appears to have been filled with misinformation and hidden threats that were used to sway public opinion towards and away from the provisions of social services. While national or provincial school lunch programs offered the possibility of an innovative approach that could address educational, nutritional and practical needs, it also represented a large, expensive, lengthy and ideologically fraught commitment. Ontario schools lacked the necessary infrastructure, funding, and personnel required to implement the program. There was also lasting contention over the “worthiness” of low-income families and women. In the end, the Family Allowance program presented a more conservative and politically easy approach to address hunger, building on an existing, moderately successful cash allowance scheme.

Today’s school lunch debate faces remarkably similar obstacles to those of the 1940s. Even after more than 60 years of nutrition education in schools, children’s eating habits are still regarded as poor. School boards and municipalities continue to encourage parents and children to adopt healthy lifestyles, with little success. “Unhealthy” foods have been banned from sale and distribution in schools in Ontario, yet children’s consumption of these foods remains high. In order to address the perception of child hunger, various non-governmental organizations continue to supply needy children with lunches, making it difficult to discern the actual need for a universal program. Considering the minimal advances that have been made to improve the Canadian diet, it
is obvious that a new approach is necessary. Instead of presenting children and parents with threatening information and expecting behaviour change, perhaps it is time to commit to the provision of healthy school lunches as a preventative measure to ensure future health. Not only would school lunches aid in preventing hunger, but may also improve the nutritional status of children, reduce health and nutritional inequities, and promote social cohesion (Colquhoun et al, 2008; Pike & Colquhoun, 2009; Moore, Moore & Tapper, 2007).

7.1 Why did Canada reject school lunches?

This thesis provides a detailed historical account of the presence of school lunch programs in Canada during the 1940s. Archival documents were used to understand the complex social, political and economic forces that led the Canadian federal government to reject the implementation of a National School Meal Service. Even with the widespread support of many nutritionists and reputable organizations, the federal government opted to address concerns over children’s nutritional statuses by increasing social support through the introduction of Family Allowances and coupling this relief with improved nutrition education within the schools and community.

Debates on school lunch programs during the 1940s were inseparable from the field of nutrition. Nutritionists, as part of an emerging field, sought to legitimize their work through large-scale scientific studies. These studies, which were completed both during and after the Depression and WWII, were used to spread fear of the prevalence of malnutrition, which in reality, appeared to be extremely low. Furthermore, ad hoc school
lunch programs already existed in many areas, particularly rural towns, making it impossible to estimate the actual need for a national service.

As the prevalence of malnutrition was known to be relatively low during the 1930s and 1940s, the decision to forgo a school lunch program partly manifested from ideological differences in opinion. More liberal health figures like Tisdall and Laver sought to address malnutrition as an outcome of inadequate income, understanding low-income families as simply unable to afford decent food. On the other hand, more conservative figures, such as McHenry and Jackson, viewed malnutrition as a knowledge-based problem. Within this perspective, low-income Canadians were seen as merely uneducated. These views, as well as Canada’s decision to favour education and cash assistance, over school meals, reflected the more conservative attitudes of many Canadians who questioned the contributions of low-income Canadians.

In addition to lasting apprehension towards social assistance programs, most of the provinces in Canada lacked the basic infrastructure and finances to develop an entirely new program. Many schools in Ontario and other provinces were not equipped with kitchens, and home economics training was only beginning to be offered in schools. Furthermore, school lunch programs that had been implemented in rural areas posed a burden on already overextended teaching staff. In light of these challenges, it simply made more sense to attempt to build upon existing cash relief programs, instead of developing an entirely new system.

Women were the most predominant champions of a school meal service, and also stood the most to gain. Following WWII, more women were working than ever, and had significantly less time to contribute to household tasks. Despite this increase in workload,
domestic labour was still largely viewed as solely women’s responsibility. Despite many women joining committees and organizations with the goal of implementing a lunch program, women lacked the social status to be taken seriously, and instead were frequently blamed for the poor quality of children’s lunches. The scrutiny of women’s feeding work during the 1940s may have arisen from hidden anxieties over the changing structure of Canadian families.

Even though school lunch debates were nearly always framed around children, they seemed to rarely focus on the actual needs of the child. Organizations, nutritionists and health professionals who supported school lunch programs often did so in order to achieve their own goals. The ‘school lunch debate’ of the 1940s, full of political rhetoric and agendas, ultimately served the appetite of its’ proponents.

7.2 Research in Context

This thesis is both relevant and useful for today’s school lunch debate in Canada. Despite the passing of more than 65 years, nutrition interventions into the lives of Canadian children remain remarkably similar to those imposed in the 1940s. The availability of school meals, as well as nutrition education, remains sporadic. National charitable organizations like Breakfast for Learning exist to provide nutritious meals across Canada to those in need. In Ontario, it seems as though each municipality has its own unique method to improve nutrition and address hunger. For example, in the Ottawa region, the Ottawa Network for Education provides over 13,500 children in 177 schools with a nutritious meal to start the day. In contrast, the Toronto District School Board does not appear to have any board-wide meal programs in place. Some schools across Ontario
have also developed school gardens to allow children to participate in cultivating and preparing their own food (Seeds for change, 2015). This newer innovation coincides well with the local foods movement that has emerged in Canada and other countries (McIntyre & Rondeau, 2011). It poses an extra burden on Canadian families, as they are expected to buy local produce in order to support Ontario farmers, as well as healthy and delicious foods. These are merely a few of many organizations with similar missions to provide children with nutritious food in schools. This shows the ongoing disorganization of school lunch programs, and the unequal allocation of resources, which complicate efforts to tackle hunger in Canada.

There has also been little development in the realm of public health nutrition education facilitated through schools. Training children to choose healthy meals remains at the forefront of nutrition education; however, has it been rebranded as “empowerment”. For example, the Toronto District School Board’s nutrition commitment focuses on “empowering you or your child to take charge of your own wellness, and sharing your knowledge to promote healthy eating throughout your school community” (TDSB, n.d.). This reflects the strong neoliberal ideology in Canada that focuses on the individual’s responsibility for his or her own health (Power, 2016). Unfortunately, even after years of prioritizing healthy eating behaviours as a key learning objective, children’s poor eating habits remain a significant challenge today. Children continue to favour energy-rich foods, and have become more sedentary thus leading to elevated rates of obesity (Poskitt, 2005). This persistent challenge suggests that strong tools used to change children’s dietary patterns are limited.
Modern public health interventions also continue to utilize fear mongering as a primary technique to scare parents and children into making sound nutritional choices. Instead of pointing to malnutrition, obesity has become the central concern. The School Food and Beverage Policy created by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2010 cites multiple studies on childhood obesity rates (Ministry of Education, 2010). It further references the Standing Committee on Health (2007) stating: “rising childhood obesity rates may cause this generation of children to have shorter lives than their parents”. These threatening messages serve to trigger parental concerns over their children’s health, and may not produce changes in consumption.

Public health interventions in Canada seem to employ many of the same techniques that were used in the 1940s, with little evidence of behaviour change. This suggests that it may be time to stop blaming parents, and banning foods, and finally commit to a universal school meal program. Ample research has already been conducted tying school lunches to a number of positive outcomes. Eating a proper lunch has been connected with improved dental hygiene (Bomer & Maloch, 2013), higher overall nutrient levels (Campbell, Nayga, Park & Silva, 2011), reduced food insecurity with hunger (Nord & Romig, 2006), and improved alertness and learning (Golley et al, 2010) among other benefits. Some researchers also stress the long-term impact of school lunch programs, suggesting that introducing new foods into children’s diets early in life improves eating practices during adulthood (Baidal & Taveras, 2014). Given these positive outcomes, perhaps it is time that we consider a universal school meal service as a preventative health measure. School lunch programs present an opportunity to directly impact the diets of children, and hopefully improve later health indicators.
References


Henry, & Allison, (n.d) Lost opportunities and forsaken legacies: a comparative analysis of school meal policies in Canada and other highly developed countries. Unpublished manuscript.


## Appendix I

### Key Events

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## Appendix II

**Search Terms**

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Appendix III

Researcher Photography Approval Forms

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Signature: [Signature]

Date: Jan 18 2016
SELF-SERVE PHOTOGRAPHY APPLICATION / DEMANDE DE PHOTOGRAPHIE LIBRE-SERVICE

USER CARD NUMBER / NUMÉRO DE CARTE D'USAGER

→ 2 3286 001963378

AUTHORIZATION DATE / DATE D'AUTORISATION

From / Du : 02/29/2016 To / Au : 02/29/16

Shaded area to be filled out by staff / Régions ombragées à être complétées par le personnel

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1. RG17 3659
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3. MG28 J 2071
4. MG28 J 3596
5. MG28 J 3596
6. MG 28 J 35954
7. MG 28 J 359120
8. MG 28 J 359168
9. 10.

Restrictions (Contractual and AIP only/uniquement contractuelles et AIPRP)

Verified by / Vérifié par:

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Signature: CARBONE

Date: Feb 16th, 2016