

Culinary Historians of Ontario

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CIVILIAN FOOD RATIONS IN CANADA DURING WORLD WAR II

My aunt Ricky, now 85, says that in Toronto "no one was really deprived and that those who grumbled and made a fuss [about rationing] were ridiculed. We pretty well had everything we needed most of the time". On the other hand, Norah Egener of Owen Sound told her overseas husband that "Food is really scarce and expensive". (*A Time Apart: Letters of Love and War*, July 14 1943, p 128)

During World War II, when rationing was imposed on a few foodstuffs in Canada, it was widely regarded as a necessary nuisance, rather than a real hardship, because it was well known that Great Britain and Europe suffered badly from food shortages. In fact, due to vastly increased production, Canada was able to officially export stunning annual quantities of fruit preserves, vegetable seeds, canning equipment, bacon, honey, fresh onions and other food items to assist Britain. And, like many Canadians, Ricky was able to send over regular care packages. Her younger sister, who became my mother, was still living in London and remembers receiving them.

Housewives had already learned the knack of cooking with minimal ingredients during the 1930s Depression. They accepted the wartime culinary challenge with patriotic enthusiasm, but also a healthy dose of scepticism toward the propaganda promoting it. "You remember those Sunday supplements, they were jammed with war stuff. How to cook cabbage, make cabbage rolls and then drink the cabbage juice. ... The news-papers, they were just propaganda sheets. My goodness, on the front pages, war, war, war, and in the insides, how to cook cheaper, how to do Victory gardens..." (*Six War Years*, Barry Broadfoot, pp 31, 32) The propaganda was both officially and voluntarily immense and pervasive. Editorials and articles in women's magazines and daily newspapers, advertisements for all types of foods, radio cookery shows, numerous government posters and booklets on nutrition, cookery

books -- everyone participated in promoting the war effort.

Examples of propaganda directed at housewives: "Your apron is your uniform and your wooden spoon your weapon." "Poor nutrition, poor shopping and waste are the 5th columns [saboteurs] in this war on the home front". "Use your cook stove to cook Hitler's goose!" "Put your family on the Victory Diet." "When the Japs give in, we'll get more tin; supplies are low -- short of tin, you know (Clark's Soups)". "Eat right to fight!" "Fat is your secret weapon!" (scrap fat was collected for conversion to glycerine for making bombs) "As a patriotic gesture we feel icings on cakes should be 'out' this year."

A few helpful dates:

Sept 3 1939	Great Britain & France declare war on Germany
Sept 10 1939	Canada declares war on Germany
Dec 8 1941	United States enters WWII
May 7 1945	Germany surrenders; WWII is over in Europe
Aug 15 1945	Japan surrenders; WWII is over

Fiona Lucas, CHO co-founder

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON RATIONING IN CANADA

What was rationing?

An official method of controlling commodities during times of shortage. To buy a rationed commodity a consumer had to have money plus an official token or stamp/coupon/ticket.

Who imposed rationing?

The Wartime Prices and Trade Board, established September 3, 1939 by Mackenzie King's Liberal government.

Who was rationed?

Everyone, including babies and military personnel on leave.

Where did rationing occur?

The whole country experienced rationing; no distinction was made between the provinces.

What foods were rationed? Why?

- **sugar, tea & coffee:** no foreign raw materials were available because ports were blocked in the Caribbean, South America, India and the Far East, and shipping was disrupted. Only 20% of sugar came from Canadian-grown sugar beets. "You are compelled to cut down on your tea and coffee, now, to save lives and conserve shipping space for war essentials." (*Consumers' News*, Ottawa, Aug 31, 1942, p 1)
- **meat & butter:** production could not keep up with both domestic and foreign demand of all milk and meat products due to fewer labourers & higher labour costs.
- **beer & spirits:** grains, sugars and metals were needed for other products.
- **wine:** Europe production devastated.

What were weekly amounts of rations?

- sugar: 8 ozs • butter 8 ozs
 - tea: 2 ozs OR • coffee: 8 ozs
- Restaurants were restricted to 1 cup per person.
- meat: 24 - 32 ozs
 - beer, spirits, wine: varied between provinces

When did food rationing start and end?

It wasn't even considered until April 1940 because the economy was operating well below projections. However, even before it officially began housekeepers were urged to be moderate to help the war effort: "Simple wholesome dishes are an important part of our economy programme" (*Chatelaine*, Jan 1941, p 40)

- sugar: Apr 1942 - Nov 1947

Sugar was rationed the longest and accompanied by the

most complicated rules.

- tea & coffee: Aug 1942 - 1947
- meat: May 27 1943 - Mar 1 1944

"Since meat-rationing commences tomorrow, I bought a lovely roast of beef." (*A Time Apart: Letters of Love and War*, May 26 1943, p 121)

- butter: Dec 1942 - 1947
- beer, spirits, wine: after July 1942 - 1947

How did ration books work?

A numbered ration booklet, valid for several months at a time, was issued to everyone through the post office. It consisted of numbered and colour-coded perforated stamps/tickets/coupons which only the store clerk or delivery boy could legally remove. Sharing, however, was quietly done, as my aunt Ricky confirmed.



Why was rationing introduced?

- To assist in winning the war.
- To share limited resources amongst as many people as possible.
- To share with ally Great Britain.

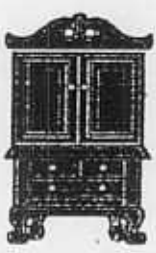
What appeals were used to promote successful food rationing with housewives?

- To their sense of economy: " 'Mrs. Consumer' as you're known in Ottawa, is considered the key person in maintaining a balanced wartime economy." "Fats in the garbage won't win the war."
- To their sense of shame: "You need not hoard - You must not hoard". "Loyal citizens do not hoard."
- To their knowledge of good nutrition: "If we all live up to the rules of good nutrition [and rationing] and use all we

learn about it, we can lick fatigue, increase energy and help make this Canada of ours a stronger nation — a fit and vigorous nation of healthy people, glowing with vitality and powerful enough to 'step-up' the tremendous job of winning this war!" (*Chatelaine*, Jan 1943, p 22)

- To their sense of compassion, particularly with comparisons to dreadful conditions in Europe. Ads for Fleischman's yeast pictorialized a contrast between Europe ("hungry there") and Canada ("well fed and healthy here") with the caption "Canada Was Never Better Fed", followed by "Today, conquered Europe is learning the awful meaning of hunger. Millions of Europeans are getting less food *in a week* than Canadians enjoy in a single day! How thankful we should be for our plenty ... for our continued health and vitality ... Let us continue to maintain our vitality. For Canada's defense, do your bit ... keep fit. Eat more bread with every meal."

Fiona Lucas, CIO co-founder



CULINARY CUPBOARD

Barbara LaDouceur & Phyllis Spence
Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories
Vancouver: Ron Dale Press, 1995.

When I picked up this book my eyes were drawn to some of the chapter titles in the table of contents. I was intrigued and realized as I began to read the book that the war bride experience was closely tied to food. Rationing in Britain was more strenuous than here in Canada, and the war bride experiences in this book mention food in every chapter. It ranges from the exotic to the ordinary just as one of the chapter title states, "Bananas and White Bread were Wonderful to Have Again".

Black Outs to Bright Lights is a collection of oral histories of war brides who married Canadian soldiers and moved to Canada. I was struck by the very personal stories about war-torn Britain, the impact of rationing on everyday life and more importantly the emotional desire for special things like cloth for making a wedding dress. There were touching moments when friends, neighbours and family presented soon-to-be brides with ration coupons for cloth, or butter and flour so a wedding cake could be baked.

It was fascinating to read about their first encounters with food on the ships to Canada. Many of these war brides were malnourished and had not seen things like white bread and fresh milk for years. In many cases the food on the transport ships was the very food they had dreamed of during the war.

But moving to Canada was not necessarily a dream come true for all. Many struggled with their new lives. Some of the brides had only known their husbands for a matter of weeks and in some cases only days. Children, new in-laws, a country with different attitudes and customs, and a much more severe climate often made it difficult for them to adjust. It is striking how all of the brides' stories in this book evoke a feeling of strength, courage and survival. These admirable traits develop when some are faced with great challenges in life.

I recommend this book as an informative and entertaining read. Absorbing and direct, it allowed me to see WWII and it's aftermath through the eyes of these brave young women.



Bridget Wrensch, CHO co-founder

Within the last few months a number of very interesting publications have come to CHO's attention.

+ Bower, Anne, ed. *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998. ISBN 1-55849-089-2
This book *Recipes for Reading* scholars from a variety of disciplines examine community cookbooks as complex texts deserving serious study. The contributors contend that such cookbooks have stories to tell about the lives of the women who wrote them, stories that are autobiographical in most cases, historical in some, and fictive in others. The volume is divided into 3 sections. Part I provides a historical overview of community cookbooks, a discussion of their narrative strategies, and insights into the linguistic peculiarities of recipes. Part II contains essays about particular cookbooks and their relationship to specific cultural groups (i.e Elizabeth J. McDougall examines a Canadian recipe collection in this section). Part III considers a range of community cookbooks in terms of their culinary, historical, ethnic, and literary contexts.

+ Last year, the University of Windsor's Humanities Research Group sponsored a lecture series focusing on "*Food, Cookery and Culture*." These lectures have now been published and offer a wide discussion on the culture of food. Three authors contribute to this publication: Barbara Wheaton discusses "Finding Real Life in Cookbooks: The Adventures of a Culinary Historian"; Ester Reiter offers readers a lesson in "Fast Food: Is Our Future Fried?" and Barbara Haber researches the relationship between women's history and the history of food in "Food, Sex, and Gender". Readers will be pleased with the excellent *Suggested Further Readings* section which concludes this package. CHO members interested in purchasing this publication should contact the : *Humanities Research Group, University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, ON Canada. N9B 3P4*. Cost is \$10 (Cdn.) for this 80 page manuscript with an additional \$3.00 for shipping.

+ The final suggestion comes from Margaret Derry in the Spring 1998 issue of *Ontario History*, Volume LXXXX, Number 1, the semi-annual journal of the Ontario Historical Society. Her article is entitled "*Gender Conflicts in Dairying: Ontario's Butter Industry, 1880-1920*". She explores the shift in the role of women within the butter industry from originally that of chief caretaker to perimeter participant. This analysis of period farm journals, machinery advertisements and other supporting documents reveals the changes in women's role within the dairy industry.

Christine Ritson, CHO co-founder



Remembering...

On September 25, 1998, the culinary community lost one of its living resources. Mrs. Beatrice Snyder, author of *Pennsylvania German Customs and Cookery* died at the age of 90.

Her book of recipes and reminiscences has been used for many years as a resource at several Kitchener-Waterloo area historic sites. Beatrice Snyder wrote her book at the request of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society which published it in 1979. Bea's friend Lorna Bergy wrote in the introduction to the book that it will "document some of our social history for posterity through this folksy collection of recipes and the reminiscences of a bygone era." She was right. Born in 1908, Bea grew up proud of her Mennonite heritage and it comes across loud and clear in her book. Throughout this publication, she describes the hard working women in her family and the happiness they created for others.

Staff at Joseph Schneider Haus in Kitchener commented that Edna Staebler writes of Mennonite foodways as a journalist while Bea wrote about it as an insider. "Listen" to Bea's comments about baking: "*Grandma said you could almost feel magic in your hands as you kneaded the simple ingredients to bouncy rounds of dough.*" When I worked at Doon Heritage Crossroads in Kitchener, reading Bea's written memories of Mennonite schnitzing bees helped me bring this activity to life. Her contribution to the community was finally recognized when she was inducted into the Waterloo County Hall of Fame in 1995. Unfortunately her book is out of print but some libraries have it on their shelves. If you find a copy, take the time to "listen" to Bea's reminiscences about baking, schnitzing, preserving and all the other kitchen tasks of the past.

Written by the staff at Joseph Schneider Haus & Carolyn Blackstock, Woodside National Historic Park

Culinary Query...

Here is a recent query sent to CHO. Please help us find the answer.

I'm doing research for a novel where characters need to have a swanky lunch and dinner in Torontolate in 1935 or early in 1936. I need to know whether or not alcohol was served at the Arcadian Court. I'm looking for menus, photos or descriptions of the Simpson's Arcadian Court and/or the Royal York Imperial Room. If you have any such material or suggestions on where it might be found please let me know. I've already searched through the Toronto Historical Board (and found a 1931 menu for the Arcadian Court for a Shriner's convention) and I have materials coming from the Hudson's Bay/Simpson's Archives in MB. I'm also in touch with the CP & Royal York Archives. My name is April Hall. I can be reached at : 59 West Lodge Ave., Toronto M6K 2T6, (416) 533-9700 or by e-mail at April.hall@utoronto.ca Thank you in advance for whatever assistance you can offer.

Create a Christmas Cookie Collection



*Todmorden Mills Heritage
Museum and Arts Centre
(416) 396-2819*

*Culinary Historians of Ontario
(416) 690-7062*

December 6 10:30 - 12:00 pm

This cookie exchange is a great way to get your holiday baking done early. Learn about the history of holiday cookies with guest speakers, Dorothy Duncan, (Ontario Historical society) Carolyn Blackstock (Woodside National Historic Site) & Elizabeth Nelson-Raffelle (The Gibson House Museum). Homemade cookies only. Historic recipes always welcome. Gingerbread house Raffle. Please call to register. Cost \$2.00 (includes refreshments)

Be sure to stay & enjoy

Todmorden Mills Christmas Open House

(admission extra)

EARLY CANADIAN CHRISTMAS

Some time before December 25th, we'll pull out the boxes of decorations and coloured lights. We'll put up and decorate the tree just where it was last year. We'll send a few cards to people we haven't seen for decades, because they sent us cards last year. We'll find Mother's spattered fruitcake recipe, hoping to duplicate what nostalgia remembers so deliciously. We'll buy each other presents, probably spending a trifle more than our budget allows. We'll get together with friends and family, eat and drink too much, and declare that this year's turkey is the best yet.

It seems that Christmas has always been like this. Indeed, to a certain extent it has. Some of its customs and traditions date back even to pre-Christian times.

A series of pagan festivals were celebrated late in December around the time of the winter solstice of "Yule", as it was called in the cold north. The most important feast day, marking the birth of the unconquered sun, was replaced in the fourth century A.D. when December 25th was arbitrarily chosen to commemorate Christ's birth.

It was not until the mid-19th century that our modern Christmas began taking root. Introduced into England by Prince Albert and made fashionable by Queen Victorian, the "new German way of celebrating Christmas" spread to our country.

By the 1890's, royal European families, fashion magazines, and Canadian retail giants like Eatons and Woolworths ensured that "the new way" was here to stay with its cards, gifts, decorations and foods.

For Canada's first settlers, Christmas was made special as lavish a main meal as their winter supplies would allow. Barreled beef and turnips were luxuries reserved for Christmas. Attempts were made to duplicate holiday food in the homeland – for instance, a handful of raisins might make a cornmeal johnnycake into a kind of fruitcake like that enjoyed in Britain. Making a plum pudding of sorts was a kind of link to home for a British settler who found herself in the midst of a bleak new land. As a result, the early settlers made a great ritual of preparing food.

By the mid-19th century, markets in cities like Toronto and even those in small towns boasted every kind of meat, fish, fowl and game. At Christmas markets, you could find...

piles of frozen pigs standing on their four legs in front of stalls. Countless lamb carcasses were decorated with gilded faces. There were deer, perhaps a bear, and frozen geese, ducks and chickens.

Grocery stores were beginning to import dried fruits, nuts, preserved ginger, Spanish grapes and oranges. Oranges and apples were popular as stocking stuffers and as the basis of many festive centrepieces.

For Christmas dinner, roast pork and goose were favourites, with turkey just starting to appear at the end of the century when shooting matches were popular. Pigeons were released from traps and whoever killed the most won a turkey. Vegetables were those long-keeping winter ones – potatoes, rutabagas, carrots and onions.

The middle class could buy all the ingredients to make the Christmas puddings, cakes, mince pies and cookies, those old-world favourites that remain popular festive desserts today.

The *Delineator Fashion* magazine quotes a menu from 1898: "oyster soup, roast turkey and cranberry sauce, mashed and browned potatoes, onions in cream sauce, tomatoes, chicken pie, rice croquettes, plum pudding with foaming sauce, mince pie, lemon tarts, salted almonds, celery, crackers and cheese, fruit and coffee." In almost 100 years, has much changed?

Rose Murray is the author of Canadian Christmas Cooking and a CHO member.



Culinary Calendar

Please send CHO information about your upcoming food history or related events. We are pleased to include them in the newsletter.

November

Country Christmas

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

November 16 - December 23

Enjoy a quiet moment amidst the holiday rush.

Adult \$3.25, Senior/Student \$2.25, Child \$1.75.

Victorian Christmas Celebration

Woodside National Historic Site (519) 571-5684

November 21 - December 23

Weekends are special with baked goods, hot beverages & Victorian activities.

Cookies, Candies and Cookbooks

Ontario Historical Society (416)226-9011

John MacKenzie House

November 22 1:00 - 4:00 pm

This fundraiser to support the historic John MacKenzie House includes a cookbook sale, tea, sweets and demonstrations (all for a mere donation). Marion Kane, food editor for the Toronto Star will be signing and selling copies of her book *The Best of Food* (1:00 - 3:00 pm).

Special Historic Dinner/Theatre Package

Spadina / Theatre Passe Muraille

November 28

This theme evening includes a candlelight period dinner and tour at Spadina and reserved seats for a performance of *Sir John Eh?* at Theatre Passe Muraille. Cost \$40.00 for dinner & show. Reservations: (416) 504-PLAY

Mincemeat, Pomanders & Paper Chains

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

November 28 & 29 12 - 5 pm

Discover the traditions of a 19th century rural Christmas.

December

Christmas By Gaslight

Spadina Historic House (416) 392-6910

December 11 & 12, 17 to 20th 7 - 9 pm

Enjoy an Edwardian style evening featuring samples of period foods, warm (non-alcoholic) mulled wine and live musical entertainment. Reservations required. Cost \$15.00 Call (416) 392-6827 ext. 265.

Stir Up Sunday

Montgomery's Inn (416) 394-8113

December 13 1 - 4:30 pm

Use Victorian recipes and make old fashioned mince meat and plum pudding. Registration required Cost \$25.00

Hogmany!

A Scottish Ceilidh Celebrating the New Year!

Mackenzie House (416) 392-6915

December 28 & 30 7 - 9 pm

Celebrate the New Year at this open house-style party. Sample traditional Scottish sweets and savouries.

Cost \$ 12.00. Reservations required. Call (416) 392-6827 ext. 265.

Preparing Hogamany

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

December 28 - 30

Enjoy the food and customs of a Scottish New Year.

Hogmany

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

December 31

Celebrate the Scottish New Year with an afternoon of song and ceremony.

January

Scotch Tasting

Mackenzie House (416) 392-6915

January 22 7 - 9 pm

Explore the nature of Scotch, sample different varieties and enjoy a light buffet of Scottish finger foods. Cost \$40.00 Reservations required. Call (416) 392-6827 ext. 265

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Thanks for this issue to Carolyn Blackstock, Joseph Schneider Haus & Rose Murray

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