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**“TROUBLE ENOUGH”:
GENDER, SOCIAL POLICY AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE
IN VANCOUVER AND SASKATOON, 1929-1939**

by

M. Theresa Healy

B.A., Double Hons. University of Saskatchewan, 1984

M.A., University of Saskatchewan, 1990

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THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

Relief policy in English Canada in the 1930s was the forerunner of the Canadian welfare state. As practised, the strength of relief lay in local responsibility but this was also a weakness. The aims of relief policy were undermined by the politics of place: the impact of specific historical and spatial circumstances at the local level. Relief policy was not uniformly enforced nor were the outcomes exactly as intended. The objectives, to provide minimal necessities, to exclude individuals and families from relief rolls, to control gender and familial roles, and to impose middle class societal prescription, were not met. Instead, a complex negotiation of responsibilities and expectations was undertaken. Relief recipients were able to win some concessions. Further, the fragility of social categories used to implement relief policies was crystallized.

The conflict between the ideals of policy and people's realities becomes apparent when two very different cities are compared. Using extensive oral history interviews and contemporary relief policy documents and relief department records, this research shows that while the principles of relief were almost identical in Saskatoon and Vancouver, the practice of relief in these two cities revealed the dependency of relief policy upon face to face delivery. Designed to eliminate potential abuse by recipients, the system barely controlled it. Further, local responsibility also ensured that citizens had access to the mechanisms of local politics and tools for change. The local population in Saskatoon was able to win considerable and significant improvements to relief while Vancouver's system remained virtually untouched, in spite of dramatic and revolutionary local activities which reached the national stage.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the courageous and feisty individuals who shared their stories and lives with me through oral history. They represent a sector of the Canadian population whose contribution to the making of this country has never been properly documented or acknowledged. I hope this work is a small testament to their achievements, from which we all benefit, and must defend and build on, today.

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PREFACE

The topic of this dissertation has been an abiding interest for some years. Building on the work undertaken for a master's thesis in history at the University of Saskatchewan, this dissertation seeks to integrate an understanding of how relief was experienced in the 1930s in Canada by focusing on the level where relief policies were actually developed and implemented: the municipal government's relief departments.

My fascination with the topic was rooted in a firm belief that Canadian history had not sufficiently explained, nor even to any extent examined, these important facets of relief experiences: the realities of ordinary women, men and children who were subjected to the relief system, nor the realities of relief policies as they were actualized by administrators and bureaucrats. Initially, my work focused only on women but as the research progressed I began to realize that considering women and men in conjunction illuminated the experiences of both. That is, gender became a far more useful construct for excavating relief systems.

Thus, my focus here has been on an attempt to integrate the concept of self identity, the attempts of individuals and groups to determine their own definitions of class, gender and race, with the concept of a politics of place. This latter is a theory that postulates that geography has an impact on the development of community and government initiatives and the collective response of local populations is influenced by the politics specific to the place. Given that the responsibility for relief policy was very much a matter of locality, this concept has proved useful in weaving together otherwise competing elements in the analysis of relief policy in action.

Chapter One
Viewing the Past:
Reviewing the Historiography of the 1930s

"Class isn't how you earn your money, it's what you do with it when you've got it."

Elsie Railton, Oral History Interview, 1995

The challenge of understanding and accessing a broader historical experience in the lives of "ordinary" Canadians in the 1930s raises questions for the practice of historiography and historical methodology. This chapter explores some of the problems of carrying out historical research on an issue, poverty, and with a population, the poor, that have been neglected by most Canadian historians. This neglect has been manifested in the absence of historical records, in traditional historical methodologies and in the writing of Canadian history. The Canadian state has been envisioned as hegemonic, steadily growing in scope and power with a resulting exterior "landscape devoid of figures"¹ and an interior landscape devoid of interest.

What has been lost in this complacent and comfortable historiography has been the complex impact of the economic depression of the 1930s on Canadian society at the local level: a politics of place rather than nation. Not only did class conflict develop over the period but gender conflict, and conflict between bureaucrats, politicians, and clients emerged as the state attempted to manage its business in the face of economic and political upheaval. These conflicts, and the shifting class and gender alliances that accompanied them, emerge when the state's apparatus, in this case, the relief system, is examined for functions rather than for appearances. Especially, these conflicts emerge when we undertake to enter into

where the conflicts happened in the hearts and minds of those most intimately involved by examining the experiences of those on actually on relief and those responsible for delivering it. As a result we can see that the economic and political chaos of the 1930s created an often violent and disruptive renegotiation of familial gender roles and state responsibilities that was carried out in homes, relief offices and city councils across the country.

To capture this history requires methodologies that allow access to the experiences of those living with poverty in Canada in the 1930s, a process that solicits both the best of traditional historiography and the best of the newer methodologies. It also engenders a theory that encompasses people as active agents in the historical process. Feminist historians began from the premise that women were active not passive participants in history and that their absence from the historical record can be redressed.² They have struggled with the obstacles and limitations of introducing women into the historical record using the same historical tools which served for so long to excise or diminish women.

The original feminist historians' agenda of "add women and stir" to include women in the historical record has expanded, by necessity, into a broader agenda of challenging how history is carried out.³ The basic tenets and methodologies which excluded women, and others, as historical subjects have come under a scrutiny which has found the methodologies wanting. Feminist historians have brought new methods and approaches to the practice of history. What has emerged complements, expands, and sometimes challenges, established historical methods. For example, feminist historians advocate re-reading traditional sources with an eye for "reading against the grain" to develop a heightened awareness of how gender affected the creation and subsequent interpretation of those historical sources. They also

focus on improving long established but underestimated historical approaches, such as oral history, to accommodate for bias which excluded women's experiences. Seeking out alternative sources has deepened our understanding of the past. In particular, the common received wisdom that the depression simply reinforced gender roles is problematised.⁴

Incidentally, these methods in no way diminish the traditional methodologies; rather, they build on them. The newer methodologies have expanded the borders of history and our understanding not only of women's historical experience but also that of men has improved. Through gender history, which in turn is building on the hard won lessons of women's history, we are gaining an appreciation of female and male as socially constituted and as such, inter-related. Female and male draw both meaning and structure from and with each other and, considered in this way, broadens our historical perspective.⁵

A key concept to accessing this broader historical horizon is to allow those in the past a greater say in defining themselves. Rather than impose previously conceived definitions of social identity it is imperative that historians find a way to let the past speak more for itself and learn to listen for the elements people used to determine categories for themselves.⁶

Determining how and what people thought of themselves and others as part of the task of interpreting the past may be a complex undertaking but it is not impossible. We can enter communities of the poor with a greater chance of understanding how people defined themselves and the issues surrounding them more easily in periods of crisis.⁷ Periods of economic or political crisis, such as was evident in the 1930s, threw normal and generally unquestioned gender conventions into doubt. The social conditions engendered by the

massive unemployment of the period could, and did, cause fear and a reassessment of values usually cherished in economically secure times. Regardless of how much individuals and families subscribed to traditional gender roles in their daily practices, societal expectation was predicated on a male breadwinner working in the public and paid work force while the ideal gender role for women was as a wife working in the private and unpaid realm of the home and family.⁸ When massive numbers of men found themselves without work, the central icon of masculinity was removed. How could traditional masculinity survive or transform under this attack? Would women's gender roles be recast under changing economic realities?

Individuals found the self definitions and identity derived from traditional gender roles were thrown into doubt by their experiences with the realities inflicted upon them by the Great Depression. The impact of the Wall Street crash extended deep into Canadian society, placing impossible demands on individuals, families, organisations and institutions at every level. Thus, we can use the period of the depression years to examine what notions of gender were common at the onset of the decade and how these might have changed over the decade and under the impact of relief and unemployment.

Relief was a gendered policy, locally conceived and delivered. Local populations, in reacting to local power structures, developed a politics of place, a concept that has been relatively under-researched and under-theorized in the historiography of the Canadian welfare state. There are works examining particular social policies or particular regions. There are works which focus on the national and provincial development of policy and on the transformation of social reform into state policy. There is some work on the experiences

of the unemployed and poor during the 1930s, though it generally details the experiences of men. But no one has considered the interaction of the state with those it sought to govern through the microcosm of where relief policy was actually created and where people actually experienced social policy: in their own homes, neighbourhoods and in the relief offices. These locales became both the form and the function of relief policy: the intersection where state interacted with people and the place where the language of policy became act. Nor, within this praxis, have the experiences of women been considered in much detail. For the most part, working class experiences with unemployment as the subject of research have focused on male experiences with the public world of paid work - even when that work was state invented. The politics of “place” refers not only to the geographical landscapes that bounded particular neighbourhoods or communities and how these may have affected political realities but also to the mental understandings and feelings people have about the communities in which they live and which they build in co-operation or in competition with each other.⁹ Where there is a shared sense of place in a local community, common vocabulary, mutual interests and community consensus may develop.¹⁰ From this, a “mutual stake in one another’s lives” allows the emergence of unexpected and unintended consequences from social policies. In the case of relief, unlikely cross-class and cross-gender alliances emerged as an unexpected result of municipal relief policies.¹¹

As a result of the occupation of the public landscape by the mass organizations of the unemployed, we know much about men’s economic experiences with unemployment in the 1930s. The entire decade is symbolised by lines of unemployed men marching in protest or waiting for food.¹² The Regina Riot is the epitome of the decade: the nascent revolution of

angry bitter men deprived of their right to be men, to work and support families. The major works in this field tend towards the collection of primary documents, catalogues of the misery experienced by unemployed men, and some women, during this period. Michiel Horn's collection, *The Dirty Thirties*, Barry Broadfoot's *Ten Lost Years*, Ronald Liversedge's *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek*, Victor Howard's *We Were the Salt of the Earth*, the collections of R.C.M.P documents recently published by the Canadian Committee on labour history and James Gray's *The Winter Years* all symbolize the era as bleak and unforgiving, the state as powerful and political conflict only as class based. While this genre of depression history may be excellent as a source of primary material it provides little analysis or context.¹³ Further, the familial and emotional experiences of unemployed men are relatively unexplored in these accounts.

We know even less about women's experiences through the depression. Perhaps this is because women's experiences are perceived, not through what they did, but through the simple fact of biology, of being women.¹⁴ What women did in the depression years was something they had always done, even in the best of times: utilize all the domestic skills they had in order to hold their families together. Mae Findlay, who lived through the depression years in Saskatoon used her parents as an example of the differing impact the depression had on gender roles:

My dad was a proud man, and to be in a situation where you can't do for your children - it was really hard on him. Women cope in a different way. The depression left men without anything to do at all. Women had far more to do than they ever had before.¹⁵

A woman's identity was seen as rooted in her domestic skills, particularly the ability to "make both ends meet when there was no middle" and the depression years simply called on this gender role to a greater extent.¹⁶

With this perspective it would be hard to see anything noteworthy or different in what women did during the depression years. In the case of this study, the politics of place allows a redefinition of domestic skills in ways which reveal the inadequacies of state attempts to control women's lives.¹⁷ Feminist historians are beginning to re-address this fallacy and to re-examine women's experiences in the 1930s. Denyse Baillargeon's "If You Had No Money, You Had No Trouble, Did you?" enters the private household sphere to explore economic strategies exercised by Montreal housewives both inside and outside the home during the depression and how these strategies interacted with exterior realities.¹⁸

Women's reactions to state control were not only grounded within domestic spheres. Margaret Hobbs, focusing on the differential attention given to married versus single women's right to work, examines the experiences of women workers in the depression era and the defence of women's right to work outside the home in "Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers."¹⁹

These works, though ground-breaking, still fall into a trap of gender bias. It is time to examine the experiences of women through the lens of gender, that is, in conjunction with the experiences of men. Thus, in addition to critiquing and accounting for the shortcomings of traditional historical methodologies it is also important not to impose feminist theoretical expectations and constructs of the 1990s on the choices and realities of women in the 1930s.

Through the newer approaches mentioned and, particularly through using oral history methodologies, it is possible to come to an appreciation of the tight links women and men forged around paid employment opportunities, relief system structures and domestic exigencies. These partnerships derived from wife and husband acting as equals in solving both work place, relief office and home place issues but the resulting decisions did not always fall within neat gender distinctions. Further, the effectiveness of these partnerships was affected by the upheaval of unemployment in the 1930. The notion of public and private separate spheres, of the ideal of male breadwinner and female home-maker, can be seen as prescriptions for reality, not descriptions of actual experience. How people understood their class and gender roles does not necessarily fit with received standard historical categories, nor with some feminist ideals.²⁰

A related problem in accessing a broader historical understanding lies with the history of social policy. The canons of Canadian history generally present an image of the Canadian state as steadily growing in power and presence with a burgeoning array of policies developed to carry out its will. This image of social policy as hegemonic is doubtful, as revisionist historians have discovered in the debate on the origins, evolution and innovations of social reforms in Canada.²¹

Canadian historians have done an excellent job of uncovering the factors involved in the development of the Canadian welfare state and policy growth and the small but influential body of work in this area has become a standard reference for the topic. Richard Allen laid the ground work of this historiography in *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform*. In this work Allen documented the marriage of charitable impulses with sociological

concern for progress which informed the scientific and modern approach to Canada's relief system.²² Subsequently, authors have continued to explore the questions of how welfare and unemployment social policy have evolved in Canada. James Struthers, in *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914 - 1941*, examined the various factors affecting the evolution of the Canadian welfare state's lynch pin: unemployment insurance. Struthers examined the unique combination of English and American influences on Canadian policy development and the conflict which developed between local responsibility for unemployment relief with the national ability to actually address unemployment problems. The two themes of conflicting notions of responsibility converged with increasing intensity after World War One as provincial, municipal and labour organizations began to hold the dominion government accountable for the management of the labour force. The simple fact of creating work through public works programs, which the federal government had undertaken, revealed the ability at the federal level to respond with decisions, with finances and with an overall vision that lower levels of government lacked.²³

Struthers' earlier work focused on the development of policy at the national level. As pointed out in the introduction to *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970*, Canadian historians generally have limited their examination of the emergence and evolution of the welfare state to this macro level ignoring the extent to which social programs were locally based and as such, subject to the politics of place.²⁴ That is, the convergence of historical, geographical and political factors at the local level of the community have not been considered when policies such as relief, are examined. Struthers,

in *The Limits of Affluence* redressed the imbalance by examining the provincial level for the development of social welfare programs. He argued national developments obscured how important provincial and local authorities were and that the state was “more intimately connected” with the lives of those coping with poverty and unemployment than the national government.²⁵

Another consequence of the focus on policy development at the national level, as Struthers noted, is the fact that none of the Canadian works, either singly or together, answers all of the questions about the timing and shape of particular social policies nor do they account for all the various factors and groups that can be seen to have had an influence over social welfare developments at the local level. Nor do they address how these, in turn, influenced national developments. In this respect, the national focus is actually a focus on the results of policy formation and allows the crucial influences of clientele and other key players on policy development to be ignored.

Struthers also points out that, in addition to the failure to answer the obvious questions on the evolution of the welfare state mentioned above, the authors of many works subscribe to particular theories of welfare state development. In doing so, they reduce complex and multifaceted issues into over simplified structures that neglect key elements or actors. Struthers stresses that his own approach is to borrow freely from all schools of thought and, as a result, sheds light on the breadth and depth of all the factors needing consideration.²⁶

The emphasis on one group or factor over others in the historiography of social welfare is not limited to the academic works on the evolution of the Canadian Welfare state.

Workers' histories, such as *When Freedom was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator and the State*, tend to foreground the unemployed worker as hero in the class struggle and, while crediting the agitator with achieving changes to the relief system, fail to account for how these changes actually came about and the perhaps unwitting role of the state in aiding those changes.²⁷

The canon of work on the Canadian welfare state tends to treat recipients of policy as faceless, powerless and irrelevant. This may be because the public bureaucracies which provide most of the sources for these works and which were responsible for administering the policies tended to treat their clients this way. The underlying assumptions in all these works, regardless of theoretical perspectives, is that social control was the aim and the achievement of social policies in Canada. As a consequence, marginal or powerless groups supposed to be under the sway of these policies are generally ignored except as illustrative background. The exceptions to this tend to be isolated and underestimated works which do not claim to be histories of social welfare. For example, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* is ostensibly a collection of oral histories with residents of the Strathcona neighbourhood in East Vancouver. It is also, however, a powerful testament to the power of place as a social category of identification and an illustration of how place interacts with other social categories, such as race and gender.²⁸

The feminist historian's willingness to adopt newer methodologies offered the potential to enter this hitherto neglected background. In considering the feminist contribution to Canadian history, what has emerged has been a debate on the primacy of gender over class and/or race in determining historical experience.²⁹ There are compelling arguments to

be made here. As Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag argue in the introduction to *British Columbia Reconsidered*, "...gender, the socially constructed meanings attached to sex differences, lies at the heart of the human condition."³⁰ Certainly, in considering the gender analysis of social policy and the welfare state some of the most "exciting and original analyses" to emerge in recent years is to be found in the feminist historian's work.³¹

Yet, more recently, the notion of the primacy of gender has been challenged. There are additional important factors beyond race, class and gender and more than a simple hierarchial preference that must be addressed. Age, nationality, marital status, sexual orientation, occupation, religion, physical health and ability, geographical location, and political affiliation are some of the factors and categories by which we know and define ourselves and others. All of these shape our world and how we experience it. Like the pieces of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope they constantly shift and reform in the patterns of our lives. As circumstances and context shift, first one, then another of these colours predominates.

The metaphor of the kaleidoscope summarizes the multiplicity and interdependency of the categories and identities by which we know ourselves and each other. For example, a woman may be, at the same time in her life, daughter, mother, student, worker and, if she has any time left, perhaps, friend, lover, and consumer. She can be all of these at the same time. At different times in her life (or even over the course of a day) one category may supersede others. The values, expectations and definitions she, or others, ascribe to these categories will shift depending on the circumstances of her life and the society in which she finds herself. For example, as a child, she may come from a culture that prizes female

children or, at the other extreme, one which murders its female children. She may have been physically or sexually abused or encouraged to see femaleness as a strength. She may have been raised as a minority in a society rife with racism but, at the same time, within a community with strong assertive roots of cultural pride.³²

Managing shifting roles, and sometimes conflicting identities, is not uncommon. Married working women for example, are all too familiar with the competing demands associated with juggling the roles of mother, wife, housekeeper, and worker. Some immigrant families contend with conflicts as second generation children begin to espouse cultural values foreign to the family's cultural heritage. Within all of these circumstances, gender is a significant and even defining factor, but it is not the only one. Gender alone is not the only source of power (or powerlessness) for historical categories of identity or analysis though it is key to the dislocation of power through how it interplays with other issues in an individual's life.³³

Internally and externally composed and constructed, such categories absorb increasing importance or register decreasing value depending upon time and place, the historical specificity, of the place and time, the society and culture in which the individual is living: the politics of place.³⁴ The exigencies of "being Japanese", for example, were more important in British Columbia during World War II for determining identity for individuals of Japanese descent than other categories such as class, age or gender.³⁵

Categories of identity such as race and class, fluctuating in importance and priority within each individual's life, also change over time, because even the categories rooted in biology are most often socially and culturally constructed.³⁶ The politics of place ensure

notions of respectable and appropriate behaviour may differ radically from community to community. Thus, there are arguments emerging for understanding place as a category of identity.³⁷ In other words, what appears to be liberating for one woman in one time and place may well spell moral downfall in another.³⁸ Added to this is the psychological component, the degree to which identity is mediated by psychic experiences and how the individual feels about, recalls and acts on these feelings and recollections.³⁹

Given these complexities, the notion of self definition is crucial. Defining one's self identity is a fluid process further complicated by the unstable nature of many of the categories. Gender behaviour, for example, is flexible and malleable, open to constant redefinition under competing demands. The overwhelming determinant of gender is not biology, but context: the environment within which the individual, of whichever gender, must make choices. Thus "in poverty and wartime, depression and boom, the sexual division of labour and its signification in dress" and behaviour is open to change and transformation.⁴⁰ The challenge for Canadian historians is to analyse the intersections of a fluid gender category in flux with the influences of other categories, with the local cultural environment and with the specificities of time and place, "for gender is only one element in the way women or men perceive or structure" their identity.⁴¹

Some historians have made inroads into the role of gender as a primary determinant of historical experience. Yet they seem unwilling or unable to recognize the inherent instability of gender itself, even when their own work demonstrates it. Bettina Bradbury, for example, in analysing the various factors affecting the selection of secondary wage earners in Montreal families during the period 1861 - 1881, undertakes exemplary work in

disentangling the various factors which influenced familial decision making about who in the family should work for wages.⁴² She shows how age, sex, economic opportunities and local labour needs, the stage reached in the family life cycle, and general economic conditions were all calculated into the decision-making process of a family. In spite of the detailed and delicate complexities she carefully excavates, the bottom line in her analysis, after all, is still gender as biology. The sexual division of labour within the home, she argues, was still the primary determinant for the decision on who in the family worked for pay. As she puts it: "... [M]ost, but never all women, withdrew from the formal labor market while most men found themselves obliged to seek work for the rest of their lives."⁴³ According to Bradbury, men will always, simply by virtue of being male, work outside the home. Women's primary responsibility, simply through virtue of being female, resided inside it.⁴⁴

This confuses cause with effect. While this "bottom line" may well be an accurate reflection of the division of labour that results within the majority of families within the scope of her study, it discounts the importance and relevance of the interplay of factors she describes. It also gives a primacy to a fixed notion of gender. Let any one factor outweigh another and different results emerge, as with her example of the family with two children. The two children were not sons, they were both female, they both worked as casual labourers. It was not gender alone but the intersection of gender with availabilities (of bodies, of types of work) that decided who worked. In this case there was work available locally for young females and the family had daughters.⁴⁵

In the present research, women described themselves, without self-consciousness as "my father's right-hand man."⁴⁶ This is a clear example of what many interviewees described as "work not caring who is at the end of the hand doing it." The individuals who used this phrase gave various reasons as to why they were involved in "men's work," an indication perhaps of the power of the social structures that apply to the categorization of work along gender lines. For example: Ewanda Boehr speaks with pride of how her father never stopped to consider she was "only a girl" and worked her as hard as if she were a full grown man - and she kept up with him. She said, "I preferred it; I hated to be indoors....The only boy was the baby of the family."⁴⁷ In other words, gender alone does not determine who will, or will not, work inside or outside the home. While assigning one gender as paid worker may be seen as socially desirable it is not always possible and it is not the biological characteristics alone that determine outcomes.⁴⁸

If historical analysis ignores the interplay of other factors with gender, and contemporary male norms are used as the basis for judging and categorizing past behaviours, what results is a clouded understanding of the links between the domestic unpaid work and paid employment and of the relationships between women and men and these links.⁴⁹ Perhaps families overwhelmingly desired to conform and fit into the gender roles prescribed as appropriate and respectable. This may be doubtful because, no matter how strong the desire to conform, circumstances would not always permit conformity. What may be of more importance is not the end results but the process of how families came to decisions on the division of labour and how the individuals within families reconciled the resulting

conflicts. This process must not be obscured under the rubric of gender as the only factor, or the most important factor, behind the decisions made within families.

The realities experienced by people are more complex than expressed by a dichotomous adherence to gender roles. Even beyond the impetus of economic need, women and men's responses to economic demands and opportunities demonstrate gender as palpably malleable.⁵⁰ Any approach to gender that ascribes fixed unchanging determinacy to sexual attributes also serves to obscure the intricate nature of work embedded in both unpaid and paid workplaces.

The dichotomy that separates women's work from paid labour is based on and simultaneously justified by, the sexual division of labour and goes a long way to account for the shortcomings of Canadian labour history.⁵¹ Women themselves contribute to the confusion, as they, too, undervalued their own work. As Baillargeon points out in "If You Had No Money" she had great difficulty determining what portion of the family income was earned by women as the women she interviewed had great difficulty recalling what money they had earned or how they earned it.⁵²

While women's domestic labour within the home was physically and emotionally draining, it was unpaid.⁵³ As a consequence it was not generally considered by society at large, or even by women themselves, to be "real work" which was something done for pay in a work place, not in the home. For example, when asked what she did during the depression Ethel LeWarne, recalls buying chickens with the last thirty dollars the family possessed and raising them in the basement and attic for sale and for use. She does not identify this as entrepreneurship even though this was, after all, a huge business risk to take

with the family's few remaining dollars. Further, she has to be prompted by the reminiscences of Bev, her daughter, on other wage earning work she undertook. It is Bev who recalls a wide variety of other work her mother did which generated cash and in-kind income for the family. These endeavours included growing and tending an enormous garden, running a lunch room for students and staff from the local school, going to business school at nights to learn accountancy and making all the children's clothes from "hand-me-downs." All this in addition to the regular domestic work of budgeting every penny and cooking and cleaning a home that was being used as a school lunch room and a chicken farm. As an indication of the high level of skills required, Mrs. LeWarne could still recall the cost of staple items at Woodward.⁵⁴

If we understand the functioning of the family from the perspective of those within it, what must be done will be done, regardless of appropriate gender roles.⁵⁵ The work connected with surviving and thriving, whether paid or unpaid, in the home or out, does not always conform to the rigorous dichotomies designed and imposed by social scientists. This is the politics of place. The local conditions and discussions around who would do what, is the stuff from which families weave their decisions, and which the researcher must strive to appreciate.⁵⁶

Class is another fluid category that must be considered in conjunction with other categories of identity. E.P. Thompson's ground breaking work on the evolution of the English working class, while unfortunately neglecting the question of gender almost entirely,⁵⁷ did introduce the notion of class as a dynamic, as something built from and between relationships of individuals.⁵⁸ Elsie Railton, quoted at the beginning of this chapter,

dismisses all of Marx's definition of class with the succinct statement that it is not how you make your money that determines class (the relationship to the means of production) but "what you do with it when you've got it" that determines class status. Mrs. Railton, a life long CCF/NDP member had been educated at the CCF camp on Gabriola Island and was not necessarily referring to the simple acts of consumption undertaken by the spending of wages, but rather to the symbolic and coded relationships embedded in the use of money. Her definition illustrates Thompson's thesis of class as "an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events....something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships."⁵⁹

It may well be more than this, that the individuals themselves construct their own perceptions of class and their own place in the rankings that do not fit with an external observer's determinations. This is the politics of place in action. Individuals within neighbourhoods had their own distinct markers of status and class. These markers allow community members to ascribe and define class and status in functional rather than theoretical ways. Such markers included social behaviours such as whether the family attended church or chapel or had hot cooked meals at noon time or on weekday evenings as well as geographical markers such as how much private family space was available to the family: did a family have additional family members or boarders living within the home space. An important geographical marker was garden space. Middle class families tended to devote the entire front garden space to lawn and/or flowers, while working class families, where they had any garden space at all, devoted all available land to vegetables.⁶⁰ In this research, working class families also utilised garden space for livestock and were also apt

to usurp public space for livestock, tethering and grazing small animals such as goats on the city's boulevards.⁶¹

Individuals were very astute at measuring the class of their neighbours using these markers and by watching how money was utilized. Individuals and communities judged whether others were frugal or spendthrift, whether they had aspirations beyond their station as evidenced in purchases and leisure activities, and how they cared for their children. Such codes measured class affiliation and assigned strict gradations within class with a complexity and delicacy beyond traditional class analysis. For example, many interviewees conflated class and respectability, regardless of how individuals earned their money, the household economy encoded measures of respectability which were named and judged by others as class status.⁶² "Poor in money but rich in other things" meant, for example, education, conversation and other habits associated with the middle class might dominate a working class family's culture and imbue a sense of being financially poor but not necessarily failures or perhaps even working class.⁶³

Race, for all its surface appearance of being rooted in biological impermeability by scientists determined to categorize people rather like plants, is also a fluid category and only one of a series of inter-related processes. As Angela P. Harris argues:

...we are not born with a self, but rather are composed of a welter of partial, sometimes contradictory, or even antiethical "selves". A unified identity, if such can ever exist, is a product of will, not common destiny or natural birthright. Thus, "consciousness is never fixed, never attained once and for all": it is not a final outcome or a biological given, but a process, a constant contradictory state of becoming which social institutions and individual wills are deeply implicated.⁶⁴

Harris demonstrates how race is part of the process of the social construction of identity and can be subverted, subjugated and mediated by the will of the individual. Using the example of Zora Neal Hurston's life, Harris points out that Zora's "being coloured" was a state of unconscious naturalness until she "was thrown against a sharp white background."⁶⁵ That is, racial identity is always relational and not inherent. As Earl Lewis points out, the "secured zones" of urban black communities allowed black Americans to define whites as "other."⁶⁶ Race becomes a constructive category used against people. In other words, individuals construct their awareness of identity, of class, and of their racial and gender status, through a complex and on-going interactive relationship with their culture and its power structures. The implications of this interactive process are only just beginning to be assessed by historians.⁶⁷ Especially, racial categorizations appear even more problematic in the 1930s because both religious and ethnic affiliations operated much as visible minority categories and homophobia operate in the 1990s: as markers of alleged inferiority and the basis for discrimination.⁶⁸

An understanding of the interactive process of self construction allows us to examine an entire range of feelings and actions denied by historians with categoric determinations of what constitutes identity. Where individuals may have experienced triumph, bigotry, rage, success or victory, the historian denying a process of self-construction would read only defeat and despair.⁶⁹ To ignore the complexity in individual and collective experiences is to glimpse the past only as shadows.⁷⁰

The construction of a self identity and the processes attending it are unconscious until placed into context, that is, into a collective setting. It is often in the sharp contrast of

measuring the self against the external context that identity is brought to consciousness. Working class people may not have perceived themselves as members of the working class, or determined themselves as “different from” others until brought into contact with members of a different class or into contact with power structures designed by the middle class to impose particular views on the working class. Values, beliefs and behaviours which appear perfectly natural and unquestioned in the community neighbourhood, become heightened only when taken out of it - the politics of place in opposition.⁷¹

The idea of place becomes an important social category - one that may have the potential for synthesising and organizing the other categories used for constructing social identity, notions of community and shared interests.⁷² Place is an important social category, very often one that is relatively innocent for categorizing others.⁷³ “Place” becomes shorthand, the word, for the intersection of physical locality with social relations at the place where people interact the most: their own communities.

The concept of a politics of place locates the arena for the contest of state, power and policy where individual lives are lived and allows an understanding of sameness and difference as political activities structured and realized through specific social practices in turn shaped by specific social spaces.⁷⁴ Thus, the relief department office, the market square and the individual homes of relievers are markers of place and shape the how of contested power relations.

As individuals enter into the contested arenas, a process of questioning or negation may result from the realization of “difference”. This may account for the “oppressor within”: the adherence and loyalty towards a class, race or gender which might objectively

be perceived as not one's own.⁷⁵ It may also explain the choices individuals make which abrogate or reaffirm loyalty to one category of self definition over another. The choice of self, its construction, its multiplicities and interactions with societal pressures assumes a power and a desire, within the individual as well as within the society, to determine and define categories of identity. Both these locations must be accounted for by the historian if historical accounts are to represent past experiences with any assurance of accuracy.⁷⁶

What makes the case of the 1930s so fascinating is the fact that, for so many of those on relief, becoming a reliefer was a new experience. Of these new relief recipients, many would have considered themselves successful, that is to say "respectable." These women and men, until the depression years, had been managing their lives and families in varying degrees of comfort. They could provide the necessities of life, in some cases more than this and a place to belong in their society. They may well have been socially conforming and committed to achieving a particular lifestyle until the depression years. Many of these women were educated, and accepted their roles as good wives and mothers. They had worked hard to raise their families as god-fearing, law abiding, contributing members of society. They were not political ideologues, neither radical feminists nor raving communists. The power of the state to control and discipline their lives, even if it was recognized, was not questioned. They had established marriage partnerships with roles they welcomed and valued. Concurrently, the men involved in these marriages had strongly defined notions of manhood and fatherhood and roles they, too, accepted and valued. A marriage of joint partners, with shared goals, such as house ownership and a settled and comfortable lifestyle, marked many female and male lives, both working and middle class. The potential of

achieving such personal goals, such comfort and conformity, may well have limited the political activity and consciousness for many people, both female and male, who valued respectability above all else.

The people leading these lives may, or may not, have acknowledged their lives and choices as socially controlled, or recognized the ability of the state to access and dictate their worlds. The point is, while the system worked, while the majority could find work, could pursue and make reality of these individual dreams, few questioned the system. If only a minority "couldn't make a go of it" it was easy to blame those individuals. Inability to find or keep a job, to find only seasonal work, to earn insufficient wages, or to have too many mouths to feed was a mark of individual failure and reaffirming for those who were successful and respectable.

Relief policies, developed and administered locally, were built on a strong notion of appropriate gender roles. As a consequence, while relief could be seen as a part of a system of social control, (the "discipline and punish" part) the interactions of those in need with the system problematizes social control as the sole reality of the system.

While relief may have functioned in well ordered society as a means to control, punish and discipline those who failed at achieving respectability according to rigid definitions of gendered and acceptable behaviours, when the society itself failed, relief became the focus of a sustained and disciplined attack from those - its clients - it was supposed to control. People, for the most part women, accessed the system as they needed it and allowed the relief administration only limited powers over their lives. This ground of contention over definitions of respectability, of family, and of household head marked

boundaries of conflict between state and household and brought these conflicts directly into the homes of those on relief. This was a politicizing process for those who were new to relief.

In this study, the relief programmes in the 1930s have been considered a "border" case; one of the crucial issues that delineated borders or boundaries of conflict around acceptable behaviour.⁷⁷ Predicated on the norms of an idealized family life, relief was constituted to protect and serve the family in need by providing help to ensure the family stayed respectable. Prostitution, starvation, family break up, would be avoided by allowing the minimum supplies needed to keep the family together in its own home. At the same time, minimalist relief policies were also designed to police and punish families that were failing to live up to a societal expectation of respectability: the capacity to maintain home and family independently of the state. The provision of state relief at a very basic and unpalatable minimum was intended to police families by motivating them to escape relief and return to independence - respectability - as soon as possible. However, relief was a paradoxical intervention. Authorities feared any level of support provided by relief would undermine self sufficiency and create a dependent class of families who had ceased desiring respectability and who would prefer to subsist on the public purse. The relief system had to be punitive to ensure dependency did not develop. This justified minimal relief provisions which, ironically, undermined the objectives of maintaining self- respect, independence and respectability by restricting families to less than respectable standards of living.

As well, these contradictory objectives were based on a potentially damaging concession. Relief pointed to the failure of society to enable individuals to achieve

respectability for themselves. Society had failed to maintain the normal economic conditions that allowed (almost) every man to work and support his family - a state of affairs that would take care of every respectable and deserving member of society. Thus, the existence of even minimal levels of relief highlighted the destabilising element inherent in relief programmes - the response and acknowledgment of society to its own shortcomings rather than those of individual members of society.⁷⁸

Feminist critiques of social welfare policies such as relief have focused on these policies as a critical expression of the juncture of patriarchy and capitalism in oppressing women.⁷⁹ According to one critique "social welfare policies amount to no more than the State organization of domestic life."⁸⁰ Michel Foucault and his followers identify the state power inherent in the creation of institutions such as social welfare agencies. As an extension of the carceral function of prisons and mental institutions, more humane institutions such as relief serve the purpose of instilling self policing mechanisms, "normalizing" individuals from the cradle to the grave. Rather than punish and inflict pain directly on the body, a more economical punishment, self control of the will and inclination, evolved. People, so the argument goes, disciplined themselves.⁸¹

The relief system illuminates the shift demonstrated in Foucault's analysis. In early colonized Canadian societies, paupers and beggars were frequently subject to jail and other physical punishments. Later, relief was given as indoor aid through the workhouse or poor house.⁸² The cost of providing relief in this preferred way was excessive. Outdoor relief, giving people relief in their own homes was adopted, and methods of ensuring people policed themselves emerged, an integration of a moral and financial economy. The shame

and humiliation associated with relief, the means test and lesser eligibility concepts for example, ensured that people tried to avoid needing or seeking relief.

While differing in emphasis, such analyses share one thing. They rarely, if ever, address policy as implementation.⁸³ While all the statements regarding the objectives and intentions of the policy in such critiques may well be accurate, "it may be fairer to say that state policies attempt to regulate rather than actually regulate the social and economic relations of normal domestic life."(emphasis added)⁸⁴ The fact that relief became imposed at a distance from the body of the recipient produced a "tolerated space", a "necessary illegality", to use Foucault's phrases. This space complicated the attempts of the state to control relief recipients. In the case of relief, I consider this tolerated space to be the policy gap, that is, a space emerged between what policy assumes to be reality and the actual lived experience of individuals. The policy gap was supposed to be bridged and contained individual self discipline and by policy. Where individuals began to resist, relief policy failed, leaving an apparently controlled terrain where experienced relievers could manipulate the system to their advantage. The complexity of relief policy provided a climate of opportunity, often allowing advantages to be gained by recipients where none was intended. Of course, this also meant the policy could be manipulated in turn by the government for the benefit of the state and to the detriment of the recipients. These more public actions had the potential to bring charges of heartlessness and ruthlessness.⁸⁵

The difficulty with any analysis that focuses only on the language and presence of the policy is that the contradictions and conflict inherent in translating policy into practice can be conveniently ignored.⁸⁶ This is not to argue that capitalist and/or patriarchal power

does not exist, or that it was not exercised, or that social control objectives were not sought and achieved. It is possible to argue that the implementation of policy and power was problematised by other factors. These variables ensured that there was no idealized monolith simply imposed on those who came under the jurisdiction of relief policy. Relief recipients, and particularly the women struggling for the survival of home and family, had strategies to deal with the circumstances facing them. In using such strategies women resembled military generals facing overwhelming odds in battle. They were often weary, forced to call on limited resources and respond to rapidly changing circumstances, often tried to the limit but never willing to admit defeat.⁸⁷ The relief structure was simply one more factor to be considered - used when necessary, submitted to when unavoidable but better avoided.⁸⁸

The gap between ideal and reality is also illustrated with the relief system. The major problem with implementing relief was embedded in the policy itself. Relief policy was formulated on and from idealized perceptions that bore little relation to most people's realities. For example, relief policy had a gender bias. It was predicated on the assumption that men worked and women did not. It was also based on an idealized norm for the society as the nuclear family with a male breadwinner and a female home-maker. Women were presumed dependent and provided for within the bonds of matrimony and, as noted earlier, these norms did not hold true for everyone.⁸⁹

There were several immediate problems with the gender bias of the relief policy, most notably those related to the intersection of gender with class. Canadian Census statistics demonstrate that at any given point in a society, large percentages of women - especially working-class women - did not benefit from the ideal of being dependent upon,

nor solely supported by the efforts of a male, particularly given the seasonal employment that is fundamental to Canada's labour market.⁹⁰ Many women found themselves solely responsible for providing for their families with or without a partner. Even when working class women did share the responsibilities of a family, it was no guarantee their labour outside of purely domestic tasks was ended. Even in the best of times, traditional relief rolls were comprised, in addition to single women, of deserted or widowed women, of women whose husbands failed to provide for a variety of reasons. Where work opportunities existed, these women would seek and find work to supplement family income as a means of support for themselves and their dependents. During the depression, many of these women also became unemployed and were thrown on relief. For women on relief without a male partner, the only relief test was respectability a moral qualification.⁹¹

Many other women, who did carry a more traditional role because of an employed male provider, also joined the ranks of relief recipients when the main providers for their families were thrust out of work. For these women, the moral tests of relief were applied to their husbands. Thus, many women and men did not "fit" within the stencil of the idealized family norm and the gendered visions of society, the idealized norms inherent and expressed through relief policy were already stressed by the discrepancy between ideal and reality.

Under the impact of economic depressions, men who were used to working, used to fulfilling certain roles and obligations associated with being a man, were suddenly out of work and forced to seek relief. For men, both the income and the obligations of paid labour were important. For most working class men there was a strong link between manhood and

work. Some of these men, who were used to a seasonal nature of employment, were accustomed to being out of work but only for short periods. What was not immediately apparent to most in the depression era was the prolonged absence of work. No matter how hard they tried, no work was available.⁹²

The gendered nature of relief assumed the same relationship between manhood and work. This relationship was reflected in the nature of the relief test for men. Men had to prove their willingness and ability to work in order to qualify for relief. To illustrate the tight link between manhood and work, much of the furore that arose over relief work was its apparent futility. Men were willing to work for their relief. They accepted the moral requirements of man as a worker first that was implied in relief policy. What they were not willing to accept was the humiliation of make-work projects, which stripped the working man of his dignity, his manhood.⁹³ Such falsity did not, in their perception, allow them to genuinely prove to themselves as men, to themselves and to others, nor to demonstrate the worth and value of their labour. The relief policy makers may have seen the work component of relief as a test of men's willingness to work. The men themselves had their own perceptions of the purpose of the work test. It was not so much a question of "earning" their relief support but of demonstrating manhood through "real" work.⁹⁴ Contesting perceptions of the purpose of relief work undermined the ideals of relief policy.

As relief recipients learned new strategies in their responses to the relief system, the system itself struggled. In fairness to the authorities, the situation was unprecedented. As early as 1932, Col. H.W. Cooper wrote, in his final report as retiring Relief Officer for Vancouver, on the "difficulties facing [city] councils across Canada...while in June, 1930,

the matter [of unemployment] was regarded as serious, there was little or no conception that conditions would be so intensified or enduring."⁹⁵ In his report, Cooper also noted how unemployment relief had come to characterize relief department work. His entire two and a half year period as a Relief officer had been "dominated by the unemployment situation" as the dramatic increase in relief rolls could be directly traced to unemployment. Cooper oversaw 14,195 new applications, as well as reopening 21,897 cases and registering 33,696 unemployed. He also managed the expenditure of \$12,465,511.00 and supervised 8,416 relief work placements. Administration and service costs, he argued, represented only 13.1% of the relief department's budget.⁹⁶

These figures disguise a further reality. Because of the soaring costs associated with increasing numbers of people in need, the system was designed to be unfair. Relief departments across Canada had to figure out ways, not of distributing relief effectively to those in need, but of reducing it. The system became a highly flexible, manipulative obstacle course aimed at categorizing people as not eligible for relief. The moral objectives of relief became entangled with, and sometimes superseded by, financial imperatives.

The delivery of relief in paltry amounts was designed to encourage relievers to rely on their own resources and return to independence as soon as possible. Interestingly, and in contradiction to its own aims of imposing correct gender and class roles, the relief department nominated whoever in the family was employed as the head of household as a way of getting people off the relief rolls. That is, the title of head was bestowed, regardless of sex or age, on who ever was working. This budgetary strategy made for some fascinating definitions of family.

The social policy of relief as applied to the family also allows an attack on the “categorical thinking about gender” and other criteria historians use.⁹⁷ An analysis of Canadian relief policy in action in the 1930s shows gender construction as a malleable and flexible process. People, with their own subjective identities and experiences made demands of the gendered language and beliefs embedded in relief policies. Gendered policy in turn, fluctuated under the competing demands of pragmatic needs and local opportunities.⁹⁸

The dynamics of social relations, not readily explained by monocausal theories, are examined here in their complexity as a politics of place. This rubric allows gender relations, the emphasis on what was expected from female and male citizens, to be seen as an integral component of the multiplicity of categories and divisions by which people knew themselves and each other. Thus, in examining relief policy as a manifestation of the politics of place, it is not only gender construction but other social constructions of identity such as race, class, age, that come under scrutiny and are called into debate. While women and men of the working class may have acted in solidarity around certain political issues, there were some issues where they did not and, instead, aligned along gender lines and across class ones. Commitment to particular ethnic communities may have strengthened in some circumstances and withered in others. What is of crucial interest is how individuals defined themselves and how they acted upon those assumptions - the intersection of self and experiences. In this study, the focus is primarily on gender, and to a lesser extent class. For example, it is possible to see middle class women and the state collaborate in policing working class women on relief when class definitions and expectations of behaviour of women collided. At other times, working class women found allies among middle class

women against the state when their gender definitions and expectations of womanhood, family and motherhood co-incided and came under threat or disrespect from the state. Middle class women also crossed class lines in support of working class men when class definitions of manhood matched: both middle class women and working class men expected that a man should work to support his family: and fought together for this right.

Actions undertaken by all parties had profound long and short term objectives. Temporary alleviation of immediate problems to deep-rooted political change and everything in-between emerged from the individual strategies and group alliances that responded to the implementation of the state policy of relief. A social conflict can be seen in the examination of gender and class expectations in the cities of Vancouver and Saskatoon. Certain assumptions and beliefs of a society had been codified, which the social structure of paid work had supported. The central concept that rallied each of these alliances was respectability. Where cross class or cross gender alliances failed, differing definitions of respectable gender behaviour were often involved.

Emerging from a process of political debate and compromise and translated into formal language of legislation was not the end point for policy but the beginning. In the translation of political rhetoric into bureaucratic behaviour, from noun to verb if you will, relief policy became a flashpoint for further conflict rather than a settlement of grievances. The attitudes, desires, behaviours and objectives of the "subjected" group emerged as incongruent with the idealized group postulated by the policy. In the clash between the expectations defined in policy and those of real people, the influence of race, class, and sex can be seen to inform the dynamics of relations between the governed and the governing.

Other individuals saw the policy of relief not as an abstract expression but as a concrete and daily experience. Their protests were framed by and within these experiences which were felt within their homes, on the streets of their neighbourhoods and in the relief offices.⁹⁹

With the relief policy based on a gendered social ideal of the nuclear family, the widespread impact of the depression affected a range of family models and highlighted the policy's unrealistic ideals. Unemployment served to remove many men from their customary and expected roles and duties as the household head or the breadwinner of the family and cast them onto relief. As unemployed men, they came under the aegis of relief policy which was founded on notions and expectations of male behaviour (that men work) which they could no longer fulfil. Ostensibly, the provisions of relief were not intended to respond to the issue of unemployment, nor were they intended to replace the male by the state as stand-in husband.¹⁰⁰ Relief was designed only to keep body and soul together until "normal" economic conditions, and thus normal gender relations, re-established themselves.

Under the impact of the depression, the vast number of unemployed who joined the ranks of relief recipients across the country were an additional challenge to the flaws in relief policy. The moral and financial economy of relief policy aimed at instilling revulsion in potential recipients, seeking to ensure individuals would "opt out" by never signing on or by finding other sources of support, alternatives which ceased to exist as the depression wore on.

Relief policy's assumptions of gender were in direct conflict with the realities facing families and individuals on relief. The passive abrogation of government responsibility to "fix" the failing economic system was also generally irritating. People on relief began to

demand and expect change not only in the relief system itself but also beyond in the political system that came to be seen as the real problem.

While the male unemployed were highly visible symbolic figures on the urban landscape during the depression, what has been lost to view is their experiences with women and with the relief departments. The lives of women and of children have been, to all intents and purposes, practically invisible. How women and men reacted to relief policy, why and how they chose particular strategies, how well the policy was carried out and what impact it had on people's lives are obscured. The interactions of poor people on relief with those administering relief, with tax payers responsible for footing the relief bills, and with politicians, social work professionals, academic and business people must be considered. All of these individuals had a stake in the relief system and its functions, and an appreciation for all roles is necessary for a rounded picture of the 1930s in Canada. Without an understanding of such experiences and the affect poor people had on the relief system, any theorizing on the origins and evolution of the welfare state in Canada is lacking in depth. By combining a variety of traditional and innovative historical methodologies, by grappling with shifting boundaries of gender and other political definitions within the context of the local, we can put together a deeper picture of the diversity of interests and conflicts on the political stage of the neighbourhood during the 1930s.

The social policy of relief incorporated a punitive and regulatory function.¹⁰¹ Relief had certainly embodied these aims in its earliest forms. By the 1930s, without the traditional trappings of discipline: the workhouse and the gaol, the self policing associated with qualifying for relief was not always effective. The investigation sections of Relief

Departments soared in size and budget, indicating the failure of relief recipients to police themselves and conform to the requirements of the policy. As the depression years dragged on, with little promise of change or hope for improvement, people began to change themselves, their attitudes and values. What they expected from relief, what they expected from themselves shifted dramatically. Relief as a right not charity, and respect for those in receiving it, became the central point of all strategies and activities developed by those seeking to change the system. Where policy and people clashed was in the offices of those supposed to administer the relief policy, both voluntarily and as paid civil servants, and in the homes of those in receipt of relief. The 1930s case study is an illustration of the politics of place as untrained staff, unprepared politicians and inadequate finances faced desperate people in an interstice that has gone un-examined for too long in Canadian history.

ENDNOTES

¹ Joy Parr's reference to the tendency for traditional Canadian historiography to create a picture of the Canadian past as mostly geographic, this phrase is used here to denote the same unfortunate tendency for the history of social policy to achieve the same. See: Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice," *Gender History*, pp. 8-27, for a trenchant discussion of this issue.

² Women have been most notable in the historical record by absence. This has begun to be addressed, particularly in respect to twentieth century women's history, but work on women in the 1930s is only just begun to uncover the "rich and varied experiences" of women in this decade. As Sternsher and Zealander point out in the introduction to *Women of Valor*, "Squeezed between the supposed liberation of the post-suffrage flapper and the wartime service of Rosie the Riveter, women in the 1930s have drawn little attention from historians." See: Bernard Sternsher and Judith Zealander. *Women of Valor: the Struggle Against the Great Depression Told in Their own Life Stories*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990).

³ Pamela Martin. "Beyond 'Add Women and Stir': Women in Canadian Rural Society." David A. Hay and Garcon S. Baran, *Rural Sociology in Canada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.)

⁴ For examples of the assumption of gender role reinforcement see: Jeanne Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the Depression* (Chicago, Follett Publishing Co., 1976) and Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982). More recent work is beginning to complicate this view. See the introduction in Bernard Sternsher and Judith Zealander. *Women of Valor: the Struggle Against the Great Depression Told in Their own Life Stories*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990) for a discussion of the more complex picture of women in the 1930s.

⁵ Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds. *Gender and History in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996), p. 1

⁶ Earl Lewis has said that the social categories through which individuals construct their identities and know self and others (such as race, class, age, etc.) can be more than "artifacts of the historians' imagination" when researchers learn to listen to how people themselves understand them. He further argues what may be more important to historical understanding is examining the relationships between them and under what circumstances people foreground or background one category over another. Earl Lewis, "Community, Memory, Self and the Power of Place in African-American Urban History," in Kenneth Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African-American Urban History*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 124.

⁷ John H. Taylor argues such communities have a coherent and shared world view. See: John H. Taylor, "Sources of Political Conflict Welfare Policy and a Geography of Need." in Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert, eds. *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987), p.144.

⁸ It is possible that gender roles were not uniformly adhered to even in supposedly secure economic periods. Lorne Brown, in *When Freedom was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator and the State*, (Montreal-Buffalo: Black Rose Books, 1987) p.18-19, argues, like others, that even the "roaring twenties" did not provide adequate livelihoods for many working families in Canada. I would suggest that such realities also imposed gender role conflicts as families struggled to find mechanisms to support themselves that, in many cases abrogated traditional gender roles.

⁹ Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), p. 5.

¹⁰ The concept of "politics of place" is borrowed from geography and, as such, is grounded in the physical landscape. "Place" may refer to areas as small as a particular street, for example, boys naming their gangs after the streets they live in. Place may also be formalized as in neighborhood associations like Nutana in Saskatoon or Strathcona in Vancouver. Place may also refer to imaginary landscapes such as gay ghettos. For a discussion of this latter concept see: Theresa Healy and Jenny Lo, "'Flagrantly Flaunting It:' Contesting Locational Identities in Urban Vancouver" *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, (Forthcoming, Spring 2000)

¹¹ Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), pp. 65-69.

¹² As Taylor points out, such images may be misleading. He argues the poor were far more geographically trapped than in the 1920s. See: "Sources of Political Conflict," op. cit. p.148

¹³ Michiel Horn, ed. *The Dirty Thirties: Canadians in the Great Depression* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972); Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years, 1929 - 1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression* (Markham, Ontario: Paperjacks, 1985), Victor Hoar, ed. *Ronald Liversedge: Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), Victor Howard, *"We Were the Salt of the Earth": The On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot, A Narrative* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), Gregory S. Kealey & Reg Whittaker, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part I, 1933-1934* (St. John: Canadian Committee on Labor History, 1993) and Gregory S. Kealey & Reg Whittaker, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935* (St. John: Canadian Committee on Labor History, 1995) As John Manley points out in the introduction to this latter volume the historian of this period is "in danger of being

overwhelmed by primary documentation." *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935* (p.20.) For other examples see: Pierre Berton, *The Great Depression, 1929-1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), James Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies* (Toronto: MacMillan and Co., 1966) and Michael Bliss and L.M. Grayson, eds., *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett, 1930-1935*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

¹⁴ Sternsher and Zealander argue the economic stresses of the 1930s reaffirmed traditional roles and values and that the United States could not have survived the depression without the traditional domestic skills of women. Bernard Sternsher and Judith Zealander. *Women of Valor: the Struggle Against the Great Depression Told in Their own Life Stories*. (Chicago; Ivan R. Dee, 1990), pp. 4-5. However, they also agree with my perception that affirming traditional roles and actually carrying them out are two very different propositions. See their discussion of the discrepancy between societal approval and women's actual practices. *op. cit.*, pp. 5-8.

¹⁵ Saskatoon Relief Recipient, Oral history interview #V049, July 17, 1996. Many interviewees recall that the survival of the family depended on the domestic skills of the women in the family. Conversely, a smaller number recalled how difficult life could be if the mother in the family had few skills in this area.

¹⁶ For further examples of this see the interviews in Jeanne Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the Depression* (Chicago, Follett Publishing Co., 1976.)

¹⁷ Jeanne Westin, for example, describes the domestic skill of "making do" as "more than stretching food or clothes, it became a philosophy, a state of being and an art." See *Making Do*, *op. cit.* p.ix.

¹⁸ Denyse Baillargeon. "'If You Had No Money, You Had No Trouble, Did you?': Montreal Working Class Housewives During the Great Depression." in Wendy Mitchinson, et al, eds. *Canadian Women: A Reader*, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996)

¹⁹ Margaret Hobbs, "Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defense of Women Workers During the Great Depression" *Labor/Le Travail* 32, (Fall 1993) pp. 201-223. Reprinted in *Canadian Women: A Reader*, Wendy Mitchinson, et al, eds. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996) pp. 212-232.

²⁰ There was almost universal condemnation of feminism among the interviews carried out for this research, not for its achievements, but for the ideological insistence on marriage as a patriarchal trap that oppressed women. Such views, according to my interviewees implied women were unthinking victims when both women and men believed their marriages and gender relationships were not described or recognized by this ideology.

²¹ There is important work emerging on the meaning of social policy in other countries in other fields which, in the absence of any comparable Canadian work, has been consulted for this study. Particularly useful has been Devora Yanow, *How Does Policy Mean? Interpreting Policy and Organizational Actions* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996)

²² Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973)

²³ James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment in the Canadian Welfare State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.) Other important works which examine the development of national policy initiatives are Alan Moscovitch and Jim Albert, eds. *The "Benevolent" State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987); Alvin Finkel, "Origins of the Welfare State in Canada" in Raymond B. Blake & Jeff Keshen, *Social Welfare Policy in Canada: Historical Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1995); Denis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* 3rd edition (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997). For more specific regional developments see also: Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In the Children's Aid, J.J. Kelso and Child Welfare in Ontario*. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1981), Richard Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario, 1791-1893: A Study of Public Welfare Administration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965); Dorothy Chunn, *From Punishment to Doing Good: Family Courts and Socialized Justice in Ontario, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

²⁴ Goldwin French, Peter Oliver, Jeanne Beck and J.M.S. Careless, Editors, Ontario Historical Studies Series "Introduction" in James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. ix.

²⁵ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, op. cit. p. 4.

²⁶ In this respect, this dissertation has been greatly influenced by Struthers' example. Examining relief policy design, development and implementation at the local level, and using the politics of place as a central unifying theme, allows the influence and activities of politicians, administrators, business, labor, local citizens, middle class reformers, political radicals and the poor and unemployed themselves to have their actions and influences brought into consideration.

²⁷ For example, Lorne Brown in *When Freedom was Lost* assigns the ending of relief as groceries to the end of the 1930s and to the "tremendous protests by organized unemployed and their supporters." This is recorded as a footnote. This symbolizes how the complicated and piecemeal victories won along the way and the other strategies which went into the various successes are left unexamined. See: Lorne Brown, *When Freedom was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator and the State*, (Montreal-Buffalo: Black Rose Books, 1987),

p.27. For other examples, see: Patricia Weir and Howie Smith, eds., "Fighting for Labor: Four Decades of Work in British Columbia," *Sound Heritage*, Vol. VII, Number 4, 1978; Jean Evans Sheils and Ben Swankey. "Work and Wages": *A Semi-Documentary Account of the Life and Times of Arthur H. (Slim) Evans*. (Vancouver: Trade Union Research Bureau, 1977)

²⁸ Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*. (Victoria: Provincial Archives, 1979.) Interestingly, the editors espouse modest aspirations for the work.

²⁹ Nancy A. Hewitt in "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s" *Social History* Vol. 10, no. 3 (October 1985): 291-32, See also: Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender Ideology in Historical Ideology: A Case Study from the 1930s" *Gender and History*, Vol. No. 1, (Spring 1987), Ruth Roach Pierson, "Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada, 1934-1940" *Labor/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990): pp.77-103; Margaret Hobbs, "Rethinking Anti-feminism in the 1930s: Gender Crisis or Workplace Justice? A Response to Alice Kessler-Harris", *Gender and History*. 5, 1, (Spring, 1993) 4-15.; Gill Valentine. "Negotiating and Managing Multiple sexual identities: lesbian time-space strategies." *Transatlantic Institute of British Geographers*. 18: (1993), 237-248.

³⁰ Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Introduction: Taking Gender into Account in British Columbia," *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992), p.2.

³¹ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, op. cit. p. 14.

³² Shirley Chan, raised in working class Chinatown, a community she remembers as a warm powerful community until she left her neighborhood to attend high school. The view of outsiders on Chinatown influenced her own for many years. See: Oral History Interview with Shirley Chan, for *Teenage: The Exhibit*. Fall, 1994. Held in the archives of the Vancouver Museum.

³³ See Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) for her discussion of the collapsible categories that construct identities. Note also, her points on the importance of pursuing gender history but not by privileging it over "more supposedly limited, women's history."

³⁴ Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1850-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Denise Riley, in *Am I that Name: Feminism and the Category of Woman in History?* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988); Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion*

of *Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Earl Lewis has made a similar argument for race, arguing that identity is more complex than a linear boxing of categories and is constructed from the inside-out. Earl Lewis, "Community, Memory, Self and the Power of Place in African-American Urban History," in Kenneth Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African-American Urban History*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 117.

³⁵ Mary Tsukamoto told Jeanne Westin that "being Japanese she remembered the 1940s better than the 1930s." Jeanne Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the 1930s* (Chicago: Follett Publishing, 1976) p. 100.

³⁶ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Construction of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966, 1989) p.89.

³⁷ Laura Pulido argues for the use of place as a category of identity. Further, she suggests that place-based identities are also not unitary or static but multiple and changing. See: Laura Pulido, "Community, Place and Identity" in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation* (Oxford: Rowman and Little, 1997) pp. 11-28. The concept of place as a category of analysis for understanding social relations has a long history and a multiplicity of meanings. See: Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1994) for a discussion of this concept and the variety of ways it which it has been used. Massey's work originated in the dynamics of class relations in Britain, though she expanded her analysis to include gender. See also David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Cortical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

³⁸ Pete McMartin uses the example of an advertisement in a *Ladies Home Journal* of 1919 for a woman's underarm deodorant that showed the bare, raised arm of a dancing woman, while the copy spoke of "the frank discussion of a subject too often avoided." He describes the furore the ad campaign generated. See Pete McMartin, "Ad Infinitum," *Vancouver Sun Review*, August 10, 1996. p. D5.

³⁹ See, for example, Ann Elizabeth Vanderbilj, "The Significance of Bodily Dissociation in the Context of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Anthropological Approach," M.A. Thesis, S.F.U., 1996.

⁴⁰ John Tagg, "Contacts/Worksheets: Notes on Photography, History and Representation" in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amerherst: University of Massachussets Press, 1988), pp. 208-209.

⁴¹ Alice Kessler Harris. "Gender Ideology", op. cit. p.36.

⁴² Bettina Bradbury. "Gender at Work in the Home: Family Decisions, the Labor Market,

and Girls' Contributions to the Family Economy," in *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1992), pp. 177-198. See also: Ruth Roach Pierson's *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

⁴³ Bradbury, "Gender at Work in the Home," p. 183.

⁴⁴ Bradbury, "Gender at Work in the Home." I believe both capitalist and patriarchal relations need to be considered in both the functioning of the family and the labor market. See: Sylvia Walby, "Women, Work and Unemployment" in Linda Murgatroyd et al, eds. *Localities, Class and Gender* (London, Pion Ltd., 1985) pp. 145-160 for a penetrating discussion of the theoretical failure regarding women's unemployment.

⁴⁵ Bradbury, "Gender at Work in the Home," p. 182. For similar results, see Neil Sutherland, "'We Always had things to do': Anglophone Children and Urban Household and Family Economies Between the 1920s and the 1960s," (Vancouver: Canadian Childhood History Project, 1988), p.9.

⁴⁶ Ewanda Boehr, Oral History Interview #S003. Langham, Sk., June 3, 1993.

⁴⁷ Ewanda Boehr, Oral History Interview #S003. Langham, Sk., June 3, 1993. Note the unconscious transmutation of gender into age and family status: "...the only boy was the baby..."

⁴⁸ Carolyn Strange's discussion of the need for feminist historians to rethink approaches to, in her case, chivalric justice and to sharpen sensitivity to race and class. Carolyn Strange, "Wounded Womanhood and Dead Men: Chivalry and the Trials of Clara Ford and Carrie Davies" in Franca Iacovetta and Marianna Valverde, *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1992), pp. 149-188.

⁴⁹ See Beth Moore Milroy, "Taking Stock of Planning, Space and Gender" in *Journal of Planning Literature*, Vol. 6, no. 1. (August, 1991) pp. 3-15 for a discussion of this issue.

⁵⁰ Lynne Marks, "The 'Hallelujah Lasses': Working Class Women in the Salvation Army in English Canada, 1882-92" in Iacovetta and Valverde, *Gender Conflicts*, pp. 67-11.

⁵¹ Canadian labor history has still some way to go before meeting Ava Baron's challenge for a gendered history of labor. See: Ava Baron, *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991). Mark Rosenfeld, in "'It was a hard life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950" in Bradbury, *Canadian Family History*, pp. 241-280.

⁵² Baillergeon, "If You Had No Money," op. cit. p.258.

⁵³ Kessler-Harris, "Gender Ideology," pp. 34-35.

⁵⁴ For a telling example of this see the interview with Ethel LeWarne and Bev Burke [Mother and daughter], SFU Archives, Local history Collection, 100/13/013. [no date, no interviewer].

⁵⁵ As Shirley Whiteside said of her British working class mother's family: "...everyone in the family worked, women in the mills, men in the shipyards." Vancouver Relief Recipient. Oral History Interview #V035 with Shirley Whiteside, Jan. 19, 1995.

⁵⁶ Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, 1880--1960*, (New York: Viking, 1988) Also see: Linda Gordon, "A Right Not to Be Beaten: The Agency of Battered Women, 1880-1960" in Dorothy Heller and Susan M. Reverby, eds. *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

⁵⁷ See Joan Scott's brilliant critique of Thompson's classic work, in "Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*" in Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.68-90.

⁵⁸ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984, 1964), p. 9. He categorically states that class is not a "structure" or even a "category": "I am convinced that we can not understand class unless we see it as a social and cultural formation, arising from processes which can only be studied as they work themselves out..." p.11.

⁵⁹ Elsie Railton Oral History Interview #V029, Richmond, B.C., Dec. 12, 1995 and Jan 16, 1995. Mrs. Railton was very educated in political concepts as a result of this early exposure and was very clear that her comments related to definitions. Respectability was not included in this discussion.

⁶⁰ See Sutherland, "We always had things to do", op. cit., in particular endnote #7, for a discussion of the allocation of garden space as indicator of class. The lowest class had no access to garden space, other than perhaps a window box. This is another indicator of the importance of place.

⁶¹ See Cora Parker, Oral History Interview, #V037, Jan, 26, Feb. 9, and March 23, 1995.

⁶² This was a central theme to emerge in analysis of the oral history interviews. Class was spoken of as synonymous with respectability.

⁶³ Several interviewees refer to both the lack of financial resources and the ability of parents to provide social skills that would not be automatically associated with working class necessities. For one example of this, Anne Bailey's sole support mother managed her relief allowance so that she could buy Anne a tennis racket and pay for lessons, an accomplishment Anne has enjoyed as a life long talent. See: Oral History Interview #V018a, Anne Bailey, May 13, 1994.

⁶⁴ Angela P. Harris. "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory" *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 42:58 (Feb, 1990), p. 584.

⁶⁵ Zora Neal Hurston, "How It Feels to be Colored Me" in Alice Walker, ed. *I Love Myself When I am Laughing...And Then Again When I am Looking Mean and Impressive*. p.154, quoted in Harris, "Race and Essentialism." p.610. Other examples of this can be found. See for example, Bertha Norton, Maidu-Wintu, who says: "Prejudice never bothered me. I just didn't see it.... But nobody ever says, "She's an Indian." They always just say, "Hey, there's Bertie." Jeanne Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the Depression* (Chicago; Follett Publishing, 1976) p. 18.

⁶⁶ Earl Lewis, "Community, Memory, Self and the Power of Place in African-American Urban History," in Kenneth Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African-American Urban History*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 129.

⁶⁷ Razia Aziz, "Feminism and the Challenge of Racism: Deviance or Difference" in Helen Crawley and Susan Himmelwest (eds). *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp.291-305. Mariana Valverde, "Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names?" *Labor/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990), pp. 227-236.

⁶⁸ Many interviewees recall painful incidents of discrimination based on ethnic and religious bigotry. What is remarkable about these incidents, and may be meaningful to the discussion of contemporary racism, is how people came to be identified and named as "other" without visible external identifying physical characteristics. Race is not taken up in detail in this work, in part because the experience of the depression had vastly different implications for those who were outside of the economic system. For example, as one interviewee pointed out, the depression provided opportunities for young black couples to get ahead because property prices fell so low. See: "Pauline's Story" in Jeanne Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the Depression* (Chicago; Follett Publishing, 1976) p. 24.

⁶⁹ What people may remember about history is not always the great historical events but the "near experiences." Lewis describes these as "...pain and joy, triumph and despair, conflict and resolution..." To my mind this is what people own of history. Earl Lewis, "Community, Memory, Self and the Power of Place in African-American Urban History," in Kenneth Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African-American Urban History*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 117.

⁷⁰ To argue the fluidity of categories such as race, gender, etc., is not to deny the existence of discrimination based on those categories or the abuses of discrimination, racism, sexism and homophobia in individual lives and historical experiences. It is to say that how we conceive and structure collectivities is mediated and constructed by the society in which we live, that these categories are not, by any means, "natural."

⁷¹ Linda Murgatroyd, et al, eds. *Localities, Class and Gender* (London: Pion Press, 1985). The argument advances here is that social and economic changes can not be satisfactorily investigated without analyzing how the changes are embedded in distinct locales and that, in fact, localities themselves are a form of social organization. As David Harvey points out, though we think of "social processes and spatial forms" as distinct in thinking, they are not so in reality. The question, as he phrases it, is how to "heal the breach between two distinctive and irreconcilable modes of analysis." Harvey, *Social Justice And The City*, p. 10. See also: Anthony P. Cohen, ed. *Belonging; Identity and Social Organization in British Rural Communities* (St Johns', Newfoundland: Memorial University, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1982).

⁷² It would be important to remember that the concept of place itself is gendered. See: Judith A. Garber and Robyne S. Turner, "Introduction," *Gender in Urban Research Urban Affairs Annual Review #42*, (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1995), pp. x-xxvi.

⁷³ Hummon argues that, not only is this a relevant and accessible category, it also speaks to the need to organize socially in order to "situate the other." David A. Hummon, *Commonplaces: Community Ideology And Identity in American Culture* (New York, State University of New York, 1990) p. xiii, pp. 5-6. Anner argues that social categories of identity are tricky because they depend on the context of social cues derived from locality. See: John Anner, ed. *Beyond Identity Politics Emerging Social Justice Movements in Communities of Color* (Boston. MA.: South End Press, 1996,) p. 6.

⁷⁴ I prefer "contest" to "mediation", which is the term political scientist John A. Agnew develops in *Place And Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State And Society*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987,) p. x.

⁷⁵ Harris, "Race and Essentialism," p.609; Kessler-Harris, "Gender Ideology," p.36.

⁷⁶ Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History" in Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Randall *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 79-106.

⁷⁷ "Border Cases" is a term used by Mary Poovey. See: Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁷⁸ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁷⁹ See: Jane Lewis, "Dealing with Dependency: State Practices and Social Realities," *Women's Welfare, Women's Rights* (London: Croom Helm, 1983); Cora Baldock, and Bettina Cass, eds. *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia*. (Sydney, London and Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) and Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State*. (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State*. p. 9.

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 16.

⁸² Such institutions still existed in the Maritime Provinces at the onset of the depression. Nova Scotia, in fact, had a poor law in operation in 1930. See: Margaret Kirkpatrick Strong, *Public Welfare Administration in Canada* (Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969; 1st edition published 1930) p. 149.

⁸³ See Eve Brook and Ann Davis, eds. *Women, the Family and Social Work*. (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985).

⁸⁴ Cora Baldock and Bettina Cass, "Introduction", *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia* (Sydney, London and Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. xii.

⁸⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 82 - 83.

⁸⁶ James Struthers has argued this is a preoccupation with the creation of national perspective on the welfare state in Canada. See: James Struthers, "Review: The Provincial Welfare State: Social Policy on Ontario," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1992) p. 136.

⁸⁷ Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 1 - 2.

⁸⁸ Potential recipients may have had their own reasons for rejecting relief. In some cases, perhaps, shame as instilled and taught by societal mores may have played a part, but working class cultural norms, such as pride (a strong component of respectability) and a desire for privacy, a distrust of the state in general, plus a reluctance to surrender decision making into the hands of bureaucrats also played a part. In fact, the shift from direct carceral institutions to self-policing structures may have created more opportunities for individuals to escape surveillance and manipulate the systems to their own ends. See:

Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 3 - 5, and 62 - 63, for an example of this.

⁸⁹ Such assumptions were enforced and reinforced through both formal and informal means, from general hostility to women in the workforce to specific labor laws excluding them from certain professions. In spite of the circular reasoning of values and laws designed to exclude women from the workforce, the participation rates of women in the work force (and even bearing in mind the likely inaccuracy of these figures) has steadily climbed, a trend the 1930s did not undermine. For more on the discussion on women's labor force participation see: Ruth Schwartz-Cowan, "Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife Between the Wars." *Women's Studies*. 3, (1976,) pp.147-172; Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980.)

⁹⁰ It must be remembered that State Census figures may not always accurately reflect women's realities. Michiel Horn, *The Great Depression of the 1930s in Canada*, (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Society, 1984), p. 11. See also: Veronica Strong Boag, *The New Day Recalled: The Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark, Pitman, 1989, 1993) p. 43.

⁹¹ In pragmatic terms this meant the mother was expected to devote all her time to motherhood and not seek employment nor was she allowed male company. The parallels with the "man in the house" rules of contemporary welfare programs is striking. See, for example, Margaret Little, "Manhunts and Bingo Blabs: The Moral Regulation of Ontario Single Mothers." *Poverty: Feminist Perspectives Conference Papers*. Vancouver: Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations, 1994.

⁹² Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor Peoples' Movements: Studies from the Contemporary United States* (New York: Pantheon Books, c1977) p.11.

⁹³ This kind of work was commonly known as "boondoggling", i.e. mindless and unnecessary. See, among others,: Michiel Horn, *The Great Depression of the 1930s in Canada*. (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Society, 1984), p. 11. James Gray, among others, recalls this phenomena in *The Winter Years*.

⁹⁴ Many autobiographies and oral history interviewees recall the importance of hard or "real" work for the men of the family. For examples of how work was spoken in the interviews for this research see the following: Jack Geddes, Oral History interview #V024, May 25, 1995. Jack recalls the pleasure of leaving the relief camps and working the harvests again and feeling muscles return after months of "laying around" in the relief camps he characterized as 'dead end.' Norm H., Oral History Interview #V022, Nov. 30, 1995. Norm recalls his father was always a hard worker but "taking relief work was a matter of survival". John Moonen, Oral History Interview #V025, Dec. 7 1994. John recalls he took whatever work he could during the depression years as long as it was "real" work, even if

it was only washing bottles. One woman still weeps as she recalls witnessing her father's loss of manhood (he broke down and cried) in the face of the relief system. Mae Findlay Oral History Interview #V049, July 17, 1996. For an example of autobiographical recollections see: Henry Henig, *I Sold Myself a Dream*. (New York: Exposition Press, 1977.) In chapter called dignity of work Henry describes pain of working as blocker working with tools, having to reuse same nails. "...the pain was unbearable but it had to be endured. After all, earning \$3 a week for a 50 hour week was quite an achievement."(p.158)

⁹⁵ H.W. Cooper, "Final Report", dated June 20, 1932. City Clerk Files, 33-B-2, 1932, Vol. IX, Relief, (2).

⁹⁶ H.W. Cooper, "Final Report", dated June 20, 1932. City Clerk Files, 33-B-2, 1932, Vol. IX, Relief, (2).

⁹⁷ The dichotomous analysis of gender simply promotes the illusion of choice while simultaneously denying it. See: Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference: or, The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism." *Feminist Studies*. 14, no. 1, (Spring, 1988), p. 45.

⁹⁸ That is, the argument is made that women are equal to men and have access to equal opportunities. However, the argument continues to justify inequalities by asserting that women are, by nature, more prone to make particular choices because of biological imperatives. Gender analysis undertaken as a discussion of interdependencies, interrelationships and multiplicity in constructing social identity and shared interests, is not restricted by a hermetically sealed notion of female and male.

⁹⁹ Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, op. cit. p.20; p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ This further illustrates Poovey's description of border cases as issues which bring together the normalized ideal and the aberrant deviant. In this case relief postulates an idealized norm of the family and measures against this the failing family: the family in need of relief.

¹⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault identified institutions such as education, social work, etc, as part of a process of normalcy, whereby these agencies function as disciplinary forces serving to pacify the population as a labor force.

Chapter Two

Crossing Boundaries: Oral History Methodology in Practice

"Not disadvantaged - curse that word of the sniffing middle classes suggesting as it does that there's nothing worse than not being like them."

Alden Nowlan, *Selected Poems*, 1996¹

Memory has always proven difficult for historians to confront, committed as they are to notions of objectivity beyond the definitive subjectivity of individual and collective recall. Usually, the evidence of memory is considered as an information source to be confirmed by scholarship or, alternatively, as a way of getting a kind of impressionistic gestalt beyond accountable testing.

Michael Frisch, "The Memory of History"²

All memory is autobiographical...We can label history "objective" and memory "subjective" but such labels are relative at best; there are many parallels and much remains only probable in validating the contents of either.

Bruce Ross, *Remembering the Personal Past*³

If the place of most confrontation was within the relief offices themselves, then it would make sense that this would be a prime area for exploration by the historian interested in the experiences of the poor with state policy in the 1930s. Of course, records of these intimate interactions of policy and people are rare. It is one thing to argue that one of the historian's primary roles is to facilitate self identification by historical actors and another to actually do this. As the records stand, women and other disadvantaged groups considered in this study were subject to the indictment and interpretation of the record keepers. As Alden Nowlan puts it, in the view of the middle class policy makers and enforcers, there was nothing worse than "not being like them."⁴ This chapter discusses how contemporary historical source documents, such

as relief department records and photographs, can be used in conjunction with oral history methodology to explore how those in the 1930s perceived themselves. The combination of methodologies reveals the realities behind the actual processes and judgements of the relief departments in Vancouver and Saskatoon and uncovers the insights and broader subtexts oral history can access. The result of the close examination provided by these methodologies is a picture of territorial competition - for dignity, for survival, for self definition and for control. This was a competition the relief department did not always win.

Oral history has been generally seen as a generator of raw historical data but there is more to oral history methodology than the simple excavation of hitherto untapped historical evidence. Certainly, oral history can access direct, unmediated data but there is, in the practice of the methodology, important and central historical themes. Politics, identity, culture, and reality are illuminated because of the “altered relationship” between historian and subject in the generation of historical data.⁵

As with data generated by any other historical methodology, oral history material requires the balance and correction of other sources. There is ample documentation on the development and administration of policy and on the workings of the relief department from the perspective of its staff. The one written source that might shed some light on the interplay between recipients and the department, case files, have been destroyed or are simply missing.⁶ Enough fragments of case files do exist scattered among other records, defensive reports of the Relief Officer to City Council frequently make use of verbatim extracts from case files, to indicate what a rich source these records would have made.⁷ Certainly, they contain descriptions and perceptions from relief department staff on the living conditions of the working class and

their bias is often revealed and revealing. Inadvertently, however, and with careful reading, they also provide insight into attitudes and opinions as expressed by relief recipients. While these fragments of case files may present a biased sample, representing only those with sufficient self possession, education or anger to speak up, they do give a flavour of what has been lost to the historian.

Developing an alternative methodology for research on the unemployed in the 1930s presents challenges, then, because of both pragmatic and ideological concerns. From the purely pragmatic perspective, documentation has always been sadly lacking for the experiences of the majority of women and others excluded from the traditional sources of power in Canadian society. Often lacking the skills and resources or too busy to record their own lives and too “unimportant” to have any one else do it, few contemporary, self-produced records of ordinary people’s experiences exist.⁸ Even in those cases where records were produced, there are no guarantees that the records would, or do, transfer into archives. Almost every historian or archivist knows the anguish associated with the knowledge that a collection of immeasurable value has been lost or destroyed because its importance was not recognised. For example, Effie Jones, a prominent activist in Vancouver, reports that she destroyed all the records of the Housewife’s League in the belief they were of no interest to anyone.⁹ Lil Stoneman, active in a wide variety of organisations, burned all her correspondence, including correspondence with Albert Kaufman - a leading advocate of birth control in Ontario - on the birth control movement.¹⁰

Records of women’s (and men’s) involvement with the relief system other than case file records do exist. Ironically, given that part of the intention of the state at the time was to

eradicate “subversive” organizations (a term very broadly defined), the clandestine activities of the R.C.M.P. in infiltrating many of the ad-hoc and short lived protest groups has provided a source of detailed records on many of the activities, groups and individuals active in this period. The bureaucracy itself became an unintended guardian of historical evidence generated by those who were generally considered “voiceless” in the writing of Canadian history.¹¹

There is evidence in other forms as well. For example, women like Alice Willis, whose letter to the Mayor is quoted in chapter five, are captured in the official record to support the notion that women were vitally interested, and actively involved, in the issues surrounding relief. Numerous letters of complaint, outrage and protest, as well as records of petitions, delegations and presentations to various bodies, their cases of appeal, and their applications for relief have been archived as part of the City Clerk’s records in both Vancouver and Saskatoon.

The experiences and feelings of women as expressed in their own words or transcribed in the official views of the bureaucrats provides two perspectives. The officials recording these conditions in their reports and case files filter their commentary through the image of how the relief system expected families and gender roles to play out. The women themselves, in the depositions or other representations they made on their own behalf, expressed how the families and gender were actually experiencing the system.¹² In addition to understanding the conditions of their lives as recorded through the eyes of bureaucrats, it is also possible to trace the nature of their reactions and responses to the conditions that the relief system attempted to impose.¹³

Government records, though filtered through the expectations and values of the government’s visitors and investigators, contain a fount of information on the lives and conditions of working people. The records which survive in the civic archives amount to more

than an example of the “disproportionate information available about elite male discourse.”¹⁴ While the records of the city relief bureaucrats capture and reflect the voice of the “male gaze” of authority, this does not automatically disqualify the records as useless for understanding the lives of those who came under the direction of the department.¹⁵ The documents are imbued with the judgements and assumptions which informed the authors of these reports and, as such, allow assessment of the measures and conventions which were expected to govern the lives of the relief recipients.

Furthermore, the bureaucracies of Vancouver and Saskatoon in the 1930s reflected a change in the structures and functions of bureaucracy within a more literate society. The democratic process of the bureaucracy captured the appeals, demands and opinions - the direct voice - of the poorer classes it was serving. Correspondence from individuals angered by the system or groups and individuals acting as advocates for relief recipients survive within the civic records. Though this sample is biased by the various levels of literacy, assertiveness, expectations, or desperation of those who took pen to paper and risked the wrath of the relief system, the presence of these voices and their response to the system demonstrates that levels of patience and passiveness were wearing thin. The contrast between the formal records of the bureaucracy and the more personal and evocative records demonstrates the conflicts arising between conventions or expectations of appropriate behaviour for relief recipients and the various individuals and organisations beginning to challenge and possibly reject those notions. A further complication is that the mixed messages that inhabit many of the more personal records demonstrating the personal conflicts individuals underwent. While struggling to reject much of the more conventional modes of behaviour associated with the rules of relief, many recipients

still claimed to be respectable and deserving. For example, so-called domestic values, the ideals of home and family life, are invoked by both female and male writers to justify their appeals. At other times writers of both sexes completely ignore such values, and focus on demands for justice, or more efficiency from the bureaucracy as a servant of the tax payers. Often letters combine a variety of these issues and values in their appeals.

The conflicts captured in the written records show the bureaucracy attempting to preserve the facade of relief as a last ditch, unpleasant necessity doled out through the kind-heartedness of the local authorities to genuinely needy, local citizens. Carrying out the instructions of government policy on the front lines of battle, bureaucrats could not ignore the conflicts. The assumption of relief as a "pension" or a right, and as inadequate, became well established among the working poor and unemployed of the thirties and competed with the official line of relief as something relievers were supposed to qualify for and earn - a concept which justified the devotion of an entire section of the relief bureaucracy to investigating the legitimacy of relief applications.

A further written source on relief as a policy action is found in another aspect of the bureaucratic system: the detailed reports kept when the bureaucracy itself was investigated. Commissions of Enquiry were appointed to "investigate" the operations of the Relief Department, in both Saskatoon and Vancouver. The Commissions were authorised by the respective city councils and directed to investigate complaints and perceived shortcomings in the administration of relief. These reports, often critical of the system, though less so of the values underlying relief, provide intimate glimpses of how the bureaucracy of the departments actually worked and how relief may have appeared to the recipients.¹⁶

The detailed documents gathered in the course of these investigations allow the researcher to trace the evolution of particular relief policies and the controversies that swirled around them. Further, the attention paid to relief generally in the local community, and especially to its costs, ensured very intense records survive. The records of daily operations within relief departments are very rich deposits for historians of social policy, despite the absence of case files or the difficulties associated with them.

There are fewer written records on the popular perceptions of relief policy. Letters to the editor, or to various political or influential figures give some account of the contemporary insights of a literate and perhaps self assertive section of both the relief population and the local population in general, however, the views of the majority are not recorded in these written formats.

Overall, the written records available are valuable, if read with care, for providing multiple perspectives on the struggle of women to maintain homes and families on relief allowances. Those generated by governmental sources are problematic without addressing the potential bias and shortcomings inherent in the material. In order to address this traditional documentary research, extant documentation has been combined with oral history methodology. This has multiple benefits. Interviewees provide insights into the functioning of the department, encouraging a 're-reading' of the documents, while the written records provide check, balance and reminder to the oral history process. Thus, a major task in this dissertation has been to seek out individuals who were on relief in the 1930s and explore their experiences with the system.

An obstacle facing the collection of potential interviews was the fact many people prefer to forget this period or wish to erase the fact that they ever received relief, or are suspicious

about talking of their involvement in activities labelled communist at the time. At the same time, there are many who wish to add to the historical record with an account of their perceptions and experiences. The oral histories conducted for this research has developed a rich and detailed primary source on the actual conditions and strategies of those who both lived on, or managed to avoid, the relief bureaucracies in Vancouver and Saskatoon. (The process involved in pursuing the oral history interview process is covered in appendix 1.) The 1930s were a period of low literacy and education was secondary to the necessity of acquiring the skills for making a living.¹⁷ The majority of working class Canada lived in an oral culture.¹⁸ Skills, political opinions and knowledge was conveyed to families and neighbours by word of mouth. This dependency and facility with oral culture is persistent. Oral traditions are both source of resistance to change from outside the community as well as origin of change and innovation.¹⁹ This makes oral history an appropriate methodology for this project and justifies the choice of oral history as the major methodological approach in this work. In fact, oral history has long been utilised by anthropologists and ethnographers as a valuable resource for research in oral based societies.

Oral history is still, in many respects, the outcast cousin in the family of historical methodologies. The recent Tri-council code of ethics, for example, underscores the abysmal ignorance of history as an intellectual discipline and the ethical concerns associated with the use of oral history. For example, the practice of informed consent, rigorously applied as in this research, more than adequately addresses the questions raised and purportedly answered by the Tri-council's proposed code of conduct for research involving humans.²⁰ Even supporters of oral history have tended to diminish oral history by seeing it as either a tool for collecting unmediated narratives or for escaping the confines and limitations of the academic institutions that have

excluded “the people” from history books, a paradox Michael Frisch describes as the “more history or no history” approach.²¹ While we are compelled to defend the validity of oral history as an historical methodology, we allow opportunities for improving and expanding the practice of oral history to be derailed. There are real concerns with the practice of oral history, but they are not the ones that are identified by detractors. For most historians,²² the sole result of oral history is “old men drooling about their past”.²³ Paul Thompson, in the *Voice of the Past*, denounced such wholesale rejection. He issued a call to arms, for a history of the people, by the people, for the people, which only oral history could achieve. For Thompson, oral history demonstrates both radical potential and a dramatic return to basic historiographical roots.²⁴

This methodology may not be the only tool employed to construct a people’s history, but feminist and other historians have long recognised its importance in contributing to the historical record. Especially for historians of the poor, oral history allows access to the voices of the forgotten, the silenced and “others” ignored by traditional research. Further, the “secret” and “private” lives of women, traditionally unimportant, ignored and inaccessible to established research methods, are accessed by oral history.²⁵ If we understand history and politics as an on-going dynamic relationship between and among individuals,²⁶ then oral history, in addition, accesses those relationships at personal and intimate levels.

Neglected and abused, praised and feted, only recently and in the sweat shop of practice, has the promise and the problems of oral history become apparent.²⁷ Practitioners have come to terms with the limitations and challenges of using oral history as a tool of historical research. Process, the actual how of the methodology, is one of the major issues to emerge in using oral history. This is because there is a potential for a challenge to intellectual hegemony inherent in

the charged relationship between historian and subject. In oral history a shared authorship evolves and results from the actual process of the methodology. The results of oral history research are open to the same problems of collection, retrieval, interpretation, and bias as any other historical source. The oral history researcher must utilise the same skills of critical reading, the same balancing information with context and other sources, and seek internal and external bias, as they would with any form of historical record. The process of oral history research is far more fraught in the execution than historians are normally familiar with a prospect that has advantage. The perils of historical interpretation are far more overt than with traditional documentary research.

Thus, researchers undertaking original oral history face both advantages and hazards different from those working solely with written materials. While the challenge to authorial singularity is present, the oral historian has more input into the process of retrieval and creation of the historical record.²⁸ Whereas the researcher working only with written materials is restricted by what has survived, the researcher pursuing an oral interview has a medium which can be interrogated in an ongoing and interactive way that is impossible with most traditional sources.²⁹ The historian can engage the narrator, the person being interviewed, for their particular meaning, interpretation and feelings.

Recognising that oral history can be an effective tool in the historical process has meant, that with increasing practice, there is a more sophisticated understanding of the problems associated with producing effective and credible oral history. The identification of these problems springs from a desire to make oral history live up to its potential.³⁰ The solutions arise

from the concrete confrontation of the past in the present, of unequal power relationships, of oral versus written meaning, of memory versus history.

Ownership has become a primary question that has arisen around the issue of who owns what is basically the result of a transaction, a collaboration, between researcher and interviewee. For the interviewee or; “giving away my private life”,³¹ involves sharing insights, information, experiences, and feelings about the past.³² The interviewer records these as raw material, as evidence to illustrate, develop, or support “her” arguments. The narrator may not recognise herself and her life in the results of the interviewer’s work. In spite of the best intentions to extend the collaboration beyond the interview, to disperse the power she wields, the interviewer does hold all the power and control over any information generated by the process. Regardless of any commitment to a shared process, the interviewer exercises a disproportionate share of the control over the research and what happens to it.

In addition to the control exercised over the end product, there is the question of the control and influence exercised during the interview itself. The interviewer, consciously or otherwise, may well be influencing the historical record under construction. What is required is a sensitivity to the potential for this; a readiness to address the implications of power, the dynamic of how control, power and influence are played out in the process of the oral history interview. In some respects, the oral history process makes more explicit the role of the historical researcher in the creation of the historical record.

It may be difficult to disentangle the complexities of power and control, personality, politics, economics and circumstances that contribute to the social construction of memory and remembered historical experience but it is not impossible. To understand how people recall their

past requires discovering the process of definition and changing definitions that is at the core of the social construction historians, and ordinary people, use to describe the past. The oral history testimony as process encourages the agency of those involved in the past in a creative present based endeavour and in some respects allows individuals an opportunity to challenge the hegemony of historians over the intellectual process of creating history. The respondents engaged for this research expressed delight at the opportunity to participate and, as many put it, to contribute their “2 cents worth”. For some, there was a sense of correcting a record they felt inadequately represented their views and experiences. In recording their own experiences, they also had the chance to contribute the issues that they thought were important.

As part of the oral history process, the participants in this research established the criteria and categories by which they understood and made sense of the past. This is memory as social construct, whereby meaning is ascribed and understood in the context of the past and the present. Through oral history interviews, people constructed narratives that not only related their experiences and but also how they understood those experiences. The interviews record not only *what* they remembered, but also *how* they remembered and interpreted their own pasts. In this process the interviewer became stand-in, a representative of the establishment and repository for their opinions, insights and take on history.³³

In some cases, particularly in those interviewees who were children during the depression years, some memories recalled during the interview are unreflective, retrieved almost unfiltered. It appears as if the same anguish, anger, or delight that marked the recalled episode is relived once the opportunity to enter into the past and retrieve it is offered. Critical incidents, events, entire conversations, seem caught and held suspended, like fossils in amber, untouched by

subsequent critical analysis one might expect from the adult recollecting the events. Tones of voice changed, eyes glazed over, the person appears to “leave the room” to completely reenter the past and forget my presence and the purpose of the interview which is sparking the recollections. For a novice interviewer, this was an uncanny and disturbing experience. I found the best reaction was to interrupt this process, to ensure individuals, if they were to continue with retrieving these memories, did so from a choice made in the present tense of the interview, not the past tense of reentering the past.

Some of the incidents recalled raised particular ethical concerns. A woman recalling the first beating she received from her husband, on her honeymoon, a man recalling sexual abuse at the hands of a trusted neighbour clearly caused distress and shame. Events such as these may never have been disclosed before to anyone and the historical agenda of the researcher has to be replaced by simple humanitarian compassion. In these situations, interrupting the recollections could have been traumatising for the interviewee could well have interpreted interruption as judgmental and silencing. Though the historian is no substitute for a trained counsellor or therapist, the first concern must be for the health and well being of the interviewee and in these cases, this becomes the simple act of “bearing witness”. There are other concerns to be addressed, ensuring there are resources to support and help and to make sure the interviewee has someone they trust to turn to, for example, but simply to be a receptive voice to the testimony of remembered pain is a simple but meaningful act.³⁴

While there are ethical concerns with the unexpected intrusion of remembered trauma, the experience of such interviews provides an insight into the collision of the historian’s agenda and real life history. What may be of importance to interviewees in their recollections of the

1930s may not be what historians have determined as important.³⁵ How to integrate and honour testimonies such as these and balance them with necessity of creating a coherent and complete picture is a challenge fraught with pitfalls.

For those interviewees who may not be recalling such traumatic events, a multiple layer of information is accessible to the researcher. The initial recollection is usually very rich data but a critical reflection from the adult mind can also be encouraged. This intersection of past and present, treated carefully, is not drawback but advantage. The contrast between the direct and unmediated reflections of younger interviewees or of traumatic recollections with other styles of recall illustrates a triangulation between researcher, subject and experience as well as between past, present and interview. Oral history recollections which are mediated and reflective demonstrate the subject undertaking the analysis, the ordering and interpretation that transforms historical evidence into historical statement.³⁶

Other interviews, regardless of the age of interviewees in the depression, offered different problems. For example, it was initially very difficult to find people willing to admit to actually having been on relief in the 1930s (A complete list of interviewees is available in appendix 2). This speaks volumes on the mythology of relief still, years later, imposing its spectre of shame and markings of failure. It took, in some cases, time to build the trust for individuals to speak of a period and experiences many of them spent a lifetime trying to forget. Conversations on the assurance of confidentiality became important (see appendix 3 for a copy of the consent form used in this stage of the oral history interview process). Considerable effort was expended assuring potential interviewees that what was of importance was their information - not their identity. As long as the information could be verified as genuine by subsequent

researchers, the use of their identity was secondary. Initial contacts with potential interviewees were devoted to educating them about the nature of oral history and about their role and responsibilities in the process. No interview was scheduled until the individual was fully informed about all the implications of participation. In some cases, this meant holding off those who were only too ready to tell their stories but who met me at the door and started to talk. All interviewees were given an information letter which included all the information covered verbally, including the names and phone numbers of who to contact in case of any difficulties.

Part of the introductory session was devoted to reviewing the consent form. The consent form designed for this research allowed interviewees to choose whether they would allow their names to be used in conjunction with their information, or to designate a pseudonym or other means of identification. This caveat became an important tool. Many interviewees, though I insisted that justification for declining to use names was not necessary, were intent on explaining their decisions.³⁷ The reasons they volunteered for their preference for anonymity initially appeared to make little sense to me. I could see nothing shameful in the reasons they gave for preferring to keep their identity concealed. After listening to several unsolicited explanations it became apparent that the concept of respectability was motivating individuals to disguise their identity and the concept was important enough that they had to ensure the reasons why were part of my understanding. For example, one woman did not want her name used because she wanted to tell me “the truth” and did not want the truth to be known by her family. In this case, the truth was how she met her husband. She had picked him up at a bus stop but, coming from a strict religious background and a strong cultural tradition of female behaviour, she had told her mother

that they had met at a church social, a myth that the couple had sustained even after her mother's death. The bus stop incident was not respectable female behaviour and as such had to be buried.

In some cases, these preliminary introductory sessions became an interview - of me. Potential interviewees wanted to understand the reasons why I had chosen this topic, who I was, my class status and political background, before consenting to an interview. One gentleman interviewed me for almost four hours. He told me later he had to be sure I "wasn't from the government". He was afraid the government was trying to find out if he had been "communistic" in the 1930s so they could take away his pension.³⁸

I also interviewed individuals who were not actually on relief. This expanded my understanding and grasp of the concept of relief held in the minds of many who struggled desperately to stay off it. I grasped the power of the relief system even in the lives of those who were not actually relief recipients as I heard of the lengths individuals would go to avoid falling into the clutches of the relief department. I acquired insight into the strategies that enabled people to avoid relief or to stay off it as long as they could. One interviewee remembered how his father sold their home in 1934, paid off the mortgage and bills with the proceeds of the sale and rented a house with the remaining money where he opened a shoe repair store in the front. The income from the store had to be supplemented with various strategies including capturing sparrows and raising goats and with the money the children in the family could earn. The interviewee, though as he said he "didn't tell everybody this", quit school after grade six so that he could work and everything he earned went for food. In spite of all these efforts, his mother became seriously ill and by 1937 the family had to go on relief.³⁹

My ideas and plans for the dissertation topic, “women on relief” was challenged by the process of carrying out the oral history interviews. Initially, I had intended to interview only women, to explore the life of the home front. The very first interview I carried out was with a woman whose husband was present while we had tea. In a comfortable, but small home where there was no place for the husband to retire to (he was lame and ensconced in the one comfortable chair in the house). I could not tolerate the idea of banishing him to the kitchen for the duration of the interview and invited him, with the permission of my interviewee, to be part of the interview. Ironically, because of these class differences in their circumstances during the depression, he actually knew more about running a household in the depression and the work of women than she did, because his family was much poorer. In his family, he and his brothers helped his mother because they had to. In her family, where her father kept his job throughout the depression, her mother had domestic help and the children were not expected to help with the housework.⁴⁰ This was one of the first challenges to my preconceived notions that came through oral history.

While class differences, dressing for dinner versus not having dinner at all, were very obvious in the comparison of the experiences of this man and wife, what was more problematic for my project was the breakdown of gender roles. I expected work to be done, in the homes of those I interviewed, according to the ideals of gender role expectations. Instead, I found that when circumstances demanded, work was done by whomever was available. That is, depending on circumstances, gender was malleable. In families with no boys, girls were roped into domestic labour usually assigned to boys. In families with no girls, boys were expected to carry out the domestic labour most commonly thought of as “women’s work”.⁴¹ Sometimes, gender

seemed irrelevant. One interviewee, one of five girls in a family with ten children, was the only one to help her father with butchering.⁴² In some households, personalities held sway. Women who despised housework, would delegate household tasks to children and take on outdoor work instead.⁴³ Some men undertook work generally considered feminine, including child care, cooking and sewing, when out of work, if they had leanings in that direction.⁴⁴ To be sure, these are not in the majority, but the deciding factor in most cases regarding the allocation of the increased domestic labour associated with the unemployment of the depression years was not simply gender alone. Without the apprenticeship approach, I may have missed much of the subtleties and insights, such as these, that individuals had to share.

This was the most valuable lesson of the experiential learning of actually carrying out the oral history interviews: to shut up and listen. I approached every interview with the same question set, I endeavoured to ensure the interview finished with answers to that set of questions, I did not attempt to control or direct the interviews. The first question was deliberately designed to encourage interviewees to determine their own priorities and to open up lines of enquiry and took almost two years to develop: "What is your most vivid memory from the depression years?" The follow up question was designed to focus the respondent in the daily world of the 1930s: "Where were you in 1929?" (For a copy of the interview schedule see appendix 4). The remainder of the questions covered five major themes: family and neighbourhood, school and employment history, social relations, gender issues and relief. Thus, the interviews incorporated both a set of standard questions relevant to the dissertation topic and open ended questions which allowed the narrator to contribute their definitions of what is important and of interest. After listening to hundreds of interviews and conducting the original

interviews for this research, it became apparent that one of the most important and useful questions begins “Tell me about....”. Reminiscent of a child’s appeal for a favourite story, this question balances both the researcher’s need to focus on a specific area and the need to encourage narrators to focus on what is important to them.

A most important ability arising from the selection and creation of respectful and effective questions is skilled listening. It is too easy to assume one knows what the speaker means, to assume where the information fits and thus lose vital opportunities to unearth meaningful and insightful material.⁴⁵ This is compounded by an interviewer intent on her own agenda, who pursues only the issues of interest to her and who derails the narrator from where memory was leading.

A major area of concern associated with skilled listening is the translation and interpretation of information.⁴⁶ There are many pitfalls in the process of hearing the spoken word and language used, of understanding the speaker’s terms of reference, rather than assuming their meaning. The assumption that we share the same terms of reference often means imposing our own understanding on the words used. Further, the nuance of words filtered through race, age, language, class, gender, may influence our perceptions. The specificity of language to the common assumptions of a particular time and place, affects interpretation. There is also the imposition of internally and externally constructed sanctions and censors. A woman may say what she feels she is supposed to say, or present herself in a way that is socially acceptable. An example of this is the number of women who took to the roads, disguised as men and who showed up in headlines to the distress of social workers. The numbers who did this in America, according to contemporary observers may have been as high as one in twenty hoboes.⁴⁷ For

women who had feelings, attitudes, opinions or ambitions that did not fit in socially approved moulds, it was difficult to value and articulate an individual “truth” in the face of overwhelming disapproval.

Additionally, interviews must be taped. The voice itself is a valuable resource, particularly for those from orally based cultures. Personality, tone, inflection, emphasis are an integral part of the meaning inherent in the use of language, not readily translated into the simple transcription of the interview.⁴⁸ Further, the lyricism, poetry and ascribed meanings of the spoken word must be heard to be appreciated. For example, one or two word expressions, such as “oh”, “you see”, or “well” may be part of a distinctive speech pattern and be used to convey a variety of meanings from disgust to humour, contentment or surprise.⁴⁹

Oral history practitioners need to bear in mind that other researchers will want to access their material. In the interest of expanding the historical record, anything that can facilitate access to the material is commended. A bibliographical form and an interview summary form (included as part of appendix 3), should be a standard part of an oral history archival deposit. While a number of interviews were carried out for the purpose of this research, the vast collection of oral history interviews already in existence was also used.⁵⁰ While using interview material generated by other researchers is different from conducting original interviews and more akin to using other primary historical sources, it does raise some unique ethical concerns, particularly if the consent process used is not of the same standard as developed for this research. For this project, interviewees were clearly informed the material gathered would be made available and public. Any restrictions interviewees might wish to place on access would be conveyed to the archives on deposit and observed. Other than this, the understanding negotiated was that the information

became part of the historical record and could be used by other researchers years from now with very different topics and very different perspectives than mine. This was an important distinction, I believed. Interviewees need to understand that no matter how personable the interviewer or how sympathetic they found this particular topic and approach, they needed to remember that there would be other researchers to follow. It is not always clear that this distinction has been made clear to the interviewees in other oral history collections.⁵¹

There is no claim to the creation of a properly representative sample in this research. Rather, this is a truly random sample. Any one willing to be interviewed who fell into the path of the outreach process was included. As a result the sample is a wide cross section of religions, ages, classes, occupations and marital states. (See Appendix 5 for the description of these categories.) However, what is important to note that these “ordinary” voices are treated on par with, and used to contribute to and substantiate, the evidence gathered from other more notable sources, such as Mayor Lyle Telford of Vancouver. Those, like Telford, with position and power have a voice that is already audible in the historical record.⁵²

Oral history must be used with the same caution and care as any other historical source. The same tests for accuracy must be applied. With these in place, and used in conjunction with other sources, oral interviews have the potential to reveal an otherwise obscured experience and to enrich our appreciation of the past as they give some insight into accommodations and challenges offered by individuals who were on the receiving end of the relief system. How individuals redrew the boundaries of acceptable gender and class roles in the face of a system that was slowly starving them of food, hope and dignity becomes apparent in the words, often poetic and evocative, that people find and articulate in the oral history interview. The vivid and

detailed recollections of experiences in the five thematic areas of the questions for this research provided a wealth of information for the dissertation.

The use of photographs during the oral history interview is another important methodology. Not only do extant photographs provide another source of information on lives and conditions of relievers for, as John Berger puts it, "...no other relic or text can offer such direct testimony about the world that surrounded people at other times" they also act as reminder for the interviewee.⁵³

The camera, as Roland Barthes argued, was used as an instrument of evidence, a type of "Cassandra in reverse".⁵⁴ Evidence and photography were linked to the emergence of new institutions and new practices of observation and record keeping by the late nineteenth century, when photography was used in support of "social and political regulation".⁵⁵ The evidentiary nature of photographs, and the uses to which they were put reveals the fact that photographs have their own rhetoric, their own languages and systems of meaning. The historian needs the ability to read photographs like text, for multiple levels of meanings and intentions.⁵⁶ To decode the layers of representation and meaning poses particular problems for the historian. The chemical and physical transformations of the photographer's gaze filtered through stylised and socialised perceptions passes through the lens and fixes a selected, specific moment and objects, from a myriad of others onto film then paper. This creation leaves a physical object, a tangible memento, to be transformed again by the gaze and perceptions of the viewer.⁵⁷ To "read" photographs, then, is to take into account an appreciation of the institutions and discourse involved in both the production and interpretations - or the "encoding and decoding" - of

photographs.⁵⁸ This reading involves analysing factors such as posture, gesture, proxemics, and expression.⁵⁹

Used in this way, photographs have the potential to pierce stereotypes, evade constructed barriers and peer behind institutional structures.⁶⁰ For example, the photographs of Madeline (Mattie) Gunterman challenge and resist comfortable notions of appropriate gender behaviour for women, by challenging and resisting the religious iconography which inscribes many formal and informal photographs of women.⁶¹ Dorothea Lange's photographs of women during the depression demonstrate the "stripping" of gender signifiers which accompanied poverty.⁶² Such evidence can contradict and expand the historical record. The understanding of photographs and their value to the historian is important.

Both Vancouver and Saskatoon possess extensive and useful photograph collections. Though Canada has nothing to match the collections produced by the Farm Security Administration in America, which sent photographers such as Dorothea Lange out to record the experiences and conditions of the poor and unemployed, individual photographers responded to the plight of individuals in front of them and were moved to capture images of these experiences on film.⁶³ These were not always created by professional photographers. For example, a manager at the harbour commission photographed the homes springing up on Harbour Commission property.

As a result of such efforts, though, the Vancouver Public Library has a photographic collection which exceeds 200,000 images.⁶⁴ Among these is a detailed chronicling of the active political life and protests of the city during the thirties. One Vancouver photographer's personal mission was to document every political march and demonstration that occurred during the

period. Major Matthews, the eccentric but prolific archivist who established the Vancouver City Archives, also established an extensive photograph collection. Leonard Hillyard, a popular and respected photographer in Saskatoon, documented many of the activities in the city, including responses to relief. During the thirties, other private individuals also took photographs to document events that struck them as important. The Reverend Andrew Roddan, for example, took a photographer with him to the “jungle” to document both the conditions there and his work in distributing food to the needy. Newspaper photographs, private donations and family albums also contribute to the images held in the more formal collections and to the general use of photographs as a resource.

An unexpected advantage of carrying out oral history interviews was the unlimited access interviewees gave me to photographs and other ephemera of inestimable value to the historian. Narrators were willing to share more than their memories. Many of them almost forced materials they have treasured, photographs, press clippings, diaries, letters, books, on their interviewers. I saw relief cards, unemployed union membership cards, love letters, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, pillow cases and tea-towels made from flour sacks, all manner of historical objects with the added advantage of speakers testifying to the provenance and meaning of these objects. For example, a famous photograph, frequently reproduced, showing the Vancouver Mother’s Council marching in a May Day parade in Vancouver, and which I often took with me to oral history interviews showed the grandmother of one my interviewees. He was able to speak quite knowledgeably about the Mother’s Council and was thrilled to see the photograph.⁶⁵ Narrators are often willing to share more than their memories. Further, they are often willing to refer and

introduce further potential interviewees once they are satisfied with the credentials of the researcher and their experience with the interview process.

All of these methodologies were used in conjunction with traditional research among primary and secondary sources on the 1930s. This painstaking work required slow and careful sifting for nuggets of information. Sometimes the rewards were immense. Too often, in common with many historical research endeavours, the payoffs were slight.

What is key to this research has been the willingness to open up alternative sources and pursue them with the same vigour and stringency of traditional historical methods. The challenge to actually hear how those in the past described themselves and their conditions has not always been easy. On many occasions my own deeply held beliefs have been challenged. I have come to respect many marriages as partnerships where once I would have seen only oppression. This is not to say that all marriages were wonderful, or that many marriages were not confining and restrictive for some people. It is to say that some people developed genuine partnerships that were not simply unthinking recreations of a patriarchal model that was oppressive of both women and men. Further, many people found religion to be a source of strength, support and solace in difficult times, in spite of my own assumptions that religion served only to silence and restrain the poor.

Having set out to challenge traditional historians' shortcomings in defining and assigning individuals in the past to restrictive categories that denied any real appreciation of their experiences, I found my own restrictive categorizing practices illuminated and changed. From considering only women on relief I began to incorporate both children and men. From seeing marriage and family as confines created solely in the interests of a capitalist patriarchy I began

to see how individuals defined and created those “institutions” on daily and local levels. The exploration of the concept of relief uncovered a broader and deeper level of resistance than I had anticipated or sought. Individuals, couples and families, regardless of the ideals spelt out by policy or imposed in respect by historians of whatever ideology, had their own world views, their own self definitions and their own standards to live by. These may have frequently come into conflict with standards developed and imposed by the society at large. But the ideals and prescriptions of the society in general did not crush or replace the ability of those on relief to shape their own understandings of the relief system nor to devise stratagems that ignored or transformed gender roles in the process.

ENDNOTES

¹ Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier, eds. *Alden Nowlan, Selected Poems* (n.p. Anansi, 1997).

² Michael Frisch, "The Memory of History," in *A Shared Authority: Essays in the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p.21.

³ Bruce Ross, *Remembering the Personal Past* (New York, 1991,) p. 151. Cited in Earl Lewis, "Community, Memory, Self and the Power of Place in African-American Urban History," in Kenneth Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African-American Urban History*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 122.

⁴ Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier, eds. *Alden Nowlan, Selected Poems* (n.p. Anansi, 1997).

⁵ See Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays in the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) for an interesting and provocative discussion of the potential of oral history beyond creator and repository of historical evidence.

⁶ The Vancouver Relief Department files were taken to the City Dump in the 1960s. In the case of Saskatoon: they have only recently hired an archivist and the City records, cared for by a records management company are not organized in a fashion that encourages historical access. See James Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairie* (Toronto: MacMillan & Co., 1966) p. ix, for his discussion on the paucity of source materials. The Freedom of Information act would make access to these records problematic even if they were available given the strict restrictions placed on the use of information that identifies individuals by name.

⁷ This was the practice of one particular relief officer. I have been unable to determine why he chose to do this. Was his choice to utilize the case file material motivated by laziness, simply to save himself time and effort of summarizing the case in question? Did he intend such extracts to convey a subtle message regarding the efficiency and thoroughness of his department? Or did he intend the case records to stand as proof of the objectivity and fair treatment of his department? Or was this an attempt to avoid responsibility, to transpose any decisions or information into the mouths of his underlings?

⁸ This is beginning to change as the skills of oral history are fuelled by interest among marginalized communities. See for example, Denise Chong's foreword to *The Concubine's Children: Portrait of a Family Divided* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994) for her discussion of the problems she encountered in recovering her family's history using oral history.

⁹ Effie Jones, Interview, S.F.U. Archives, 100/013/042. Also cited in Howard, *The Mother's Council*, p.253.

¹⁰ Lil Stoneman, Interview, [n.d.], S.F.U. Archives, 100/013/062.

¹¹ Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whittaker, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part I, 1933-1934* (St John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1993), p.15. See also: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Private Eyes and Public Women: Images of Class and Sex in the Urban South, Atlanta, Georgia, 1913 - 1915", in Ava Baron, ed. *Work Engendered, Toward a New History of American Labor* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 244. For the question of "whether the subaltern can speak" (i.e. whether the lives and voices of the other can be expressed through the work of academics,) see: Laura Pulido, "Community Place, and Identity," in John Paul Jones III, Heidi Nast and Susan M. Roberts, eds., *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1997) pp. 11-28.

¹² Careful reading suggests that there were times when recipients were clearly framing their arguments in ways designed to make them heard. That is, they are framed and shaped by interpretations of how the system worked and what "voice" the system would actually listen to and hear. Such framings were clearly part of a strategy to make representations more successful. A key example of this would be the stress on respectability, of never having relied on public alms before.

¹³ For an example of the work that can be done with extant case files, see: Beverly Stadum, *Poor Women and Their Families: Hard Working Charity Cases, 1900 - 1930* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992).

¹⁴ Rachel G Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p.6. Fuchs was addressing the difficulty in obtaining the direct voice of the poor in bureaucratic records of the institutions she examines in her study.

¹⁵ Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris*, p.6. Note: while the emerging profession of social work may have been dominated by women, relief was a municipal responsibility and part of the male dominated institution of municipal government. As such, relief was governed by political authority not a professional social work ethic. For example, medical care available through relief went through the city's medical health officer rather than through public health nurses. To ensure medical demands made by relievers were genuine.

¹⁶ This is very palpable in the reports of the various investigative Commissions. For example, Paul McDowell Kerr, appointed to investigate the Vancouver Relief Department after an initial report by Alderman, actually stood in line with relief recipients and experienced the hardships associated with the long line ups, which began at 2 a.m. See: Paul McDowell Kerr, *Commissioner, 1935 Relief Department Enquiry, Report of the Investigation*, Vancouver: [The

Commission], 30 July, 1935. C.V.A., Series 20, 16-D-3, file #5.

¹⁷ Interviewees report early ends to their education because of parental beliefs that employment was more important. This was did not always conform with the desire of the individual. For example, Don MacIntosh still regrets that he was unable to pursue the interests his schooling was instilling, but he took his father's advice and took an apprenticeship which would ensure a good job. See: Don MacIntosh, Oral History Interview #S020b, Saskatoon, Oct. 16, 1993. See also the discussion on parental views of prolonged education, especially for girls, in Chapter two of Joan Sangster's *Earning Respect*.

¹⁸ In spite of the importance of the newspaper as a major media source, many working class families were unable to afford the cost of the newspaper and information gleaned from newspapers was shared orally.

¹⁹ Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p.xv.

²⁰ Beatrice Craig of the University of Ottawa produced a thorough defense of historical research, including oral history methodology in a letter to M. Joly, in response to the Tri-Council's proposed code of ethics. See: Beatrice Craig, "Tri-Council Code of Ethics", H-Net List for Canadian History, 12 July, 1996. See also, "Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans", draft dated March 1996 and also J. Miller, "CHA's Response to Tri-Council Code of Conduct", H-Net List for Canadian History, July 9, 1996.

²¹ Michael Frisch, "Oral History and *Hard Times*" in *A Shared Authority*, op.cit. p.9.

²² The exceptions, I am reminded by my supervisor, are the historians of native peoples, who rely greatly on the tools of ethno-history, including oral testimonies.

²³ Anthony Seldon, *Contemporary History: Practice and Method* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 1. Also Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 edition), p. 70. The quoted remark was originally made by A.J.P. Taylor.

²⁴ See the chapter "History and the Community" in Thompson, *Voice of the Past*.

²⁵ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 7. Also see: Kathryn Anderson, Susan Armitage, Dana Jack and Judith Armitage, "Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology on Oral History", *Oral History Review* 15 (Spring 1987), p. 104.

²⁶ An adaptation of E.P. Thompson's ground breaking definition of class as process under construction. See the introduction, Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

²⁷ Michael Frisch, in *A Shared Authority* (op.cit) argues the new scholarship originating in the 1960s and 1970s (and including oral history,) has transformed the critical landscape. He believes the new scholarship is arguably the dominant intellectual reality but with little

control or influence. He sees, rather, the reverse. Methodologies such as oral history remain controversial and problematic. pp. xvii.

²⁸ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*. p. 5. Some historians may see this as "control over".

²⁹ This is not to say that written documents can not be interrogated, only that the interactive nature of oral history, which allows the narrator a place in the interpretation and development of the record, is missing. For example, in the absence of documentation regarding the lives of oppressed and silenced groups in society, such as women, natives, or immigrant groups, historians have taken to re-interrogating the traditional record. Re-reading governmental policy or a social worker's report with an eye to the context which produced it, and the language used may reveal unintended information which can give a "back door" entry into the lived of ordinary people. Some historians are taking a similar approach to diaries, letters and journals. I am grateful to Jacqui Parker-Snedker for discussions on this point drawn from her work on the diaries of Susan Allison and Anne Lister.

³⁰ Important discussions in this regard are emerging. See, for example, Shana Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1990.) The role of the person being interviewed, and the role of the interviewer as mediators of historical experience must be borne in mind.

³¹ Melitha Rose Kraus, Interview, Vancouver: March 1989. S.F.U. Archives, 100/16/001/1.

³² I do not wholly accept Michael Frisch's arguments about a "shared author-ity". Certainly, there is a shared authorship in the creation of the data in the oral history interview, but the ultimate power still lies in the hands of the historian as she or he uses the material. Further, I think Frisch contradicts himself and supports my case when he argues for a firm hand in editing the transcripts. See Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, p. 84 for this discussion.

³³ This revelation contrasted with the sense of guilt I had carried with me into interviews that I was exploiting people in the furtherance of my academic career. The SUNY project on unemployment in Buffalo encountered a similar phenomena. Concerned that the interviews they were conducting for a *New York Times Magazine* article on unemployment would transform individuals into "Sunday brunch", items served up for privileged and distant readers. Rather, they found individuals quite clear that they were using the article to gain access to that audience. Michael Frisch, "Oral History and the Presentation of Class Consciousness", in *A Shared Authority*, p.63.

³⁴ All individuals who were involved in these interviews reported a sense of relief and well being after the conclusion of the interview and at later times. All noted the fact of being heard, of finally articulating the experience was an important epiphany.

³⁵ That is to say the incidence of housemaid's knee in Belleville, Ontario, may well not interest Canadian historians, but it certainly was of interest to those who suffered from it. The conflict of who decides what is important to the historian's creation of the historical record and the intersection of topics with this decision making is more overt in the oral history collection process.

³⁶ Michael Frisch identifies this triangulation of subject historian and experience, and the struggle between past and present inherent in the triangulation, as the underlying unrecognized but central theme of the work of oral history. See his introduction, *A Shared Authority*, pp. xv-xxvi.

³⁷ I strived to ensure that my opinions did not influence anyone and accepted whatever directions I was given regarding use of names.

³⁸ Elof Kellner, Oral history interview #V026, Vancouver, Dec. 9, 1994.

³⁹ Oral history interview #VO21, Vancouver, Nov. 26, 1994. Name withheld by request.

⁴⁰ See: Oral history interview #S001, Saskatoon, Oct. 7, 1992. One member of the couple wished not to be identified, both names are withheld in any instances referring to them both. Where used separately, the identity used with permission will be given.

⁴¹ There has been evidence of this. Many oral history interviews record a different perception of the gendered division of labour and stress the equality of their experiences. See, for example, the interview with Kathryn Haskell Perrigo in *Making Do: How Women Survived the 1930s*. She says: "My husband and I pulled together, literally, all our lives. We worked and we struggled and we tried hard. We'd go to cut white oak fence posts and I pulled my end of the cross cut - a six foot cross cut saw - and he pulled his.... There was no "his" and "her" jobs on a farm We both did all the jobs we could." Jeanne Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the 1930s* (Chicago: Follett Publishing, 1976) p. 52-54.

⁴² Jean Fawcett, Oral history interview #S032, Saskatoon, June 2, 1994. Jean also recalls "I wanted to do it. I was a tomboy, I guess. And I still like to be outdoors. Far better to be out in the garden than doing housework."

⁴³ For some interviewees, recalling this fact about their mothers, sometimes raised resentment. They did not like housework any better and would have preferred the outdoor work.

⁴⁴ One interviewee recalled it was her mother who fixed the roof as her "father was not a handy man." Ellen Pearce, Oral history interview #S045, Mission, B.C., Jan. 20, 1995.

⁴⁵ Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses". in Shana Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

⁴⁶ See Roland Barthes, "From Speech to Writing", in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews, 1962 - 1980*, (Toronto: Collins, 1985), pp. 3-7.

⁴⁷ For the American case see: Thomas Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America* (New York, 1934) cited in Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1982,) pp.33-34. There is no comparable work in Canada that I am aware of to support this, though the evidence is suggestive. See, for an example, the wonderful interview with Leslie Wells, Interviewed by Honor Wells, Vancouver, May 1986. [Copy in possession of the author]. Honor interviewed her aunt about her experiences riding the rods [*sic*] disguised as a male. She reports to me that her aunt requested the tape recorder be turned off while she related particular incidents. Also, see primary material such as newspaper headlines: "Girl Hoboes Problem for Traveller's Aid Officer." *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, October 13, 1932.

⁴⁸ The practical aspects of carrying out the collection of oral history data have received much attention. The task of "translating" voice onto paper is one of these. See, for example, Davis Callum, Kathryn Beck and Kay Maclean. *Oral History From Tape to Type*. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977.) Much less attention has been paid to the daunting task of interpreting the mass of material once collected.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Lil Stoneman, Interview, op cit.

⁵⁰ An extensive collection is held at the Provincial Archives Board of British Columbia. Smaller collections are held at the Simon Fraser University Archives, and several groups in the province of B.C. have been pursuing collections of oral memories.

⁵¹ I should point out that, where I felt the interviewee in previous collections was not fully informed, I did not make use of the material.

⁵² Mayor Telford's papers, including transcripts of his radio broadcasts, constitute a considerable, and rich, deposit at the Vancouver City archives. However, the difference between notable and "ordinary voices is represented in the difference between reading about the CCF camp on Gabriola island from the perspective of those who organized and ran it as in, for example, Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, Unknown Reformer*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992, pps. 162-163, and hearing about actually attending the camp from the perspective of a young CCfer. See Elsie Railton, Oral history Interview #V029, Dec. 12, 1994 & Jan 16, 1995. Mrs. Railton's memories highlight the effectiveness and the endurance of the education and support provided by the camp.

⁵³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 10. This comfortable and seductive view of documentary photography has been challenged by Martha Roster, who refused to photograph the inhabitants of Skid Row. See: Martha Roster, *3 Works* (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981). As Craig

Owens puts it: "The photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced these people in the first place". Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernists", p. 69.

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p.32. Barthes argues "...the photograph is dangerous with functions that give the photographer alibis: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire".

⁵⁵ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 5. Michael J. Shapiro, "The Politic Rhetoric of Photography" in *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography and Policy Analysis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 141.

⁵⁶ John Collier, Jr. calls this the "Grammar of Vision". See: John Collier Jr., and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as Research Method* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1986), p. xi. Also see: James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982). This is contrast to Michael Hiley in *Seeing Through Photographs*, (London: Gordon Fraser, 1983), who argues that without context photographs are "mute" and Barthes, who argues that regardless of "codes" photographs are emanations of past reality. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Tagg argues that in spite of the multiplicity of layers, such as language, representation, psychological structures and practices, we have no choice but to work with the reality of the print, "the material item". Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, p. 188.; Davidson and Hamilton in *After the Fact*, speak of photographs as mirrors which are silvered on both sides.

⁵⁹ See: Collier, *Visual Anthropology*, for a detailed and practical "how to" of working with the use and analysis of photographs. This is still a relatively new field of historical interpretation, most historians preferring to use photographs for illustrative purposes in their work.

⁶⁰ Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation*, p. 163.

⁶¹ See: The Mattie Gunterman Collection. Historic Photograph Collection, Vancouver Public Library. Also: Henri Robideau. *Flapjacks and Photographs: A History of Mattie Gunterman* (Vancouver: Polestar Books, 1995) and Susan Close, "Mattie Guntherman's Family Album" *Queen's Quarterly Special Issue: Bridges to Memory*, Vol. 103, no. 2, (Summer 1996), pp. 318-339. See also: Mary Martin, Interview, S.F.U. Archives, [n.d.] 100/013/048/01. "I can show you a picture, it's fifty years old..."

⁶² See: John Tagg's discussion of this element of Lange's photographs in *The Burden of Representation*, op cit, note 5.

⁶³ For some of the images Dorothea Lange captured see: Theresa Thau Heyman, *Celebrating a Collection: The Works of Dorothea Lange* ([n.p.] The Oakland Museum, 1978) and Christopher Cox, ed. *Dorothea Lange* ([New York:] Aperture Masters in Photography Series, number 5, 1981, 1987). For a description of Lange's (and others') work with the F.S.A. see: William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that the excellent Vancouver collection was not established without a political battle. Roy D'Altroy, custodian of the North West History room at the public library displayed 54 historic photographs the History Room possessed at the time. The public response to the display was very positive and justified his contention that there was a demand for access to historic photographs. See Bonnie Murray, "The Vancouver Public Library Historic Photograph Collection", November 1992, Unpublished paper in the collection of the author.

⁶⁵ Bob Arnold vividly recalled being taken to the Mother's Council meetings by his mother and grandmother and playing at the back of the hall while the women discussed their activities and strategies. In retrospect, he sees much to be proud of in what his mother and grandmother did, though at the time, as a child he did not have such a positive impression. He also recalled how the basement of their home on Commercial Drive was a dormitory for many of the single unemployed men and he was taught to treat them with respect. See: Bob Arnold Interview, V031, Vancouver, Dec. 13, 1994 and Jan. 12, 1995.

Chapter Three

The Politics of Place: Unemployment Relief and Canadian Municipalities

Events strikingly similar, but occurring in a different historical milieu, lead to completely dissimilar results. By studying each of these evolutions separately and comparing them, it is easy to find the key to understanding this phenomenon; but it is never possible to arrive at this understanding by using the great *passe-partout* of some historical-philosophical theory whose great virtue is to stand above history.

Karl Marx, cited in E.H. Carr, *What is History?*¹

Unemployment has been continuously increasing and quite a marked increase took place in the month of June over the month of May. There is no doubt that during this coming winter many more people will have to go on relief who have heretofore been able to sustain themselves. Fully 50% of all meetings held this year has [sic] been taken up with relief questions. In addition to this there have been at least two committees appointed to look after relief matters, including the food question. These committees have had to meet practically continuously.

Mayor Underwood, reporting to Saskatoon City Council
on the necessity for a Relief Commission,
July 18, 1932.²

Canadian relief policy in English Canada at the onset of the depression was a national myth. Derived from nineteenth century Britain, the principles of the relief system operating in Canada promoted the idea that local authorities could impose standards of respectability on local populations and punish those who deviated. This was the moral economy of relief, the heart of relief systems in Canada, a shared understanding among politicians, bureaucrats, tax payers and relievers that was codified not only in legislation and policy but in expectations and behaviours. The limitations and implications of a relief policy developed for a social and cultural milieu of another time and place are clear from the history of Canada in the 1930s. Locality, the politics of place also played a role in the failure of relief policy in the history of this period. While the cities of Saskatoon and Vancouver present a

contrast in Canadian urban development, their relief policies in 1929 were almost identical and their attempts to control relief costs similar. In spite of their best efforts, both politically and practically, neither city had managed to divest itself of any political responsibilities or achieved any significant reduction in relief costs by the end of the depression era. Nor was either city notably successful in imposing the moral standards that relief policy was supposed to establish. These failures were directly linked to the influence of locality. By examining the origins and principles of the relief policy present in two very different cities in English Canada at the onset of the depression, and exploring the differences between them, the influence of locality can be discerned. The two cities of Saskatoon and Vancouver set very different stages for the relief policy script to be played against.³ Saskatoon, as an immature commercial city, proved far more vulnerable to public pressure to change the relief system to the benefit of local residents. Vancouver, as a modern industrial city, was more immune to pressure, even though local protests and resistance reached the national stage. Relief policy was designed for the stage of urban community development that Saskatoon had reached.

The reasons for the many similarities in actual relief services in two very different cities was grounded in shared principles. The relief system in English Canada was based on the English-Canadian inheritance of British policy and practice. Over the centuries, relief in Britain had evolved from the religious to the political, from a spiritual practice of *charitas* to the pragmatic provision of the necessities of life by local authorities to those unable to provide such needs for themselves. According to both law and custom, the "necessities of life" were defined for relief purposes as food, shelter, clothing and fuel. Those

administering relief believed the “inability to provide” had to derive from “acceptable” causes.

Acceptable causes for needing relief ranged from infirmities, such as failing health or old age, to acts of God, such as widowhood or fire. Other causes, such as unemployment or desertion were considered more dubious. Regardless of why an individual or family applied for relief, every applicant was subject to rigorous examination to ensure they were legitimate and qualified, that is to say “deserving”, of relief.⁴ Thus, the major qualification of relief, other than proving genuine need, was rooted in proving respectability. Relief systems tended to focus on ensuring any potential recipient was godfearing, eager to work, and remained independent and left relief as soon as possible. The suspicion behind relief was, that no matter how minimal or unattractive relief support might be made, relief recipients would prefer it to actually working for a living.

The assignment of relief to the parish was based on an assumption that local authorities would know applicants and, as a consequence, be better equipped to deal with applying the stringent moral and financial tests of eligibility. In Britain, these principles had been largely abandoned by the emergence of the labour party, greater centralization of the state apparatus, and by the beginnings of the welfare state. In Canada, the nineteenth century British approach still persisted and it was not until the depression, under the sheer impact of numbers of unemployed, that the inadequacy of the relief system was revealed. The British North America Act had clearly assigned powers and responsibilities between provincial and the Dominion government. The provision of social and welfare services by

default, were assigned to the municipality, an expression of the traditional parish responsibility inherent in Britain's Poor Laws.

The tax base for providing these services, however, had stopped growing with the onset of depression and in fact began to shrink. Not only were the tax bases allowed to municipalities inadequate, they were decreasing steadily under the onslaught of rate payers who were joining the ranks of relief recipients, defaulting on tax levies, or (as in the case of Vancouver), moving to bedroom communities such as Burnaby.⁵ Unfortunately, the demand for civic services had not decreased, and the growing demands made on the relief system in the 1930s worsened the fiscal situation.⁶ Further, members of city councils also found themselves facing other conflicts. In addition to shrinking tax revenues, municipal rate payers who were able to pay their taxes wanted assurances that relief costs would be kept down, that any money spent on relief would benefit the local economy, and that relief recipients would not become a cheap labour force threatening the job security of the employed.

Once the inability of relief policy to solve the problem at the local level had emerged, the first response for municipal governments responsible for delivering relief was to turn to upper levels of government. Many of the problems municipalities faced were identified as originating in areas outside of their jurisdiction. This was the politics of place in action. The constitutional division of powers and responsibilities ensured that municipal, provincial and federal levels of government became competitors for tax dollars. As a result of this competition, governmental bodies preferred to pursue and promote policies that enhanced their own particular base of revenue rather than become partners in pursuing solutions to

common problems. This competition for tax revenues turned the massive unemployment of the 1930s into a political "hot potato".

One response to the escalating costs of relief was to rely on the politics of place. Within this structure, relief was not a government service but a charitable duty. To a great extent, city councils in both Vancouver and Saskatoon relied on local organizations to organize and deliver relief, providing small grants in aid for them to do so. Perhaps because of the fact the great majority of recipients were women and children and certainly because of a desire to keep costs low and encourage independence, the councils in both cities prior to the depression had fostered the rhetoric of self help and charity, along with the neighbourliness of the west, in order to provide basic social services. It was a logical step to consider these charitable, quasi-public bodies should act in the matter of unemployment relief.

Manipulating relief was not only a responsibility of municipalities it was also, in many cases, a direct task of city councils, something they actually did.⁷ The close link between relief administration and city councils was due, in part, to the fact that in some Canadian cities, prior to the 1930s, relief expenditures were small, city administrations immature and the understanding of the role of city council tied very much to actually overseeing the work of the city. In these circumstances, the numbers of citizens on relief tended to be small, and mostly restricted to "traditional" relief recipients: the aged, sick, widowed and deserted i.e. that is, mostly women and children. The implications of this experience reinforced many of the traditional notions surrounding relief: that recipients had failed to attain respectable and independent standards of livelihood and lifestyle and that relief

fostered this dependency. Most men who were on relief because of unemployment could find work when the season changed. Women, on the other hand, tended to stay on relief because of a variety of factors. Lack of work opportunities, societal disapproval of working mothers, and lack of child care support meant female heads of families tended to stay on the relief rolls year round.⁸ The sustained unemployment of the 1930s changed this picture and brought greater responsibility to the local government.

Municipal governments quickly came to realize that the responsibilities for relief were far beyond their capacity. They began to argue that national problems required national action and solutions. Thus, many of the municipalities' attempts to lower their costs focused on both dominion and provincial governments. The intransigence of the upper levels of government brought municipal councils into alliances with each other across Canada in a concerted effort to force Provincial and Federal governments to assume the costs and associated problems of relief.⁹ Within months of the onset of the depression, municipal governments were protesting against their responsibility for a problem that was "national in scope". The senior levels of government, they argued, had the taxation rights, the tax base and the democratic powers to address a problem caused by international economic conditions, which municipalities did not.¹⁰ The municipalities wanted the Dominion Government to implement national registration, employment services and relief programmes, and failing this, at the very least, for both provincial and dominion levels of government to assume a greater share of the financial burden.

The economic depression of the 1930s put enormous strain on the municipalities. The numbers of unemployed demanding relief services can not be understated. In 1936, the

Minister of Labour's report on Unemployment and Relief in Canada, in spite of optimistic statements on the net recovery since the low point of 1933, was forced to conclude that the "recession in employment" showed a net relative decrease of 18.2% from the pre-depression peak of 111.4 in March 1930.¹¹ Use of this statistical indice (1926 was used for the base 100 points) disguised the magnitude of the problem, "for behind these figures of unemployment and relief...[was] the harsh reality of human privation and frustration."¹² From 1930 to March 1936, the Dominion Government had paid out a grand total of \$199,587,759.01 in relief payments to the provinces and in Federal Work Expenditures in the provinces, a figure which did not include Public Works Construction costs or Supplementary Act figures.¹³ The Liberal government's in 1936 - 1937 was to establish a National Employment Commission because

...it is not within the power of government to end unemployment by its own unaided efforts....that victory over the depression and unemployment cannot be won by a pitched battle on any front, but only by a sustained campaign along the entire front of our economic life. The success of this campaign requires that the leadership of government should be supported and supplemented by the co-operative effort of organised industry and commerce, financial institutions, labour organizations and social services agencies throughout the entire dominion.¹⁴

The use of military language did not rally the forces against unemployment. Financial disaster faced governments as well as individuals.

City Councils across Canada faced an unenviable equation. On one side was ranged unhappy taxpayers, citizens in need and financial and political powers unequal to the task. On the other, senior levels of government unwilling to help. The options were not always pleasant. The city of Burnaby, British Columbia among others, went into receivership.¹⁵ The

upper levels of government , in spite of such financial hardships were adamant in their refusal to take any responsibility for social services. The city of Saskatoon, for example sent a memo to both the provincial and dominion governments in July, 1934, claiming the city was on the "verge of financial exhaustion" and facing an "inability to perform ordinary and essential civic services." In the memorandum Mayor J.S. Mills, Mayor of Saskatoon, continued that although he understood such matters should pass through the province:

...the extreme urgency of the problem and the urgency of its immediate solution, however, prompted the council to have me place the matter directly before you, The Council hopes this course of procedure will not, under the circumstances, be considered unreasonable.¹⁶

The appeal was substantiated with considerable evidence: tables detailing the fall in taxes collected since 1930, the increase in interest paid on bank loans and the stupendous raise in the city's share of unemployment relief and in the cost of administering relief which the city bore alone. R.B. Bennett's reply to the city's appeal indicates the determination of the Federal government to stay out of unemployment matters.

I note that your financial position is giving you grave anxiety, I urge you to place the matter before the Provincial Government at the earliest possible moment for I am sure you must realise there are no contacts between municipalities and the Federal Government except through the Provincial Government, which is the constituted channel of communication.¹⁷

The Constitution thus excused the Dominion Government of the financial liability for unemployment relief.¹⁸ While municipalities across the country might have been calling on the Federal level to assume the responsibility for unemployment, and began doing so at the Union of Municipalities meetings from very early on in the depression years, the Provincial governments were not so keen. A conference between Premier Anderson of Saskatchewan

with City of Saskatoon Mayor and Councillors, held in February of 1934 and recorded verbatim, reveals the political realities which underlay the opinions of both federal and provincial governments. Anderson was adamant that, while the Federal government itself was opposed to taking responsibility for unemployment, the provinces too opposed it. According to Anderson, the provinces were quite prepared to participate in a national Works program, or to take federal grants-in-aid, but would not countenance the Federal Government taking over social services:

- Alderman Tucker: We can only speak, I understand to the Federal Government through the Province on relief.
- Premier Anderson: They deal entirely with us.
- Alderman Tucker: Has there anything further been put up to the Federal Government that the Federal Government should take over the whole cost of relief?
- Premier Anderson: They won't agree to that.
- Alderman Tucker: Some of us have begun to realise that we have got as far as we can go, and the Federal Government will have to take it over.
- Premier Anderson: Some of the Provinces opposed that.
- Alderman Tucker: We have only three sources of taxes, real estate, business and amusement taxes. Only collected about 50% of taxes. It is impossible for the city to carry on with existing taxes. It is true we should take care of our aged and indigent but when it comes to conditions as today...¹⁹

The politics of place was represented in the desire of mayor and councillors to speak directly to the Federal government of their own behalf, a right the provincial levels of government were not prepared to concede.

The dominion government's response to the concerted pressure from municipal governments was a piece-meal, reluctant process of grants in aid that were usually late. This solution only placed a municipality in the unenviable position of dividing an inadequate

number of loaves and fishes among the multitudes without the miraculous powers of transformation. The difficulty of translating inadequate supplies into services that could meet even a fraction of the needs devolved to the local relief departments.²⁰

Because of the financial tightrope imposed by, on one side the intransigence of upper levels of government and on the other by desperate tax payers unable to pay their taxes, city councils across the country found themselves forced to respond on two fronts, political and practical. On the political front they were forced to respond to the unwillingness of both provincial and dominion governments to act effectively (or at all) to combat the problems caused by massive unemployment. Until the upper levels of governments assumed the responsibility for the unemployment situation by exercising their powers or accepting a greater share of the costs, a vision the cities never relinquished, the local governments across Canada were reduced to fighting bush fires, such as reassigning "unemployable" between themselves and their provincial governments and spending beyond their budgets, in order to meet immediate, minimal needs at the local level.²¹ At the practical and immediate level, municipalities began to rewrite and constantly tinker with their relief policies over the decade.²²

The practical activities revealed municipal relief programmes for what they were: cumbersome, bureaucratic mechanisms primarily designed to minimise the cost of relief to a city most often by finding ways to exclude potential recipients, through "tests" of eligibility such as work for relief. Local taxpayers supported the moral economy of relief inherent in testing eligibility. They agreed with the role of relief as work test, insisting that "reliefers", the common parlance for those on relief, take work to prove "willingness to

work". At the same time this created additional conflicts as tax payers who were employed feared losing their jobs and job security to relief recipients willing, or forced, to work for nothing.

As the depression continued unabated the realities of the depression brought the primary and secondary objectives of relief programmes into conflict. Work relief became far too expensive, and ideology which required testing willingness to work by putting relief recipients to work, had to be sacrificed to economy.²³ The municipalities had to derive other, less expensive means to test respectability. The attempts to provide even minimal relief services were financially crippling. Many municipalities came close to, or into, bankruptcy because, regardless of changes to language or policy definitions designed to reduce numbers on relief, numbers continued to grow and the costs of relief to the municipalities continued to soar.

At the same time, relief recipients were becoming increasingly assertive. The false economies of relief departments, including the general inadequacy of supplies, created grievances and the very shape of the relief system, such as long line-ups waiting to apply or to receive relief in-kind created the opportunities for relievers to share grievances and develop alliances.²⁴ As a result, relievers and tax payers confronted city councils across the country, either as individuals or as formal and informal associations, with increasingly political demands. Those seeking relief across the country were often vociferous, highly organised and made their dissatisfaction known through a variety of media, including, at times, through the bureaucrats of the system. Occasionally, relief bureaucrats themselves

became a source of support for changes to the relief system and a conduit for relievers' views to council.

There was, however, one commonality across Canada: relief was considered shameful by all respectable people regardless of class, though perhaps for different reasons. This was the underlying and primary message of the moral economy of relief. To apply for relief, for any reason, was considered an admission of personal failure. For an individual to concede an inability to be self supporting and resort to dependence on the charity of the state marked one as less than other citizens. One of the major purposes of relief programmes was to reinforce this notion in recipients. This purpose had a two fold objective. First, it was designed to discourage people from applying for relief and, secondly, it encouraged people to find ways and means of getting off relief as soon as possible.

As part of the objective of discouraging applications and long term assistance, the provisions of relief were temporary and minimal. While only the most basic goods necessary to sustain life were supplied to relief recipients, the gap between what relief departments considered adequate for basic needs and what relief recipients themselves considered necessary was to be a constant source of tension and conflict in Canada. The temporary and minimal nature of relief was also important from a financial viewpoint.

Underpinning and reinforcing these general perspectives of relief policy were the notions that relief recipients were untrustworthy or lazy, seeking ways to live off the proceeds of other, hard working and tax paying citizens. As a consequence, relief programmes were marked by suspicion. Every application was investigated and negative assumptions about the need, honesty and truthfulness expressed by applicants were made by

the relief department staff. Applicants had to "prove" they were legitimate and deserving. Simply being in a position of need was not enough.

Another manifestation of legitimacy reflected the generalised racism and xenophobia of the times. If the appropriate candidate was a British born subject, a well established resident who could prove both citizenship and residency in the city. As a consequence, those who were not Canadian or British subjects, who had foreign sounding names or different coloured skin, experienced even greater difficulties in applying for State aid and, if they were approved for relief at all, received it as charity and at lower amounts.²⁵ Underlying these various attitudes and expectations of relief programmes at the onset of the depression was a belief in a functioning social fabric that provided respectable individuals with the wherewithal to avoid dependency on State Aid.²⁶ The male middle class policy makers - the politicians and bureaucrats who designed and delivered relief programmes - firmly believed in the Canadian economy. Any self respecting individual could find the necessary work to provide for his family. During temporary and rare dislocations to the economy, self respecting persons would have savings, family, friends, neighbours, church and other social organizations, such as the Legion, to provide any short term help to tide individuals over such temporary difficulties.

These assumptions were gendered. They framed a particular construction of manhood: married, working and supporting a family. In turn, the family was perceived in a way that incorporated dependency for women and children. Men, women and families who fell outside of these norms were viewed with distrust. Unemployed, unmarried men, for example, were treated with the greatest suspicion. Women who applied for relief were also

suspect but in different ways. Women who were single were funnelled back to their families or into the homes of others as domestic help. Failing this, single unemployed women only received relief through a hostel system, or at very minimal rates paid to reputable women's organizations, such as the YWCA who subsidized the state by providing relief and employment services to women.

Women faced a double bind when applying for relief. An underlying gendered assumption was that a single woman never need be unemployed. Marriage, her mother's home or prostitution were overt and covert expectations. Hostels for single girls, for example, were attacked as providing state support for street prostitutes. For example, in Vancouver, the hostel for single women on relief was operated out of a house "Dunromin" at 34 East 13th Avenue. An earlier hostel had been closed on the basis that prostitutes were utilizing state support. Following a vice crackdown on "Bawdy houses" a hostel for single women had to be reestablished as a means of coping with the number of single women thrown out of work and on relief.²⁷ Such beliefs justified viewing and constructing relief as a place of last resort for only those few cases who did not fit into the ideals of social and economic fabric would need it. Those who needed relief were failures on many fronts: morally, economically and socially.

While relief could sustain such outcasts, relief programmes had to be constantly vigilant that the support given would not damage or undermine the normal functioning of the social fabric. The concept of lesser eligibility, making relief less attractive and rewarding than the lowest, most menial paid work available locally, embodied this objective and meant a convergence of the objectives and attitudes of relief.

It must be stressed that the objectives of relief as described were framed by the perspectives of middle class policy makers, those who devised, legislated and delivered relief. These perspectives were based on the moral principles of the middle class and they expected a relief system developed in this way would instill ideas of independence, thrift, and self support in the working classes. This was the major thrust behind relief as shameful and degrading. In order to combat the idea of something for nothing, relief had to extract some kind of payment from those receiving it, such as a price tag of hours of labour that must be paid in order to earn the relief given.

This was not necessarily the view of the working class who simultaneously believed in the right of labour to be paid fairly and also feared lower paid relief workers as unfair competition. As a consequence, relief programmes were constructed to reinforce and instil this view. At all costs, the notion of "something for nothing" had to be avoided. This would avoid destroying individual initiative and morale, and creating a perpetually dependent class. The major concern facing municipalities was to ensure breadwinners did not become attached to receiving relief in preference to working:

...the individual circumstances of each applicant for relief should be considered on the merits. If the applicant having the ability to work, and having work available to him, refuses to accept employment, I am of the opinion that he cannot be said to be indigent or destitute within the meaning of the section quoted above. To hold otherwise would amount to an invitation to every able bodied man to cease work with the assurance relief would be provided for him.²⁸

Thus, at the out set, work relief, as an answer to direct unemployment relief, took priority over direct relief for those perceived as able to work. The provision of work relief not only preserved morale, it served as a test of the applicant's willingness to work. Thus, rather than

developing a positive relief program of stable, productive support, municipalities had a primary objective of keeping relief costs to an absolute minimum. The focus was on ensuring potential recipients were genuinely in need and not simply state leeches. Thus, the bureaucracy became experts in classifying potential recipients as ineligible, maintaining relief supplies at the barest possible minimum and perfecting methods of investigating applications. At the onset of the depression schemes of public works, - work for relief - contributed to achievement of all these objectives.

Relief had to be reinforced as shameful and degrading, because of the simple fact that the social fabric so confidently assumed to operate by the policy makers did not exist for the majority of those who found themselves in need of relief services. The realities of the Canadian labour market and of the idealised nuclear family did not match the ideals and expectations envisioned by those with the power to implement programmes. For working class families, relief was one more strategy to be utilised when necessary but otherwise avoided for the power it assumed over their lives, the inaccurate readings it made of their lives and of society, and for the offensive judgements it made of people in need.²⁹

The similarities of relief policies and expectations of those policies across the country at the onset of the depression breaks down at a crucial juncture and failed to hold up over the course of the decade. The social fabric so confidently assumed by relief policy was an immature commercial urban structure and this fabric was not in place uniformly across the country. The politics of place had an impact on how effective relief policies could be at the local level.

The striking contrasts between the cities of Saskatoon and Vancouver represent different points on the path of urban development in Canada and speak to the importance of the politics of place.³⁰ State and society are mediated by the realities of locality. That is, social relations are frequently modified, altered or transformed by the historical circumstances of place.³¹ Saskatoon was still very much a commercial city, dependent on the surrounding rural areas for its economic health and with little evidence of urban-industrial development. Vancouver, on the other hand had elements of post industrial development.³² In spite of this remarkable difference in the economic development and urban structures of the respective cities, the relief policies in the two cities were almost identical. Relief policies in Vancouver and Saskatoon were designed, as they were for the rest of the country, for immature commercial urban structures.

The cities of Saskatoon and Vancouver demonstrate the difference stage of commercial and industrial development. They were very different physically, economically and socially because of their respective stages of development: one a large bustling port city, the other a supply centre for a prairie agricultural region. (See Table 3.1)

Table 3.1
VANCOUVER AND SASKATOON, 1931
Area, Density and Population per square mile

City	Area (square miles)	Population	Population (per square mile)
Vancouver	43.90	246,593	5,609.49
Saskatoon	13.25	43,291	3,267.25
<i>Source: Drawn from Census of Canada, 1931. Vol. II. Table 7, p. 7.</i>			

The stark differences between the two cities are symbolized by a comparison of the founding of the two cities.³³ In 1881, in Toronto, the Temperance Colonizing Society (T.C.S.) had been searching for a place to establish their dream of an alcohol free community and began the political organizing and the financial work that eventually led to the founding of Saskatoon.³⁴ The initial settlers of Saskatoon, recruited by the advertising of T.C.S. and the sincerity of their own commitment, built Saskatoon on the ideals of temperance. The realities of the harsh prairie climate, and the influx of other, less temperance-minded settlers, challenged the initial idealistic enthusiasm of the earliest settlers. The greed, buoyant optimism and extravagance of later land speculators were, however, expressed within a framework established by temperance.³⁵ The extravagant promises of the "boosters" never materialized. In spite of the extravagant promotion and promises of its early years, the city only developed as a service centre to surrounding rural localities and, as a consequence, acquired a local economy dependent on the success of local agriculture in any given year.³⁶

Vancouver was a different proposition. The mythology of Vancouver's founding represents the extreme opposite to the temperance ideology inherent in the origins of Saskatoon. "Gassy Jack", the founder of Gastown, reputedly bribed saw mill workers with a barrel of whisky to help him build the saloon and hotel which became the origins of Vancouver. Located as a port city, the economy was varied. Thriving businesses catered to local industries, to the docklands and to a variety of industries developing in the interior of the province, ensuring a wide range of labour and investment opportunities.³⁷

The two cities represented opposite ends of the climatic spectrum as well. Vancouver was ideally located. A mild climate combined with a geographical position as the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, the city readily attracted eager, ambitious settlers without the necessity to gloss over the unpalatable truth of local conditions which characterised much of the promotion of Saskatoon. Long, harsh winters and short, blast furnace summers plagued with mosquitoes did not figure prominently in promotional materials for the prairie city. Certainly, Vancouver had a vitality and diversity to its founding and early growth that Saskatoon, dependent on the single resource industry of Saskatchewan's role as the world's bread basket, never experienced.

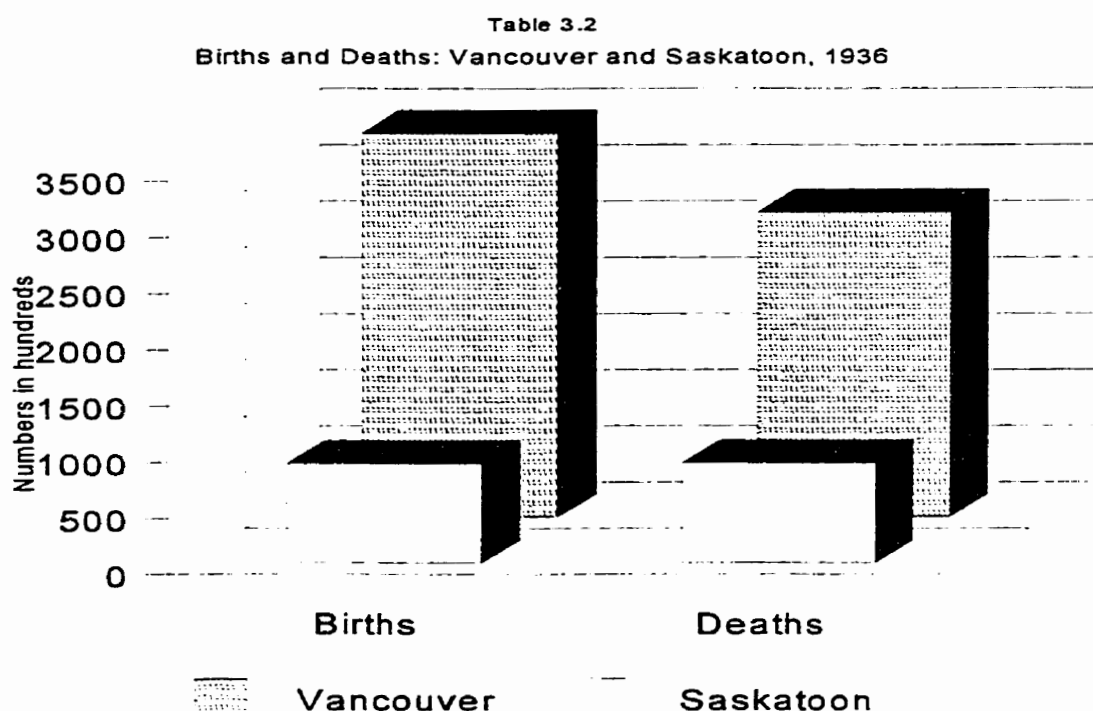
As the "Pacific Gateway", Vancouver was a central transportation centre for the interior of the British Columbia, western Canada, and linked the Canadian east with the Western United States west. Saskatoon claimed to serve a similar "gateway" purpose on the prairies. Called the "Hub City", Saskatoon served as a trading centre for the surrounding agricultural area and as a link between Manitoba and points further West.³⁸ According to one expert, the Vice President of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Saskatoon owed its phenomenal growth in population (from 113 in 1903 to 50,000 in 1930) to its geographical position:

Trade cannot fight against geography, and the geographical position of Saskatoon is such that it is bound to be the commercial capital of, and share in the accumulations of a vast area of much richness.³⁹

Both cities laid claim to a future prosperity based in geographical location. The difference lay in how realistic those claims were and how much was bombastic rhetoric. What may be

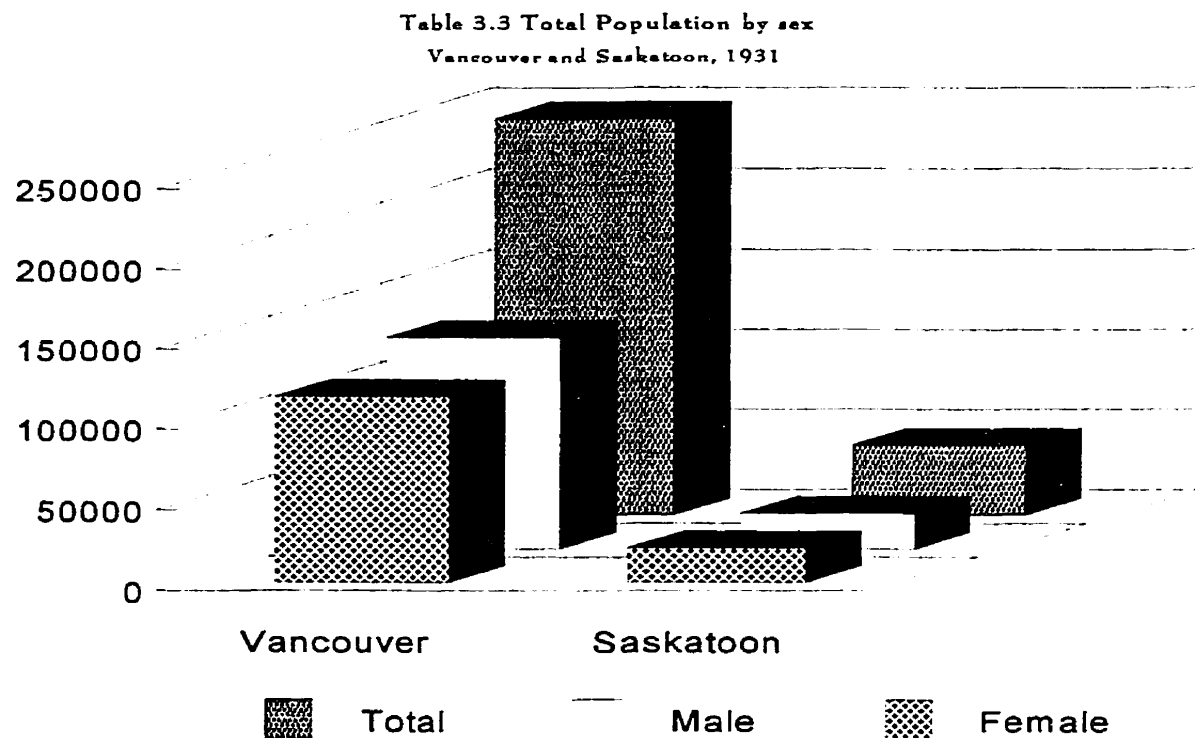
of more significance is the importance of location as a category of social construction for the implementation of relief policies in the two cities.

While the two cities were well established by the onset of the depression years, Vancouver's population figures far outstripped Saskatoon. The number of births and deaths in the two cities for 1936 dramatically illustrates this (see Table 3.2). The numbers of births and deaths are almost equally balanced in Saskatoon, while births clearly outweigh deaths in Vancouver, indicating a potential for population growth that Saskatoon did not have.



The population figures also reveal some interesting dynamics when examined for sex ratios (see Table 3.3). The population in Saskatoon was almost evenly divided between male and female, whereas in Vancouver men outnumbered women. British Columbia and Saskatchewan had generally been provinces where men routinely outnumbered women.⁴⁰

This pattern was not the case for the cities. The city of Vancouver had generally equal numbers of men and women until the 1930s when the advent of large numbers of men seeking work arrived to disrupt the sex ratios.



Source: Drawn from *Census of Canada, 1931*, Vol. II. Table 7, p. 7.

Age groups also reveals a similar shift in sex ratios in Saskatoon, in the diametrically opposite direction: women outnumbered men in the 15-34 age group. Men outnumbered women in the 35-44 and up age group⁴¹(see Table 3.4). Vancouver was also, generally, a city of older people. The figures of population by age and sex show over 57% of Saskatoon's population under 29 years compared to 47.6% in Vancouver for the same age range. 42% of Saskatoon's population was in the over 29 to 60 plus range, compared to 51.7% in Vancouver.⁴²

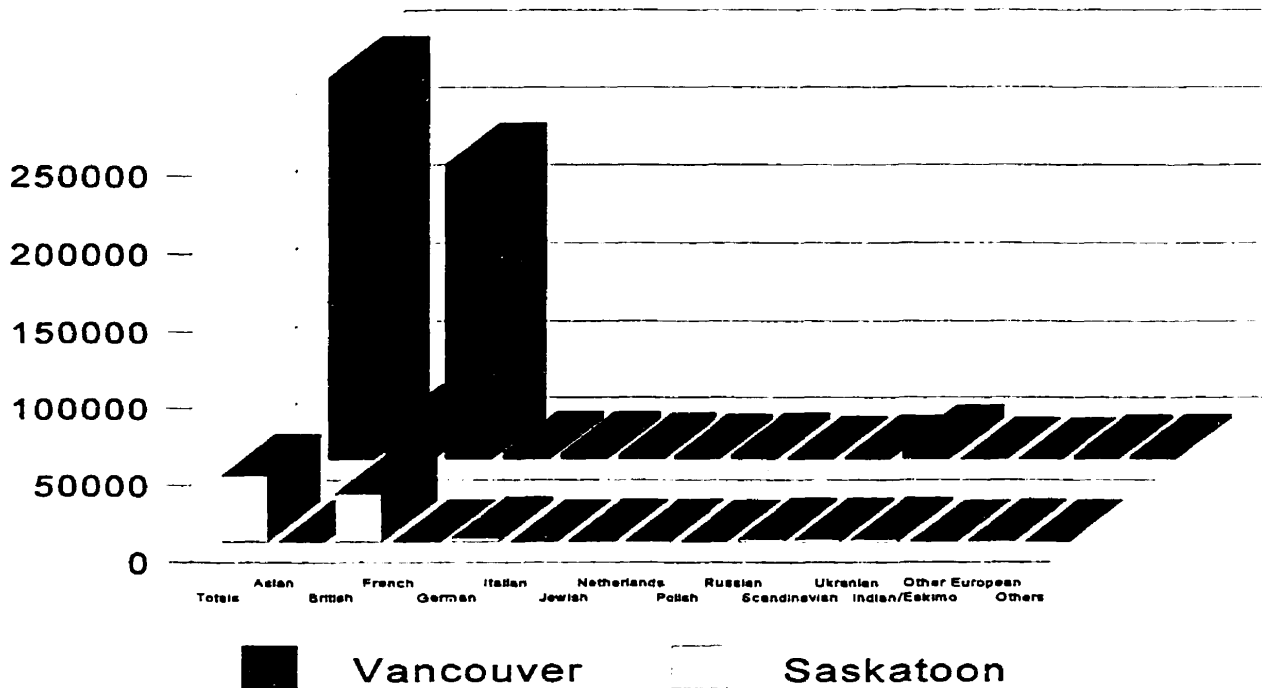
Table 3.4
Population, by age and sex
Vancouver and Saskatoon

Age	Vancouver		Saskatoon	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-14	28909	28189	6066	6002
15-34	38757	40029	7509	8542
35-44	23185	18353	6618	5244
45-54	19651	15940	2954	2162
> 55	<u>18587</u>	<u>13041</u>	<u>1777</u>	<u>1508</u>
Total	131473	115120	21795	21316

Source: Drawn from Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. III, Table 6, pp. 33-38. and Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936.

Another remarkable difference in the two cities was in the mix of ethnicities in the population. (See Table 3.5) Saskatoon was very homogeneous. The overwhelming majority, 72.5%, of Saskatoon citizens were registered as of British origin in the census of 1931 and no other ethnic group registered more than 4.1% of the population total. In Vancouver, citizens of British origin dominated the population figures, yet there was also a significant percentage of Asian origin in the population records and a definite representation of other ethnic groups. This contrast of homogeneity in Saskatoon and diversity in Vancouver was also generally reflected in the sample generated by the oral history interview research for this project (see chapter 2) Nonetheless, the Anglo-Saxon population dominated in both cities. This dominance was reflected was reflected in the social and cultural make up of the cities. Civic leaders tended to be British and it was British styles and institutions that set the tone of the upper and middle classes in both cities.⁴³

Table 3.5: Ethnic Origins of Population
Vancouver and Saskatoon, 1931



Drawn from: *Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. III*, p. 283

A further contrast between the two cities was, however, apparent in their financial health. Although a comparison of civic expenditures in 1931, only two years into the depression, displays a relatively congruent division of per capita costs incurred by the municipal governments in running and providing local services (See Table 3.6), Vancouver was a more expensive city for the property owner. For example, the costs of health and sanitation were higher per capita in Vancouver than the corresponding services in Saskatoon, though government appears to have cost the average rate payer in the west coast city a bit less. Charities, which included both relief and correctional services were more expensive in Vancouver.

Table 3.6
Selected Per Capita Expenditures
Vancouver and Saskatoon, 1931

Per Capita Municipal Expenditure	Vancouver	Saskatoon
Taxable Assessment	\$1,511,00.00	\$872.00.00
Central Government	\$5.53	\$8.52
Charities	\$6.30	\$4.04
Health/Sanitation	\$5.94	\$3.71

Source: Financial reports, *Municipal Yearbooks*, Vancouver and Saskatoon, 1931.

The cost for each of these categories rose over the years of the depression, a situation which was worsened by a steep fall in revenues collected from the local ratepayers as local citizens joined the ranks of the unemployed. (See Table 3.7)

Table 3.7
Unemployment Among Wage Earners, over 20 years of age
Vancouver and Saskatoon, June 1, 1931¹

of WAGE EARNERS # of UNEMPLOYED EARNERS

CITY	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Vancouver	83,067	68,012	15,055	25,042	23,324	1,718
Saskatoon	13,860	10,977	2,863	3,319	3,011	308

Source: *Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. VI*, Table 2, P. 1268

Municipal governments saw the numbers on the relief rolls, and the associated costs, soar to almost unmanageable proportions. Table 3.8 shows the relief costs facing the Western Cities as early as 1932.

¹These numbers, of course, do not include the vast numbers of those under 20 who would normally have considered themselves wage earners. It also excludes many who would have worked because of need yet were unable to find work. This latter group may not have considered themselves wage earners by census definitions.

Table 3.8: Relief: Numbers and Costs, Western Cities, July 1932					
City	Single men	Families	Women & girls	Budget for year	Spent to date
Vancouver	1900	5150	n/g	\$800,000	n/g
Edmonton	990	1784	140	\$553,000	n/g
Calgary	2700	2700	170	\$335,000	\$240,000
Regina	n/g	1785	n/g	\$287,000	\$360,000 ¹
Winnipeg ²	3131	5439	612	\$900,000	\$545,000
Saskatoon	n/g	1605	n/g	\$157,491	\$219,081

Drawn from: "Mayor's Report to Council on the Unemployment Conference of Representatives from Western Cities held Winnipeg, July 6 & 7, 1932." Presented to Saskatoon City Council July 9, 1932. CSA., Minutes of City Council, July 11, 1932..
Notes: ¹ Regina "to date" figure is from September of previous year, not January of current year. ² Winnipeg figures do not include transients. ³ Saskatoon figures not included in this report. This figures are drawn from Relief Officer's Monthly Report for same period. CSA, Minutes of City Council, August, 1932.

For some idea of the dramatic increase these figures represent, the Relief Department in Saskatoon in November, 1929, was supporting 25 families. One year later they had 71 families on relief.⁴⁴ By November, 1932 they had 1,524 families on relief.⁴⁵

Part of the problem the cities of Saskatoon and Vancouver faced was a mythology that had seen the west as a natural relief project. As a result of the imagery of Canada's west ability to provide for anyone willing and able to work, relief (like other social services), got short shrift in municipal budgets. Most municipalities in the west, however, had maintained small, year round, relief rolls of "acceptable" relief cases. These cases were caused by such events as widowhood, old age, or ill health. The nature of the relief rolls changed

dramatically however, as a six week period in Saskatoon, compared over three years demonstrates. (See Table 3.9)

Table 3.9 Causes for relief, Six week period Nov. 1 - Dec. 6 Saskatoon, 1928, 1929, 1930			
Week Ending	1928	1929	1930
Nov. 1	19	27	72
Nov. 8	23	32	82
Nov. 15	21	25	71
Nov. 22	22	30	118
Nov. 29	21	37	168
Dec. 6	23	42	184
Source: City Council Minutes, Relief Department Report, Dec. 8, 1930			

Those applying for relief in November in 1928 and 1929 had done so because of traditional causes. There were no cases recorded applying for relief from “unemployment”. In 1930, a total of 203 families were on the relief roll because of unemployment.⁴⁶

The enormity of the problem is reinforced when the figures for the provincial governments are considered (see Table 3.10). The provinces were responsible for certain types of relief recipients such as civilian pensioned mothers and single transient men. This led to conflicts between the two levels of government over who was responsible for particular individual cases. This contest over “responsibility” was a manifestation of the desire to transfer the costs to the other level of government. These figures reflect only the numbers of employables in receipt of direct relief and do not include the dependents of heads

of families in receipt of relief, nor “unemployables”. The figures also do not include farmers or those in relief camps. They do reflect the extent to which unemployment was a major factor in the relief rolls.

Table 3.10 Classification of Direct Relief Recipients Saskatchewan and British Columbia, January 1936		
Type of case	Saskatchewan	British Columbia
Heads of Families		
Male	4350	13775
Female	2150	1555
Total	6500	15330
Employable dependents		
Male	1550	2716
Female	1050	3218
Total	2600	5938
Individual cases		
Male	800	10591
Female	200	834
Total	1000	11425
Total Employable Cases		
Male	6700	27082
Female	3400	5607
Total	10100	32689
Percentage of Dominion Total	3.04	9.84
Source: Canada, Department of Labour, Table III, <i>Unemployment and Relief in Canada</i> , 1936, p. 15.		

It also interesting to note the difference in gender between the two provinces. In Saskatchewan, women were almost thirty percent of the heads of families category, almost fifty percent of employable dependents, and twenty percent of individual cases, making just

over thirty percent over all of those defined as employable persons receiving direct relief in the province. In British Columbia, women made up far smaller proportions of the heads of family category, the individual case load category and the overall total. Women were over fifty percent in the employables category.

Given the changing face of the relief applicant, the municipalities had striven to adapt to the changed realities. Although most municipal governments were familiar with unemployment relief deriving from the negative impact of Canada's dependence on primary resource industries, the change in demands and complaints because of the depression was not immediately recognised. There was a belief that, as in the past, "natural" conditions would prevail and the employment crisis would right itself. Given that most of the fields supplying work opportunities were governed by the cycles of nature, most municipalities experienced temporary increases in their relief rolls during the seasonal lay-offs associated with industries such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. Those thrown out of work by seasonal lay-offs returned to the cities in a usually fruitless search for work, where they became a charge on the local relief system. This experience with unemployment relief was augmented by direct experience with unemployment of longer duration, such as that associated with the depression succeeding World War One. In these scenarios, the large numbers of unemployed not only placed tremendous strain on municipal budgets, they also generated fear and hysteria of a workers' revolution.

Every Canadian city had experience with delivering and regulating relief services and was not without experience in relief matters related to unemployment. Unfortunately, as the

case of Saskatoon and Vancouver illustrate, the lessons from that experience were negative. Relief needs were seen as short term and temporary. Further, municipalities focused on investigation, assuming those who applied for relief because of unemployment were deliberately avoiding work, and preferred relief to paid employment. Relief programmes were designed to exclude all but the deserving cases.

The municipal bureaucracy associated with relief developed policies that embraced a range of criteria to carry out these overall objectives of low numbers, low costs and automatic suspicion. These criteria ranged from subjective judgements based on behaviours such as drinking habits, political affiliation and sexual proclivities, to objective assessments based in physical descriptions such as race, marital status, place of residence and nationality. In the early years of the depression, the relief delivery work also included running relief works, where unemployed male heads of families could "earn" their relief.

The intransigence of upper levels of government and the increasing numbers of those in need placed both cities between a rock and a hard place, a result of inadequate support from upper levels of government and the increasing demands from those in need below. The point where these opposing factors intersected was at the local level, inside the cities' relief departments. This politics of place incorporates both the differences in the social and economic fabric of the two cities as well as the similarities in the moral and practical application of relief policy in their relief departments.⁴⁷

The attempts of two such different cities to cope with the growing demands on their relief system with identical policies not only demonstrates some of the fundamental problems

facing cities in Canada in the 1930s but also illustrates the influence of effective political organizing by local people at the local level - the politics of place. This important factor was obvious in the workings of the political and fiscal crisis of the 1930s. If gender and class found a place of confrontation and renegotiation within relief offices, relief policy in action engenders a broader understanding of the politics of place. It was the gap between the type of society relief policy was designed to serve and the kinds of society and culture extant at the onset of the depression that created conflicts. Advocates of change to relief systems were able to achieve greater changes to the Saskatoon relief system because Canadian relief policy in the 1930s was designed for a commercial society, a stage of development reflected in the urban structure of Saskatoon. Vancouver, a metropolis moving into a post industrial structure, was a less malleable structure within which to affect change. Efforts to change the relief system in Vancouver were often more dramatic, involved greater numbers, and were frequently better organised but it was relief recipients in Saskatoon who won a plebiscite and, by 1934, had moved the relief system from a demeaning and inadequate system of groceries and other in-kind materials, to a cash based system. If fiscal solutions to the depression were beyond the resources of municipalities, political solutions were not beyond the resources of the local citizenry.

ENDNOTES

¹ Karl Marx, cited in E.H. Carr, *What Is History?*, found in John A. Agnew, *Place And Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State And Society*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987,) p. x.

² CSA, City Clerk's Files, City Council Minutes, July 18, 1932.

³ These two cities were chosen in part because of the extensive differences between the two cities and in part because of the extensive collections of documents related to the actual administration of relief from their relief departments held in the respective city archives. In addition, resident in both cities, I was familiar with the landscape and context of both. These two very different cities present a convincing case for the use of local and comparative studies of the institutional structures of relief. More cities will need to be studied to see if this argument can be sustained.

⁴ In responding unilaterally to such a variety of causes, relief was the forerunner to today's highly specialized and diversified social services.

⁵ Bettina Bradbury, "The Road to Receivership: Unemployment and Relief in Burnaby, North Vancouver City and District and West Vancouver, 1929-1933" M.A., Simon Fraser University, 1975.

⁶ John H. Taylor, "Sources of Political Conflict Welfare Policy and a Geography of Need." in Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert, eds. *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987), p. 147. Taylor succinctly summarizes the fiscal crisis facing Canadian municipalities.

⁷ This demonstrates one of the differences in the politics of place between Saskatoon and Vancouver. In Saskatoon, relief cases were brought before the council for review, discussion and approval. In Vancouver, City Council dealt only with the financial matters of relief.

⁸ Veronica Strong Boag, "'Wages for Housework: Mother's Allowances and the Beginning of Social Security in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1 (Spring 1977): 24-34. Note that Vancouver did have a creche where women could leave their children while they worked. The creche also operated as a domestic labour exchange. Mothers could arrive at the creche, leave their children and go to day work solicited by the creche. The Creche was

established in 1910 by the Associated Charities to provide a day care center for the children of working women. In 1912, the Creche became a public institution under the health department and new quarters were provided in Haro Street. In February, 1917, the Creche was transferred to the Infants hospital and the Creche was moved into the former old people's home in Cambie Street. In June of 1932 the Creche was closed and the activities taken over by the foster home plan of the Vancouver Day Nursery Association. The building later became the city relief office. See: City of Vancouver Archives, Add. Mss. 124, Vol 1-4, box 1.

⁹ The growth of unanimous opinion is visible for example in the resolutions placed before Saskatoon City Council in July, 1933, which endorsed the resolutions passed at the Conference of the Cities of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in Regina. This particular set of resolutions included a declaration that "the Cities of Western Canada have always held...that the present unemployment Situation is a National Emergency and that, as such, the Relief thereof should be administered by the Federal Government."

¹⁰ Vancouver made this clear in a national forum: "Wherever the discussion of relief and unemployment begins, it always comes back to the same point - the doorstep of the Ottawa Government. Unemployment is a national matter. It is on a national scale. It is due to national or international causes. It is accentuated in certain localities - Vancouver perhaps the chief of them - by the fact that unemployed can move freely from city to city and from province to province. It can only be attacked effectively on a national basis. It can only be remedied by national means. Anything the cities or provinces can do is merely palliative and has to be done again. See: "Vancouver's National Remedy for the Unemployment Situation in Canada", *Vancouver Sun* editorial reprinted under authorization of the Mayor and Council as an open Letter /advertisement in selected Eastern newspapers. McGeer, on the recommendations of the City's publicity firm, Cockfield and Brown, subsequently hired the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Toronto Star* to send tear sheets of the advertisement to elected officials, and copies of the newspaper to every Mayor and every newspaper in Canada with the request that the ad be reproduced in local newspapers (with either local councils or the local paper carrying the cost) to disseminate the Municipality's position to the public. The original editorial was dated April 29, 1935. The advertisement was carried in May. See 33-B-5, 1935, Vol. 12, Publicity, CVA. [This file also carries the various responses to McGeer's request.]

¹¹ Canada, Department of Labour, Norman McL. Rogers, Minister. *Unemployment and Relief in Canada*. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1936. (Supplement to the *Labour Gazette*), pp.10-11.

¹² *Unemployment and Relief*, p.8.

¹³ See Table "Dominion Unemployment Relief: Disbursement Summary", *Unemployment and Relief in Canada*, p.10.

¹⁴ Department of Labour, Canada. *Unemployment and Relief in Canada*. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1936.

¹⁵ Bettina Bradbury. "The Road to Receivership: Unemployment and Relief in Burnaby, North Vancouver City and District and West Vancouver, 1929-1933." M.A. S.F.U., 1975.

¹⁶ Letter from J.S. Mills, to R.B. Bennett, July 17, 1934. C.S.A. City Clerk's Records, Box 5684, file 303, Federal, Provincial, etc.

¹⁷ R.B. Bennett to J.S. Mills, July 23, 1934. CSA, City Clerk's Records, Box 5684, file 303, Federal, Provincial, etc.

¹⁸ As Allan Seager points out, this was a typically centralist view of the Constitution which was also very effectively used by the King government to delay vital decisions. Personal communication, September, 1998.

¹⁹ CSA, City Clerk's Records. Transcript of Conference, Saskatoon, Feb. 1934.

²⁰ The struggle with upper levels of government was hardly new. Municipalities had, since the aftermath of World War One, fought to have the federal government accept unemployment as a national responsibility. See: James Struthers. *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment in the Canadian Welfare State*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) pp. 24-34.

²¹ J.D. Belshaw. "The Administration of Relief to the Unemployed in Vancouver During the Great Depression". M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1982. p.102.

²² For example, Saskatoon rewrote residence requirements so that the definition of Resident changed from "longer than six months" to "prior to Dec. 31, 1930". It must be noted the provinces were more generous with their residence requirements because defining single unemployed men as residents of particular cities ensured they became a responsibility of the municipality. For example, in August, 1931, British Columbia defined resident anyone living in a municipality *before* May 1, 1931 and transient (their responsibility) only those who had arrived in the city since May 1. See the letter from Hon. R.W. Bruhn, Provincial Minister of Public Works, re conditions of Unemployment Relief Works, dated Aug. 22, 1931. CVA City Council Minutes, Vol. 32, Sept. 11, 1931.

²³ Work relief remained the preferred form of relief for many administrators, and other officials connected with relief. For example, see the proceedings of a conference of officials concerned with Relief organized by the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare. "Problems in the Social Administration of General and Unemployment Relief: The Discussion and Findings of a Conference on this subject, called at Ottawa from May 1 - 4,

1933, under the auspices of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare: The Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare, 1933. Supplement to "Child and Family Welfare".

²⁴ This situation is reminiscent of the opportunities for pick-pocketing created by the spectacle of execution described by Foucault. See *Discipline and Punish*, op. cit.

²⁵ For example, see Denise Chong, *The Concubine's Children: Portrait of a Family Divided*. (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994) pp. 61-62.

²⁶ The paradox here created tension however. To be in receipt of relief made an individual suspect, de facto disreputable.

²⁷ The hostels were closed because the relief department believed there were women who preferred to "retire on cash relief rather than solve their unemployment through their own efforts." W.R. Bone to Alderman Corey, Chair of Social Services Committee, Jan. 20, 1939. CVA City clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. The creation of a hostel for prostitutes was the result of a remarkable marshaling of forces, feminist and religious in the city.

²⁸ Report by City co-operation Counsel on advisability of giving relief to striking Longshore Workers, August 9, 1935. CVA, City Clerk's Records, 33-B-5, R.G. 3, Vol. #12 File 2b.

²⁹ There is an argument that social welfare policies have benefitted women considerably but this is not to argue that the state is welcomed into the home as a consequence. See: Jane Mark-Lawson, Mike Savage and Alan Warde, "Gender and Local Politics: Struggles Over Welfare Policies, 1918-1939" in Linda Murgatroyd et al, eds. *Localities, Class and Gender* (London: Pion Ltd., 1985,) p. 1987-198.

³⁰ Taylor, "Sources of Political Conflict," pp. 144-154. Taylor argues relief policy was designed for the commercial city but was transformed, by the 1930s, to urban industrial context. In both cases relief policy lagged behind the actual stage of the development of cities in Canada. I would agree, with the caveat that Canadian urban development was not as even and seamless as he portrays. The politics of place has been very much a concept of geographers, less so of historians, but has value to understanding and synthesizing the various social categories that influence identity, especially at the local level. John A. Agnew, for example, argues for the value of using the perspective of place because it allows a grounding of social analysis in every day life, allows for the historical specificity and a greater access to political agency. See his succinct discussion on what "place" is as an organizing concept. John A., Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1987). My concept of politics of place is drawn from and builds on Taylor's concept of "geography of need" though it also

incorporates many insights from the discipline of geography.

³¹ This is contrast to much historical work (with some exceptions) which treats place as so much fixed, dead and immobile space. For a discussion of the evolution of the concept of place see: John A. Agnew, *Place And Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State And Society*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987,) pp. 26-43 and Laura Pulido, "Community, Place and Identity" in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation* (Oxford; Rowman and Little, 1997) pp. 19-21.

³² See the description of the growth of Vancouver in Jean Barman, "Neighborhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver: Residential Differentiation and Civic Voting Patterns." in Robert A.J. MacDonald and Jean Barman eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History, Vancouver Centennial Issue of B.C. Studies* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1986) pp. 97-103.

³³ It would be possible to do a more intensive treatment of the comparison of the two cities. For the purposes of this chapter it is only necessary to establish that the cities were very dissimilar in matters related to urban development: size, economic activity and ethnic/social make-up. These differences sharpen the similarities embedded in the respective relief departments.

³⁴ Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half Century*. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), p.4.

³⁵ D. Rees, "The Magic City on the Banks of the Saskatchewan": The Saskatoon Real Estate Boom, 1910 - 1913" in D.H. Bocking, ed., *Pages From the Past: Essays in Saskatchewan History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Books, 1971), pp. 158-169 and F.J. Artibise, "Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871-1913" in *Town and City: Aspects of Prairie Canadian Development* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), pp.209-236.

³⁶ Present day city limits have yet to reach these optimistic boundaries.

³⁷ Rolf Knight, *Along the No. 20 Line: Reminiscences of the Vancouver Waterfront*. (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1980.) An Editorial in *The Labor Statesman* pointed out the important role Vancouver had in supplying labor for the province and the economic benefits the city reaped from that role: "The majority were hired from Vancouver, the clothing they wore, the food they ate, the tools and machinery they worked with, was made in, or purchased through, Vancouver." This argument was made in order to support the idea such labor had the right to return to Vancouver during seasonal layoffs. See: "The Unemployed" in *The Labor Statesman*, Dec. 20, 1929, CVA, Series 75, 75-F-1, File 12.

³⁸ The slogan of the Saskatoon Board of Trade was "Ship from the center instead of the rim". See: "Saskatoon's Position is Best in the West" in *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*. Saskatoon Development: A Review of 1930. December 31, 1930, p.44.

³⁹ D.C. Coleman, Vice-President of Canadian Pacific Railway, quoted in "Saskatoon Striding Forward Steadily", *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, Saskatoon Development: A Review of 1930. ([n.p.] [n.p] December 31, 1930) p.3.

⁴⁰ See Table II, in Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) p.369.

⁴¹ The census also records the age groups for each year of age, in which it is possible to see that the numerical shift in favor of men begins with the 25 year old age group. See *Census of Canada, 1931*, Vol. III, Table 6, p. 33. Drawn from: *Census of Canada, 1931*, Vol. III, Table 6.

⁴² This trend was also true of the research sample for this project.

⁴³ The social columns in the primary newspaper in each city are replete with reports of teas, bridge-parties and other social activities founded on British rituals.

⁴⁴ Weekly report of relief, for week ending Nov. 15, 1930. CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes, December 8, 1930.

⁴⁵ Monthly Reports - Relief - November. CSA, City Clerk's Records, December, 1932.

⁴⁶ CSA, City Council Minutes, Dec. 8, 1930. Item 14, p. 12881

⁴⁷ Perhaps symbolic of the moral nature of relief, it might be pointed out here that the relief department in Vancouver was actually officially called "Employment and Relief".

Chapter Four
Refining the Relief Policy Script:
The Relief Departments in Vancouver and Saskatoon

"I ask for assistance for myself, dependents and all members of my family because I, and they, have income only as shown below, and have no other money and no means of obtaining the necessities of life and are therefore destitute."

Form RLF-2-200M-10-34 [Declaration of Destitution]
*(First step in City of Vancouver's relief application process)*¹

Every applicant for relief...is tabulated and cross indexed in half a dozen cases before his application is even considered. His marital condition, occupation, age, earning capacity, previous employers, if his mother died of tuberculosis, or if his father had dandruff is all listed. In fact he is subjected to every indignity of a common criminal except being mugged and fingerprinted - that will come later.

The Unemployed Worker, Vol. 3. No. 6, Nov. 22, 1931. p.3.²

The relief bureaucracy was remarkably similar in both Saskatoon and Vancouver because of a fundamental commonality: a shared base of assumptions that framed the acceptable relief figure. Central to the business of relief was the process of determining the criteria of the deserving relief applicant and excluding everyone who did not fit this template. This made investigation the primary task of relief. This chapter explores the "how" of policy. That is, in what forms did relief staff translate the goals of policy into the concrete practice of exclusion. This reveals the relief delivery system as essentialist; a vicious cycle of redrafting internal policies that reduced the qualifying relief figure to more and more narrow terms in order to ensure the original objectives of exclusion could be met. At the same time, in order to meet financial restrictions, the rations allowed became more and more reduced, reducing the physical body of the recipient. These strategies failed. Rather than relief policy reframing the reality of individuals to fit the idealized template of

deserving recipient, the stark realities of the depression forced a constant reframing of the policy.

The process of applying for relief in Vancouver and Saskatoon, and the regulations surrounding qualification for it, illustrate the attitudes and parsimony which underlay most municipal relief programmes in Canada in the 1930s.³ In both cities the initial stage was to "prove" residency, prove you actually belonged to the city before the authorities would even entertain an application.¹ In both cities all applicants had to have a "proof of residence" form. (see facsimile of form reproduced below, Figure 4.1).²

Figure 4.1: PROOF OF RESIDENCY

THE RELIEF OFFICER
VANCOUVER
B.C.

RE: _____

I hereby certify that to my personal knowledge the above mentioned person is in need of the necessities of life and has no means of obtaining these except through public funds, and that he has resided in Vancouver since _____

No.	Street	From	To
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Signature _____
Address _____
Taxpayer on Lot _____ Block _____ D. L. _____ Ward _____ Vancouver
Occupation _____
Date _____

Source: CVA, City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

¹ Please note: most examples of relief policy in this chapter are drawn from the City of Vancouver. References to Saskatoon appear only where substantive differences between the two cities existed.

² Please note all forms reproduced here are exact replicas of the originals held at the City of Vancouver Archives.

This form had to be signed by a local resident ratepayer willing to vouch for their legitimacy as a city resident willing to verify not only how long the applicant had live in the city, but at what addresses.⁴ Unless the applicant had been living in Vancouver prior to May 1, 1931, and in Saskatoon prior to December 31 1930, the application was automatically denied. Applicants received a form specifically for this for this purpose.

Residency became the first point at which applicants could be rejected. This meant applicants would have to find a someone who qualified as respectable according to the definitions laid out on the form, who knew them, to whom they would be willing to declare their dire need, and who would be willing to fill out and sign the form on their behalf. The waiting period, while the department established whether applicant's period of domicile qualified them as citizens, meant "difficulties and anxieties" for families and acted as a defacto though temporary exclusionary device, keeping families off relief for the investigation period.⁵

If the prospective applicant could provide proof of eligible residency, the application for relief was put in progress. In both cities, the forms were completed by Relief Department staff and the applicants simply answered the questions put to them by the staff members (see Appendix 6 for a facsimile of the relief form used in Vancouver and Appendix 7 for a facsimile of the form used in Saskatoon). These forms, ostensibly appeals for state aid, were in fact consents to become subjects of investigation as both of the application form concluded, not with a simple space for a signature but with a section turning the application into a sworn statement:

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath, and by virtue of the Canada Evidence Act.⁶

This affidavit appears to reinforce the serious nature of the relief application, requiring applicants to swear to the “truthfulness of their statements”.⁷ Those who lied risked being disqualified from relief and those who were caught lying after receiving relief could also find themselves facing charges in court.

In both cities the application forms were detailed and explicit. They also strove to create an intimidating air of legality. The major, though subtle difference between the relief process in the two cities lies in the differences between these basic application forms. The relief application form in Saskatoon was an 11 x 17 inch four page document. The Vancouver form was an 8 x 11 inch document printed on the front and back of the brown file covers. These file folders in turn encompassed the series of forms that made up the Vancouver relief application record. The application form for relief in Saskatoon is far more detailed, while the Vancouver form required less information at this initial stage. In essence, the relief department in Vancouver put far less trust in both applicants and its own staff, diverting most of the relief application process to its investigation section. In the Saskatoon relief system most information was obtained through the application interview.

In both cities, the next stage in the application process were the creation of a file on the applicant. In addition to the interview which developed a detailed history of the applicant, a variety of supplementary forms had to be completed and supporting documentation, such as marriage certificates, passports, naturalization or citizenship certificates, had to be produced. These documents were used by the Vancouver Relief Department staff to ascertain the veracity of statements made by applicants.

The Relief Department in Vancouver seemed inordinately interested in what they termed the "social state" of applicants.⁸ There were two separate forms. One form was a straightforward "Statutory Declaration" giving the particulars of the marriage, which was used when there was no marriage certificate available (see Figure 4.2). A legally sanctioned, heterosexual couple was the cornerstone of the properly constituted family. The strict investigation into the circumstances of couples living together was a reflection of a moral expectation of the policy makers.

Figure 4.2: STATUTORY DECLARATION

CANADA }
Province of British Columbia } TO WIT:
I, _____, of
the City of Vancouver, in the Province of British Columbia, do hereby solemnly declare:-

(1) THAT I was married to

at _____, on the _____ day of
_____, in the year _____.

(2) THAT the above named is the woman I am now living with as my wife.
AND I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and
knowing it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath and by virtue of the CANADA EVIDENCE ACT.

DECLARED before me at the City }
of Vancouver, in the Province }
British Columbia, this _____ }
day of _____ A.D. 1934 _____

A Commissioner for taking Affidavits within the Province of British Columbia.

Source: CVA City Clerk's Records, 33-B-2, Vol. X1, 1932. Relief I.

Those who claimed to be married and could not produce a marriage certificate or those who openly declared to be co-habiting had to find a property owner willing to testify on their behalf and sign affidavits (see Figure 4.3 below).⁹

**Figure 4.3: FORM FOR PROPERTY OWNER
TESTIFYING ON BEHALF OF COHABITATION**

CANADA }

Province of British Columbia }

TO WIT:

I, _____ of _____,
Name Street Address

a tax-payer and a resident of the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia, for the past
_____, having been duly warned that I am not obliged to say anything, but that anything
I do say may be used in evidence against me, hereby voluntarily and solemnly declare:-

(1) THAT I identify _____
Applicant's name

and _____ of _____, Vancouver, B.C.
Woman's name Street address

they being now here and present as the parties they represent themselves to be man and wife
for the period _____; this to the best of my
knowledge and belief.

AND I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be
true and knowing it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath and by virtue of the
CANADA EVIDENCE ACT.

DECLARED before me at the City }
of Vancouver, in the Province }
British Columbia, this _____ }
day of _____ }
A.D. 1933 }

A Notary public etc. .

Source: CVA City Clerk's Records, 33-B-2, Vol. X1, 1932. Relief I

The investigators were given strict instructions on how to handle enquires regarding the nature of heterosexual couples' relationships. The questions on social state should be "approached delicately but definitively". Any "irregularity" including the failure to produce a marriage certificate meant investigators should put in a signal (that is, put a hold on relief services until the matter was satisfactorily investigated).¹⁰ Further, investigators were instructed: "Although this [issue] appears on the report form on front page, the subject should be dealt with towards the end of your visit for obvious reasons". Relief applicants were also to be asked "Is there any legal reason why the parties cannot enter matrimonial bonds?" and to find out what these might be. Of course, any details given concerning marriage (or any other matter for that fact) would be compared with the information given by the applicant at the time of initial application.¹¹

The appearance of this document (Figure 4.3) testifies to the seriousness with which the Relief Department officials perceived common-law relationships. The instructions which accompanied this form also attest to this:

Where there is not marriage and a family, visitor should inquire as to the exact parentage of the children and how their births have been registered, and also if there is any legal reason why the parents cannot enter marriage, If so, what?...The subject is to be approached delicately but definitely. If there is irregularity or no marriage certificate, a signal is to be put in. Although this appears on the report form on front page, the subject should be dealt with towards the end of your visit for obvious reasons.¹²

To find a respectable (i.e. taxpaying) citizen willing to undertake such a legalistic process including an oath may have imposed hardship on couples and families already under the stress of applying for relief. Again, the period of waiting while "irregularities" were investigated served as de facto exclusion..

Other forms required applicants to provide signed permission that would allow relief investigators to inspect bank account status. Both the Saskatoon and Vancouver applications had a space for details of military service in order to see if applicants were eligible for a federal pension of any kind. The Saskatoon form also enquired into the personal habits of applicants regarding liquor and narcotics.

Finally, risking redundancy in the name of creating a legalistic and intimidating document, the applicant had to swear they were absolutely destitute and had exhausted every possible source of alternative support. In Saskatoon, this was simply a clause in the application form. In Vancouver, applicants had to sign an additional form, testifying to absolute destitution. Furthermore, to prove destitution applicants had to itemize every source of income or support from which they did not receive money, which tested the fact that applicants had exhausted every possible resource (see Figure 4.4 below). The fact of destitution was discovered through the probing and detailed questions designed by the Relief Department to determine any funds applicants should use, or sources of support they should call upon, before applying for relief. These resources included relatives, friends and assets. In Vancouver, for example, Mrs. M.C. had been told she would have to cash in her life insurance policy before she would be considered for relief.¹³

Figure 4.4: DECLARATION OF DESTITUTION

NOTE: - All revenue from wages, sick benefit, superannuation, pension, compensation, rents, roomers, boarders, agreements, Allowances, remittances, loans, commissions, fees, book debts, collections or other sources whatsoever received by any member of the family must be clearly shown on this form.

CITY OF VANCOUVER PUBLIC WELFARE AND RELIEF DEPARTMENT

Date _____ 193__ Case No. _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

I ask for assistance for myself, dependents and all members of my family because I, and they, have income only as shown below, and have no other money and no other means of obtaining the necessities of life and are therefore destitute.

THE ONLY EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PAST THIRTY DAYS OF MYSELF, DEPENDENTS AND THE VARIOUS MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY HAS BEEN AS FOLLOWS:

Name of Person Employed	By Whom Employed	At What Wage Or Salary	When Paid During Last 30 Days
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

The only other money they or I have received from any source whatsoever during the past thirty days has been:

None of my dependents or other members of my family have had any income from any source during the past thirty days except:

There has been no increase or decrease in the number of dependents or members of my family for the past thirty days except:

Witness Signature

TO CLERICAL STAFF: Please make your notifications on the back when necessary. See that applicant correctly fills out dates and names of dependents and members of family who have any income.

Source: CVA City Clerk's Records, 33-B-2, Vol. X1, 1932. Relief I.

The destitution forms, according to the head of the Investigation Section, “squarely put the onus on the applicant” to determine the need for relief. That is, in signing the destitution form the applicant was declaring failure to provide for himself and his family:

In signing that form he says he is destitute and without money or the means of livelihood, that neither he nor his dependents have had any work for the past 30 days, except that which he declares; that he has had no income from any source than wages for the past 30 days, from any other source than wages for the past 30 days, except that which he declares.¹⁴

As must be clear this was not the case. The structure of the Vancouver Relief Department illustrates that the declaration form was not sufficient proof of determine need - investigation was the real determinant of need and once all forms required of the application were completed investigation began.

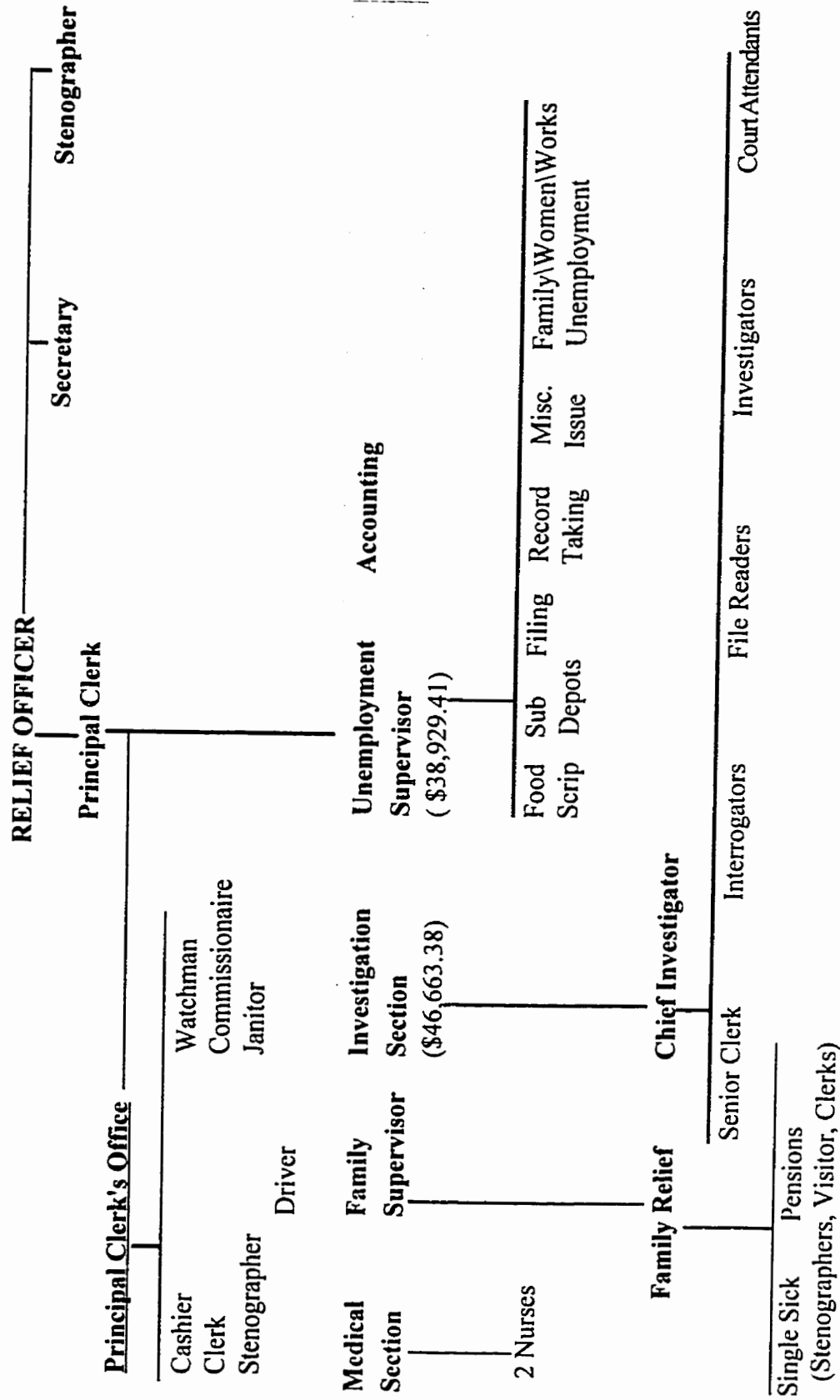
There were still more forms to be completed but these would be filled out in the applicant's own home whereas the forms described to this point were filled out by the relief office staff in the relief office. These initial forms made up the application file which, in turn was assigned to “visitors” by the Routing clerk. The visitor was assigned a daily list of homes to visit by the Routing clerk who arranged these calls so that the visitor “could go from house to house with the greatest possible dispatch”.¹⁵ On the first visit to the home, the visitor would complete a “Full Report”, a four page document covering every aspect of the applicant's life, including material already covered in the application form. The visitor's report form was subtitled “Visitor's Report (Full) (Supplemental)”. Investigators were instructed to complete the entire document on the first visit (hence “full” report). On later visits, the initial information section was omitted and “Full” struck out on the title page. This, in effect, subjected the applicants to the same barrage of questions repeatedly.

After the completion of the file, the next stage of the application process involved investigation, as all records taken to date to investigated and verified before relief could be given.¹⁶ The completed file was first forwarded to file readers. These individuals would insert “flags” or “signals” at any questionable point. Signals put a halt to all relief - another method of denying relief, albeit often only temporary. Flagged files were passed on to the investigation department.

It was at this stage that the investigators would enter the relief process. Investigators would follow up and attempt to clarify discrepancies such as contradictions between information given on the initial application form and information acquired by the visitors in the in-home visit for example, or by seeking further information on irregularities such as unmarried couples. The internal landscape of the department gave considerable autonomy to the Investigation Section (a chart laying out the structure of the Relief Department shows the central and privileged position the Investigation Section held. See Figure 4.5).

This was actually the section of relief had the most to do with every person on relief. The investigative section of the department had the right to enter the homes of anyone on relief, to contact employers, friends, relatives and neighbours to ascertain the truth of relief recipients statements and the right to “flag” any file and deny relief to recipients until their investigations were complete.

**Figure 4.5: STRUCTURE AND EXPENSES, DEPARTMENT OF RELIEF
CITY OF VANCOUVER, 1935**



Source: City of Vancouver Archives, Social Service Department, Relief Department Enquiry 1935, 127-A-7.

The investigator, as known as the "visitor", was assigned the name and address only of the cases to be investigated, usually by most convenient routes to enable visitors to visit a maximum number of cases each day. The initial visitor's report was a detailed four-page form, recording many intimacies of the home life such as how much fuel, furniture, food and cash was in the home and what were past earnings and current income. The forms also elicited the professional, though more often subjective, opinions of investigators regarding the relief recipients. Questions addressed the ability of recipients to "rustle" fuel on their own and their eligibility for work.

What must be remembered at this point is that Relief Departments were probably the only growth industry in Canada. Although the Relief Departments themselves had experience with administering relief programs, the vast numbers associated with the depression years put an enormous strain on the resources of the departments. As a consequence, staff shortages were dealt with by transferring in workers from other city departments.¹⁷ Given that the majority of relief staff were transferred in from other municipal departments (i.e. not trained social workers), the necessity for detailed instructions was understandable. The staff of the Vancouver Relief Department had grown from 13 permanent members in 1929 to 140 with temporary appointments by 1935 and it is probable that some applicants were more familiar with the relief system than the staff.¹⁸ Certainly, the work of relief staff was subject to considerable scrutiny from city council members and the public¹⁹

Internal civic transfers meant the department lacked not only trained or professional social workers, it also acquired workers inexperienced in simple office procedures. A

consequence of this was that, in addition to circulating directions on the variety of edicts passed to the department from the Provincial Department responsible for regulating relief, the Relief Officer also had to incorporate directions on a variety of basic techniques to his staff. Reminders about the necessity of coming to work on time, switching lights out at night and prohibiting staff from the city car on personal errands, suggest the new staff were not familiar with the culture of the office.²⁰

Visiting the office late last night I again found many of the lights still on, quite unnecessarily. Please ensure that both during and after business hours economy is observed in the use of light.²¹

The Relief Officer also had to instruct his staff in more serious etiquette. For example, some applicants experienced a lack of respect at the hands of relief office staff.²² How to treat relief applicants became a subject for another Relief Officer directive:

When speaking to clients of the department, employees will always preface the name of the person addressed with the proper courtesy title, Mr. Mrs. or Miss, as the case may be. Under no circumstances shall clients be addressed by their surname only.²³

In many cases, it appears the Relief Officer's directives and instructions were in response to particular problems that had arisen, a case or reactive rather than pro-active administration. As late as 1939, the Department was still trying to improve the professionalism and expertise of its staff. This was an on-going exercise designed to produce a perfect system that would reduce the opportunities for recipients to manipulate staff members.²⁴

The inadequacy of the staff to live up to the expectations and needs of the state policy is reflected in these regular staff circulars. They were posted almost daily throughout the

depression years and document the most seemingly obvious requirements of running a municipal office. The instruction, once drafted and numbered was circulated amongst staff who were required to read and initial it. These instructions were then kept in a large binder, a proof of the amoeba-like quality of policy to spread and encompass activities, generally in a post hoc fashion. This departmental policy manual reveals the extent of ineptitude and inefficiency that plagued the relief service internally as the Relief Officer was consistently devising policy in response to errors made by his staff. It was in the inability of the Department to manage its own staff easily and effectively through policy and procedures that some opportunities for relief recipients to take advantage of the system were established.

It was in the body of these individuals, poorly trained and inexperienced, that the language and rhetoric became real as they moved into the homes and neighbourhoods of those seeking relief, carrying state policy into the community space. The investigation stage had several objectives besides ascertaining the eligibility of the applicant for relief.²⁵ The major qualification, destitution, had to be proved, as well as the general truthfulness of the applicant. Additionally, the thoroughness of the initial records, and the competency and truthfulness of relief office staff was also under scrutiny.²⁶ The investigation section checked every detail of every relief application to seek out deliberate and accidental fraud. If fraud were discovered, and if it were considered accidental it was dealt with internally. Otherwise, it was referred to the Relief Committee for its decision. These "Investigators" were justly feared. Their identity was kept secret from the Relief Officer himself. They had the right to enter the home without prior notification. They also had the right to question anyone, neighbour, friend, relatives, co-workers, who was connected with a relief applicant that they

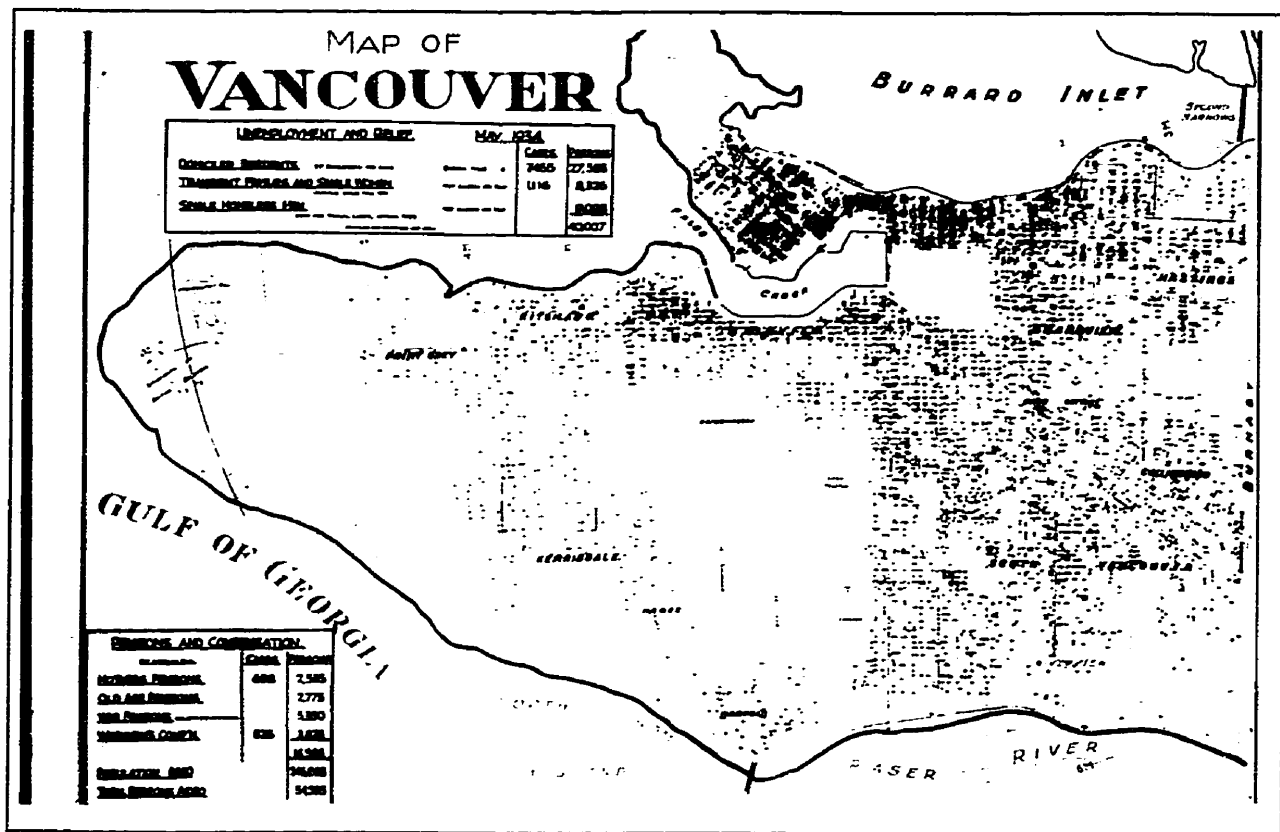
considered relevant to their investigative purposes. One relief recipient recalled the general atmosphere the visits of investigators generated:

I think it was once a month [they came]. And you had to endure them and the sneery attitude they had. And even if they didn't have it you thought they did because they were invading your privacy. You had to put up with it because you were getting money you desperately needed. You couldn't do it otherwise.... But I remember, if you saw them coming it was panicsville. Oh, it was the most awful thing. Not that you had done anything wrong, but because you were so terrified, because they had that power to cut you off.²⁷

In spite of the power they wielded, and rather like the rest of the Relief Department staff, the investigators were poorly trained and lacked experience. A series of "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" clearly spelled out some of the strategies the Relief Department expected recipients to utilize and guiding investigators on the appropriate response. Tips on how to trick or manipulate relief recipients into giving themselves away and telling the truth were also part of these instructions.²⁸ In addition to this initial in-depth investigation, every active relief file was subjected to a supplemental investigation every four months.

The investigative department was quite large and expensive. The administrative costs of the investigative section for 1935 were over \$46,000 dollars. The unemployment section's cost for the same period were over \$38,000. It cost more to administer the investigation of relief, then to deliver it. The prime objective was to determine that those on relief actually qualified and deserved it and to deny or remove those that did not. The number of visits records the number of times an investigator visited the home of someone on relief. For example, in 1935, according to the Department's numbers (see Map 4.1 for geographical lay out of homes on relief in 1935) there were 6,571 homes of resident or transient families and

single women on relief. The department's investigative unit made 49,343 visits that year, an average of 7.5 visits per relief home.



Map 4.1 Homes on Relief in Vancouver, 1935

The “Confidential Instructions to Visitors”, designed for the use of the investigators, had very stringent definitions of destitution, potential abuse and minimum need and placed these clearly as keystones to eligibility, perhaps more so than the authors intended.¹² In analysing these documents it becomes obvious that while investigators, the visitors from the Relief Department, were examining the needs and sincerity of applicants they were doing so using techniques that were ethically questionable. For example, visitors were given detailed directions on how to acquire information on bank accounts, information bank managers were lamentably unwilling to give to the Relief Department without permission:

Getting information re bank accounts is an art and the following suggestions are made as to procedure:- Do not come out with the direct question, "Have you a bank account?" If the person has one he will probably say "No", and in doing so he is safe because it [existence of bank accounts] is more or less a sacred subject with bankers.¹³

The instructions continued with detailed directions on how to inveigle the relief applicant into giving away the information about bank accounts. Asking about the ability to save and playing on the pride men were presumed to have in providing well for the family meant investigators could avoid asking direct questions unless as a last resort.¹⁴

Further, investigators were not above misleading the people they were investigating. One investigator, while calling on a woman who had written to the Mayor offering to let some of the rooms in her home to relief recipients, allowed her to believe he was from the Mayor's office. She assumed he had come to inspect the rooms and offer information on how much the Relief Department paid for room rentals: "When she asked if I was from the Mayor's office, visitor merely smiled." With this stratagem he was able to acquire a wealth of information and ask a variety of questions about her personal circumstances. The woman thanked him for his attention at the end of the visit:

She was very pleased that the mayor had sent me to call on her and explain Relief Department rates. She has not the faintest idea that I represented the Relief Department but thinks I came directly from the City Hall.¹⁵

These approaches provided not only entry into people's homes but also ensured people gave away information they might not have chosen to reveal if they had been aware of the identity of their visitors.

The Department also played on other weaknesses in the lives of the applicants. For example, regardless of literacy on the part of the applicant, the forms were filled out by relief office

staff, the process of completing the application appears to become almost ritualistic: the taking of evidence by the duly authorized officers of the state, with citizens confessing destitution and waiting, penitently, for each of their words to be transcribed onto the forms.²⁹

Completing the visitor reports meant incorporating additional forms. There were so many of these that Robert Mundy, chief of the investigation section, drafted a set of “Confidential Special Instructions to Visitors” in September 1932. This set of instructions “consolidated circulars” which had given instructions for specific cases in the past. This set of instructions were

...to govern and aid you to fill out the new form of report. The danger of a printed form is that visitors may become “Stereotype” [sic] in the method of handling it. Therefore, a word of warning in this respect is in order. To get at the true facts in each case it is essential that visitors be astute and that they pin applicants down to definite statements on all subjects pertinent to their case. Avoid generalities. The form contains many pertinent questions and if you apply yourself intensively to the work, being guided by these instructions, it is felt that you will eliminate to a large extent those who are not entitled to relief, and expose those who have laid themselves liable to prosecution.³⁰

One of the major tasks of the Relief Department was to reinforce the work ethic. This was connected with the work of keeping costs low and was built on a fundamental assumption that working class people were idle and uninterested in being self supporting and independent and would prefer to cheat the department. The number of prosecutions belie this attitude (see Figure 4.6). As will be seen in figure 4.6, the work of the Investigation Department, given the amount of money spent on Investigations appeared to result in negligible prosecutions and even fewer convictions. It may well be that the presence of investigation and the threat of prosecution and convictions was seen, and paid for, as deterrent though there is little evidence to support this notion. It appears more likely then, that the investigation section

work with a firm belief in the potential for dishonesty but fraud and dishonesty did not exist to the extent the Department staff anticipated and worked to prevent.

Fortunately, the effectiveness of the department in imposing its punitive measures was undermined by the level of skill and the ability of its staff in the Investigation Section. If the Department had trouble instilling the simplest of procedures into its regular staff, as outlined above, they had even greater problems with the demands of the Investigation section. This enveloped the operations of the visitors and the special investigators in a shroud of secrecy. The identity of the Investigation Section staff was kept even from the Relief Officer himself. The culture of secrecy required by the operations of investigation was not well instilled in the staff. The most prosaic of assumptions and practices had to be reinforced. Staff had to be warned not to show their files to other employees or to carry out the instructions of other sections.³¹

The utility of this shroud of secrecy was targeted by the special investigation into the Vancouver Relief Department held in 1935. There had been numerous complaints about the department, but the final straw seemed to be the concerted and organized criticisms of the new Chairman of the Relief Committee of Vancouver City Council: Alderman L. D. MacDonald. Not long after taking the chair of the Relief Committee he launched his own investigation of the Relief Department and made a series of recommendations. He wrote:

...it is costing taxpayers the unbelievable sum of approximately \$207,000 per annum for looking after people to see that they do right. The cost of the Investigation branch under the present system was approximately \$4,000 per month during 1934. and according to the annual statement of the former chairman of Relief, only 81 convictions were registered, with a total annual restitution for \$2,040.44 for the same period , and it is sufficient evidence to prove that a very small percentage of those unhappy victims are dishonest.³²

Figure 4.6: INVESTIGATIONS SECTION, DEPARTMENT OF RELIEF, CITY OF VANCOUVER

Record of Investigations, Referrals, Cases, etc. 1932-1939

Year	# Calls	# Reports	Alleged Fraud³	Convictions Secured	Dismissed or Withdrawn	Amount Restituted
1932	36,152	-	112	54	3	\$762.54
1933	89,535	-	148	78	-	\$2,049.49
1934	52,737	-	128	81	-	\$2,040.44
1935	49,343	33,887 ⁴	42	33	5	not given
1936	40,994	26,969 ⁵	56	24	18	not given
1937	34,019	24,103	-	-	-	-
1938	27,401	19,885	-	-	-	-
1939	-	19,292	-	-	-	-

Source: City of Vancouver Archives, Social Services Department, Series 4, Annual Reports, Loc. 106-D-3, File 2, Annual Reports of the Relief Department to City Council, 1938-1966.

³ Number of cases referred to City Solicitor for prosecution

⁴ 359 cases of alleged fraud handled within the department

⁵ 319 cases of alleged fraud handled within the department.

MacDonald argued that the entire system needed overhauling including issuing relief in cash and sending it through the mail, asking recipients only to keep receipts according to a condition or behaviour card sent with the cash, that clothing relief also be mailed directly to the recipients and that cheques made out to landlords be sent to recipients from them to endorse and pass on. Such changes, MacDonald felt, would represent enormous savings and “eliminate the present inhumane system of waiting in line at the relief office” for food rations. MacDonald argued this would also raise the self esteem and self respect of those on relief.³³

Rather than move on his recommendations the Council asked that he make a full report to the Special Committee and on February 28, 1935, as part of this report, he expanded the scope of his criticism and levelled charges of favouritism, intimidation, conspiracy and other malpractices against the Relief Department.³ MacDonald had pushed the council early to look for an “adequate and intelligent” response to the “tremendous burden of unemployment that he felt the council would be facing “for many years to come”:

For this purpose it is imperative that recipients should be organized and permitted to make representations through spokesmen. The second important problem is that the mass of these unhappy victims shall degenerate as many of them are today. This is a matter that wants a definite intelligent approach. ...The beginning and end of this task, however hard it may seem to remember, is that the unemployed are still human beings. Public officials who complain that the minds of the unemployed are being poisoned by radicals or communists or any other group of organized workers are guilty of gross negligence in their failure to offer any intelligent alternatives or even tell them what is being done for them, and how or why.³⁴

He also recommended the immediate firing of scores of Relief Department staff.

In response to his allegations, and possibly to repel the unthinkable idea of trusting relief recipients with cash, and certainly in preference to implementing his radical innovations, the council ordered a full independent investigation in 1935.³⁵ The Council appointed a lawyer,

Paul MacDowell Kerr, "to inquire into and investigate the charges and matters referred to [in McDonald's report] relating to the said Relief Department and any such matters as may be presented by any person" and to bring forward any recommendations for efficient or practical operation.³⁶

Kerr interpreted this role broadly. His enquiry could well serve as a model for a social history research project. During the course of his term as Commissioner of the Enquiry (read investigator,) he held 26 afternoon sessions and 6 evening sessions of enquiry, heard 78 witnesses, reviewed exhibits including 1000 pages of exhibits and over 2,600 pages of transcripts of testimony, participated in aspects of the relief system such as waiting in the clothing line-up and talking with recipients in the queue, adapted his demeanour and methodology to the requirements of different witnesses and still delivered a comprehensive report by the end of July the same year.³⁷ He also demonstrated an astute grasp of the realities facing those who presented evidence and a willingness to assess evidence accordingly: "Complete poise and assurance on the part of a recipient who is beneath the arrow of misfortune is as impossible as scathing denunciation of the Relief Officer from one of his section heads."³⁸

Though his report did not support any of the specific allegations of fraud, favouritism and anti-union activities against the Relief officer, nor did he find any corroborating evidence for the charges of "intimidating clients", he did report scathingly on the Investigation section of the Relief Department. While Kerr dismissed most of the charges in McDonald's report of February 28, 1935, he supported most of the other allegations in McDonald's letter of February 4, 1935. Kerr took a most serious view of the activities of the investigation department. The

Relief Officer, according to Kerr, had abdicated his control over the investigation section. For example, the identity of the Investigation Sections' "operatives", a term Kerr particularly disliked, were unknown to the Relief Officer. Further, Kerr was not impressed with the head of the section and felt the Relief officer had given up too much power and control over investigations to this individual:

There is no need for such "dime novel practices". The Relief officer was advised by your commissioner during the enquiry that he was surrendering too much power and control into the hands of the Head of this Department....This department should not be allowed to operate like a miniature Scotland yard. Another feature which has caused disapprobation is the practice of operating a sort of inquisitorial board to deal with the unfortunate who has not declared his earnings properly and whose scrip allowances are thereby stopped. The very name "interrogators" by which the members of this board are designated is intended to be a deterrent to wrong-doers, but in reality is a nightmare to the well meaning recipients who have made an error.³⁹

Kerr did not feel such secrecy was a necessary adjunct of relief work. While the Relief Officer was responsible for the internal affairs of the Department the Investigation Section seemed to be beyond control. As a consequence, the Council was unaware of the existence and methods of the Investigation section, particularly the practice of interrogators requiring recipients facing charges of fraud to swear affidavits of their guilt before the needy family could obtain any food.⁴⁰

The Relief Officer, decided Kerr, was only following orders in establishing very strict guidelines for relief allowances and applying the relief policy in the harshest manner possible and this did require stringent investigation. A Provincial memorandum had stated, "A strict investigation of each applicant is necessary to ensure that only those who are without means of any kind will receive the maximum".⁴¹ Such formal requirements were supported by the exhortations of city council members. Alderman Miller told Kerr they had given "instructions

to the Relief Officer to be good and tough and to use his own discretion to just make it tough for those birds that were doing that.” Kerr drew the conclusion that the Relief Officer was simply following policy over which he had no say or control. During the hearings, Kerr asked Alderman Miller if this were so. Miller replied, “Absolutely. And the times we have been running over estimates, I have called the Relief Officer and said “Don’t get too soft. Don’t get too kindhearted.”⁴²

Certainly, the Relief Officer kept this part of the bargain. The application process discussed to this point here only spelled the beginning of anxiety and worry for recipients. The first call of the visitor meant more forms to be completed and visitors were required to continuously check information given against information already recorded. Filling out the Visitor’s Report also generated additional forms and each case was expected to be investigated and reported upon on a regular basis.

As Kerr reported this could amount to a considerable number of forms, as he showed in describing the process for a typical relief recipient.

In the morning of one day, deposit his destitution certificate and secure an issue of food scrip, he was still required, upon applying for rent allowance in the afternoon to sign and deposit another destitution form. As each recipient obtained food scrip twice and sometimes three times in one month, rent at least once and fuel at least once, it is apparent that all recipients were required to deposit four or five destitution forms at least in one month and for each unusual expense such as medical expenses, extra milk or any extraordinary expense.⁴³

Kerr criticised this as wasteful as, even the simple cost of the forms involved, and the staff time for processing them, was enormous. The cost to individuals so constantly and so graphically reminded of their state, as if the contact with the Relief Department was not difficult enough, would be considerably worsened by the constant reminder via the

“completely destitute” refrain of the declaratory form, one that had to be signed with every request.

The Relief Department of Vancouver was, essentially, a multi-million dollar business. It was run inefficiently not only because of the inadequacy of staff but also because the emphasis of the department was to assume every individual applicant applying was intending to defraud the city and live idly at the tax payer’s expense. While one might argue the unprecedented scale of need made rigorous investigation necessary, it also appears that such unforeseen need could have obliterated the need for investigation. The necessity for investigation may also have been rooted in a middle class fear of working class masculinity.⁴⁴

The work of the Investigation Section was hampered by inefficiency which in turn was worsened by the unreality of the assumptions which provided the rationale for the work. The majority of relief recipients were neither fraudulent nor were the men uniformly devoted to drunken carousing and fathering children they refused to support. The use of gendered, race and class assumptions to measure which applicants would qualify for relief and, once qualified, which would continue to remain on relief was an inadequate tool to cope with the reality of the communities of most relief applicants. The ideal candidate was male and British, eager to return to work, properly deferential and grateful, and determined to support his family without recourse to state aid. The Relief Department’s policies were designed to reinforce, contain or punish and were based on this template. Many relief applicants did not fit this mold. Numerically, women and children made up the vast majority of relief recipients. Many others were from racial and ethnic backgrounds designated as other than white.⁴⁵ And many of those who were male applicants were angry, bitter and resentful precisely because the Relief

programmes did not encourage them to stay with their families, or help them find work that would allow them to be self supporting.

These realities did not impact on the investigation stage in any significant way. Rather, investigation incorporated punishment of these realities. Minor infractions or any doubts as to suitability uncovered during the investigation resulted in reduced rations or halting of relief. The practice of signalling by investigators brought an immediate halt to relief while the issue that attracted the signal in the file was investigated. Signals were placed in files for example, by such things as families owning more furniture, having more fuel or food on hand than an investigator thought necessary for immediate needs, or where they suspected bootlegging or immoral conditions might prevail. In the “Confidential Instructions to Visitors”, investigators were encouraged to snoop:

You have no right of search but a nicely put request will get you to the basement, larder and closet. The Department requires to know what supplies the applicant has on hand in order that his necessitous circumstances may be supplied. Always report any surplus of food, naming kind. By inserting in your report the applicant’s ability to rustle fuel in the future plus the supply on hand you enable the Department to hand the next fuel application without having another visit made.⁴⁶

Certainly, the Relief Department’s visitors and investigators were expected to make judgements on the amounts of food and other supplies families held in their homes and how long such supplies could, in their opinion, hold out. They were required to make other judgements too.

Are there indications in the house of drinking, such as empty bottles, glasses, etc? Is the demeanour of occupants of house such as to arouse suspicion as to moral conditions? Has [the] applicant got a liquor permit? If so, ask to see it. Deal with this under the heading “Remarks” on report form.⁴⁷

Alcohol, obviously, was a luxury the poor could not afford, even if conditions were such to drive a saint to drink. The community standard on bootlegging was very different from that of the Relief Department:

You say it, that crime is violence. Crime is not bootlegging from a home. Crime is not prostitution from a home. Crime is destruction; destruction of homes, of goods, of people, of community, from outside of it or inside of it. Crime is lack of care.⁴⁸

In spite of strong internal community standards, the relief department set out to impose their own. Other moral conditions, less obvious perhaps than the use of alcohol, were also under investigation. Investigators were instructed to find out if school-age children were in fact, in school and, if they were in private schools, who was paying the fees. They were also instructed to assess the general atmosphere of the home. The author of the "Confidential Instructions" waxed lyrical on this point:

Does the applicant give the idea he is lazy and content to "let George do it" or does he show evidence of being industrious and eager for work. Are the premises well kept or otherwise and are the living quarters sanitary and fit for the needs of the family. Does family unity seem supreme or otherwise in the home.⁴⁹

Overall, the necessity of trying to meet the goal of cutting costs by applying such stringent tests guaranteed wasteful mismanagement, multiplicity of work and inconvenience, and increased chances of friction and general inhumanity and guaranteed an infringement of individual and household rights to privacy.⁵⁰

The relief investigation was arduous. Once successfully investigated and having graduated from applicant to recipient, the relief system became a quagmire of regulations governing what relief would actually be given. The allowance for a relief family was determined according to the "Jones Scale of Relief". Introduced under the Tolmie

Government in 1932, the Jones Scale allowed \$9.00 month for the first adult in a family, \$3.50 for the second adult, and \$2.50 per dependent. This was found insufficient and increased, in March 1934, by 10% plus \$1.00 per dependent. Therefore a family of two adults and one child would receive an additional \$1.50 and \$1.00 for a child to their original grant of \$15.00 ($\$9.00 + 3.50 + 2.50 = \15.00), making a grand total of \$17.50 per month for a family of three.⁵¹ This sum was well below the basic minimums for survival determined by the Labour Congress for a similar family in the early 1920s and less than half what the average family was spending on food in 1937.⁵²

The Jones Scale also included additional allowances, for fuel, light, and rent. Allowances for these were called "miscellaneous grants". Shelter allowance was issued as cheque made payable to recipient, but only negotiable when endorsed by landlord and was calculated at 40% of food allowance for tenants plus a fixed sum for rent on a sliding scale. (\$9.00 for our sample family of three). Fuel allowance ranged from \$2.50 in the summer months, to \$3.75 in the winter. Light was allowed at a fixed amount per month, which the household head was supposed to "work off" for the municipality, usually in the woodyards.

Clothing relief was also difficult to receive, simply because demand far outstripped supply. In both cities, clothing relief was managed by a consortium of private agencies that combined traditional charity work, collecting both funds and clothing supplies from citizens, with public service work, collecting grants from the city coffers to purchase supplies. The role of the Relief Department was to approve the need of applicants and refer them to the Clothing Relief agency. Because of the imbalance between numbers in need and the supplies on hand, the Relief Departments could only issue a limited number of clothing orders per

day and relief recipients could not have received any clothing grant in the previous five months. The problems with this system were worsened for relief recipients at certain times of the year; the change of seasons or beginning of the school year, for example, made waiting for one's turn more problematic.

The relief systems in both cities also provided health care. With the agreement of the respective provinces, the City contracted with the Medical association and later with the dental associations, to provide basic emergency health and dental care to relief recipients. The services were very minimal, for example, dental care meant only extractions.

While the most important qualification for relief was absolute destitution, in practice, relief recipients were permitted to earn cash. This was intended to allow people to obtain items not provided by relief, such as matches, sewing thread, or toilet soap. There was a strict limit on the amount of deductible earnings allowed. Casual earnings up to ten dollars a month were allowed but anything above this was deducted from the relief grant. This deduction clause also applied to other income such as Mother's allowance, or pensions. This amount was adjusted if the family had children. In any case, any "reasonable salary brought in by any [*emphasis added*] member of the household" meant the family was not considered destitute.⁵³ Additionally, no person in business, regardless of income, could be considered destitute. The definition of "reasonable and "any member" gave considerable leeway to the judgement of the Department's staff.

In all cases the husband was considered the head of the household and expected to resume responsibility for his family. Newlyweds were approved for relief on a case by case basis as administrators suspected that people married in order to get more relief.⁵⁴ Single

unemployed men and women had to produce proof they were registered with Employment Service and that their registration, involving a trip to the Commission, was being renewed fortnightly.

There was an important caveat to the gender role of the "Household head", however, as the state had no intention of substituting itself for husbands. For example, if the male head left the city in search of work, the family would be carried by the city Relief Department for two weeks only, unless proof was received from the husband's firm that his earnings were insufficient. The assumption that the male was head and responsible carried on, even in cases where couples had separated. The relief issue was still administered in the name of the husband and he was required to draw the relief for the family. In cases where husbands disappeared, or other members of the family were working, they were designated as the head of the family, regardless of age or gender. Thus, the department was quite capable of subjecting the "head of household" definition to revision to suit its own purposes. That is, it was not always the male who was defined as the husband or head of the family.

There were many examples of the Relief Department adjusting this criteria of relief. For example, in the case of a man or wife receiving a pension, instructions were issued which clearly stated the person in receipt of relief "should be immediately struck from the relief rolls and the non-pensionable person in the family unit" was to be designated "as Head of the Family".⁵⁵ For the Department's needs, any employed member of the family was automatically assumed to carry the role of family head - an assumption that undermined traditional gender roles and expectations.

The regulations that developed over the period demonstrated the variety and complexity of the relief situation in the thirties. No single unemployed male who was sick qualified. Single women were not covered by the public works programs designed to combat male unemployment and were consistently encouraged to return home to "help" their mothers or directed to seek domestic service. When relief was given to single women, prior to 1932, it was on the basis of destitution rather than unemployment.⁵⁶

Furthermore, every level of government strove to avoid responsibility for those in need. Wherever possible people were transferred to other jurisdictions, such as other municipalities or other programs such as War Veterans Allowances, War Pensions, Mother's Allowances or Blind Pensions. Council minutes and Relief Department reports are repeatedly taken up with the question of the proper authority for particular individual cases.

Relief provisions were also consistently reduced to below what was needed for survival. For example, no allowance for electricity was allowed in homes which maintained a telephone, though where illness or disability existed the regulations were adjustable, in order to meet individual requirements. Stringent requirements were imposed on any program designed to meet relief needs, such as relief work schemes.

Reducing provisions also squeezed people off relief but at the same time generated fear. For example, the Vancouver Relief Officer, Mr. W. R. Bone, commenting on a proposal to reduce food relief allowances, reported to the Unemployment and Relief Committee:

There is one factor which, however, can not be ignored, the effect that such reduction will have on the temper of relief recipients. Food has been the basis of allowance in the Vancouver scale of relief and to cut at this time might serve to fan the existing spark of discontent.⁵⁷

The pragmatic response of city council focused on how little relief could be given. Councils in both cities became preoccupied with questions of just how much, - or rather just how little - relief could be given. The practicalities of delivering relief were, however, challenged by the exigencies of budgetary restraints imposed by the Dominion and the provincial governments and by the imperative need to satisfy competing sets of voters. The bureaucrats became responsible for translating policies devised by politicians and the allocated dollars into concrete daily services. One of the reasons municipal governments had to focus on cost cutting was because of the unequal sharing of relief costs devised by the upper levels of government.

Theoretically, the costs associated with relief were divided on a 33 and a 1/3 basis between each level of government. But administrative and other costs were considered ineligible for Dominion and Provincial funds which meant the cities' actual share of overall relief costs was more than a third. What each city paid out for relief differed from the fixed amounts granted by the upper levels of government. In Vancouver, for example, the monthly Jones scale was based on a 30 day month. This meant on a 31 day month the city made relief payments for the extra day - a costly proposition. Despite repeated pleas, the provincial government refused to pay this extra amount termed "overage".⁵⁸ The municipalities found themselves powerless to change the financial resources allocated by the senior levels of government. It was this reality, reinforced by the principles and assumptions of relief, which restrained municipal governments from undertaking any creative or innovative approaches to the development and delivery of relief. Rather, the city councils and their administrations relied on cost cutting measures and a stringent investigation process.

Inadequately trained staff resulted in other problems, including inefficiency. One result of

inefficiency was a necessity for frequent changes in policy. The process of relief over the years was constantly subject to revision. Not only the Dominion and Provincial Government, but the local municipal government and the internal power structure were continually revising policies and instructions to try to close down loopholes and escape hatches in the policies and functions of the Relief Department.

Beside the difficulties associated with qualifying for relief were the problems associated with actually receiving it. Relief provided, as in England, only the bare minimum, and recipients were expected to show gratitude for any relief. Such responses included properly correct and moral behaviour. Drinking or lewd behaviour by either male or female recipients, or neglect of the children by women, for example, automatically disqualified recipients. In relief programmes, pity and suspicion accompanied a parsimonious care for costs. The primary objective of every relief programme was to keep relief costs to an absolute minimum. The primary objective of the investigation process was to examine the lives of every relief applicant and recipient to exclude those who did not meet the rigorous standards of moral and social behaviour.

While the councils of Vancouver and Saskatoon had begun a political campaign to divest themselves of the burdens of relief, the cities' administrations framed another level of municipal response. In Vancouver, the Relief Department was responsible to City Council through a Relief and Unemployment Committee, while in Saskatoon, the Relief Officer reported directly to City Council as a whole until the creation of a city appointed Relief Board in 1932.⁵⁹ In spite of a tremendous upsurge in work load, the Relief Officer responsible for the department's operation was expected to keep costs to a minimum and

efficiency to a maximum. One way he managed this was by hiring temporary staff: numbers rose from 13 to 140 by 1935.⁶⁰ The Vancouver city councillors exhorted the staff of the Relief Department to avoid "being kindhearted" in considering relief applications.⁶¹ The city council was engaged in cutting costs.⁶² At the same time, the bureaucrats were engaged in reorganizing the relief department's structure and responsibilities⁶³. All these manuvres were an attempt to combine both economy and increased efficiency. Regardless of such efforts the costs associated with relief soared (see Appendix 8 for a comparison of costs between the two cities). The increasing costs to the municipality were intensified by the percentage increase not only to their overall costs but to the steeply rising costs of running relief, for which they were solely responsible. (See Table 4.1)

TABLE 4.1
Relief Disbursements, including Government Proportions
and Department Expenditures,
Vancouver, 1930-1934

	Government Share	City Share	Department*	# on relief**
1930	\$100,000.00	\$487,037.71	\$73,970.89	3508
1931	\$559,053.08	\$613,902.57	\$152,659.88	5728
1932	\$1,358,935.42	\$684,960.90	\$221,365.41	9354
1933	\$1,407,998.39	\$787,547.21	\$203,429.93	8795
1934	\$1,416,893.39	\$910,666.61	\$190,145.22	8126

* *Department Expenditures, as overhead, borne entirely by city.*

** *Average number of cases on relief during year, except for 1930, number given is for those receiving relief December 1930.*

Source: Table drawn from CVA, Loc. 127-A-7, Relief Department Enquiry 1935, Exhibit 78.

The two-pronged approach of exclusionary criteria and reduced supplies failed to reduce numbers. As more and more people applied and qualified, in spite of rigid qualification criteria, and intensive investigation, and as more and more people stayed on relief for prolonged periods, the policy definitions and terms were frequently rewritten and constantly debated in an effort to exclude more potential applicants or disqualify those currently on relief.

In its first stages the administration problem was confined to supplying temporary relief to those in need. Only the immediate necessities were provided in the hope and expectation that unemployment would not be of long duration. Continuous changes in the form and scope of relief became necessary as the relief situation intensified. Such changes affected the nature, extent and amount of relief granted also the form and stringency of investigation, and these at all times were the subject of both Government and City Policy. Thus, the increasing acuteness of unemployment conditions gradually necessitated the provisions of such items as clothing, fuel, rent, light, water, medical and dental attention, and special allowances of various kinds. In providing for such emergencies, regulations were laid down from time to time applicable to each category of relief recipient, with the result that the City policy has now entered into almost every aspect of relief recipients' lives.⁶⁴

All these activities were dictated by the over riding need to alleviate relief demands on their budgets and justified by the moral economy underlying the relief system.

At the same time, the Municipal councils could afford a certain amount of self righteous posturing. They could, and did, lecture to the senior levels of government on what relief should be.⁶⁵ They had to argue vociferously with upper levels of government because the councils of Vancouver and Saskatoon were in an increasingly difficult situations given their shrinking tax base and the increasing demands for relief, which eroded significantly larger proportions of the cities' budgets.⁶⁶

The realities of municipal relief programs in Vancouver and Saskatoon became reduced to minimizing financial outlays. The aims and objectives of relief, to encourage independence and thrift, to reinforce class and gender assumptions became diverted to meet

the over-riding goal of keeping costs and numbers down. The structure of relief translated the policy into practice reflect this reality.

According to relief policy, bona fide residents could receive monies from the Relief Department to support them in hard times. This simple principle was translated into action through a complicated and fearsome set of rules and regulations. The Vancouver Relief Department staff⁶⁷ expected applicants to prove they were legitimate residents of the city.⁶⁸ In practice, the Relief Department employees expended a great deal of effort in proving potential recipients did not qualify and in returning applicants to where they had come from, or charging back the costs of their relief to the municipality responsible for them. In some cases this meant deportation.⁶⁹

The strain of the relief application process may be dismissed by contemporary observers as arduous but necessary. Such an approach may well be acceptable if, having once proved one's suitability and having cleared all the hurdles an applicant could feel they were accepted as recipients. What undermined much of the Department's approach is the fact that much of the process was repeated, continuously. Recipients were trapped on a Merry-Go-Round of applying, declaring destitution and enduring investigation. For the sad fact was that to qualify for relief did not mean security of income, it meant accepting the right of the state to investigate every word and act for its reflection on fitness for relief. Thus, those in need of relief were continuously subjected to the application process. Every time a recipient approached the department for any type of aid the entire process, declaration of destitution, questions and visits from Department staff, the whole cycle was re-enacted. This meant those on relief were required to fill out the declaration of destitution before any transaction with the

Relief Department. Given the fact that relief was delivered in such a piecemeal fashion, relievers were constantly visiting the relief offices.

Within the context of the Relief Department, the Investigation section became the key instrument for ensuring the policies of the state were translated into action and had the desired effect of reducing costs and controlling numbers. In effect, the Investigation section was investigating not only the relief recipients, but also the Relief Department staff. The shroud of secrecy was necessary to protect the “operatives” from being identified by other staff as well as by recipients. This factor indicates the inability of the Relief Department to implement its own *raison d’être*. The Relief Department did not even trust its own workers as the investigative section kept an eye on its own people as well. In matters of substance, the relief policies in the two cities reveal the same priorities, a difficult and time consuming process for both bureaucrats and applicants, a delay in receiving services, a minimizing of supplies and a maximizing of suspicion.

Investigation became a priority for municipalities because this was one strategy that fell within the scope of their powers and would permit cost reduction. In fact, the only way municipalities had to cut costs was by denying the legitimacy of applications. Thus, municipal governments focused their attempts to control costs on investigating relief applicants and recipients. An examination of the Relief Departments of Vancouver and Saskatoon is facilitated by the fact that the Relief Departments of both cities were investigated: Vancouver in 1935 and Saskatoon in 1936. The results of these investigations brought together documents, analysis and information which give insights into the actual functioning of the relief programmes in these two cities. In both cities, the investigations were ostensibly

motivated by a variety of reasons. While the question of general costs and financial wrongdoing may have carried the day in actually getting investigations in place, in both Vancouver and Saskatoon there had been myriad complaints from relief recipients, local merchants and local taxpayers regarding the efficiency, the fairness, the quality and the functioning of the respective Relief Departments.

The internal functions of the Relief Department are important. They reflect the “operationalization” of policy, the translation of policy objectives into concrete activities. They bore the brunt of the burden imposed from above by all levels of politicians and also had to deal face to face with fitting real people into the pigeonholes created for them by relief policies. The internal landscape of the Relief Department was a battlefield of competing demands. The language and rituals which informed relief transactions demonstrate the lengths to which the bureaucracy had to go in its attempts to reconcile competing demands.

City councils in the respective cities focused on ways to reduce costs through a combination of investigation, exclusion and reduction in an effort to keep the overall costs of relief from overwhelming their cities. The cultural emphasis on independence and self help, both on an individual and community level, meant the municipal governments in both cities maintained a very low profile in providing relief services before the depression and they continually sought ways to return to this natural state of affairs.⁷⁰

For the most part, Saskatoon had a relief department much in the same way it had a health department. That is, most relief issues were dealt with by the council and control over policy and decisions rested directly in the hands of councillors as a whole prior to the depression. Further, municipal relief recipients tended to be the traditional category of the

deserving poor, rather than the unemployed, that is, widows with small children and with no other source of familial support, the blind, and the crippled [*sic*]. Such recipients were considered "genuinely" incapable of providing for themselves and their dependence was a natural outcome of circumstances. Yet even they were expected to do whatever they could to help themselves, expected to work for any relief they received in order to prove their willingness to work which would prove they qualified, and were assessed frequently to ensure their circumstances had not changed. City fathers gave unemployment relief reluctantly, and in strictly limited and controlled conditions, with the same careful consideration of qualifications.

The concrete result of the priorities established by city council policy was that relief staff providing the actual relief services were caught between the human faces of relief confronting them across the relief office barriers and the hard fiscal lines used as the ultimate policy. An unexpected consequence of this was the need to "police" the department itself to ensure the staff carried out policy so that policy could have its intended consequences.

As a result, relief policy provisions allowed the Relief Department staff to impose more than means tests. As the example of Vancouver shows, the policies encouraged the Relief Department to use gender and class tests to be applied and to act as punitive, exclusionary mechanisms when individuals did not act as the policy makers dictated. The use of deportation and citizenship tests also allowed racism to enter into the departmental operations. Kerr's belief that the point of view to be adopted by the Relief Department ought to be the welfare of those in its charge was not in evidence before he investigated the department, nor introduced after.⁷¹

Both Saskatoon and Vancouver found it expedient to focus on money rather than human needs and to use categories based on their class, race and gender notions to achieve budgetary goals. Thus, the practices of the two Relief Departments in two very different cities in the process of application and approval for relief illustrate the gendered and class assumptions embedded in Relief Department policies and practices. Middle class fears of working class masculinity and assumptions about the dependence and passivity of working class women were inherent to the clauses of the relief policies and sought out through investigation. Investigation of relief recipients pursued middle class demons: alcoholic, irresponsible men and immoral women. The keystone of the entire relief process was investigation. This was the point where the state actually entered the homes, neighbourhoods and communities of relief applicants to determine if they matched the state ideals and thus qualified for relief. The body of the investigator carried the language, the rhetoric, the objectives of the state policy and, filling out his required forms, ascertained if the applicants and their families fit the stringent moral and economic requirements required before relief could be granted. The relief investigators were the central lynch pin of attempts to control the costs of the system.

Using investigative techniques with individuals, and budgetary and financial reasons for the collective, justified minimizing and restricting relief. The policy and practice of bureaucrats and politicians in both cities punished and categorized relief recipients for not maintaining middle class standards. In the process, inhumane and inadequate services became the characterizing features of relief in both cities as the illusory nature of the acceptable relief case confronted the real faces of those in need. The failure of the systems to meet its

objectives was influenced by the politics of place, however. By 1939 local activists in Saskatoon had achieved important improvements to the local relief system. The relief system in Vancouver, in spite of dramatic and confrontational politics which reached the national stage, remained impervious to change.

ENDNOTES

¹ CVA, City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932, Relief I. This file contains a complete set of the various documents required to complete a relief application.

² CVA Police Department Fonds, Series 199, 75-F-2, File 23, Unemployed Worker (Newspaper), March 31 - Nov. 2, 1935.

³ The description for the Vancouver relief application process is drawn from several sources: (1) "Relief Department Regulations as at April 15, 1935. Exhibits, Paul McDowell Kerr, Commissioner. Vancouver, [The Commission], 30 July, 1935. CVA, Series 20, Loc. 16-D-3, file #5. (2) The Unemployment Relief Branch, Department of Labour, "Test Investigation of The City of Vancouver Relief Department," Jan. 14 1935. CVA, Series 53, Loc. 28-A-7, 1935 Relief Department Enquiry, Correspondence, Exhibits, Transcripts, Evidence, files #1 - #4. (3) "Confidential: Special Instructions to Visitors". September 1, 1932. CVA, Loc. 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932, Relief. (4) "Staff Instructions Manual", CVA, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions 1933-1940, file #6.

⁴ To emphasise the stress on strict residency requirements, it is worth noting the Relief Department had a code for residency requirements. "M" indicated resident in Vancouver over one year; "MX" indicated resident over three months and less than twelve months, "T" indicated resident less than three months. See: "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932. P.12. held in CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁵ "Appendix F: A Survey of complaints raised in relief cases." In Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5.

⁶ See Appendix 6 for the complete document. Taken from CVA "Welfare and Relief Department Vancouver B.C.", City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁷ Alice Telford, letter to Mayor Telford dated January 30, 1939. CVA Mayor's Correspondence, 33-E-2, File W, General, Vol. 29, 1939. See also letter from W.R. Bone, Acting Relief officer to Mayor Taylor, dated Sept. 26 1932. CVA 33-B--2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁸ This euphemistic term referred to what today we would term "marital status."

⁹ In Vancouver, the absence of legal documents had to be compensated for by statutory declarations.

¹⁰ Staff Instruction number (hereafter S.I.#) 130, "Marriage Certificates" Dec. 13, 1931. "Staff Instructions Manual", CVA, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions 1933-1940, file #6.

¹¹ See Clause 1, "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932. p.1. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

¹² See Clause 1 "Social State" sub clauses b and c, "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932. p.1. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

¹³ She had appealed her case to a special committee of City Council, who upheld an earlier decision that she should cash in her life insurance policy worth some \$1,300 before applying for relief. CVA City Clerk, Special Committees Minute Books, Vol. 68. Superannuation and Insurance Policies or relief Recipients, Sept. 26, 1934.

¹⁴ "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932, p.12. held in CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I, Clause 34 "Destitute Forms", p. 9.

¹⁵ R. B. C. Mundy, "Confidential Instructions to Investigators". Sept. 1932, held in CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I, p.10.

¹⁶ If the applicant declared an emergency, two weeks food supply could be issued.

¹⁷ See the list of Departmental staff which includes education and work experience of Relief Department staff produced at the request of Paul McDowell Kerr, Relief Department Enquiry, Correspondence, Exhibits, Transcripts, Evidence, CVA, Series 53, Loc. 28-A-7, 1935 files #1 - #4.

¹⁸ Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. P.10. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5. The Relief Department in Saskatoon had 22 staff in 1934 with 1,741 families on relief at that time. "Alderman Nash's Enquiries," CSA City Council Minutes, December 17, 1934, p. 16168.

¹⁹ CVA, City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, 1932, Vol. XI, Relief (2).

²⁰ S.I. #155, "Hours of Employment", Aug. 29, 1933, *Staff Instructions Manual*. CVA, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions 1933-1940, file #6.

²¹ Relief Officer to the Principal Clerk, S.I.# 14, "Use of Light", Nov. 4, 1930. *Staff Instructions Manual*, CVA, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions 1933-1940, file #6.

²² Ellen Pearce reports her mother had dreaded the family going on relief because of the "indignities" relief recipients experienced. She also reported that after her mother's death

in 1937 she was responsible for going to the relief office and felt they harassed her. Ellen Pearce, Oral history interview #S045, Mission, B.C., Jan. 20, 1995.

²³ S.I.#90, "Modes of address", Jan 23, 1931. Staff Instructions Manual, CVA, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions 1933-1940, file #6.

²⁴ Memorandum on Social Service Form #74, Sept. 1939, *Staff Instructions Manual*, p.6. CVA, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions 1933-1940, file #6. This memorandum points out Social Service Form # 74 was "designed to eliminate, as far as possible, misunderstandings which have often occurred in the past". Recipients would show up on the wrong days for appointments and "fail to bring the documents required for the routine handling of the case".

²⁵ The Relief Bureaucracy had more sympathetic notions of the objectives of investigation. In his report on "Requirements of the Employment and Relief Department for 1929" Relief officer Ireland reported that "every form of indigency was investigated. No help is given until a thorough investigation of the case is first made." He pointed out the investigation responsibilities of the department were broad and included investigating applicants to the Marpole Home for incurables, patients entering the municipal hospital, and parents charged under the Infants Act, etc. He went on to say "While the work of investigation may suggest to the bystander to be so much red tape, it has frequently been demonstrated that cases may be closed and families rehabilitated as a result of a study of their problems intensively and extensively. "Report on Employment and Relief Department Requirements for 1929," City Clerks Records, Series 20, 14-E-6, File #8, 1928. Unfortunately, these claims of rehabilitation are not held up by the department's own statistics. A large percentage of the 1880 cases closed in 1927 were due to "own efforts" of the recipients, and many more due to causes that could not be defined as due to the rehabilitation efforts of the department, such as deported, regained health, etc. See: Letter to Mr. A.J. Garbutt, chair of Employment and Relief Committee, Jan. 13, 1928. CVA, City Clerks Records, Series 20, file 14-E-6.

²⁶ Assets such as life insurance was not generally touched if the cash surrender value was under \$1000. Those who owned cars were forced to surrender their licence plates to the care of the Relief Department.

²⁷ Vancouver Relief Recipient, Oral History Interview V012, (Name withheld by request). Vancouver, April 27, 1994.

²⁸ "Confidential Special Instructions to Visitors" September 1, 1932. CVA, Loc. 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932, Relief.

²⁹ Kerr recommended, in his report on the Relief Department, that relief applicants should fill out their own forms, with staff only assisting those having trouble with them See: In Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. P.52. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5. He also recommended reducing the number

of forms by combining some, abolishing others. *Ibid.*

³⁰ R. B. C. Mundy, "Confidential Instructions to Investigators Sept. 1932. P.12. held in CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I, Foreword, p.1. The instructions also included instructions on how to treat the instructions: Clause 38 stated: "A copy of these instructions is to be carried at all times and treated as strictly confidential. They may be amended or added to from time to time. Should a visitor leave the employ he will be required to return his copy to the office." *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³¹ See Clause 48, "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932, p.11. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

³² Letter, dated Feb. 4, 1935 from Alderman L. D. MacDonald to the Mayor and members of Council, in his role as Chairman of the Relief Committee. CVA City Clerks Files, 106-D-3, 1935.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Letter, Dated Jan. 16, 1935. To Mayor and Council, CVA City Clerks Files, 106-D-3. 1935.

³⁵ Minutes of meeting, Feb. 4, 1935 V.C.A City Clerks Files, 106-D-3. 1935.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. p.5. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5.

³⁸ Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. p.5. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5.

³⁹ Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. p.5. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13 and p.15. Kerr recommended an immediate transfer of the head of the Investigation Section, a complete reorganization of the department, and immediate abolition of the term interrogators.

⁴¹ Exhibit 90, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. Appendix E, Exhibits. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5. See also p. 14 of report.

⁴² Transcript of witnesses' evidence, p.1255. Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5. See also pp. 14-15 of report.

⁴³ Paul McDowell Kerr, *Relief Department Enquiry: Report of the Investigation*, 1935, pp. 21-22. CVA City Clerks' Files, Series 20, 16-D-3. File #5.

⁴⁴ This fear has generally been seen as a fear of revolutionary sentiments. It may be that the middle classes had long held suspicions about the commitment of the working classes to work itself, even if it were available, and cherished a decided belief that working men would rather drink than work to support their families. These ideas about working class masculinity - enjoying the ability to father children but reluctant to parent them - fuelled much of the fear of the state becoming burdened with the financial support of working class children and they need further research. Regardless, investigation was a tool to reinforce proper gender role behaviour in men.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, the category white appears synonymous with British. Other nationalities, eg, Italian, Ukrainian, etc. did not appear to be considered white.

⁴⁶ See Clause 8, "Fuel, Food and Clothing". "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932. p.1. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁴⁷ See Clause 17 "Bootlegging or other immoral conditions", "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932. p.1. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁴⁸ Ines Leland, quoted in Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter, eds. *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*. (Victoria: Provincial Archives, 1979) p. 11. See also, among others, Peter Battistoni's comments on bootlegging as "friendly", op. cit. p. 51.

⁴⁹ See Clause 18 "Energy" and Clause 19 "Home Conditions", "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932. p.1. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁵⁰ These terms are all drawn from McDowell-Kerr's Report.

⁵¹ This explanation for the Jones Scale is drawn from Appendix G, "The Jones Scale, The Split System and Overages", in Paul McDowell Kerr, Commissioner. *1935 Relief Department Enquiry, Report of The Investigation*, Vancouver, [The Commission], 30 July, 1935. CVA, Series 20, 16-D-3, file #5, p.105. The Commissioner argued one could not understand the Relief System without understanding the Jones Scale. Exhibit 41 contains a complete chart of all the figures involved in the Jones scale for every combination of family.

⁵² Dominion Bureau of Statistics. *Family Income and Expenditure in Canada, 1937-1938*. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1941), p.45. The average for the city of Saskatoon was \$429 and \$440 per family in Vancouver.

⁵³ "Confidential Instructions to Investigators", Sept. 1932. CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I. Interestingly, this did not apply to the income derived from those serving in the armed forces who designated a mother or other family member to receive their

income. Such income was not to be included in the Relief Department calculations.

⁵⁴ Such cases are common in the records of both cities. Further, couples who had separated and later reunited were also considered suspect. See the case of Mr. and Mrs. S. who had to undergo a court style hearing in front of the Civic Relief Board. They were appealing the Relief Officer's ruling that their reunion was not genuine but only a ruse to increase relief income. CSA case file.

⁵⁵ E. W. Griffiths, Administrator, Department of Labour, Unemployment Relief Branch, CVA 106-B-2, Social Service Department, Series 4, Office of the Director, Staff Instructions, 1933-1940.

⁵⁶ Joan Sangster admirably sums up the paradox of women's employment in the 1930s. The dilemma of the cultural expectation to stay home and not take jobs from men (and a "cultural anger" when they didn't) ensured that relief for single women was hard to come by. Joan Sangster, "Canadian Working Women," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., (St John's, Newfoundland: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1985,) pp. 72-72. Domestic labour was the standard prescription for young single women's unemployment. It may have been, for the young women concerned, the acceptable equivalent for women, of "riding the rods".

⁵⁷ W. R. Bone, letter dated July 15, 1932. CVA City Clerk's Files, Relief, 33-B-2, 1932.

⁵⁸ For some months this could represent a significantly large figure. Shelter, for example, meant the provincial government was only paying, per family: \$10.14 for 28 day months, \$10.85 for 30 day months and \$11.28 for 31 day months. The city was committed to a fixed rate of \$11.00 per month and did not allow tenants to assume responsibility for more than this in a month. The city had no recourse to make up the short fall in the 31 day months, because the provincial government would not pay more than was actually paid out, (ie the \$11.00) so the city did not receive the \$11.22 grant and was receiving less than they allowed in the other months. In Saskatoon, relief allowances were determined by family size and the calender did not present problems.

⁵⁹ After 1936, a Social Services Committee. See: Joanne T. Ragotte, "An Administrative/Historical/Documentary Study of the City of Vancouver's Social Services Department", paper for ARST 505, March 29, 1991, UBC.

⁶⁰ There was some scandal about the hiring and unionization of the Relief Department staff. As might be expected, the only growth industry in Vancouver and Saskatoon during this time was the Relief Department. Accusations of favouritism (City Councillors were accused of sending men to the Relief Officer with instructions to hire them) and union busting (the temporary employees wanted to join the Civic Employees Union in order to fight the salary reductions) fuelled an investigation into the Relief Department in 1935. See: Paul McDowell Kerr, Commissioner, *1935 Relief Department Enquiry, Report of The Investigation*,

Vancouver, 30 July, 1935, CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 16-D-3, file #5, p.8.

⁶¹ Evidence presented to the Paul McDowell Kerr, by the Relief Officer on remarks passed to him at various times, by elected civic officials. See: Paul McDowell Kerr, Commissioner, *1935 Relief Department Enquiry, Report of The Investigation*, Vancouver, 30 July, 1935, CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 16-D-3, file #5

⁶² For example, staff members in the Relief Department had received a 10% cut in salary an, later still, a further 10% cut in their salaries. See the evidence exhibits in CVA, City Clerk's Records, 127-A-7, Relief Department Enquiry 1935, Exhibits File, Staff response to Commissioner's Questionnaire. Earlier in the depression, staff had voluntarily contributed half a days salary per week to relief costs, as council had defeated motions to impose salary reductions. See Report of the Special Committee on Salary Adjustments, CVA Vol. 31, July 3, 1931. Alderman Loat put in a minority report which called for a reduction of 5% in all salaries over \$100 a month and a reduction of 2.5% in all salaries under \$100 by 2.5 % a month, but there was no seconder. The language and rhetoric of his motion was very interesting.

⁶³ In 1932, the Employment and Relief Department became the Public Welfare and Relief Department, and in 1937 became the Social Services Department. See: Rajotte, "An Administrative, Historical, Documentary Study of the City of Vancouver's Social Service Department", Paper for ARST 505 U.B.C., March 29, 1991. See also: Vancouver City Archives, City Clerk's Records, 33-B-2, Vol. IX, 1932, Relief (2), The Report on the Re-organization of Departments, submitted by the Special Committee, June 16, 1932.

⁶⁴ Wardhaugh Report, April 30, 1936. Series 27, Special Committee Reports, Loc. 27-C-5, File #7. pp.3-4. Mr. Wardhaugh, Comptroller of Accounts was appointed Dec. 2, 1935, by a resolution of the Special Committee of Enquiry in the wake of McDowell-Kerr Report, to "examine carefully and report as soon as possible on the practicality or otherwise" of putting Kerr's recommendations into operation. He disagrees with Kerr on almost every point. Instead he designs and submits his own scheme for overhauling the system. Interestingly, he does agree with Kerr's suggestion regarding women as suitable employees in the unemployment section, the only point on which the two appear to agree.

⁶⁵ See, for example, the memorandum of the B.C. Union of Municipalities to the Provincial government regrading public works.

⁶⁶ Some municipalities had, in fact gone bankrupt. In Vancouver's case, three were neighbouring municipalities. See, for example: Bettina Bradbury. "The Road to Receivership: Unemployment, and Relief in Burnaby, North Vancouver City and District and West Vancouver, 1929-1933". PhD S.F.U. 1988.

⁶⁷ The Vancouver Relief Department process is presented here as the case study for ease of organization. While the basic forms may differ between the two cities, the process,

procedures and expectations were basically identical.

⁶⁸ That is, in both cities, people who could prove they had resided in their respective cities prior to 1931 were entitled to apply for relief and receive the amounts of relief the program dictated as suitable for their circumstances. The determination of residency changed over the period becoming increasingly restrictive. For example, in Saskatoon, applicants only had to prove residency for 6 months before application. This was increased to 1 year, then 2 years and finally to the phrase "before May 1931". Drawn from Relief Department policy documents over the decade.

⁶⁹ In one oral history report a woman spoke of helping a woman the department was trying to deport to the States and her abusive husband. This claim was supported by official documentation. See, for examples, special forms "Deportation particulars - British Subject"; "Undesirable Immigrant Report"; "Deportation particulars - Foreigner"; "Deportation particulars - U.S. Citizens". CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I. and the section on deportation cases in R. B.C. Mundy, "Confidential Instructions to Investigators" Sept. 1932, CVA City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

⁷⁰ This reliance was something they continued to foster throughout the depression.

⁷¹ McDowell thought one of the ways to reduce charges of harshness aimed at the department was to make 50% of the Relief Department staff, especially in the investigation section, "women with good educational backgrounds". See p. 51 of his report, *op. cit.* Interestingly, women were part of the department. In 1928, under Relief Officer Ireland there were 5 women staff, 3 of whom were investigators (See Report on Employment and Relief Department Requirements for 1929, City Clerks Records, Series 20, 14-E-6, File #8, 1928.) In 1931, Relief Officer Cooper, sought and got, approval of council to appoint four temporary staff, three of whom were women appointed as investigators. (See CVA City Council Minutes, Vol. 32, Sept. 28, 1931. Report of Finance Committee to Sept. 28 1931 meeting of City Council.) I have not been able to determine what happened to these women investigators.

Chapter Five
Making the System Work:
Gendered Strategies for Resisting the Relief System

"Haven't we trouble enough stretching allowances and keeping our children healthy or trying to without being pushed around from pillar to post?"

Alice Willis, to Mayor Telford, Vancouver, 1939¹

"Women cope in a different way. The depression left men without anything to do at all. Women had far more to do than they ever had before."

M.F. on relief in Saskatoon in the early 1930s²

Alice Willis had supported her children on relief from early 1931 after her husband had abandoned the family. Like many others in both Vancouver and Saskatoon, Alice was not adverse to writing directly to the City Mayor to express her displeasure with the relief system: "I haven't been around there all these years with my eyes and ears shut. I could write a small book of the goings on down there. It would sure make interesting reading and the axe for lots."³ In the course of her letter, Alice demonstrated how the relief system failed and some of the ways relief recipients responded to those failures. The Relief Department's concentration on balancing the City's books meant the funds allowed to individuals and families on relief was woefully inadequate. The first step for most relievers was simply survival. This chapter will explore how women and men coped with the impact of the depression and found ways to supplement an inadequate relief system. The standard conception that the depression served only to reinforce gender roles is complicated by the reality that women and men, in both working class and middle class homes, reshaped their gender behaviour to suit local circumstances.⁴ Certainly, there was reinforcement of certain gender specific roles. As Mae Findlay commented, women had far more to do of what they had

always done. But the actions of women and men inside and outside of the relief system were dictated, not by the standards of the relief system or by society's standards. The wealth of strategies developed and utilized by relievers trapped into "making ends meet when there was no middle" show a depth of ingenuity fuelled by desperation.⁵ As the depression moved on, there was an increasing disregard of the morality framing the Relief Department's approach to relief. Relievers began to adapt to the peculiar circumstances of relief and challenged both class and gender roles as a means to an end. From simple survival mechanisms to outright fraud, from individual gender role adaptation to outright political protest, individuals determined for themselves what would work in their localities.

There were differences and similarities between women and men and across class in relief survival. Irrespective of class, the stereotypes expected married women to be feminine and their skills assumed to be primarily domestic, though how women in different localities manifested proof of these skills took different forms. The working class woman took pride in balancing limited income in the household budget, in canning and in cooking skills, abilities related to providing for the family under difficult conditions. The middle class woman demonstrated her femininity in appearances, taking pride in the appearance of her home, of her self and of her family. For working class women, their gendered skills became even more vitally important to the survival of the family and more visible. Middle class women were compelled to take over domestic tasks their gendered skills had rendered obsolete in order to maintain appearances. Domesticity for middle class women had become mostly supervisory, overseeing paid help or purchasing new technologies. Now, she had to retreat and take over household chores because of reduced incomes. Thus, much of middle

class female effort was devoted to “keeping up appearances” without the financial resources of previous years.

This was the domestic front. The reality of women’s paid employment and unemployment - for both middle and working class women was obscured by the patriarchal notion that married women’s unemployment is non-existent. A women who is married is, de facto, employed. This stereotype held in spite of the fact that many married women did, in fact, seek and find paid employment outside of the home when necessary.⁶ The depression years were no different in this respect. Segregated employment opportunities protected, to some extent, women’s employment. In certain cases, women’s employment increased.⁷ However, hostility to women working, and especially to married women in the paid work force, was overt and bitter. Letters to the editor column reflected this attitude though it certainly did not prevent women from seeking paid work when necessary.⁸

Men of both the working and middle classes were defined by their role as providers. Unemployed men, deprived of this rightful gender role as financial provider, found it difficult to meet societal expectations amidst the reality of massive unemployment. Men made choices that lived up to their standards of acceptable male gender roles, in spite of the circumstance of unemployment, though these actions often clashed with middle class expectations of masculinity. For example, working class men were accustomed to leaving their families in search of work in other locations. This was not acceptable masculine behaviour for middle class men; that is, gender roles had different definitions and expressions which were dependent on class but which were challenged by the impact of the depression years.

Gender expectations were not only challenged during periods of high unemployment; in some cases they collapsed. The gender boundaries between what was expected of women and men, and what women and men actually did, frequently broke down under local circumstances. Ironically, the very system designed to reinforce proper gender and class roles within the working class became the mechanism that undermined them.

Much of these gender and class “violations” were precipitated by the inadequacies of the relief system, however, the failures of the relief system to impose moral and political imperatives were not solely rooted in the material shortcomings identified by relievers like Alice. The relief system’s inability to meet its own goals of social and gender regulation was rooted in an unwillingness to recognize the concrete results of capitalism’s failures on ordinary lives. The relief system’s overarching objectives of exclusionary and controlling mechanisms contradicted the lived realities of those in need of relief. As a consequence, while failing to provide even the basic material necessities of life, relief also failed to impose the “correct” gender and class roles authorities believed could replace the need for relief. Individuals struggling to cope with the strictures and limitations that marked relief in Canada, found conforming to strict gender and class roles became secondary to survival.

The paucity of relief provisions was highlighted by family income and expenditures expected during periods of employment. In a national study of “Family Income and Expenditure,” the “family” was defined as a husband and wife living together as joint heads. This couple would have between one to five children and have no more than one lodger or domestic living with them in a self contained dwelling unit.⁹ A family in Canada under this definition, on average, could expect to earn an average of \$1400 a year, have 2.2 children

and have a male head of 41 years of age. Thirty percent of these families owned a car, and forty percent owned their own homes. Average expenditures for these ideal families were almost as much as income: \$332 per person per year in Saskatoon and \$323 per person in Vancouver.¹⁰ The stringent financial situation for even ideal families highlights the abject poverty which relief families experienced.

The sums for the average family, though limited, were far in excess of the sums which were used to calculate relief. Model family incomes, per person/per month, in Vancouver were \$27.66 per month and in Saskatoon were \$26.90, per person. Relief only allowed \$18 per month in Vancouver and \$19 per month in Saskatoon - per family, not per person.¹¹ This concrete reality underlay the clash of people and policy. The staff of Relief Departments were given the unenviable task of cutting costs and doling out these inadequate sums of money to relief recipients. They were not, for the most part, trained social workers nor was the welfare of those on relief their primary concern. This reality gave relief recipients who, through harsh necessity had learnt first hand about the relief system and how to make it work, opportunities to subvert and manipulate the system.

The opposite of this adoption of norms and conventions prescribed by society was the outright rejection of conformity. For example, the relief camp workers could assume and exercise for themselves a voice of authority as they observed and responded to the conditions of the relief camps, contrary to the social role assigned to them by politicians of the thirties. "Plain murder is the verdict the guys have arrived at" is one example, of relief camp workers' adopting a role of critic of the relief system. This indictment was their response to the death of two workers in a truck driven by a very nervous young kid over a

mountainous treacherous road in a truck which should have been repaired before, rather than after, the journey.¹² The relief camp workers borrowed the language and vocabulary of the official justice system to arrive at their own judgement of events affecting their lives. Such a voice would eventually transform and be expressed as political will in the relief camp strikes and the On to Vancouver, and On to Ottawa treks. Women would use the language of motherhood as they organized to protest relief conditions. The Vancouver Mother's Council, for example, spoke of the relief camp workers not as unemployed, or communists, but as "our boys". Using familiar language and calling upon accepted roles, they used these to undertake new activities outside the normal sphere of wife, mother and woman, that is to say, they became political activists.

The shared experiences of relief and the attempts to reshape familiar roles to fit new circumstances brought together people of different ages, ethnicities, class and religious backgrounds into a common rejection of the economic and political system which relegated all of them to one social category: relievers. The social construction of relievers as idle, troublemakers, communists and useless members of society had to be reconstructed by the relievers themselves. They were not content to be labelled by untruths purporting to identify or categorize them, nor were they content to become that label. As individuals and organizations they began to reshape roles, policies and their conception of self. It becomes apparent that "woman" as a descriptive and defining term was often subsumed under wife, mother and family. In defining woman, roles and attributes were assumed and assigned to members of the female sex. The social construction of woman centred around social duties, the procreation and reproduction functions of womanhood took precedence for women. Man

was defined also by achievement in social duties: the ability to provide was the central defining factor of a good man. What determined “good” women and men as perceived and constructed by ordinary people clashed with the conceptions formed by those responsible for relief policy. The policy had the power of erasure. One daughter recalled the impact of the depression on her father because of the labels generated by relief: “...depressing. This is a man who was a brilliant mathematician, who was a tool and dye maker, a pipe fitter. He was an artisan at his trade. He wrote music.”¹³ Relief policy could write out the characteristics that made women and men proud of themselves.

One of the major sources for information on the expectations of woman as wife and mother, and man as husband and father, is in the context of the failures, the deviants, those who failed to live up to the norm. While prescriptive literature, social policy¹⁴ and popular sources may have propagated the ideals of womanhood and manhood, the most overt statements of gender roles is often most clearly articulated in the propaganda connected with female failure. In the case of relief, the failures were those who did not fit the norm of the independent male heading a family dependent upon him. The relief structures collided with people who, regardless of their own wishes or desires, did not fit the preconceived ideals.

The lives of women and men were fractured by the depression, and in particular the relief system.

Well, almost everybody was on relief. Although maybe that's not true. When we lived in that house on Avenue M the man next door to us worked in the federal building which I suppose was the busiest office in the city. But an awful lot of your neighbours were on relief. I don't think anyone in the area we lived in wasn't.¹⁵

The issue for many recipients was not simply the shortage of funds. Working families were accustomed to “making do” or “going without” until times “got better”. This was a reality of life, given the seasonal nature of much of Canada’s labour market. The problem in the 1930s was, in spite of temporary fluctuations in the economy, times never got better: “the depression didn’t end, war happened.”¹⁶ The prolonged duration of the depression resulted in the slow deterioration of material possessions and reinforced the capacity of the relief system to sustain individuals and families through harsh times. The relief system was never designed to provide adequate resources, and prolonged reliance on it initially sapped morale and energy.

Curtains, you dreaded taking them down to wash because they came out of the water in shreds...Another really bad aspect was the fact there was never really any money to replace things. Bedding and clothes you mended until you mended over the mends. And you didn’t have a change of them so you would have to pick a really nice day where you could get them dry and put them right back on the bed. Dishes, they cracked and broke and you couldn’t replace them. I remember some of the cracked cups. We didn’t throw them out. We kept them in the back of the cupboard.¹⁷

Long term scarcity, perpetuated by rapidly diminishing material resources, escalated malnutrition and other health problems. As the *Unemployed Worker* reported in 1930 in an article entitled “Relief Worker killed by speed up and starvation”, a relief worker was killed on the Point Grey relief job in Vancouver.

It is another story of the combination of speed up and starvation. Brendon, the murdered worker had been working on relief for about three weeks but the wages were so miserable that he was unable to provide food for his wife and family for the entire week. The result was that on the day on which he was killed he had NO LUNCH. *[emphasis in the original]* He was offered some by some of his workmates but he was too proud to acknowledge that he had nothing to eat. In the afternoon he ran into a snag that was falling. His senses benumbed from hunger failed at the crucial moment. The speed up

prevented proper safety techniques being operated and between the two the unemployed army is less by one.¹⁸

Problems such as this resulted from long term dependence on sustenance intended only for short term. Men were not the only ones too proud to admit to hunger. Women also neglected their diet and their health. Mary Woodland remembers her mother's health during the depression years.

She had quite a number of illnesses, some great problems. She had a wonderful fistula, which she let go for years. When she finally showed it to her doctor, he said, "For heaven's sake, Why did you let this go for so long?" Well, she figured she didn't have anytime for sickness, she wasn't expendable....The closest she came to resting was when she would sit down in the living room...doing all this endless mending.¹⁹

It was within this context of abject poverty that the continuum of responses developed. The very first, and most basic response, was to cope, to make do on a daily basis. For many citizens this was a difficult task, one that took all their time and energy. There are many relief recipients who simply barely survived the depression years. As relievers successfully navigated the first set of hurdles designed to keep relief costs down and citizens independent, and actually registered on the relief roll, the stark problem was how to manage the scarce supplies allowed by the system. This was seen as primarily a woman's responsibility. Women's ingenuity and creativity became of prime importance in this regard. Strategies used by women to make ends meet in periods of steady income became of critical importance during the depression years. Almost every person interviewed for this research has memories of the efforts and sacrifices of the women in their families which mark their recollections.²⁰

For the women responsible for coping with relief supplies for their families, food was a major concern. The groceries limited meal choices and had a direct impact upon how a wife and mother could carry out her role. A Saskatoon relief recipient recalls:

There was lots of beans, but nothing to do with them, no ingredients. My mother wasn't a good cook, but she was clean. No, that's not fair to say. How could she be a good cook when she had nothing to work with? She made a bean soup that everyone in the family liked, but me.²¹

Relief supplies would challenge the ingenuity of every women's skills.

Vancouver supplies were no better. "I would say there was enough if they would eat it. But there was so much of one thing that they didn't like. Like dried peas and dried corn and dried barley, all those things. You don't eat those regularly, but when you start having to eat them, it makes a different meal." Monotony was not only a constant companion to relief family meals, it also meant that cultural differences and individual preferences and needs were not acknowledged. If the Relief Department had purchased macaroni in bulk, then macaroni was what every family received that week.

Individuals sought ways to supplement the relief diet. Many of those interviewed recalled that gardens were life savers, though the ability to utilize this resource was sometimes limited by access to fertile land. Saskatchewan residents, for example, experienced more difficulties in this respect because of the severe climate problems than the British Columbian resident. The urban nature of the family residence of the relief recipient was a factor - many urban homes had quite rural surroundings and did have extensive gardens and livestock. Horses were still very much in evidence in both cities for delivery and other purposes. One family kept a goat in Vancouver, which they allowed to graze on

the boulevard, until it ate the coat of a passer-by who had stopped to pet it.²² One Vancouver relief recipient recalled that his parents moved into a much larger house and took in boarders. The major attraction of the move was the space available for gardening. His family were so successful with the garden that they had more produce than the family could use:

We had a garden. We had all kinds of vegetables we used to give away, tomatoes and all that. Before we had the chickens we used to eat sparrows. You would put a trap out. In those days it was an old garbage can and grains of rice. And you would pull it. Dad would clean them and fry them. Once in a while we used to hit the jackpot: a pigeon.²³

Many families, living in rooming houses or other limited accommodations, did not have access to the space for gardens. They might have access to garden produce. Some of these methods for supplementing food supplies might be considered less than honest. Cora Parker spoke of the activities of Bill, her husband, in Vancouver: “He didn’t go out to steal a sack of potatoes. They didn’t know what they were going out looking for. They didn’t especially go out for the stealing. If there was something there they figured they could use they would steal it.”²⁴ Cora insists this was not stealing: “It wasn’t stealing, it was petty thievery. And you just done it to keep body and soul alive, to keep your nerve up.”²⁵ Mr. Clare recalls what he terms “a breakdown in morality”, when he stole berries from a next door neighbour’s yard:

We picked berries mostly in open [vacant] lots. And one lady had a marvellous bunch of raspberries in her yard. Now here’s a breakdown in morality. But I sneaked into her yard and picked berries off her berry bush because it was so laden with berries and so much easier. Truthfully, out of devilry, I went out selling the berries after and I knocked on her door to sell them - to try and sell her some of her own berries. I don’t recall if she brought any. She probably said, “no, I got a yard full”.²⁶

Families with relatives in rural areas were lucky in two respects: sometimes they could send the children out to the farm during the summer to help with farm labour, and rurally-based relatives were also a source of much needed fresh produce.²⁷ Certainly, families sending children to stay with relatives helped redress the imbalance of too little food, too many mouths.

In Saskatoon, the concept of relievers supplementing their diets was formalized through a community garden project. Individual relievers had applied to the city for permission to plant gardens in vacant lots owned by the city. The city approved of this initiative so much, that they formulated a system for allocating gardening space and distributed free seeds, especially potatoes, to relievers, however, if the garden space was not sufficiently utilized, the relief family would not qualify in subsequent years.²⁸

Women found other ways of supplementing the family diet. In addition to using the fresh crops from gardens, women pickled and canned garden produce. They also made jams and jellies. Keeping chickens, rabbits, pigs, ducks, and any other small livestock that readily reproduced and could be converted into food or used for barter was another mechanism reported by many of those interviewed. Such resources could save lives. Bob Arnold's father traded a load of wood for a goat after the doctor said his newborn son, premature and weakly, needed goat's milk.

Again, as with the respondent quoted above, acquiring a home with the space for livestock was a bonus. The Relief Department was often supportive of relief recipients they identified as having "get up and go" which was frequently seen as the ability to "rustle" supplies for themselves.²⁹ For example, one family was supported in their endeavours to take

over an adjacent vacant lot so they could expand their chicken flock.³⁰ These examples are a small sample of the alternatives families sought out to augment the inadequacy of the Relief Department supplies.

Given the paucity of food allowed by the Relief Department, families had to seek alternatives. Through scientific calculations, the Relief Department in Saskatoon formulated diet plans that corresponded to number of individuals in a family group (see Figure 5.1)

Figure 5.1
Diets for Unemployment Relief
As Approved by the Saskatoon Civic Relief Board
August 31, 1933

One Adult Person.....Diet 8	For each child over 12 and
Man and Wife..... Diet 16	under 21 add 4 diets
Man and wife with one child	Widow or widower and
up to 2 years of age.....Diet 17	eldest child classed.....Diet 16
Man and Wife with 1 child	and other children as
over 2 and under 6.....Diet 17A	set out above.
For each child over 6 and under	
12 add two diets	

Source: Extracted from Diet List, City of Saskatoon Archives, City Clerk's Records, Relief F. 1933. A fuller version may be seen in Appendix 3 of "Engendering Resistance: Women Respond to Relief in Saskatoon, 1930-1933" in Dave De Brou and Aileen Moffat, *Other Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women*, (Regina: Plains Research Centre, 1995).

Unfortunately, this quantitative approach ignored significant variables that had a direct impact on the nutritional needs of families. The health of children, the presence of lactating mothers, invalid family members, and other variations were not accommodated by the lists and, as a consequence, these needs were dismissed or overlooked by departmental staff.

The impact of struggling with the relief system, for crucial needs that were simply denied, can not be understated. In some instances the consequences could be fatal. Ellen Pearce recalls how her invalid mother worked to supplement the relief supplies, using her skills as a brilliant seamstress probably to the further detriment of her health, because the system did not supply sufficiently for the needs of her family.³¹ Ellen believes the work, worry and stress, combined with poor diet, contributed to her mother's premature death in 1937.

Women who had jobs in the restaurant industry would "sneak" food home from the restaurants for their children. Both Bailey and one other interviewee had mothers who would wake them when they came home for work "at the ungodly hour of 2 a.m. to feed them the food they had gathered:

We would go to bed. And then around 2 in the morning, we'd be wakened. And it would be mother. And she would have us sit on the side of the bed -- we slept together. We would sit on the side of this bed and she would unfold a pure linen napkin, and then it would be a couple of cold potatoes and maybe a cold pork chop, and that would be our dinner.³²

These are only a few examples of the methods of supplementing relief diets undertaken by individuals. There was yet another way. A major source of control women could exert was over their own intake of food. Many respondents recall their mother ensuring everyone else had eaten before they did themselves, often contenting themselves with left overs: "I don't actually remember seeing my mother eat."³³

This control over their own bodies was a first and last resort for women. They could achieve a balance between the food coming in and the mouths to feed. This was reflected in women's attempts to control their fertility. While birth control was not legal, women shared

information on how to limit their births. As one woman recalled, what frightened her was not having children but "...feeding them. I didn't know whether I would have enough to feed them or not." She went on to comment on birth control:

The thing about birth control was - if only a person knew. But nobody would talk about it. That there was an easy way out and every household has it. But they didn't know how to use it...They weren't that educated. Oh, no, they weren't that educated and as I say, they were scared to use it. You'd say, "well gosh, what if I used that and it makes me sick or does something to me in there? What do I do then?" They were scared. Everybody was the same. If I told you to do it, you'd be scared too.³⁴

The method Mrs. Parker refers to here is the douche. She goes on to say that she found out about this by talking to a woman who had only given birth to one child. She also stated how other women sought out very close friends who seemed to be successful in limiting family size.³⁵

Other women were able to access an informal network of birth control providers. One interviewee was, working as a hairdresser and engaged to be married, was given advice by a customer:

I guess it was through hairdressing, and I was working and engaged to be married when one of my customers said to me, "when are you getting married?" And I said, "on the 28th of January." This was earlier on in the fall. And she said, "do you know anything about birth control?" And I said, "no, I don't."... So anyway she said, "well, if you're not wanting to have a family right away," she said, "you'll probably want to know about birth control." But you must remember, I was 20 years of age! She told me what to do. She said, "you just go upstairs to -" I don't know, the second floor where I was working, and she said, "you just go up there and you make an appointment with Miss Wann...she has birth control devices." So I said "okay. What the heck, nothing ventured, nothing gained." So I went up to see her and I told her I was getting married, and that this lady had recommended I see her. And she said "fine." And she fitted me for a diaphragm. And she said, "this is what you use and so forth and so on, and how you use it." And I remember taking it home -- and this is where my mother comes in. My mother and I were just living in one

room by this time....We had our bed in there. And I took this nice little container that Miss Wann had given me. And I just put it on the bed. And my mother noticed it and said, "what's that?" And I said...., "well, Bob and I are getting married and we don't want to have a family right away, so this is what we're going to use so we don't have a family." [And she said] "What is it?" "Well, okay -- you want to see what it is!" I opened it up and I showed it to her. And she said, "what do you do with it?" And I said, "well, you insert it." "You insert it! Heaven forbid, I never thought my daughter would be showing me this!"³⁶

This young woman made this decision without consulting her future husband and paid for it herself. The diaphragm, carrying case, instructions, fitting, a book on hygiene and some ortogynal cost \$12.50 at a time when This young woman was making \$9 a week.³⁷ Birth control at this time, whether providing or advertising it, was illegal under a law dating from 1892. Regardless of the law it was not completely unavailable - falling birth rates attested to this.³⁸

In the absence of birth control, or effective birth control, some women resorted to abortions. This was a distinct and physical rejection of the role of woman foremost as mother. The rejection of the role was rooted in the pragmatic, an attempt to use one's own body to balance scarce resources and the demands of mouths to feed could have fatal consequences. Bob Arnold remembers his mother's attempts in this direction led to her death from septicaemia.³⁹ The specific case of Bob's mother was duplicated by other women. One young woman Leask witnessed the aftermath of an abortion in her mother's rooming house:

Although I do remember one time, we had a lady who was in the front room -- she had rented the front room with her -- I don't think he was her husband -- but it doesn't matter. They lived together. And she wakened in the night -- she went out and did housework, you see, this lady did. And she wakened in the night screaming and screaming. And, of course, my mother's bedroom was just over the hall, and she dashed out. And I dashed out and my sister dashed out. She wakened practically everybody in the house. And here she had aborted

herself. And, of course, they didn't want to have a baby. So she'd aborted herself. And, of course, it was just all over everything. And my mother went and got towels and old sheets and everything, and was packing this woman. And finally she said to the man, "you'll have to take her to St. Paul's." That was the closest hospital. "You'll have to take her to St. Paul's." And that lady said to me, through her tears, she said, "I have some house-working jobs to do tomorrow. Would you do them for me?" I said, "sure, whereabouts are they?" And she said whatever his name was, Dick or something, she said, "Dick will tell you." She said, "will you do them for me til I get back?" I said "Sure." And I went out and I did her housework for her while she was in St. Paul's. And I guess they gave her a D and C or whatever. *[TH: So in the middle of all that, she was still thinking of her job?]* FL: Oh yeah. You had to. I guess you had to. I mean, a job was a job, eh? Two bits an hour, carfare, and your lunch.⁴⁰

The emotional trauma of abortion was mitigated by reality: a job was a job and it came first.

Women attempted to help themselves and other women with both birth control and abortion services.⁴¹ Interviews carried out for this research, as well as interviews already in archives, are replete with references to women utilizing abortion services and birth control mechanisms.⁴²

Food was not the only resource strictly controlled by the Relief Department and women were not prepared to let the Relief Department dictate priorities. While the Relief Department, through policy and bureaucratic administrations attempted to control families, one method of resisting this control was simply to divert relief funds to sources other than the Relief Department intended in its policy. That is, some women made choices in direct conflict with the instructions of the relief staff. Anne Bailey's respect for her mother is rooted in the ability of her mother to assert her own values and philosophy of life in the midst of the trauma inflicted by the Depression years.

When the social workers would hand out the money they would often hand out little brochures and guidelines as to how the money should be spent, and the idea of buying things in bulk...we shopped with the money she [the social

worker] had assigned to us. And we were all set up with what should do us for the entire month, recipes and so on . But it seems the way it should be done rarely worked out that way....I won't claim my mother did everything she could along this line because sometimes her approach was - what was it - "And hyacinths to feed the soul" [*TH: Like the early women's movement, "Give me bread but give me roses too?"*] Yes, so, on things that she deemed necessary for our emotional health and psychological health....I was blissfully unconscious of much of the hardship in many ways that all of this imposed on my mother....I just know in retrospect that she must have been strong.⁴³

Anne Bailey's mother had a history of taking on the bureaucracy and winning. Though legally blind, she had fought for custody of her child, carrying out an undertaking to the judge to have an operation which restored partial vision in one eye, a step which cost her the position she had held with the CNIB canteen for a number of years. She raised her daughter through combining paid work with recourse to the Relief Department and to other welfare agencies in the city, however, she was determined it would be her choices, and not always welfare agencies that determined her priorities for her daughter.⁴⁴ The mother of another interviewee had a similar personality. She fought to stay off relief. This determination included confronting unjust employers.

And I can remember she had asked for a raise at the Metropolitan. She'd been there quite a while and she asked for a raise and so this man gave her -- everybody got just a little envelope with your wages in and you mustn't tell anybody how much wages you made, you know, it was very hush hush, you didn't discuss these things. And Saturday night when she got her little envelope and she looked in it, and I guess she was putting in a good 50 or so hours a week at the job, and there was 50 cents [extra]. So she just marched up the stairs and she went in and knocked on the door and he was in his little cubicle. And she said, 'I asked for a raise.' I can remember her telling this story. And he said, 'you got your raise.' And she said, 'you gave me 50 cents.' And he said, 'that's your raise.' So she said, 'I just took it and threw it at him, and said, 'you need it more than me. I quit.'" That was a Saturday. So the next morning was Sunday morning, and she said to me, 'Frances,' with her good Scottish brogue, 'you're not going to Sunday School this morning, you're coming with me. I'm

going to get a job.' So that was fine. Away we went, and we went down to a place just west of Burrard on Pender, and it was called the Alison Hotel. Oh, it was really pretentious, beautiful. Sort of big stairs going up and everything. And she said to me at the front door, 'now, you stay here and I'll be right back.' And I remember it was just slightly drizzling. She came back after a little while and she said, 'well, I start work tomorrow.' And she got a job as a cook there.⁴⁵

Electricity was also strictly controlled by the Relief Department.⁴⁶ Monthly electricity allowances were calculated on the size of the family and "paid for" by a certain number of hours labour given to the city by the male head of the household. Any electricity consumed by the household above the set allowance had to be paid for by the family in cash. For example, Cora Parker's family was allowed \$1.50 in electricity each month. They could not afford to pay for electricity above that allotted amount but the allotted amount would quickly be used up. When their meter had reached the quota her husband and his friend rigged a bypass wire, so that electricity continued to come into the home without registering on the meter.⁴⁷

Relief recipients were expected to repay goods or services supplied by the city such as electricity or water, with their labour. Municipal tax bills could also be paid this way. A relief recipients' labour was assigned a per dollar figure value and he (the work was all designed for male recipients) worked in the city wood yard and other basic labouring work until the city "bill" was paid. Recipients found ways around this requirement. Whether sick, or working for pay elsewhere, an individual could still be working off his city debt through the services of a friend or neighbour. One woman recalls how her husband was supposed to dig ditches for the city, but "...he couldn't dig ditches, you know, not after having T.B. So Don, [a family friend] he dug the ditches for him and put it in as if it was Bill who did

it....And some of them had odd jobs, you see. And they'd get someone else to work for them when their turn came up"⁴⁸

Relief also covered rental costs. Again, relief recipients resisted the Department's attempts to determine where they should live by the amount they allowed for rent. Recipients had their own standards. In reality, the amounts allowed by the department bore little resemblance to the true costs of accommodation. Finding ways to earn the difference between actual rental costs and what the Relief Department allowed was another method for individual coping mechanisms. Alice Willis, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, found a "little job" to earn enough to pay the difference: "I have a little job which brings me in just about the difference between \$6 allowance and the \$13 rent for this flat. The full rent having to be paid, or out."⁴⁹ One relief recipient remembers his family rented out rooms in their home to make up the difference. "We applied and were investigated. And he [father] got for a family of six - we got - \$9 a month for rent. And the rent [due on the house] was \$17. So, what he did, he rented out part of the house. [He rented out] Two rooms for five dollars and he rented another room for \$3."⁵⁰

Anne Bailey's and her mother, for example, rented the front room of an "ordinary residence" owned by an elderly crippled woman who lived in the back part of the house and rented the upstairs rooms to single men. According to Anne Bailey, this was a very common stratagem for homeowners as "one way to survive, it was income."⁵¹ This was one of the nicer housekeeping rooms they had lived in, some were very "dingy." A Saskatoon recipient remembers when her family had absolutely no money that they had to share a house with another family: "A family of 8 and a family of six, altogether. The adults got along all right,

but by the time we got a place of our own none of the kids were speaking". She also recalls the moves they made over the course of the decade always were to smaller, less expensive homes:

The house on Ave M had only two bedrooms. I slept with my sister in a double bed and sometimes we had my young brother in with us. We had a trundle bed underneath it had pulled out for my other two sisters. And the youngest always slept with the parents.⁵²

The mother of another interviewee kept herself and her daughters off relief by running a rooming house and finding work wherever she could get it.

...when we moved to 787 Homer, where she had the first rooming house, we had city relief boys there -- a dollar five a week [for each one]. They got a ticket, and then they would have like little red flyer wagons, and they would go down to what we called the Hamilton Hall and get their groceries. I can see that still, you know. And so it was pretty grim [laughs]. *[TH: And so they would get their groceries from the Hamilton Hall office.]* FL: Yes. *[TH: And then go back to their room.]* FL: Yes, to their room where they had a hotplate. And in those days it was not the natural gas we have today but the manufactured gas, and you'd put a 25 cent piece in and pull the lever and sometimes they had a little string on it and they'd pull it [the quarter] back up again. So they could use it again. Shades of BC Electric. I guess they really had to count their pennies, you know. I can remember some of them. This was while she worked as a cook, oh yes, she had to. She didn't run the rooming house just for the fun of it. She had to work besides. And she was away all day at her job.⁵³

Not only size, but basic amenities such as running water became too expensive and the houses were further and further on the outskirts of town. Houses such as this had to fetch water from the "standing pipe". One respondent recalls a major household chore for herself and her brother was to haul the copper boiler to the pipe for water in the summer, not only for household needs but to water the garden. She recalls that the line up for water was a social occasion as it was mostly children carrying out this task.⁵⁴

By 1938, Vancouver was considering a minimum standards bylaw for housing. A Special Committee appointed to look into this, headed by Helena Gutteridge, the first female elected to Vancouver City Council, believed such a by-law would be “of inestimable service in Vancouver where the number of low standard living quarters is growing at an alarming rate, in some cases the owners of such property are exploiting unfortunate citizens who are living on relief allowances.”⁵⁵ This Special Committee on Housing Conditions had, with the help of the University of British Columbia’s Sociology Department, carried out an extensive survey and gave, in its June, 1938 interim report a sample of the typical housing found under this form of exploitation:

Location:	2500 block Quebec St..
Dwelling	6 room house erected in April 1906 at a cost of \$1,000
Rooms added	2 rooms, in low ceiling attic, 3 rooms in basement (head room just over 6 feet)
Occupants	13 adults, 5 children
Sanitation& heating	1 toilet 1 bath, Round stove in basement with stove pipe cut through floors to second story
General information	Information was volunteered to the effect that the furniture and the right to operate the building as a rooming house was recently purchased for \$700 and a monthly rental of \$25. Total income from rooms estimated at about \$70 a month. ⁵⁶

Caught between inadequate shelter allowances and undesirable quarters, in the last resort, it was often cheaper to move on without paying and start over.⁵⁷

While women were struggling to utilize their domestic skills for the benefit of the family, men were reduced to the seemingly hopeless task of finding work. Much of working class male identity was tied up in the ability to work and to provide for the family. The Depression had an enormous impact on men who had taken pride in this identity and who had believed in their roles as husbands, fathers and providers. Men such as these were fit, hardworking and proud of their abilities. One woman recalls her mother having to put a vent

in the back of her father's trousers because he had gained weight without the physical exertion associated with his work. To be without work meant not only a loss of a physical identity as a provider, it also meant loss of an emotional identity. This same woman recalls seeing her father cry, for the first time, when he was blackmailed into signing the notorious relief agreement developed by the Saskatoon Relief Department. They had no food in the house, and her parents had rejected the agreement because "it made relief into a charge against your estate." The Relief Department's officials came to their house and threatened to take away the children if he did not sign. As they had no food in the house and because relief would be denied if they continued to refuse to sign, he signed and cried afterwards at the loss of his independence. "I'll never forgive them for that, for making my father cry, never."⁵⁸

The imperative to find work was strong, so much so that many men left their families and went on the road hoping to find work in other cities. While there has been much historical coverage of this phenomena, an under explored aspect has been the impact on the women and children left behind. Further, the emotional price paid by these husbands, fathers and sons who pursued this strategy has not been explored. The pressure of fulfilling the role of provider, for some men, overwhelmed their desires to stay at home with their families, live on relief and hope to find work locally.

In some ways, a man leaving his home and family was a way of supporting the family. One woman recalls her father leaving because their chances of getting relief would be increased if he "abandoned" them. Her family, then only consisting of women, had a

somewhat easier time as women were not expected to seek work in order to prove eligibility for relief.

That was why my dad left, what they called relief at that time was started but if there was a man in the house he was supposed to go to work whether he could or not. And the only way my mother and sister and I were going to get any help was for him to go so he just vanished into thin air.⁵⁹

Other men left home in search of work, believing that once they had a job somewhere, anywhere, they could then bring their families out to join them. This did not always work:

Well, honey, I guess you thought I was never going to write to you, but you are on my mind all the time. Honey, I can't get a house up here at all so I think I will be coming back. But please don't worry as it will all turn out for the best. I will have about \$50 so we won't be flat broke. I am just going to work til the 24th and then come home. Things didn't turn out as I thought they would....Gee, honey, I am never going to leave you home alone again. I feel so lonely without you, I can't wait [until] the 24th.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, Bill Parker, the author of this letter was not able to keep his promise. He had to leave his wife again searching for work in other areas, and he was also stricken with T.B. and spent months recovering in the sanatorium in Kamloops.⁶¹ We know very little about the loneliness and worry that men endured as they left their families in the search for work that is evident in Bill's letters to his beloved wife. And certainly the impact on women and children was not positive:

My mother used to have a saying that the more she saw of men the better she liked cats and dogs! So I guess she had a bitter experience with my dad. You know, after all, there you are with a four month old and a three and a half year old and father decides he's going to leave.⁶²

The younger men in the family sometimes left home in an effort to help the family. By attempting to becoming self supporting at very young ages, young men could relieve the

pressures at home and, with luck, could send funds home. Jack Geddes is an example of the hardships such young men, boys really, faced. He left home after losing his job at British Ropes on Granville Island when his mother moved out to a small holding out in Aldergrove when he was 17.

They stole our youth away from us. I was just a young lad when the depression hit, 15 actually, in 1929. And from then until I went to the Old Country [armed services] I didn't have a youth. I was just riding box cars and begging door to door. I've always resented it, that I didn't have a youth like other people.⁶³

Jack spent his 21st birthday begging for food in a small town in Alberta, while the CPR train he was riding stopped for coal and water. Jack Geddes also bitterly resents the fact that, after having heard R.B. Bennett speak in Vancouver and believing that the Conservatives would “blast their way into the markets of the world” to end unemployment, that he convinced his mother to vote for him: “Jesus, how stupid can you be when you're young! Two years later I could have hung the bastard.”⁶⁴ The relief camps, which was the government's solution to the problem of “single unemployed” (read single unemployed men), paid only 20¢ a day, not enough to enable young men to help themselves, let alone any families they might have. Sadly, for many of these young men, the solution to the Depression was the outbreak of war. One woman remembers her brother had been criss-crossing the west from the age of seventeen in a fruitless search for work. He went into the armed services “to get a decent suit of clothes” and was killed in action not long before his nineteenth birthday: “Between the depression and the war, he had no life.”⁶⁵

Just as some of women's strategies carried risks, so did taking to the rails. Clare Way's brother was an example of some of the tragedies that emerged from the unemployment situation:

He rode the box cars across Canada as far as Regina or Winnipeg in the 1930s. A lot of men with nothing to do, that's what they did. They climbed up on the box cars and they wanted to go somewhere else to see if they could find something [work] there. He told us the stories and they were the kind of stories that were carried in the papers in those days: Middle of winter, freezing they pulled the tar paper off the sides of the box cars to cover themselves....they certainly didn't have any heavy clothing.⁶⁶

While it was acceptable gender behaviour for working class men to leave home in search of work, it was not considered acceptable by the middle classes who considered the support of families as paramount. This was reflected in the refusal of municipal Relief Departments to give single unemployed men relief.⁶⁷ They were considered transients and were the financial responsibility of the federal government. It simply meant men without families. As part of the rejection of this behaviour, unemployed men who took the roads in search of work were, regardless of personal characteristics and political inclinations, labelled idle and communistic. Any man not working and living with his family was feared as a source of unrest, or worse, a revolutionary threat: "Of course all unemployed protesters, we were communist whether we were or not."⁶⁸

Taking to the roads in search of work was not an acceptable option for women, a gender expectation that crossed class lines. This did not mean that women did not want to do this. Some women report that leaving home to search for work elsewhere by riding the rails was a very attractive option. As Jean Fawcett said: "At that time there lots of men and

boys who were hitch-hiking rides on trains going west. And if I had been a boy or a man I would have been one of them. But I was afraid, otherwise, I was afraid to go out on the road to travel or hitch a ride because of the poverty times.”⁶⁹ As research into women’s experiences of the 1930s expands accounts emerge of women who did ride the rails.⁷⁰ The YWCA in Saskatoon reported “girl hoboes” were a problem. Young women, they said, were slicking their hair with Vaseline and hiding it under men’s caps.⁷¹ One woman recalled disguising herself as a man by binding her breasts. Her first foray with another young woman similarly disguised came to an abrupt end, because her friend was not up to carrying off the deception. After that, she travelled alone.⁷² Another woman made the move from Saskatchewan to Prince George, disguised as a male, in search of work. Disguised as men, women took to the rails for the same reasons as men: to find work, to make one less mouth to feed at home and to avoid domestic drudgery which was always seen as the answer to women’s unemployment.

Single women were very much on their own in regards to unemployment. The Standing Committee on unemployment Relief reported to City Council in 1932 that the matter of relief for single girls” was “not a problem to the city other than the work entailed in finding positions for them,” a task they paid the YWCA to carry out.⁷³ The positions were, mostly commonly, in domestic service. Young women in search of work were placed with families as live-in house-hold help. Jean Fawcett, for example, moved from her home in Khedive, Saskatchewan in 1936 at the age of 21. On her arrival she shared a “light housekeeping” room with a friend until she found a live in domestic situation.⁷⁴ Her first job paid \$8 a month, she slept on a canvas cot at the foot of the stairs and found the work quite strenuous and the

neighbourhood very rough. She only stayed in this position for one month, then found a family in a better neighbourhood with a church she could attend nearby with a salary of \$13 a month.⁷⁵ Young women may have had dreams of careers before the depression began, but the reality of harsh economic times crushed many. For example, Jean had dreamed of being a school teacher ever since she had seen, as a young child, the local school teacher arrive to visit her father who was a school board trustee in Khedive:

I knew that I wanted- that I wanted to be a school teacher because a car drove into the yard one day and this young beautiful lady stepped out in high heels and talked to dad, he was trustee. And I thought, wasn't that beautiful, I'm going to be a school teacher. And all my life I wanted to be a school teacher.⁷⁶

Sometimes, young women took live-in domestic situations in the city so that they could afford to go to Normal School.

For other young women, the domestic service was full time work. Leaving home to work in live-in domestic service was considered socially acceptable for young women from both a class and a gender perspective. Young women in this occupation were replicating the work they would normally be doing as wives or mothers. The real role of full time wife and mother was denied by the depression's unemployment of eligible (read employed) men. normal conditions were expected to return and the training would not have been wasted. Additionally, domestic service was considered to provide safety from sexual predators, emotional support and some financial security. In many cases, the young woman could afford to support herself and send money home to help her family. This meant a decrease on the strains of the budget at home.

As far as safety from sexual violence went, this was not, unfortunately, always the case. Some women reported sexual harassment and even rape, as part of the working conditions

attached to domestic service. Jo Ferguson, who had taken a live-in domestic help situation in return for room and board while she went to Normal School in Saskatoon, reports one of her friends coming to her to escape the intolerable conditions her employer's husband was visiting on her.⁷⁷ Ruth Siemens, in her research into the Mennonite Girls home in Vancouver, reports from her research how one girl's life was dramatically affected by being repeatedly raped by her employer's husband.⁷⁸

Even in the homes where sexual violence did not exist, many young women resented the drudgery, the low pay, and the control employers exerted over their lives. Other young women were fortunate. Their employers made them feel "part of the family", and encouraged them, as in Jean Fawcett's case, to pursue educational goals. Nellie McClung is an example of this type of employer.⁷⁹

Domestic service was encouraged on young women who sought relief. If they were unwilling to take a situation in someone else's home, they were encouraged to return to their own homes and help their mothers. Country girls were encouraged into the city; city girls found themselves sent to farm homes as household help. The YWCA in both Vancouver and Saskatoon operated employment bureaus that placed young women in domestic positions. This organization also involved itself in a training program designed to improve the quality of domestic servants so they could earn more money, status and respect.

The reality was, that domestic service was available as an employment alternative for two reasons. First, the labour associated with running homes in Canada in this period was strenuous, repetitive and burdensome. More than one pair of hands was necessary. Secondly, any woman whose husband kept a reasonably paying job through the thirties could afford

domestic help. All such women had to provide was room, board and a stipend. This alternative was such that the federal government, assisted by the YWCA acting as an informal employment agency for single women, embarked on the process of trying to make domestic service more attractive to young women.

Another gender difference in the treatment of female and male unemployment was an assumption that a woman always had her body to “fall back on”. Young women applying for relief would be told “a pretty little thing like you shouldn’t have any trouble”. The reference could easily be taken to refer to a woman finding a husband or using her body to support herself. The Vancouver trade union newspaper, *The Labour Statesman* carried a cautionary tale of a young shop girl seeking relief who is refused, who is reluctant to marry because the man who loves her will not be able to support her and, as she lives with her sister and sees her life with unwanted babies up close, decides marriage for love is not a choice she wishes for herself. Her solution is to take up the offer of a wealthy young man to be his mistress.⁸⁰ This option was not just in the realms of fiction. Hostels for single women relief recipients in Vancouver had been closed as a measure designed to control “abuse”. These young women, the Relief Department felt should be able to solve their problems through their own efforts rather than simply “retire on relief”. The closure of the hostels caused moral problems which became apparent in the crackdown on vice. Many of the women selling their bodies were not professional prostitutes. Resorting to selling the only commodity they had was a fall back strategy for some women.

Professional prostitutes are small in number as compared with the number of women who are willing to prostitute themselves during a period of

unemployment, to supplement inadequate wages, or to supplement the earnings of father husband or male companion.⁸¹

Not that a “life of sin” was any guarantee of a good income. For example, every time the police in Vancouver instituted a crackdown on vice, the number of young women applying for relief increased. The response to this was a major initiative led by ministers and other social leaders to establish a home for “fallen” girls who wanted to leave the streets and find a new life.⁸²

Women who worked at prostitution became adept at avoiding detection or breaking the law. Police reports complain bitterly at the problems they faced in trying to arrest women. For example, in a report on the vice situation in Vancouver, the Police Chief described bawdy houses that had alarm bells built into the stairs,⁸³ false cupboards built into rooms to hide people⁸⁴ and how women would rent hotel rooms in the names of their male customers to avoid charges. Two detectives, in a report to the Chief Constable dated Feb.7, 1935, reported on a visit they had made to inspect a premises on Union Street for a lodging house license. They noted: “This house is being visited by well known prostitutes. Only the men register for the rooms, the women being allowed in without having to register.”⁸⁵

Generally, however, the major gender difference for considering the difference between male and female unemployment in the 1930s was the fact women were invisible. As a well-known Vancouver feminist, Helen MacGill, ironically commented: “An unemployed conference does its whole duty...when it discusses the difficulties and seeks the relief of unemployed men.”⁸⁶ The problems facing unemployed women were considered solved simply by the fact of being female. Being female meant that employment within the

domestic sphere was always believed available. As a consequence of these three acceptable, though not equally respectable, avenues of employment (domestic service, prostitution or marriage,) “girls” were not counted as unemployment statistics, nor were they accepted as relief recipients in their own right.

Regardless of whether young women were considered “fit subjects” for relief or not, many of them found themselves responsible for dealing with the department on behalf of their families. Ellen Pearce remembers her mother dreaded going on relief, but they had no choice. “It was something she dreaded. She never wanted to go and submit to the kind of indignities that were dealt by the bureaucrats who ran the Relief Department”.⁸⁷ After her mother died, she was sent by her father, who was out of town seeking work, to take care of the family’s needs at the relief depot.

Dad was away and he left me with books, the relief books that we had, with specific instructions what to do. But, when I got to the Relief Depot...I got a lot of flack. They really harassed me and I got upset. I was upset at having to go there in the first place. Then to meet this! They wouldn’t believe me about my dad being out in the country looking for harvesting. I got so upset I fled. The depot was on First Avenue, not too far from the station. And, I fled that depot upset and awfully mad for doing that. So he [father] had to go down and fix them.⁸⁸

A young woman in Vancouver found her mother unable to cope with the strictures of the Relief Department after the father had abandoned the family. She, at 13 years old, became responsible for dealing with the relief system.

Of course this [being forced to take relief] was the most horrible thing that had ever happened to her, to take any kind of help like that was, well, if it had been left to her she never would have - we would have starved. If it hadn’t been for the neighbours, we would have [starved]. She would never apply for relief or anything like that. *[TH: So who made the initial application for relief?]* I did. *[TH: Young as you were?]* Yes.⁸⁹

This young woman did not have the privilege of being too proud to accept relief. At the age of thirteen, she was not only coping with the relief system, she was also finding paid work, which she was not reporting because her earnings would be deducted from their relief allowance. Her family needed her earnings. Initially she was working in a laundry which was laundering the supplies for the China-Japan war. She also took babysitting and then moved to another laundry where she ironed men's shirts, 3¢ a piece. She used her earnings to clothe and feed her family:

You didn't dare let the relief people know what you were doing or they'd take it off you whatever you were getting...The clothing situation was terrible. Because we had to pay the rent, there was no way out of that. That had to be paid whether you ate or had anything on your feet or not. So that was what I used the money for, whatever I earned, I worked it so that whatever money I had one month would go to one of us, and the next two months it was the next two people.⁹⁰

The shame and humiliation connected with receiving relief was very real. Clothing was a major source of these emotions. One interviewee remembers how her brother came running home from school calling "Shoes and rubbers [rain boots] for Sissie". She can still remember his voice calling those words. She remembers her mother taking her to a shoe store on Main street in Vancouver, just above 25th street and being "very tickled" with the pair of black oxfords for which the school coupon was valid. She recalled that she felt quite fine about the transaction but "I remember my mother sitting there weeping in front of the salesman in shame. Because of having to accept this free donation from the government."⁹¹

Women went to great lengths to change the appearance of relief clothing which was identical and readily marked the body of a person as a relief recipient. Interviewees recount, with great pride the skills demonstrated by their mothers and other female relatives, such

as grandmothers and aunts, who would spend hours “turning” clothes so they no longer resembled the relief issue.

A major obstacle in Saskatoon was the fact that the relief clothing bureau purchased material in bulk, cut it all out in exactly the same patterns and gave this to women to sew up.⁹² Women used their skills to subvert the Relief Departments intention to inscribe relief onto their bodies. This was literally the case with the women’s dresses that had arrived at the Relief Department with “Relief” in large red letters across the back shoulders of the dresses. Gender barriers broke down when it came to survival. Men, for example picked up groceries from the relief depots (See Photograph 5.1).



July, 1932

Month after month, each morning, and afternoon, the endless queue of citizens and others seek 'relief,' otherwise, civic charity, at the Relief Office, (formerly The Cliche, MS, all, Priv. by, and City Hospital) corner Cambie and Pender St. Note: observe one man carrying away his issue of groceries.

Photograph 5.1 Men lined up at Relief Depot in Vancouver, 1932. Handwritten caption reads: “Civic Relief July 1932 Relief Office, Corner Cambie and Pender. Note two men carrying away their issue of groceries.”

When there were no men in the family to carry the relief issue from the relief depot, women had to do it. This was resented by women, particularly when, as in Saskatoon, they were expected to haul their groceries home in empty liquor cartons.⁹³

There were other ways that gender roles broke down. One woman remembers her father knitting. He also “crocheted cushion covers, granny square cushion covers. I don’t know where the yarn came from, but they were red, maroon and black. He hooked rugs. He taught my mother how to knit.”⁹⁴ Another woman remembers her mother fixing the roof, turning her hand to whatever had to be done.⁹⁵ Another woman remembers helping her father, without his ever questioning her ability as a young girl to keep up with him, an adult male.

I was the oldest in the family and I didn’t have any brothers so my father needed my help too. I loved outdoor work better than indoors...I remember the winter my father and I hauled loads and loads of felled trees on a bob sled chassis. To avoid getting too cold I walked behind the load as the horses plodded home about five miles away. It had to be unloaded and piled for sawing. There was never a wood sawing day that this teenage girl was not on hand to work along with any male help.⁹⁶

Ewanda goes on to point out she was able to turn “totally feminine” in the winter months, doing embroidery by lamplight, but she was proud of the strong right arm that she wasn’t sure she was born with or developed through all the farm labour. She also comments, quite un-self consciously, of herself as her “father’s right hand man”.⁹⁷

The relief department itself also rewrote gender entirely as in the case of two brothers who were relief recipients. Administrators were responsible for putting policy into practice to reconcile competing objectives of policy by making gender a flexible variable in traditional family roles as exemplified in the case of these two Vancouver brothers. Both

single men in their sixties, they had each rented a room from their sister and lived independently, of each other and of her, on their respective relief allowances. The Relief Department cut those allowances by \$4.26.⁹⁸ Upon enquiring with the department for the reason for this cut, they were informed they were being treated as a married case. The younger brother's file had been placed within his older brother's file, the older brother's file had been stamped "married" and the new, expanded, file of this "newly wed couple" had been placed under the jurisdiction of the married section:

On appearing at the Relief Pay Office and asking a Mr. Turner the reason of this cut, he explained that as we are brothers, and as we rent a room from our sister who is the landlady, we are then a family living together and immediately marked and placed the eldest one's card in the married category, in other words we were instantly married to one another, and the eldest one, W.G.C. made responsible for the younger J.C. Also told by Mr. Turner that if he, J.C., deliberately attempted to move out from his present abode "He had better look out" therefore at present he is shorn of all individuality as an adult citizen, and one could say made a child of the family, by the way is there a means test here, or is this Social Service Hitlerism on Single Persons we can not see anything Democratic in such an action.⁹⁹

In challenging the Relief Department's right to cut their allowance, the brothers revealed an understanding of gender roles and the relevant status accorded those roles. Part of their challenge was to regain the social status they felt they had lost through the relief office decision in defining one of them as female. Their analysis of the situation did not stop at gender roles but also incorporated political accusations. This example also demonstrates the fluidity of the concept of family. The Relief Department was able to reconstitute not only gender, but "family", in accordance with either moral or financial imperatives.

This case also exemplifies a further problem with relief policy in action. The policy was translated and carried out by the working members of the municipal Relief Departments.

In many cases, as discussed earlier, these individuals were not trained social workers nor even trained bureaucrats, yet they were expected to work within the structures and ideologies laid down by the relief policies¹⁰⁰ Their everyday interactions with relief recipients meant that interpretation and implementation could differ greatly from the intention of the policy makers or even from day to day. In the case of the two brothers, financial imperatives clearly overrode consideration of gender roles or family make-up.

Alice Willis is only one voice of the many that challenged the relief system for its shortcomings. The first step in protesting was survival. All of those on relief had various strategies for subverting the inadequacies and cruelties of the system. The first lesson was to learn to be poor. The second was to learn to fight it. Women and men had different strategies which were informed by their understanding of their gender roles. They also called on skills and behaviours considered appropriate for their gender. These were not completely inflexible. Where necessary, women and men adapted to the circumstances of their life with only a passing nod to gendered conventions.

From individual resistance to organized protest was a short step. Some of the individuals whose experiences are recorded here went on to involve themselves in various organized groups and activities, the subject of the next chapter. In these responses it is possible to see a rejection of the relief system as a punitive and regulatory institution, and the beginnings of an increased expectation of relief as a social service. Individuals demonstrated the ingenuity and ability of relief recipients to rewrite the relief policies in their own favour through actions and language. Further, they re-figured the morals and values that were supposed to control their class and gender behaviour . Their actions illustrate individual

survival as a form of protest. Subverting the system, outwitting it, forcing it to provide to meet needs was a daunting challenge. To make the system work meant effort from those the system was supposed to serve. These efforts varied in respectability, from self sacrifice to the exercise of high level skills to what many would call fraud or cheating: the system had to be made to provide. While the system had specific expectations of men and women, the strategies developed had specific gender overtones, but were not always carried out by the “right” gender. Gender, as a social construct was reframed by the constraints and challenges of the society in which women and men found themselves. Survival was a tougher script writer than conformity.

ENDNOTES

¹ Alice Willis, Letter to Mayor Telford, Dated January 30, 1939. CVA, Mayor's Correspondence, 33-E-2, File W, General, Vol. 29, 1939.

² Saskatoon relief recipient, Oral History Interview #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996.

³ Alice Willis, Letter to Mayor Telford, Dated January 30, 1939. CVA, Mayor's Correspondence, 33-E-2, File W, General, Vol. 29, 1939. Unfortunately, Alice did not carry out her threat to write a book, or at least, I have not found it if she did.

⁴ This appears to be the received wisdom on the depression years. See chapter one.

⁵ The amount married women were given as "housekeeping" in the inter war years has been shown to be "remarkably inelastic" in other locales. See: L. Oren, "The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families: England, 1860-1950" in M. Hartman & L.W. Banner, *Clio's Consciousness Raised* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) pp. 226-244. Cited in Jane Mark-Lawson, Mike Savage and Alan Warde, "Gender and Local Politics: Struggles over Welfare Policies, 1918-1939" in *Localities, Class and Gender: Difference, Methodology, Representation* (London: Pion Ltd. 1985) p. 197.

⁶ Unemployment was considered the loss of "gainful employment." A gainful occupation, according to the census is "an occupation by which a person earns money or money equivalent. Children working at home on general household work or chores were not considered gainfully employed. Similarly, women doing housework in their own homes without wages, and having no other employment were not included among the gainful occupations. The term wage earner as used in the census means a person who works for any capacity for salary or wages. Wage earners constitute approximately two-thirds of the gainfully employed. *Census of Canada 1931* Vol XII. See also: Sylvia Walby, "Women, Work and Unemployment" in Linda Murgatroyd et al, eds. *Localities, Class and Gender* (London, Pion Ltd., 1985) pp. 145-160 for a penetrating discussion of the theoretical failures regarding women's unemployment.

⁷ Overall, Canadian women's employment increased from 1921 to 1941, though it dropped in 1931 for the 14-19 age group. Series D107-122, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983.) Cited in Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1988, 1993) p. 43. The chapter "Working for Pay" in this work explores the complexity of the paid work world for women in the inter-war years.

⁸ See the Letters to the Editor column of the Star-Phoenix for a local perspective on this issue. For a national perspective see the article by Medric Martin "Go Home, Young

Women," *Chatelaine*, (Sept. 1933) and Agnes Macphail's response the following month: "Go Home, Young Women? Ha! Ha!" *Chatelaine*, (Oct. 1933). Also, see the subsequent lively discussion in the letters to the editor, "Can you Shackle Women Again?" *Chatelaine* (Nov. 1933).

⁹ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Family Income and Expenditure in Canada, 1937-1938*. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1941. p.8.

¹⁰ *Family Income and Expenditure in Canada, 1937-1938*. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1941. p.8.

¹¹ The gap between the amount of money even average families could expect to earn and the amounts deemed necessary by experts and the even greater gap between amounts of money allotted by Relief Departments has been verified by other researchers. For a most recent and related discussion see: Denise Baillargeon, "If You Had No Money, You Had No Troubles, Did You?": Montreal Working Class Housewives During the Depression" in Wendy Mitchinson et al, (eds) *Canadian Women: A Reader*, (Toronto: Harcourt and Bruce, 1996). p. 253.

¹² Edmund D. Francis. *Why? Diary of a Relief Camp Striker*. [Vancouver?:] Commonwealth Printing and Publishing Company, [1935?]. p.3.

¹³ Vancouver Relief Recipient. Oral History Interview #V035 with Shirley Whiteside, Jan. 19, 1995.

¹⁴ For example, see Government of Saskatchewan, Department of Social Welfare, *Social Welfare in Saskatchewan*. (Regina: Bureau of Publications, 1949), which describes the duties and functions of the department in the absence of correctly functioning family and individual units.

¹⁵ Saskatoon Relief Recipient, Oral History Interview #S049, Tape # 3, July 19, 1996.

¹⁶ This quote, from Oral History Interview #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996, expresses a sentiment expressed in many ways in many of the interviews undertaken for this research.

¹⁷ Saskatoon relief recipient. Oral History Interview with Ellen B. Pearce, Interview #S045, Jan. 20, 1995.

¹⁸ "Relief Worker killed by speed up and starvation", *Unemployed Worker*, Vol. 3, no. 5, Nov. 5, 1930. p.3. CVA Police Department Subject Fonds, Series 199, 75-F-2, file #23, *Unemployed Worker*, Mar. 31 - Nov. 22, 1930.

¹⁹ Vancouver resident, Oral History Interview with Mary Woodland, Interview #V005, August 18, 1993. Mary Woodland's family was not on relief, but only maintained their standard of living with great difficulty, partly due to her mother's physical efforts, partly

due to the fact they shared a home with her aunt and uncle. Her aunt was quite a sickly invalid and Mary's mother was responsible for caring for her in addition to all the household duties.

²⁰ For examples of similar recollections in previously published sources see, among others, Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years*, Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Michel Horn *The Wretched of Canada*, Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, *No Easy Road: Women in Canada, 1920s to 1960s*. (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990); Patricia V. Schultz, *The East York Workers Association: A Response to the Depression*. (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975); Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1988, 1993).

²¹ Saskatoon relief recipient, Oral History Interview #S049. May 14, 1996.

²² This story, interestingly, emerged from a question about prejudice. The respondent was talking about her friends, who were Germans and very popular, until the outbreak of war. She made friends with them, because it was her goat which ate the pocket of the woman who had stopped to pet the goat. She paid to have the coat mended, fearing a complaint which would have meant the end of the goat. The two families became very close friends. See: Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995.

²³ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview #V021. Nov. 26, 1994.

²⁴ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Vancouver resident, Oral History Interview with Mr. Clare Way, #V038, Jan. 27th, 1995.

²⁷ See for example, the interview with a Saskatoon relief recipient who recalls with wonderment the size of family her rural relatives took on over the summer: Maybe once you've got a certain number of kids around, you don't notice the extras." Oral History Interview #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996.

²⁸ This was true of both cities.

²⁹ *Confidential Instructions to Investigators*, September, 1932. CVA, City Clerk's Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932, Relief I.

³⁰ There may be elements of racism in some applications of this policy. For example, one gentlemen, who wanted to build a lean-to shelter for his cow, was refused planning

permission. He hired a lawyer, Hamilton Reed, who alleged his client was being discriminated against because he was a Hindu. The Special Committee appointed to investigate, upheld the earlier decision saying "...the keeping of a cow at this location disturbs the residential character of the neighbourhood". See CVA Series 34, 26-D, Special Committees, Minute Books, Volume 69. Sept. 2. 1938. See also: Bettina Bradbury's discussion on the differential control exercised over the working classes through the increasing control municipalities developed in "Cows, Pigs and Boarders: Non-wage Forms of Survival Among Montreal Families, 1861-1891" in *The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post Confederation Canada*. Ian Mackay, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992) pp. 65-91.

³¹ Oral History Interview with Mrs. Ellen Pearce, #S045, Jan. 19 & 20, 1995. Ellen recalls helping her mother with the finishing work for the sewing jobs her mother took in. She also takes pains to note her mother was very clever with her hands and turned them to whatever needed doing, including repairs to the roof as "father wasn't a handyman." She also notes the death of her mother was very traumatic. Other recipients also note the traumatic impact of the death of a parent, or even severe illness, had during these times. See interviews # V021, V022, V038 and S032 for examples of this.

³² Vancouver resident interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994. See also Vancouver Relief Recipient, Oral history Interview with Anne Bailey #V018, May 21, 1994.

³³ A common comment during research for this dissertation. Sadly, for many families, the situations and circumstances described here are still realities of poverty in Canada today.

³⁴ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Many of the oral history interviews referred to different methods of birth control. One informal interviewee (sadly, this informant died before we had a chance to carry out a formal interview) told me of the quilting bees she attended in the company of her Norwegian mother where, rather than make quilts, the women made contraceptive jelly. She vividly recalled driving home with the smell of the jelly in the car. I have not had any other source discuss this.

³⁶ Vancouver resident, Interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994. This young woman had mentioned earlier in the interview that her mother "would never tell you where babies came from".

³⁷ Vancouver resident, Interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994.

³⁸ There may have been class differences in the availability of birth control. What the depression may have heightened was the need of poor women to get access. A British Columbia woman had contacted Albert Kaufmann and was soliciting contacts in various communities in order to provide birth control to women and noted her method of finding

potential clients in rural areas. She simply found the house in the poorest neighbourhood with diapers on the washing line. Mary F. Bishop. "Vivian Dowding, Birth Control Activist" in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on The History of Women's Work in British Columbia*. eds. Barbara K. Latham and Roberta Pazdro. (Victoria, B.C.: Camosun College, 1984), p. 33. Note: Miss Wann [name and spelling uncertain] may have been connected with Albert Kaufmann's Parent Information Bureau. For more on birth control see also: Mary F. Bishop. "The Early Birth Controllers of B.C." *B.C. Studies*, 61 (Spring 1984): 327-337, Angus MacLaren. "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1870-1920." *Canadian Historical Review*. LIX, 3, 1978, Angus MacLaren "The First Campaigns for Birth Control Clinics in B.C." *Journal of Canadian Studies*. Vol. 19 (3) Fall 1984.

³⁹ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Mr. Bob Arnold. Interview, V031, Dec. 13, 1994. Bob points out he never knew the real cause of his mother's death until years later, though he vividly remembers waiting for his grandmother outside Vancouver General Hospital, where his mother had been admitted, and his grandmother coming out to tell the children their mother had died. His mother's death had an immediate impact: his father left home, leaving the children with his mother in law.

⁴⁰ Vancouver resident, Oral History Interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994.

⁴¹ Efforts in this regard that were undertaken in a more systematic collective way will be covered in Chapter 6.

⁴² Besides the interviews carried out for this project see also Lil Stoneman Interview, S.F.U. Archives, Local History Collection, 100/013/062 [no interviewer, no date].

⁴³ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Anne Bailey, Interview #V018, May 13, 1994.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Vancouver resident, Oral History Interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994.

⁴⁶ In both cities, the electricity was a utility owned and operated by the city. The monthly relief allowance of power was set at \$1.

⁴⁷ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995.

⁴⁸ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995

⁴⁹ Alice Willis, Letter to Mayor Telford, Dated January 30, 1939. CVA, Mayor's Correspondence, 33-E-2, File W, General, Vol. 29, 1939.

- ⁵⁰ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview #V021. Nov. 26, 1994.
- ⁵¹ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Anne Bailey, #V018, May 13, 1994.
- ⁵² Saskatoon relief recipient, Oral History Interview #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996.
- ⁵³ Vancouver resident Interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994.
- ⁵⁴ Saskatoon relief recipient, Oral History Interview #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996.
- ⁵⁵ CVA Series 34, 26-D, Special Committees, Minute Books, Vol. 69. Interim Report of the Housing Committee, June 28, 1938.
- ⁵⁶ CVA Series 34, 26-D, Special Committees, Minute Books, Vol. 69. Interim Report of the Housing Committee, June 28, 1938.
- ⁵⁷ As Mrs. Parker said: "If you don't got the money, you can't pay the rent." See Oral History Interview with Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ Vancouver relief recipient. Oral History Interview #V012, April 27, 1994.
- ⁶⁰ Letter from Mr. Bill Parker on Vancouver Island where he was working at a mill, to his wife Cora in Vancouver. Used with permission. Original held by Cora Parker's daughter, Shirley Davies.
- ⁶¹ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Mrs. Cora Parker, #V037, Jan. 26, Feb. 9 and 16 and March 23, 1995.
- ⁶² Vancouver resident. Oral History Interview #V023, Dec. 2, 1994.
- ⁶³ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Jack Cowie Geddes, #V024, 7 Nov, 1994 & May 24, 1995.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Because of his experiences, Jack became a life long union activist and was involved in the Relief Camp workers Union and the On to Ottawa Trek.
- ⁶⁵ Saskatoon resident, Oral history Interview S007c. June 4, 1993.
- ⁶⁶ Vancouver resident, Oral History Interview #V038, January 27, 1995. See also interviews #V024 and #V026, for the reminiscences of two men who actually rode the rods.
- ⁶⁷ It is important to note here that single, in this case did not necessarily mean unmarried.

⁶⁸ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Elof Kellner, #V026, 9 Dec. 1994. I would like to note here that Mr. Kellner questioned me very closely before he consented to an interview. He told me later, "You can never be sure". He wanted to know that I was not connected with the government in anyway, trying to take his pension because of his activities in the 1930s.

⁶⁹ Saskatoon resident. Oral History Interview with Jean Fawcett, S032, June 2, 1994.

⁷⁰ American research may be more advanced in this regard. See, op. cit. Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the Depression* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), chapter two for a fuller discussion of this phenomena.

⁷¹ "Girl Hoboes Problem for Traveller's Aid Officer." *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, October 13, 1932.

⁷² Oral history interview with Honor Wells, by Leslie Wells, Vancouver, May, 1986. Used with permission. A copy of the interview is held by Ms. Wells and a copy will be part of the deposit made with the oral histories undertaken for this project.

⁷³ Clause 28, Report 6-1932 of the Standing Committee on Unemployment Relief, April 5, 1932. City of Saskatoon Archives, Box 5887a, Relief - S, 1932, File 208.

⁷⁴ Light housekeeping relieved the home owner of providing meals, as with room and lodging for boarders and it was cheaper for the renter, however, conditions were often poor and the regulations strict. One room provided living, sleeping and cooking accommodation and bathrooms were usually shared. One respondent remembers keeping milk and other perishables on the window sill in a box that was mounted to the window frame. See: Lorne Paul, Oral History Interview, S015, Oct. 11, 1993.

⁷⁵ Saskatoon resident. Oral History Interview with Jean Fawcett, S032, June 2, 1994. After the family moved, her salary was raised to \$14 a month.

⁷⁶ Saskatoon resident. Oral History Interview with Jean Fawcett, S032, June 2, 1994.

⁷⁷ Saskatoon resident, Oral History Interview with Jo Ferguson, ##S028, Feb. 21, 1995. Interestingly, Jo's friend did not reveal the circumstances behind her desire to leave her job until only a few years ago. This may be due to intense shame and the fear that any stigma would have attached to her rather than her employer.

⁷⁸ Ruth Siemens, Presentation to Women's Studies 201, Simon Fraser University, on her research into the Vancouver Mennonite Girls Home, Spring 1995.

⁷⁹ See: Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davies, *Firing the Heather: The Life and Times of Nellie McClung*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1993) p. 77. Also see the many references in Candace Savage, *Our Nell, A Scrapbook Biography of Nellie L. McClung* (Saskatoon: Western

producer Prairies Books, 1979).

⁸⁰ Constance Halifax, "Quo Vadis?" *The Labour Statesman*, Dec. 20, 1929. Held by the CVA, Police Department Records, Series 199, 75-F-1, File #12. This paper was financed by what Allan Seager calls "upper crust" Vancouver trade unions.

⁸¹ Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, Memorandum submitted March 15, 1939. City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939.

⁸² See Michaela Freund's excellent research into the topic of prostitution in Vancouver during the 1930s. "Writing the Body of the Prostitute", MA. Thesis, SFU, 1994. See also: V.W.F. *Vancouver Through the Eyes of a Hobo* (Vancouver: [n.p.], 1934, for his discussion of meeting a prostitute and taking her out for dinner. Contemporaries of prostitutes did not always condemn them, an instance of the politics of place. See Daphne Marlatt and Carole Iiter, eds. *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*. (Victoria: Provincial Archives, 1976) p. 81.

⁸³ The second step of a set of stairs rang a secret bell, all the working women and their customers, presumably, knew of its existence. CVA, Police Department, Licencing Correspondence, Series 211, 43-C-2, file #1 A-L, 1925-1932.

⁸⁴ CVA, Police Department, Licencing Correspondence, Series 211, 43-C-2, File #4 1935 A-H. The same locale with the hidden panels also had an elaborate alarm system connecting all the rooms and operated by the elevator attendant from the elevator.

⁸⁵ CVA, Police Department, Licencing Correspondence, Series 211, 43-C-2, file #5 I-W 1935.

⁸⁶ Helen Gregory MacGill, "The Jobless Woman", *Chatelaine*, 30 September, 1930. p.5.

⁸⁷ Saskatoon Relief Recipient. Oral History Interview with Mrs. Ellen Pearce, #S045, Jan. 19 & 20, 1995.

⁸⁸ Saskatoon Relief Recipient. Oral History Interview with Mrs. Ellen Pearce, #S045, Jan. 19 & 20, 1995.

⁸⁹ Vancouver Relief Recipient, Oral History Interview, #V012, April 27, 1994.

⁹⁰ Vancouver Relief Recipient, Oral History Interview, #V012, April 27, 1994.

⁹¹ Vancouver Relief Recipient. Oral History Interview #V035 with Shirley Whiteside, Jan. 19, 1995.

⁹² Saskatoon Relief Recipient. Oral History Interview, #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996.

⁹³ Letter from Saskatoon Women's Unemployed Delegation, to City Council, dated July 26th, 1932. City of Saskatoon Archives, Box 5887a, Relief - S, 1932, file 308. This letter was signed by 7 women.

⁹⁴ Saskatoon relief recipient, Oral History Interview #S049, July 17 & 19, 1996

⁹⁵ Saskatoon Relief Recipient. Mrs. Ellen Pearce, Oral History Interview #S045, Mission, B.C. Jan. 19 & 20, 1995.

⁹⁶ Ewanda Boehr. "Teen Trifles" Summer 1990. In the possession of the author. I also have a copy of a photograph of Ewanda posed on top of a load of felled trees.

⁹⁷ Ewanda Boehr, Oral history interview, #S003, June 1, 1993.

⁹⁸ See: Letter, dated June 4, 1939, CVA, Mayor's Correspondence, 33-E-2, Relief, File C, Vol. 29, 1939.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See: C.V.A Series 53, Loc. 28-A-7, 1935, Relief Department Enquiry, Correspondence, Exhibits, Transcripts, Evidence. This file includes an investigation of the Relief Department staff including a questionnaire, filled out by the members of the department, which covered educational qualifications, the length of service with the city, and with the Department. Many of the members were transferred in from other city departments.

Chapter 6

In Concert: Group Strategies for Fighting the Relief System

As we see the situation there is no prospect of work in sight and we would ask you to consider the problem of obtaining adequate clothing, medical attention and light for ourselves and our families, which you are aware we do not have the wherewithal to purchase. Our reserves are rapidly coming to an end . . . We find ourselves facing the cold fall and winter months without any hope of being able to provide for our little ones. We must have clothing and if we are not allowed to work and earn same surely it is up to those in charge of affairs to make suitable arrangements. We must look to you to take the matter in hand without delay. We have placed the facts before you. It is humanity crying out in distress for just treatment. The responsibility is yours - will you meet the challenge? Again we say - give us work. If not, provide us with at least the bare necessities of life.

Mrs. Pashka, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. McKenzie, Mrs. McKague,
Mrs. Reeves, Mrs. Squire and Mrs. Hall.

Letter to Saskatoon City Council, July 26, 1932.

Common experiences moved individuals towards collective actions.¹ Groups emerged in response to the challenges of the depression willing and prepared to challenge the relief system and the political system that engendered it. The gender and class base from which these relief activist organizations drew membership, the structures the members developed, and the focus of group activities all had varied degrees of success that were influenced by the politics of place. While some of these groups became mass organizations with national status and national objectives, such as the Relief Camp Workers Union, (R.C.W.U.) most relief activism took place at the local level.

Though the provocative national activities of “mass organizations” like the R.C.W.U. set the backdrop for the local arena, in particular establishing the context which framed the reading of all relief activism, the collective response to relief of families, women and children was acted out at the local level because municipal authorities were responsible

for the relief of families and local residents.² Negotiating, bargaining and advocating for improvements to relief took place at the local level because the responsibility for delivering relief was seen by relief recipients as including the power to change the system. The very public nature of relief, embedded in the local, was designed to humiliate relievers and reinforce societal strictures regarding the undesirability of relief. The publicity of relief had unintended consequences, one of which was the fostering of common grievances, a sense of shared oppression and injustice. As a consequence, relief activist groups emerged early in the depression years.³

A discrepancy in the levels of success achieved by relief activist groups can be discerned in a comparison of Saskatoon and Vancouver. In Saskatoon, the abolition of the hated relief store and a move from a controversial voucher system to cash payments took time and a great deal of effort but were issues that were not resolved in favour of relief recipients in Vancouver. Relative success and failure was related to the nature of the groups in relation to the context of the place in which the groups were organizing. The work exemplified by the groups in Saskatoon was ideally suited to the smaller and more face to face nature of relief delivery in Saskatoon.

Relief activist organizations had two general forms (see table 6.1 for a matrix of the sample organizations of each type used in this chapter). One type of organization focussed on providing alternatives outside of the relief system. Ironically, because they did not directly challenge the relief system nor the societal mores which supported relief, these groups became quasi-official sources of relief supplements. The Army of the Common Good in Vancouver was an example of this kind of organization. Affiliation with these

“supplementary” kinds of organizations did not automatically mean disqualification from the official relief system.

The other type of relief activist group, in spite of ostensibly working within the system, was more confrontational. The evolution of the various local unemployed organizations in Saskatoon provides an example of these confrontational groups. Affiliation with this confrontational type of group could and often did mean the loss of, or the threat of losing, relief supplies. In both instances, some long established men’s groups, such as the Canadian Legion undertook relief activities in both these arenas while other organizations sprang up directly out of the depression conditions to take on either supplementing or challenging relief. While differing in origins, goals, objectives, rhetoric, and politics these organizations were very similar in one area: how the membership considered issues of gender. Most relief activist organizations generally ignored them.

Table 6.1: Types of Relief Activist Organizations Operating in Vancouver and Saskatoon, 1929-1939				
Gender Base	Class Base	Focus of Group	Vancouver Example	Saskatoon Example
F & M	Mixed	Supplementary	Army of Common Good	Canadian Legion
F & M	Mostly w.c	Confrontational	Flying Squads	S.L.U.A.
F & M	dependent on locality	Combination	Neighbourhood Councils	Central Council of Unemployed
Women-only	Middle Class	Supplementary	Single Unemployed Girls Club (YWCA)	Clothing Bureau (NCW)
Women-only	Mixed	Confrontational	Mother’s Council	Housewives and Mothers

Because of the general neglect of the needs of unemployed women by mixed gender organizations, women’s auxiliaries developed, already a familiar type of organizational

structure. Additionally, some women-only groups catered to the interests and needs of unemployed women and their families on relief. These long established women's organizations with a leadership of educated, middle class women, such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) or the National Council of Women (NCW) responded to the unemployed woman as apart of a long standing notion of serving the social, economic and political needs of women. The Single Unemployed Girls' Club which operated in Vancouver under the aegis of the YWCA is an example of the social and cultural service of women only groups. Like the male dominated counterparts, these organizations served to supplement rather than challenge the relief system.

There were also women only organizations with a broader political focus, which did intend to challenge the relief system and the politics surrounding it. For example, the New Era League in Vancouver led the formation of a women's coalition which took on relief issues in Vancouver on a broad scale. From this coalition emerged the Vancouver Mother's Council, a group specifically focussed on relief issues and with working class and relief recipients among the members and leaders:

As noted, the work at the local level was affected by the national scene even though different levels of government and two different relief systems were involved. The activities of the unemployed single men's movements in Canada during the 1930s were dramatic and well documented. The activities of other unemployed organizations are less well explored. In the case of women's relief activities, in some cases at least, this was because the activities fell within the realm of acceptable female behaviour and delivered under the aegis of respectable (read white middle class) women. For example, the case of the unemployed

single woman was adopted and argued on the national level by already existing women's groups, such as the National Council of Women and the Young Women's Christian Association. The efforts of these groups on the National level focussed on the political and economic aspects of unemployed women's needs. The fact that many homes and families were supported solely by the efforts of these women was used to combat the frequently recurring notions that married women should give up their work to men as a patriotic and gender appropriate method of solving the national unemployment crisis.⁴

For the most part, the needs of women regarding relief and unemployment were left to the local response and, for the most part, were responded to by women-only organizations. An example of this was the YWCA's Single Unemployed Girls' Club in Vancouver. Instituted by the YWCA, the Club recognized the gender specific problems unemployed women faced. Based on West Hastings Street, the club offered formal and informal support to unemployed women. The club's activities included lectures, classes on crafts and practical skills, such as typing and shorthand. The facility included a lunch room, a reading room, and provided access to resources such as a typewriter and phone.⁵ The club provided an invaluable contact and networking opportunity and provided the opportunity for unemployed women to learn about their rights and share strategies for surviving both the relief system and unemployment.

The Single Unemployed Girl's Club seem designed to meet emotional and physical needs not recognized by the relief system. "Girls" were presumed cared for by their fathers. In many cases, these girls, as young as twelve, were responsible for finding employment and contributing to the support, if they were not the sole support, of their families. Providing

moral support and companionship, in addition to support services designed to help unemployed “girls” find work, the Single Unemployed Girls club forged such bonds among its members that they continue to meet today.

The support given by women’s organizations such as the YWCA was gendered. Unemployed men might be put to work with a pick-axe. Unemployed women were given a sewing needle.⁶ For example, The Local Council of Women in Saskatoon, with the financial support of local men’s service organizations, ran a clothing bureau which provided work for women on relief as a method of paying city utility bills. The women repaired, or altered, donated clothing for relief distribution.

Other women only groups, such as the “Housewives and Mothers” in Saskatoon, who authored the letter opening the chapter, and in spite of names which referred to the traditional female roles, were clearly motivated by political ideologies that conflicted with the authorities. As a consequence, not all women’s organizations limited their work to traditionally feminine arenas. The focus for these women-only groups shifted from supporting women on relief to educating women about their rights and developing a political critique of the system. These women-only organizations were clearly designed to present political alternatives. At the same moment, these groups confronted the inequities of the system directly through the relief bureaucracies and through city council.

These politicised groups, in both cities, were made up of women who were on relief. For these women, individual relief cases and individual difficulties with the system were not only problems to be shared and tackled collectively for solutions, they were also examples and tools in a vivid and energetic campaign designed to discredit and overturn the relief

system in the first instance and the political system which bred it in the second. That is, these women's groups fought not only to improve the relief system in a way that would meet needs as determined by women themselves but developed a variety of strategies designed to promote the rights and dignity of those on relief as well.

When women did confront the political system they were not always treated with respect. In Saskatoon, in 1932, a group of women confronted the Mayor and threatened to stop the bailiff from seizing the goods of a woman member of their group. The press coverage of this incident made light of it:

From indications at City Hall this morning some local bailiff may tonight be enjoying an arnica rub and possibly the application a cold raw beefsteak to a black eye....Assuming the bailiff to be the type who sees his duty and do it, and to judge by the indignant tones of the delegation, druggists and doctors may be busy tonight and a clothier may sell a suit of unostentatious pattern tomorrow. Mayor Underwood, while promising to investigate the case, pointed out he could not countenance anything rougher than bridge table tactics.... Bailiffs in this country have been known to take to their snowshoes and skis in pursuit of their calling, but there is no known record of a bailiff being "prevented" in anything by a crowd of angry women folk.⁷

Perhaps, in response to the newspaper column, when the women went to the house to protect the household goods from seizure, the group included a large number of men.⁸ Clearly, women were involved in many such confrontations.

Women were successful relief activists in other regards and some of these women's groups had a more distinctly feminist bent. The New Era League founded in 1916 in Victoria to fight for women's suffrage was still active in Vancouver at the onset of the depression. The group had strong feminist opinions on relief. In 1933 for example, the membership had requested the appointment of women to advise on relief matters affecting

women.⁹ By 1934, the group had asked for the formation of a Department of Public Welfare because the “present plan of a multiplication of semi-public charity [was] inefficient, wasteful, and generally unsatisfactory”.¹⁰

The League moved beyond the role of critic into the role of activist. In 1935 they issued a call for a conference. Seventy-four representatives from twenty four women’s organizations attended (see Appendix 9 for a partial list of women’s groups active in Vancouver in the 1930s). This conference adopted a resolution put forward by the Vancouver Local Council of Women to form an “Action Committee” on unemployment issues. The Action Committee met one week later with 37 women present and decided to organize a “tag day” to raise funds for the single unemployed men. The coalition went on to organize a parade and rally for Mother’s Day. The coalition eventually became the Vancouver Mother’s Council. Interestingly, one interviewee remembers the Mother’s Council from the perspective of his involvement through his mother, who took him to all the meetings.

My Grandmother lived around the corner, so my mother was very active with my grandmother and involved with the Mother’s Council and all this sort of thing . . . They were always going off to these committee meetings. I was always dragged along. And this one particular parade I remember, I think it was a Mayday parade and it was in Stanley Park.¹¹

The Vancouver Mother’s Council expanded the range of groups activities beyond male unemployment. The formal coalition began to address how unemployment affected women and relief.¹² The group’s activities expanded even further as members became involved in referring people to the nurses who could supply birth control. The Mother’s Council became involved because working class women simply could not afford to have children but the

methods women were forced to resort in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies were dangerous:

We had four nurses. They didn't report to us exactly, but we gave them the names. Who to go to. And then they'd go visit. People [in] the different branches would send them [the names] in . . . There were so many complaints, [about unwanted pregnancies] or we wouldn't have started it.¹³

This work was kept very low key because of the trial of Albert Kaufman's nurse had undergone in Ontario. "It just went on through our meetings. We didn't make it public. We had been afraid."¹⁴

In spite of their work with birth control, the Mother's Council became adept at using the ideals of motherhood to bolster their political activities. In one of their political parades they had a truck with a naked man in bed with his clothes being washed. This was to highlight the fact most families had only one outfit of clothing and while it was being washed, you had to stay in bed. Apparently, the gentleman acting the role was a real "ham": he kept throwing back the bedclothes and trying to get out of bed, so the woman doing the laundry had to keep pushing him back in. This was apparently a great hit with the crowd yet at the same time it demonstrated the serious problems facing relievers and perhaps a mocking parody of the gender roles attributed to men and women.

Another organization which was very adept at utilizing the ideology of motherhood to further its aims in Vancouver was the Civilian Pensioned Mothers' Association, which often undertook the cases of women on relief. Under the able leadership of Mrs. H. H. Mortimer, the organization fought for the rights of mothers on pension.¹⁵ The pension for mothers in British Columbia was more liberal than in other provinces but it still aimed more

at imposing and regulating moral motherhood than providing for women and their children.¹⁶

Mrs. Mortimer herself became an advocate for women in fighting the system. Her work as an advocate was made difficult because the local relief department was more interested in arguing with the provincial levels about who was more properly responsible for widowed women.¹⁷

Both the Mother's Council and the Civilian Pensioned Mothers' Association were prepared to cooperate with other organizations on relief strategies though much of their focus had a gender bias. The interests of women and children, however, were very broad and, as a consequence the women's groups committed themselves to increasingly radical actions. For example, a crucial issue for relievers was security in the home, a value that was undermined by evictions.

Evictions were very common. The Unemployed Association organized a "Flying Squad" which would go to the home of anyone being evicted. The flying squad would put up a picket line to prevent the sheriff's bailiffs from evicting the family. Jack Geddes was a member of the Flying Squads:

Yeah, I was on the Flying Squad, we used to go to people's [homes]. Well word come that so and so was going to get evicted that day so we'd all get on the bus and go, streetcar I should say. We'd all sit on the steps and we wouldn't let the guys go up the steps. Well, there was nothing they could really do . . . But it was sad going to these houses because the woman would make you tea or coffee and that, and they would be crying and the kids would be crying. You know, it was really sad. They'd be getting put out. And sometimes you'd get there and the buggers would be there ahead of us, and they'd have all the furniture out on the lawn, you know, and then we'd be trying to get it back in the house. You know, and we'd be wrastling with each other. It depends how many was on -- if we were in the majority we'd shove it back in the house.¹⁸

Women would take a sheet or blanket and visit local homes and stores for food contributions. Lil Stoneman recalls the organizing that had to be done to support the Flying Squads:

First thing to be done was the dunning sheet. You had to take a bed sheet and go round to all the little stores near the people to get food to feed the pickets. And if the sheriff had removed the furniture everybody helped to carry it back in the house. And that would go on until someone got tired.¹⁹

Both women and men became involved in this confrontations. The politics of place was invoked when the struggle engaged people on their own doorsteps.

Evictions were common in both Vancouver and Saskatoon because relief departments did not pay rent as a matter of course. Relievers were supposed to make private arrangements with landlords to be carried until they could obtain work and repay overdue rents. A reliever's rent would not be paid in Saskatoon until a notice of eviction had been issued, a situation that often encouraged collusion between landlord and tenant. In Vancouver, landlords began a systematic campaign of evictions in order to put pressure on the city to pay rents for relief tenants. In March, 1933 members of the Lodging House and Restaurant Keepers Association began locking relief families out of their housekeeping rooms²⁰ The city responded by paying rents at the scale demanded by the Association, but only for a week. The evictions began again the following week.²¹ Home owners who had relief tenants were so impressed with the success of those renting housekeeping rooms to relief tenants that they formed an organization "for the purpose of taking steps as shall be deemed necessary to collect rents owing by relief cases in the city and also to advance and protect the interests of the members."²² Vancouver landlords took on city hall directly and

tenants were caught in the crossfire. In Saskatoon, the landlords and tenants knew each other's situations far more intimately. As a consequence they formed an alliance and put joint pressure on city hall.

The women's organizations, for the most part, carried out work that fit society's traditional notions of women's work. For example, during the outbreak of single men's protests in Vancouver, they had a hall where they cooked meals for the unemployed which were delivered to the men occupying the public buildings. At the post office the food was hauled up the outside of the buildings in baskets.²³ Such work combined traditionally acceptable female tasks, the domestic care and support of men within the home, with radical political activity, taking on the state in direct confrontations outside the home.

Another "traditional role" women had turned to during the depression was prostitution. In 1939, the New Era League in Vancouver took up the cause of prostitutes who were caught in a double bind. The Relief Department had established a policy that ensured relief to single women only through hostels. The hostels, however, were designed and had functioned primarily as a deterrent to applications for relief. The Relief Department believed women who needed relief would make super human efforts to stay off relief if the only form of relief available to them was to become residents of hostels such as "Dunromin" on East 13th Avenue. For some women, prostitution was preferable to relief under these circumstances. The hostels were closed early in 1939. As the last hostel was closed, applications for relief from women increased.²⁴ At the same time, the local police were undertaking vice drives which drove prostitutes to seek relief. "During the past week, applications have been received from individuals who admitted they were prostitutes and

stated the recent vice drive had deprived them of their livelihood..." the Relief Officer informed the chair of the committee responsible for relief, "...as press reports indicate that a considerable number of such women will be affected, it is imperative that your committee should decide on the medium through which relief will be delivered."²⁵ Thus, according to authorities there were two classes of women, those who were lazy and needed to be discouraged from public relief and prostitutes who, driven out of a form of employment, needed relief if they were not to return to a life of shame.

In an effort to resolve the situation, the New Era Women's League wrote a letter in January 1939, seeking to have the hostels reopened:

The members of the New Era League appreciate the stand of the Police Commission in the action in regard to the vice situation in Vancouver and we ask that some official action be taken in regard to the women who may find themselves in need of sustenance and care requisite to their needs. We believe many of these women have been driven to prostitution as a means of livelihood through the economic situation and are therefore eligible for consideration.²⁶

The response to this initiative was initiated by the New Era league, a strategy already used by them earlier: the formation of a coalition of interested agencies lobbying for a specific form of hostel care. The hostels should provide for women who "are forced to apply for public assistance on account [of the closing of the houses of prostitution due to the vice drive] giving up a life of prostitution." The coalition held a conference, with representatives from 30 social, religious and other city agencies, on February 9 and March 9, 1939. Their recommendations included setting up a hostel run by and funded by the relief department, with an experienced and trained social worker in charge. The hostel was to take clients of the various social agencies, which would also have representatives sit on an advisory

council.²⁷

This was easier said than done. The three major requirements that were to act as guiding principles, the suitability of the house itself, its location, and the individual responsible for its operation, were difficult to satisfy.²⁸ Finally, a Mrs. Williams was hired on an experimental basis to run a boarding home for women. She was guaranteed a subsidy of \$80 per month, payable in advance for an experimental period as the project was considered risky.²⁹ The temporary commitment was a combination of attitudes. Not only was there a recognition that leaving prostitution was difficult and finding paid employment even harder but there was also a belief that women should be able to find the support they needed within their own homes and families.

While women's organizations were taking on relief issues, as they related to women's interests there were also the groups with both male and female membership bases operating in the two cities. Some of these organizations were not overtly political, rather developing in very pragmatic, self-help directions and, often, with a traditional division of labour along gender lines. Overall, the rich and complex diversity of these groups and, their sheer numbers, was indicative of the growing collectivity of resentments emerging around relief.

For many of the relief activist groups there was a growing rage and frustration which was beginning to boil over. The political perspective on relief issues, the critique of the relief system, was becoming a critique of the state. All the organizations, however, whether politically motivated or otherwise, found their activities played out against the back drop of the national stage. That is, political activities around relief issues were read by authorities

against the back drop of single unemployed men's activities. As such, any relief activism was decoded as proto-communist and an anti-democratic prelude to revolution.

Given this coded context and the ferocity and proclivities of the national relief activities, there was good reason then, for the RCMP to consider the organizations, associations and groups which sprang up around relief issues at the local level, as communist.³⁰ The Communist Activities Branch of the RCMP (CAB) seemed to consider any group that organized to protest relief conditions as communistic. In 1935, for example, the branch sent a list of Active Communists. This compilation included both individuals and organizations presumed to be controlled by the Communist Party.

Some of the groups listed were clearly communist or with communist sympathies: The Young Communist League, the Friends of the Soviet Union, the Worker's International Relief proudly declared their affiliations in, or between the lines of, their titles. Other groups were less clearly communist. Unions were listed because the leadership was suspected to be communist or because known communists were on the membership lists. The list produced by the CAB reads as a "Who's Who" of those trade unions in Vancouver that were fighting to protect the rights of the working class. The Workers Protective Association, and the Single Unemployed Protective Workers Club were specific relief organizations which were also registered. Other social organizations devoted to social justice causes, including relief issues, were also listed, such as the Women's Labour League, the Student's League of Canada, the Canadian League Against War and Fascism, the Canadian Labour Defence League, and the Workers Ex-Service's League.

The RCMP investigators also added recreational clubs, which tried to alleviate the

everyday conditions of those on relief, to the list. This included social groups that offered services to people of common national backgrounds, particularly where the word “worker” appeared in the name, such as: the Finnish Workers Club, the Swedish and Scandinavian Workers Club, the Polish Farmers Workers Club, the German Workers Club, the Jugo-Slav Workers Club, and the Italian Workers Club. Groups such as the Workers Sports Association and the Maxim-Gorki Club, were also considered active communist groups. They also named the publications believed to be communist in motivation: the *Ship & Rock*, the *B.C. Worker’s News*, the *B.C. Lumberworker*, and the *Progressive Street Railwayman*, for their critical treatment of relief and the relief authorities..³¹

While the CAB branded this wide range of diverse organizations as communist, the political leanings of these groups were far more complex. The endorsement by the CAB did demonstrate that the needs of those on relief were being addressed. The communists were responsive to the needs of the working class and the unemployed in a way that the official relief system and traditional political parties were not. The result was that the energy of the state apparatus was thrown into monitoring all relief activities, regardless of the type of group or the political perspective underlying their activities even though, as noted, not all the groups that were identified as communist focussed on radical political alternatives. Many groups or associations were designed to produce supplements or sources of alternative supplies to the relief system.

A prime example of the non-partisan approach was the “Army of the Common Good” operating in Vancouver and Burnaby. Founded in 1932, this organization of women and men, which later became the Common Good Cooperative Association, planned “to

rehabilitate the unemployed, settle land and commence industrial production.”³² This organization had strong gender role biases built into its language, structure and services. For example, women were responsible for providing the children’s prizes at the annual picnic, while men took care of the adult prizes.³³ Women also designed the emblem for the group and organized the gathering of domestic supplies for the men guarding the operations at Burnaby Lake.³⁴ While the organization divided tasks along gender lines, however, men and women joined as equal members.

Individuals applied for membership by outlining skills they could offer to the Common Good. In order to join, all prospective members had to take a solemn and secret pledge:

Pledge: I, [name]_____, before these my fellow citizens and in the name of all which I consider most sacred, pledge my loyal support to the Army of the Common Good and the cause of Humanity. I pledge my silence where silence is necessary. I pledge myself to think, and act and speak constructively, and to count the interests of the common good as dear as life itself. The recognized salute of the Army of the Common Good is now, and ever shall be, the symbol of this my pledge.³⁵

In the first year, a total of 134 men and women from various occupational classes had joined. The work members undertook with this organization was both moral and economic in that it was aimed at eliminating poverty. This mandate was realized primarily through work creation. By creating work for the membership, members believed they would assist individuals in rebuilding the cornerstones of the home and family: independent, self sufficient wage earning men and home building wives. Members were in agreement that any work they undertook to create would be done for “standard wages or equivalent”. This was

in contrast to relief work which was paid at “pittance” rates.³⁶

Work creation took many forms. For example, some members worked in one of the three market gardens or on the Common Good Farm in Ladner. The families employed in these marketing gardening ventures kept a percentage of the produce; the rest was sold through the Common Good Stores. Market gardening was probably the easiest and most successful venture of the Common Good Cooperative. The first annual report recorded twelve gardens begun with seeds supplied by members and producing approximately 80 tons of vegetables and the retail structure to serve the marketing gardening enterprise had two stores with average monthly sales of \$699 in operation in the first year.³⁷

In addition to the market garden which benefited all members, a structure of districts and locals ensured different branches of the Army could pursue and develop a wide variety of alternatives based on neighbourhood realities and could undertake to find other forms of employment opportunities. For example, one local kept a rabbitry, with a start up herd of twenty rabbits.³⁸ Securing property and equipment for wood cutting and timber production was a major endeavour in the first year.³⁹ Locals also investigated the possibility of establishing a brick factory including analysing clay deposits, and began operating a barber shop. Others investigated peat fields, a cannery, sheep shearing and looms, and a colony scheme.⁴⁰

The organization also believed in supplying other needs that the traditional relief system did not even recognize: it accounted for and responded to social and intellectual needs. For example, the group rented halls for meetings and events, produced a newsletter, organized lectures, first aid lessons, and social outings such as community picnics. Members

who were ill, or in hospital were visited, and the organization also canvassed members for interest in a colony scheme.

While all these activities were carried out by members who were receiving relief, membership in the organization, or involvement in its activities, did not interfere with their position as recipients in the traditional relief system, because no money was received or exchanged. The Army of the Common Good worked on a barter system. The board determined the value of one hour of labour and assigned “chits” to reimburse members for labour carried out for the Co-op. These could be exchanged for goods, such as vegetables at the Common Good Cooperative store, or for services, such as a hair cut, or a shoe repair.

The language and rhetoric used by the Army of the Common Good allowed working class men to reaffirm their masculinity. Borrowing from the army, the church and the union movement, the members created a forum for their needs, both political and physical, that the local relief system did not provide. Over time, the Army of the Common Good saw many of its members drawn off to the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation but it continued to focus on the cooperative and self help movement rather than political issues.

In Vancouver, the Army of the Common Good was an example of the kind of organizations that worked outside of the relief system, focused on organizing alternative sources of work and supplies as a supplement to the relief. Other organizations sprang up which intended to work within the relief system. These groups were directly and clearly designed to fight for political changes to the system of relief. The politicised actions associated with these groups were also undertaken by those who were on relief though, in contrast to the activities of the Common Good, the activities could and often did interfere

with an individual's right to continue on relief. For these groups, individual relief cases and problems with the system were symptoms of the inherent injustice and instability of relief. Relief problems also became the tools for an energetic campaign designed, in the first place, to discredit and force improvements to the relief system and, in the second place, to overturn the political system which bred it. That is, these groups not only had immediate goals to improve the relief system in ways that would meet the needs of individual relief recipients as determined by relief recipients themselves but also addressed broader, long term goals promoting the rights and dignity of those on relief.

In Saskatoon, over the course of the decade, five distinct organizations of this type emerged which responded to the relief system with persistence and success. These five organizations often worked in concert, though they represented different constituencies and did not always agree on strategies, goals, or rhetoric. They were able to win concessions that had important implications for the ideological understanding of relief, as well as frequent smaller victories that made a difference to life on relief. By 1933, the relief activist groups had united with other interest groups, to form the Central Council on Unemployment.

The first of these organizations emerged very quickly. The Saskatoon Local Unemployed Association (S.L.U.A.) sent a letter to the City Council asking the Mayor to appear at a mass meeting they were holding at Market Square in July, 1930.⁴¹ Later that same month, Sam Scarlett, a well-known Communist party agitator, and Fred Shunaman made a more substantive appearance before City Council representing the S.L.U.A. In their presentation to Council they spoke of the 716 unemployed men they had registered with their

organization. According to a survey of their members, 91 % were permanent residents of the city, and 41 % were married. They presented a series of recommendations on the basis of relief. They argued relief should be given as \$2 a day for married cases, with a supplement of 25c per dependent. They also argued against the practice of cutting off light and water to the homes of people unable to pay these city utility bills, and that all working days in the city be scheduled as 2 - 6 hour shifts, which would create more employment.⁴² This group continued to make frequent appearances before City Council in the form of reports, letters, requests for information, delegations, forwarding recommendations, and acting on complaints raised by members or others on relief. By 1931, they had become the local branch of the National Association of Unemployed Workers and by 1934, there was also a separate provincial body, the Saskatchewan Association of Unemployed, active in the city.

The S.L.U.A. appears to have functioned as a union for relief recipients in a period when relief was given as work. The group strove to protect the rights of relief recipients as workers, and tried to improve working conditions and wages. For example, the members fought for, and got the right to visit the relief work site on the new bridge, the right of one of the members (later three) to sit on the safety committee and gained significant input into the way workers were called for their turn on the project and what they were expected to do

The S.L.U.A., in spite of frequent conflicts with city council, also worked very closely with the council on relief matters. This collaboration included council granting street car passes so the S.L.U.A. grievance committee could investigate complaints by members.⁴³ requesting city council to deduct membership dues from relief payments made to their members and remit them to the organization,⁴⁴ and calling for and participating in round

tables and other conferences on relief questions.⁴⁵ This close working relationship with city council did not prevent the S.L.U.A. from adopting a close and often hectoring tone when the circumstances warranted. In April of 1932, for example, the group called for an investigation of the relief department because the membership did not believe relief monies intended for relief projects were reaching those they were intended to help.⁴⁶

The S.L.U.A. had a women's auxiliary. The Women's Branch of the association appeared, for the most part, to focus on the traditional female areas of the home because, while relief was given as work, the men's relief work payment was given during the early period as relief vouchers. The men had to deal with the relief system to get work assignments and the voucher payments, while women had to translate the vouchers and their specified goods into their domestic routine. The two areas, men's paid relief work and women's domestic home front, often intersected in this cashless system. As a consequence, the Women's Branch was often in conflict with, or taking the lead from the S.L.U.A. on some issues, as the women attempted to re-establish traditional authority. An example of the leadership by the Women's Branch was the issue of the city owned relief store. On April 1, 1932, the S.L.U.A. had told city council that the organization had no objection to the city opening and operating a relief store and would leave this matter to the discretion of council. On May 19, 1932, Mrs. Carr from the Women's Section of the S.L.U.A. appeared before council to speak to a letter from the Women's Section opposing the establishment of the city owned relief store. The Women's Section pointed out that such a store would mean a number of store clerks' employed locally would probably be discharged, that such a store interfered with the rights of those on relief to shop where they chose, that such a store would

mean considerable inconvenience to those on relief who would have to travel from all points of the city to reach the store's only location, and that the range of articles proposed was far too limited. The women also suggested that, if the store were to go ahead, any employment provided by the store should be rotated among the unemployed.⁴⁷ By June, the S.L.U.A. also came out in opposition to the relief store and asked the council to allow the organization to appoint a small sub-committee to investigate and make recommendations on the entire question of a relief store.⁴⁸ The letter the Women's Section of the Local Unemployed Association in Saskatoon wrote to protest the establishment of the relief store illustrates the ability of women to highlight their own issues as political and having economic and social consequences, issues too often dismissed as domestic.

The Women's Section had passed a resolution at a general meeting which was presented in a brief to the city council:

Resolved we do not consider the establishment of a City Store as a fair consideration as we do not believe selections available would include the proper essentials for rightful sustenance, and it is a wrongful encroachment upon our rights, as our men work for this relief we should be privileged to make our own selections.⁴⁹

Prior to the relief store opening in Saskatoon, those on relief were assigned vouchers which were legal for exchange at local stores for relief supplies. The relief store brought the Saskatoon relief system into line with Vancouver's approach: to supply relief in kind. Vancouver, as reported in an 8-city survey carried out by the City of Saskatoon, estimated savings of 33% on relief costs through supplying its own relief groceries.⁵⁰ Certainly, the opposition to the relief store method of supplying groceries was widespread. The store was rejected not only by those on relief, but by local merchants who initiated a petition to City

Council. Copies of the petitions held by City archives, demonstrate the opposition from store keepers was wide spread, as signatures came from all city districts, represented both speciality foods, general grocery stores and other businesses, and from both large and small retailers.⁵¹

The opposition to the relief store was very marked. The day after the store opened for business, a mass meeting was organized by the Saskatoon Local Unemployed Association. Hundreds attended the open air meeting in Market Square to hear speakers denounce the store as “a new scheme to chisel down an already meagre sustenance allowed the working class and a method of further degrading the working class.”⁵² While the women were not successful in preventing city council from opening the store they soon became leaders in opposing it. Among the speakers presenting to city council in June, not long after the store opened, were Mrs. Paskow, Gerald Dealtry from the Trades and Labour Council and numerous other “Workless Orators”. The speakers levelled charges of incompetence and dishonesty in the running of the store and the allocation of provisions. They also complained about the layout of the store, how they were driven to pick up their supplies “like hogs in channels” in spite of the fact, as one speaker put it, “...we haven’t come down yet where we have to grunt to get something to eat.”⁵³

The Saskatoon Local Unemployed Association had formally requested the date for this audience for their delegation, who would represent a creative work that would be “satisfactory to both city council and the unemployed.” This plan had been passed unanimously at a mass meeting of the unemployed where, they claimed 1,500 were in attendance.⁵⁴ The plan was very assertive:

Firstly, That there shall be no abusive or insulting language used to the unemployed by any of the relief officials or clerks. Secondly, that the affidavit system in the relief store be abolished at once. Thirdly, That the relief store be abolished at once. Fourthly, that no one shall be cut off relief until case had been thoroughly investigated and found to be legal according to rules and regulations governing relief. Fifthly, That the present creative work plan as at present being operated as a relief measure be abolished and the following plan as endorsed by the S.L.U. Association be substituted. The Plan: That the sum of \$25 be paid in cash, said cash to be worked out at the rate of 45c an hour. The unemployed agree to pay for rent, light, and water and take care of their own food during work period. The remainder of month unemployed to receive vouchers for direct relief, said vouchers to be good at any store.⁵⁵

The plan presented by the unemployed organization had the merit of incorporating factors that would appeal to everyone through the simple expedient of incorporating all the relief schemes - except for the provision of cash - that had been utilised to date in the city. Cash for work done appealed to the relievers. Vouchers for direct relief would appeal to city council as a control and cost cutting measure. The vouchers would also appeal to local store owners who had lost business when the relief store opened.

Certainly the organizations protesting against the relief store were doing more than simply trying to ensure adequate food supplies. They were also fighting for respect and dignity. As a group of "Housewives and Mothers" expressed it:

Perhaps you cannot visualize the humiliating influence that such an institution [the relief store] has on people who have, up until the past two years, regarded themselves as free citizens. We still feel that we have a right to express our opinion and ask for and receive human and decent treatment. Our husbands and those of us responsible for the welfare of our children have for many years been able to earn a living in this City. Surely it is not our fault that we are not allowed to do this now. The statements have been made that we workers are shiftless and we should have saved and prepared for times like this. We wish however to point out that wages received even in the best of times do not allow very much savings . . . Surely we are entitled to food, shelter and clothing, and that is all we ask. Please do not expect us to accept anything less in a country which is blessed with all the good things in life.⁵⁶

This group of women, who called themselves “Housewives and Mothers” in their letter, also called on appropriate gender roles to underscore their protest. They appealed for street car tickets which would allow them to take their groceries home by public transit, rather than carry them for miles through city streets (Saskatoon had only one relief store location: downtown whereas Vancouver had several relief depot locations).

Many of us have no one to send and it is indeed humiliating to have to carry our parcels away from the Relief Store in beer cases. We do not wish to advertise the Liquor traffic and we do not think you should expect us to do so . . . We have placed the facts before you. It is humanity crying in distress for just treatment, The responsibility is yours - will you meet it?⁵⁷

The language and imagery used by the housewives and mothers was gender based. They called on notions of respectability that were based in traditional female roles to reinforce the validity of their arguments. They called on those in power to live up to the ideals of gender roles, to respect women as women, to give women the respect and support they were due, as women. The feminine ideal was called upon as advocate, the notions of proper womanhood expected to make their case.

In spite of this storm of protest, not only from the S.L.U.A. and from the S.L.U.A. Women’s Section but from other unemployed groups and from local retailers and their association, the city went ahead with its plan. The only concession the protesters could wring from the council was a month long trial. This only served to demonstrate, to council’s satisfaction if no-one else’s, that the relief store was an effective cost saving measure. As an editorial in the local paper pointed out, a saving estimated at \$5,000 a month could not be turned down.⁵⁸

Not every one agreed with the calculations of savings affected by the store and calls

for the abolition of the relief store only intensified as the summer of 1932 progressed.⁵⁹ As Mr. A.W. Wylie of the Retailers Association pointed out the savings resulted not from the operation of the store but from reducing the value of the average relief grocery order from \$3 to \$2, a decision made by council just before the store went into operation. Further, as Mr. Wylie pointed out, retailers had and were continuing to lose businesses to the relief store and no amount of savings could compensate the city and the local taxpayer for the loss of revenues from defaulted taxes, unrenewed licences fees from bankrupted businesses, or from having retailers go on relief.⁶⁰

The city-owned relief store became a flashpoint for protest that united a diverse array of interests both employed and otherwise. Among the unemployed groups were the British and Canadian Born Unemployed (B.C.B.U.) This organization had been active in approaching city council on behalf of its members, appearing first in June of 1931. This group, initially, had a very limited vision seeming to act as a nativist watchdog over city council's actions. For example, they were assiduous in pointing out to council when those of "unnaturalised" or "foreign extraction" were getting relief work or were employed by the city, as with "Mr. M. a Ukrainian with "only four and a half years residency" who was working on the street railway.⁶¹ Ethnic issues, though apparently the basis for the formation of the group, quickly faded as the major focus of the group's work. Like the other organizations in Saskatoon, the necessity of improving relief itself was imperative. In their opposition to the relief store they argued that men had the right to work for cash not groceries.⁶²

The B.C.B.U. also demonstrates some of the problems which beset unemployed

organizations. Narrow range of membership, limited interests and internal disagreements meant many of the unemployed groups had short life spans. In fact, many of the groups which appeared before council to protest the relief system were ad-hoc formations, sent by mass meetings or conferences to speak on their behalf as delegates. Often, these groups had to defend themselves against charges of communism. On June 8, 1931, one of these groups made a preemptive strike by opening their presentation to council with the statement “[we] belong to no particular group though Steve Forkin, Communist, had called their names for nomination.”⁶³

Some of the groups that worked on relief issues in Saskatoon were well established. The Canadian Legion was very active on behalf of its unemployed members. First, their Employment committee tried to find or create work opportunities. Next, the Necessitous Cases Committee began to appear before council. The Legion had been running its own relief program through the Necessitous Cases Committee but the demand for help far outstripped the group’s ability to provide.⁶⁴ A separate lobby group, the Unemployed Ex-servicemen’s Association appeared, but the Canadian Legion continued to advocate for, and act in concert with, unemployed men and their organizations.⁶⁵

The Unemployed Ex-serviceman’s Association did not make its first appearance until July of 1932, but it did so in style. Its first approach to council included six recommendations one of which was a demand that the Relief Officer, Mr. Rowland, apologise for calling the unemployed “bums and wastrels” and another of which called for the council to demonstrate more cooperation with the relief officer.⁶⁶

Other established groups also confronted city council on relief matters. The

Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council (STLC), chartered in 1909 by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC), was often before council on relief matters. Originally, it appears the STLC appealed to council because the “hiring” of unemployed workers on relief work projects was a threat to the wages and working conditions of organized labour but it very quickly began to focus on protecting the rights of relief workers as workers.⁶⁷ In Saskatoon, as elsewhere, the local trades and labour council did not always agree with the other organizations advocating for the unemployed. For example, in August, 1932, the S.L.U.A. called on Alderman Eddy to resign from city council because of his attitude towards the unemployed “he was not fit to represent labour on city council.”⁶⁸ The STLC, however, gave a vote of confidence in the alderman as their representative.⁶⁹

By November of 1932, there was yet another organization of the unemployed in Saskatoon: the Fraternal and Protective Association of Unemployed Citizens and Ratepayers.

The purpose of this organization, according to their constitution was:

- a) to foster the reconstruction of the economic system so that the waste, inequality of wealth, concentration of power, exploitation of the workers and the abundant resources of the country are used to supply human needs and provide work for all;
- b) so long as unemployment exists, to assist the unemployed in obtaining a higher standard of living justified by the over production of most primary commodities; c) to give encouragement, protection and assistance to its members seeking redress for legitimate grievances.⁷⁰

This group applied to the city council for, among other things, office space in one of the city’s work shacks. This request was granted and the group were also, like the S.L.U.A., granted street car passes for their work with the unemployed.

Other relief activist groups in Saskatoon united around locality. Even within the urban setting, the impact of geography on social relations can not be underestimated. The

core neighbourhoods of the city reflected the close and intimate relationships normally associated with rural living, where shared knowledge of neighbours and their circumstances was common. In fact, some urban living conditions in both Vancouver and Saskatoon , with no running water, outhouses, large gardens and livestock, meant some neighbourhoods in both cities resembled villages, rather than the urban cities they were supposed to be. In many ways, the neighbourhood relationships became crucial to the survival of many families as individuals cared for those in need and pooled scarce resources.⁷¹

These informal neighbourhood links around relief often became formalized. In Saskatoon, the Local Unemployed Neighbourhood Council and the Nutana Welfare Association were formed specifically around neighbour concerns regarding relief, other established neighbourhood groups like the Westmount Ratepayers Association, the Nutana Ratepayers Association and the Central Executive of the Rate Payers Association took on relief issues for their members as well. Both these broad based groups and the relief based organizations approached city council over the decade on issues of relief when these touched the lives of residents of their districts.

In addition to all these bodies, the Ministerial Association, the Local Council of Women and other, broader based organizations also frequently came before council to speak to relief issues. Many of these groups were running de facto relief programs and were appealing for more funds. Many of these groups received their funds in the form of grants, which had been considerably reduced in 1931 over 1930 amounts.⁷²

Because of the considerable commitment of effort and energy required of councillors at their meetings, the city council in Saskatoon, in 1932, decided to establish a civic relief

board to handle the administration of relief. Unfortunately, the Civic Relief Board did not ease the burden of City Council but rather increased it because, as City Relief Officer Rowland claimed after his resignation from that post because of his conflicts with the board members, the board was comprised of some of the “toughest men in the city.”⁷³ City council had given this board all the powers associated with relief, except for financial matters. In effect, this meant there was no avenue for appeals or complaints. The Civic Relief Board quickly became a second flash point for protest, given that its objectives were to slash the cost and numbers associated with relief. The apparent arbitrariness of decisions, the cost cutting measures and the encompassing power wielded by the Board had the unintended effect of turning everyone, including the council that appointed them, against the idea of a citizen run Relief Board and this one in particular.

The Board had begun by asking all relief recipients to re-register,⁷⁴ asking City Council to give them complete control over the hated relief store⁷⁵ and by defining all relief as a loan which should be repaid.⁷⁶ In addition, the board had also threatened to cut off any one who refused to sign the controversial relief agreement which summarized the changes they were introducing and which was part of the process of re-registering (see appendix 7 for a copy of the relief form including the agreement).⁷⁷

As a consequence relief recipients began to approach City Council once again with requests and this time found that city council began to support their position against the Civic Relief Board. This held true for big issues, such as rejecting the notion of relief as a loan and smaller issues such as the provision of specific food items. Unfortunately, the Civic Relief board in both these examples simply ignored the directions of council.

While the S.T.L.C. and the Ministerial Association began to speak out against the Civic Relief Board,⁷⁸ the various unemployed organizations began to unite and call for a judicial enquiry.⁷⁹ Their move was supported by suggestions that the Council did not have the power to pass its responsibility for relief into the hands of non-elected officials and by the suggestion that the Provincial government was becoming interested in allegations about the handling of relief in Saskatoon. For example, the notion that the city council would require repayment of sums of which the city had only contributed one-third and the federal and provincial governments the other two-thirds was seen as constituting a degree of fraud.⁸⁰

The role of women's groups in the response to the changing relief system in Saskatoon also had a political component and took a more overtly confrontational role in the issue of the Relief Board. In November of 1932, as the city was preparing for the civic elections, a group of thirty women and their children occupied City Hall to protest not only the inadequate quality and quantity of relief goods available through the relief store but also the political basis on which decisions about relief were made. They pointed out that the relief agreement made relief a loan to be repaid on demand, a reliefer's home open to inspection without warning day or night, and male household heads subject to deportation to wherever a job could be found (see appendix 7 for a copy of the application form containing the complete text of the relief agreement).⁸¹ The women also protested because the Board that was making the policy to frame terms and conditions of relief was a non-elected body.

In Vancouver, some months later, a group of women also threatened to occupy Vancouver City Hall unless their demands for a cash scale, paid every two weeks, replaced

the meal and ticket system. They argued that women could provide more for their families using their domestic skills to advantage under a scheme that trusted them with cash.⁸²

The Saskatoon incident, where women physically occupied the public arena of council chambers, had more lasting success than the Vancouver event. The “City Hall Sit-down” garnered support from unlikely sources. The local paper, the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, ran an editorial which, while condemning the illegality of the women’s actions, sympathized with the women’s plight. The agreement, the editorial said, was little more than blackmail.⁸³ The sit-down strike was the beginning of major changes to the relief system in Saskatoon. Council was forced to take the reins of relief delivery back into its own hands.

Initially, City Council was reluctant to return to the *status quo ante*. In the aftermath of the sit-down strike the Council relied on civic authority to direct the Civic Relief Board. Council passed a motion, following the 48 hour occupation of City Hall by the 30 women and their children, stating the requirement to sign and the clause making relief a loan to be repaid on demand were to be removed from the relief application form. Months later, however, Council discovered the form and the requirements remained unchanged.⁸⁴

The conflict between the City Council and its relief board sharpened. After city council upheld a call by relief recipients for eggs as part of relief supplies distributed through the relief store, the Civic Relief Board simply said relief recipients could wait until February for eggs when they would be cheap.⁸⁵

Such outright rejection of City Council authority exemplified a growing rift between City Council and its own appointed body and a new alliance between City Council and relief recipients and their allies. The combination of council’s dissatisfaction with the way the

Civic Relief Board was running the relief system along with the growing agitation among relief recipients and their growing body of supporters moved council in a new direction. After two years of continual protests and complaints by relief recipients and other citizens affected by the Civic Relief Board, and increasingly acrimonious communications between City Council and the Relief Board the council developed, in 1934, a city wide plebiscite which resulted in the overthrow of the relief store and the establishment of relief through cash.⁸⁶ The vote resulted in the introduction of a cash system for relief groceries. This proved so successful that within a year cash was also introduced for milk, bread and meat. The cash system did not entirely do away with protest and dissatisfaction with the relief system in Saskatoon. For the remainder of the decade, however, the autonomy and self determination inherent in the cash system addressed much of the unrest. In fact, Saskatoon City Council expanded its policy of consulting with, and including, representatives from the bodies of unemployed organizations in its deliberations, including its own consultations with the Provincial Government.

An immediate result of the pressure was city council's decision to hold a conference on relief matters. They passed a motion to invite 2 representatives from all the various unemployed organizations. The invitation list was very extensive and ranged from long established broad based organizations such as the right-wing Canadian Legion, the left wing Canadian Labour Defence League and the ecumenical Protestant Ministerial Association, to newer more specific concerns such as the Unemployed Ex-Serviceman's Association and the Fraternal and Protective Association of Unemployed Citizens and Ratepayers. Neighbourhood based groups and women only groups, like the Nutana Welfare Association,

the Women's Labour League, the Neighbourhood Council Movement were also invited.⁸⁷ The breadth of the invitations list served to underscore the seriousness with which the City Council was now taking the situation - anyone with an interest in the problem was invited to be part of the solution, regardless of political affiliations. Unemployed groups in Saskatoon sat at the table when relief was discussed.

In response to this initiative the invited organizations formed a mass organization: the Central Council on Unemployment. While the organizations involved in this central body continued to operate and approach city council as individual groups, the Central Council became an important step in the evolution of relief activism in the city.⁸⁸ The centralized body was able to push for broad based changes which focused not only on concrete improvements, such as increases to relief allowances at Christmas but also for the protection of rights, such as the right to privacy.⁸⁹

The activities described to this point were relatively similar for all the various groups in both cities. What was distinctly dissimilar was the impact the activities had. While Vancouver city council was relatively responsive to suggestions from respectable coalitions such as the coalition of Vancouver Social Services Agencies formed in response to the prostitution question, the council was far less responsive to suggestions from representative groups of the unemployed. This was in contrast to Saskatoon's city council willingness to work with unemployed groups and the recognition of the power and influence of the Central Council of Unemployed. While having labour representatives, such as Alderman Eddy, might have been a contributing factor for Saskatoon's city council's openness to hearing and acting on the complaints of unemployed organizations, the success of unemployed groups

in Saskatoon in forming a unified coalition was central to their success in obtaining hearings and action. Further, the bureaucratic structure in Saskatoon, with City Council more directly responsible for the delivery of relief, was an important element. Urban size was a major factor in creating a form of participatory democracy. Neither city council, however, regardless of level of responsiveness, was able to stop unemployed organizations from making frequent, vociferous and detailed complaints, appeals and petitions. Many of these became assertions of rights. The organizations soon became familiar with, and effective within, the standards and practices of city hall politics.

In Saskatoon the collectivism developed to the point of a united front that achieved direct and measurable improvements to the relief system. In Vancouver, the relief system saw little concrete change. In fact, though there were two small increases to Vancouver's relief food allowances in 1934, the first real increase to the relief food allowance did not come until November, 1940. This increase was not due to unemployed activism which, interestingly had not stopped with the war effort, but came about due to an increase approved by the provincial government and a drop in the local relief rolls.⁹⁰ While Vancouver's relief recipients received higher allowances than those in Saskatoon, the cash system conferred a greater purchasing power and an ability to take advantage of local bargains in a way the relief in kind process of Vancouver did not. Further, the emotional advantages such as self respect, reinforcement of traditional roles and a degree of anonymity possible with delivery of relief in cash ensured the Saskatoon relief system was superior.

In their activities, those on relief in Vancouver and Saskatoon had struck alliances that bridged class and gender differences. Yet, there was a distinct difference in what was

achieved in the two cities. The sheer size of Vancouver ensured that the business of the city council was run by “committee.” The Employment and Relief Department in Vancouver reported to the Employment and Relief Committee of Council, who in turn presented their minutes to City Council as a report.⁹¹ In Vancouver, the Council committee tended to leave many of the decisions to the discretion of the Relief officer. For example, the Relief officer wanted the Employment and Relief Committee to develop a policy to deal with married men who a) refused to go to work offered; b) were laid off with good cause; c) were dismissed by foreman for laziness or unwillingness to work; or d) were dismissed by foreman for insubordination. The Committee preferred to leave issues such as this in the relief officer’s hands.⁹² Further, the reports attracted very little attention at Council meetings, generally being accepted without question.⁹³ This left both individuals and collectives protesting against the system with few options for arguing for changes. Further, delegations appearing before the Council’s committee did not receive the same kind of reception or hearing that similar groups received in Saskatoon. In Vancouver, a group’s entire presentation was reduced to a sentence stating they had appeared with complaints or demands with no further explanations or actions recorded.⁹⁴

In Saskatoon, the minutes recorded the details of delegations and their presentations. Saskatoon had a standing committee on unemployment relief, to which the Relief officer reported, but relief issues appeared at City Council at the “Meeting of the Whole section of City Council. Here, delegations were heard, individual alderman raised questions and relief was discussed fully. Given that the local newspapers reported council meetings in great depth, including verbatim transcripts, the unemployed in Saskatoon received a valuable

public forum for their views. Speakers to council on relief issues became advocates for changes to system and their groups, in some cases, partners with city council in delivering relief. Further, representatives from unemployed organizations sat with the city Council at conferences and consultations about relief matters.

The contrast between how relief was handled demonstrates a reality of the politics of place. Saskatoon afforded a more face-to face interaction between politicians and relief recipients. This local control of relief was ostensibly intended by the principles of parish control to allow greater control over social conduct and relief costs by local authorities. In reality, it also permitted greater access to the system, with greater potential for change. In Vancouver, a larger city, the isolation of recipients from the political control of the system hindered the potential for change.

Saskatoon City Council tried to seek ways to institute a similar distance between themselves and relief recipients. Regular council meetings had begun to last past midnight, and to be held more than once a week, and frequent special meetings had to be called in order to cope with the mass of work their hands-on management of relief generated. The Saskatoon City Council established Civic Relief Board in order to reduce both its workload and its involvement with relief. Unfortunately, rather than reduce the workload of council, the Civic Relief Board managed to antagonise almost everyone. A general consensus emerged that non-elected people were managing the city's money and the accountability citizens expected to be able to exercise with elected officials was removed. Relief recipients and rate payers alike, united against the actions of the Civic Relief Board and terms like fascism and "Mussolini Tactics" were directed at their activities. Their actions led directly

to an unlikely union of interests and the escalation of protests that culminated in a sit down occupation of City Hall, the abolition of the City Relief Store and the plebiscite that introduced a cash for relief system while similar initiatives in Vancouver were derailed.⁹⁵ Instead of being able to adopt a more arm's length relationship with relief matters, Saskatoon's City Council became intimately involved with the unemployed organizations as they began to work with them in a more co-operative fashion.

The relief system depended on a face to face interaction that should have ensured control and power lay uncontested in the hands of the authorities. Unfortunately for the functioning of the relief system, this close contact also ensured relief recipients had insight, knowledge and power as well. In Saskatoon, the close networks created policy gaps that were visible and malleable. In Vancouver, the City Council managed control over relief policy in the face of the same sustained pressure that forced changes to the Saskatoon system because the indirect and faceless bureaucracy was more developed and well established. The interplay of forces such as gender politics, unemployed strategies and personal influences were all swayed by the persistence of locality. The more sophisticated bureaucratic structure in operation in Vancouver was immune to most strategies and to the different kinds of collectivities that emerged.

Another distinction afforded by locality was related to the favourable climate in Vancouver. Because of these advantages, Vancouver attracted large numbers of single, unemployed single men. The efforts of Vancouver City Council tended to focus on this category, even though the responsibility for these individuals was not, strictly speaking, a municipal one. Occasionally providing direct relief to the transient unemployed, council

became, somewhat unwillingly, an advocate for the needs of the single unemployed male. This de facto role in advocating for improvements to the national relief system meant the relief system for local citizens was overshadowed by the sheer numbers and drama of unemployed single men.

The organizational activities of those on relief had differential impact because of the politics of place. Success or failure with the relief system was determined by the intersection of political strategies with local realities. Regardless of the impact the activities of the unemployed had on the relief system itself, what was most powerful about the organizations of unemployed that emerged in the 1930s was the enduring legacy of their struggle: the long term effect on the language, rhetoric and understanding of relief itself.

Suspicion, inertia, and parsimony were the three great driving forces of relief programs and the two major political parties of the period. Unemployed organizations not only named and identified the problems facing relief recipients, thus giving legitimacy to their grievances, they also offered ways of taking action to fight changes that no-one was prepared to offer without duress. The groups went further than this, offering a sense of belonging to those who were rejected and isolated by the experience of unemployment. The relief activists developed a sense of identity that rejected the “bums and wastrels” label that was used to justify the inadequacy of relief prior to the 1930s. Women’s organizations addressed the gender issues neglected by both the authorities and by other relief activist groups.

The results of the unemployed agitation were not only concrete improvements to the relief supplies and delivery but changes to on the political landscape of relief. Mass meetings

offered a public expression of discontent. The shared experiences of the relief lines changed people's attitudes towards relief and developed common grounds for the formation of collective responses. Individual and collective presentations to relief departments, standing committees and city councils, and to the public at large, created a forum for the redefinition of relief based on the experiences and insights of those in receipt of it. It was from these actions that the reality of state support as a right not as social control emerged. This was the greatest achievement of relief activists work in the 1930s.

ENDNOTES

¹ Collective organizing was bred in the relief line ups. For example, one interviewee responded to an interviewer's eager questions on how political organization around relief issues in the 1930s was undertaken replied, with a puzzled tone, "We just talked to each other, standing around in the line up. We passed the word." See: Lil Stoneman Interview, S.F.U. Archives, Local History Collection, 100/013/062 [no interviewer, no date.] There are other similar examples of this public sharing of experience fostering relief resistance in this collection.

² John Manley, "Starve, Be Damned!" *Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed.* *Canadian Historical Review*, 79, 3 (September 1998): 466-491. Manley argues the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) moved into mobilizing married men and families on relief, with a new more serious focus on women's issues. As part of this initiative, the CPC had established 114 block councils with a membership of 2200 by January 1933. Interestingly, he identifies the lack of ideology on the part of the rank and file of the various factions as the basis for unity in the face of the CPC's attempts, controlled by directives from the Comintern, to use unemployed issues to further doctrinaire objectives. See p. 484.

³ Manley, "Starve, Be Damned!" p. 499, argues the unemployed organizing may not have achieved any lasting gains for the CPC, especially given their turn away from unemployment issues after 1935. He states, however, that the structure and activities of unemployed work by the CPC gave hope and optimism which off set the brutal conditions, ensuring people had options other than becoming victims or succumbing to despair.

⁴ The debate took on a virulent tone in a national forum with the publication of Mederic Martin's, "Go Home, Young Women!" *The Chatelaine* Sept. 1933. p.10 & 37. 44. And the subsequent response of Agnes Macphail in "Go Home Young Woman? Ha!" *The Chatelaine*. Oct. 1933. P. 13, 53. See also: The Editors. "Can You Shackle Women Again? Some of the Hundreds of Letters received in Reply to Mederic Martin's Article 'Go Home Young Woman!'" *The Chatelaine*. Nov. 1933, p.26 & 44.

⁵ Members of the YWCA Single Unemployed Girls Club, Oral History Interview #VO16, Vancouver, May 9, 1994. See also: "The Class of 1933," *YWCA Contact*, Fall, 1993. This article reports the ages of membership ranged from 16 to 60. One member of the group I interviewed was younger than this when she joined.

⁶ This comment made originally by Dorothy Nyswander, A Works Progress Administration official, to Eleanor Roosevelt. "Report on Women's Work in the WPA," Sept. 29, 1935. Quoted in Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, Mass, 1981) p.109. Cited in Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the Depression* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982) p. 41.

- ⁷ "Local Women Threaten to Stop Bailiff.." *Star Phoenix*, Aug. 19, 1932.
- ⁸ "Jobless Gather to Prevent Sale by Bailiff Here," *Star Phoenix*, Aug. 22, 1932.
- ⁹ "Women Want Cash Relief. Unemployed Present New Demand to Relief Committee." *Daily Province*, June 20, 1933.
- ¹⁰ "New Era League Asks [for] Department of Public Welfare," *Daily Province*, June 20, 1934.
- ¹¹ Vancouver Relief Recipient, Oral History Interview with Mr. Bob Arnold. Interview, V031, Dec. 13, 1994.
- ¹² Lil Stoneman in an interview held in the Simon Fraser Archives, claims the Mother's Council was a rebirth of the Women's Labour League. The reformation was necessary she said to broaden their activities and appeal. Lil Stoneman Interview, S.F.U. Archives, Local history Collection, 100/013/062. [no interviewer, no date]
- ¹³ Lil Stoneman Interview, S.F.U. Archives, Local history Collection, 100/013/062. [no interviewer, no date]
- ¹⁴ Lil Stoneman Interview, S.F.U. Archives, Local history Collection, 100/013/062. [no interviewer, no date]
- ¹⁵ Mrs. Mortimer's daughter later became Vancouver's first policewoman.
- ¹⁶ Margaret Little's exemplary work on mother's pensions makes this point.
- ¹⁷ Examples of correspondence between the two departments abound.
- ¹⁸ Vancouver relief recipient, Oral History Interview with Jack Cowie Geddes, #V024, 7 Nov, 1994 & May 24, 1995.
- ¹⁹ Lil Stoneman Interview, S.F.U. Archives, Local history Collection, 100/013/062. [no interviewer, no date]
- ²⁰ "City Tenants are Evicted" *Daily Province*, Mar.20,1933.
- ²¹ "Second General Eviction Planned" *Daily Province*, Mar. 25, 1933. "Relief Evictions Start Once More" *Daily Province*, Mar. 27, 1933.
- ²² "Relief Owners to Form Association" *Daily Province*, Apr.15,1933.
- ²³ There is a famous photograph of this. See CVA, Major Matthews Photograph Collection under Relief.

²⁴ Letter from W.R. Bone, Relief Officer for City of Vancouver to H.L. Corey, Chair of Social Services Committee, CVA, City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. Letter dated Jan. 20, 1939.

²⁵ Letter from W.R. Bone, Relief Officer for City of Vancouver to H.L. Corey, Chair of Social Services Committee, CVA, City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. Letter dated Jan. 20, 1939.

²⁶ Letter from the New Era League, dated Jan. 17, 1939 to Mayor and City Council and signed by Mrs. J. Jackson, corresponding Secretary. CVA, City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. Hostels for Single Women Relief Recipients.

²⁷ Please note: the phrase within the square brackets was struck out and the subsequent phrase substituted). See Memorandum to Mayor and Council, from the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies. CVA, City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. Hostels for Single Women Relief Recipients, March 15, 1939.

²⁸ Report of Special Sub-Committee, Minutes of Social Services Committee, July 10, 1939.. CVA, City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. Hostels for Single Women Relief Recipients.

²⁹ Report of Special Sub Committee, Minutes of Social Services Committee, August 31, 1939. CVA, City Clerk's Records, 27-D-5, File #6, 1939. Hostels for Single Women Relief Recipients.

³⁰ A rich source for information on many of the organizations of the unemployed is the Police Department records, a delightful irony given the objective of the police at the time was to stamp out these groups. Though these records are riddled with bias, without the police records, our knowledge of these groups would be scant. For example, the Police Department Fonds held by the City of Vancouver Archives carries almost an entire run of the *Unemployed Worker's Gazette* for 1931 and 1932 and some of the publicity materials produced by the Sit Down Strikers, who produced this while holding the Post office. See: CVA, Vancouver Police Department Fonds, Series 199, 75-F-2.

³¹ This list is drawn from the RCMP's own list. See CVA, Series 199, 75-F-2, file 12, List of Active Communists and Related Correspondence.

³² CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 4. Newspaper clipping "Co-operative Relief Urged" June 17, 1932.

³³ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 1, Minute Book, June 17, 1932.

³⁴ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 1, Minute Book June 3, 1932.

³⁵ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 7, Miscellaneous Materials, Copy of Pledge Form.

- ³⁶ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 1, Minute Book, First meeting, March 22, 1932.
- ³⁷ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 7, Miscellaneous Materials, First Annual Report from Agricultural Section. 1933.
- ³⁸ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 1, Minute Book, First meeting, March 22, 1932.
- ³⁹ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 1, Minute book. See records for meetings on April 5, 12 and 29, 1932, and special meeting May 8, 1932, for examples of the complexities the organization faced in the initial growing pains of acquiring a truck, permits, a functional donkey engine and tackle, not to mention the appropriate provincial information re: fire hazards, and other regulations.
- ⁴⁰ CVA, Add. Mss 62, Vol. 1. File no. 1, Minute Book, various dates.
- ⁴¹ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, July 7, 1930.
- ⁴² CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, July 17, 1930.
- ⁴³ The S.L.U.A. first applied in 1931 for these car tickets and frequently reapplied over the decade. City of Saskatoon Archives, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, Feb. 15, 1931.
- ⁴⁴ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, Oct. 13, 1931.
- ⁴⁵ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, March 31, 1932.
- ⁴⁶ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, April 14, 1932. Similar charges were raised in Vancouver. See, for example: "New Era League Asks Department of Public Welfare: Are Critical of City Organization Under Mr. Falk. Alleged Anomalies of Relief are outlined in Statement." *The Daily Province*, June 20, 1934.
- ⁴⁷ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, May 19, 1932. Under the voucher system, at least, women could choose their own local grocers. Depending on the reputation and personal relationships with the grocer they could, and often did, make "arrangements" which subverted the control exerted by the specification of goods on the face of the vouchers.
- ⁴⁸ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, June 6, 1932.
- ⁴⁹ Letter to City Council from members of proposed delegation of Women's Section of the Local Unemployed Association, dated May 19, 1932. CSA, Box 5877b, file 308 Relief - S. 1932. (Note reference should be checked as the hiring of city archivist in 1997 means a new cataloguing system is being developed).

⁵⁰ Of the 8 cities surveyed, only Brandon, Manitoba, operated its own relief store. They reported the advantages of greater control over relief, including doing away with the abuse of substitutions, considerable savings and a general deterrent effect through recipients having to carry away their own groceries in public. See: "Summary of replies received relative to operation of Relief stores in other cities in Western Canada" CSA, Box 5877b, file 308, Relief - S. 1932,

⁵¹ Examples of signatures: W. Malcolm, Shoe Repairs, Frank Holmes, Groceries and hardware, L. Saimon, Savemore Store. Southside Business men's Association, Petitions, dated April 8, 1932. CSA, Box 5877b, File 308, Relief - S. 1932. A subsequent petition, after the relief store had been established, opposed the store as petitioners now found "Incomes materially reduced" and requested a return to delivery of relief through usual retail store channels" *op. cit.*

⁵² "Claim Store Merely New Scheme to Cut Down on Food Grant. Unemployed At Meeting in Market Square Protest Against Relief Shop; Say Short Weight Given; No Hint of Communism Tinges Gathering". *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 1, 1932.

⁵³ " Claim Store Merely New Scheme to Cut Down on Food Grant" *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, June 1, 1932.

⁵⁴ Letter signed by W. Taylor, Chair and Geo. Plass, Secretary. Dated July 25th, 1932. CSA, Box 5877b, File 308, Relief - S. 1932.

⁵⁵ Plan attached to letter signed by Taylor and Plass, Dated July 25th, 1932. CSA, Box 5877b, File 308, Relief - S. 1932. The meeting which endorsed the a plan was held at the Market Square on Friday, July 22, 1932.

⁵⁶ Letter dated July 26, 1932. CSA, Box 5877b, File 308, Relief - S. 1932.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ "The Relief Store," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, Aug. 9, 1932, p.9.

⁵⁹ "Abolition of Relief Store Again Mooted," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, Aug. 2, 1932, p.5. This story reports the overwhelming number of petitions "piling up" as council business from unemployed organizations, including the Housewives and mothers group and a petition signed by 97 merchants submitted by a former alderman.

⁶⁰ "The Retailers' View," Letters to the Editor Column, *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, Aug.13, 1932.

⁶¹ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, Aug.19, 1931.

⁶² CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, July 27, 1932.

⁶³ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, June 8, 1931.

⁶⁴ By May of 1931 they were asking City Council for help with their relief program for ex-servicemen. See: CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, May, 1931.

⁶⁵ For example, in 1933, on the occasion of the King's Birthday, the Legion invited Frank Rowland, the City Relief Officer who was himself a returned servicemen, to present his side of his recent resignation from the post. Rowland had served as City Relief Officer from 1920 to 1923 and then again from 1927 to the date of his resignation. He gained much support from the Legion in the uproar which surrounded his departure. "Frank Rowland Tells His Side of Trouble in Relief Supervision," *Star Phoenix*, June 5, 1933.

⁶⁶ CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, July 18, 1932.

⁶⁷ As, for example, when they argued contractors hired by the city should include a fair wage clause for any relief workers hired. See: CSA, City Clerk's Records, Minutes of City Council, July 7, 1930.

⁶⁸ "Up to Labour Council, Says Eddy", *Star Phoenix*, August 9, 1932, p.3.

⁶⁹ "Eddy Given Backing of Labour Body," *Star Phoenix*, Aug. 11, 1932, p.3.

⁷⁰ Constitution of the Fraternal and Protective Association of Citizens and Ratepayers Association of Saskatoon, as submitted March 13, 1940. CSA, City Clerk's Records, File 307, Relief. March, 1940.

⁷¹ One example of this pooling of resources I heard frequently was the house on the block with the phone. Those owning the phone took messages, particularly around jobs. Those without phones reported awareness of the need not to take advantage of this resources and used it only for outgoing calls in emergency situations.

⁷² Letter to Mr. T.C. Laycock, Secretary, Haultain Ratepayers and Residents Association, from the City Clerk, dated Nov. 10, 1931 compares amounts granted to organizations such as the Children's Aid Society, Victorian Order of Nurses and the YWCA. Some of the groups received no money at all, 4 groups received lower sums and 4 groups received the same. Only one group, Traveller's Aid, received an increase. CSA, City Clerk's Records, File 140, Grants, 1931.

⁷³ "Eight appointed to Act on City's Relief Board," and *Star Phoenix*, October 4, 1932 and "Frank Rowland Tells His Side of Trouble in Relief Supervision," *Star Phoenix*, June 5, 1933.

⁷⁴ "Board Will Pass on All Relief Pleas," *Star Phoenix*, October 6, 1932.

⁷⁵ "Relief Tribunal Will Ask for Full Control of City Operated Store," *Star Phoenix*, October 12, 1932; "Board to Handle City Relief Store," *Star Phoenix*, October 21, 1932.

⁷⁶ "Relief Applicants in Future to Sign Notes Promising to Repay," *Star Phoenix*, October 13, 1932; "Pledge to Repay Must be Signed for City Relief," *Star Phoenix*, October 13, 1932, evening edition; "Share of Relief to be Repaid Not Yet Settled," *Star Phoenix*, November 6, 1932 .

⁷⁷ "Board to Stand Firm on Policy; Those Refusing to Promise to Repayment of Relief Will Be Cut Off List," *Star Phoenix*, Nov. 15, 1932.

⁷⁸ "Trades Council Against Repaying Relief," *Star Phoenix*, October 27, 1932; "Clergymen Meet Relief Board to Plead Leniency," *Star Phoenix*, Dec. 1, 1932.

⁷⁹ "Wylie Says Provincial Probe Coming: Operation of Relief Store Subject of Quiz," *Star Phoenix*, Mar. 1, 1933; "Mayor Says He Welcomes Any Quiz," *Star Phoenix*, Mar. 17, 1933. See also record of correspondence received calling for judicial enquiry, CSA, City Clerk's Records, City Council Minutes, July 7, 1933.

⁸⁰ A report prepared by the Hon. R. Merkely on the share of costs pointed out urban centres had no authority to require recipients to repay relief. See: "Cities to Pay One-Third of Relief Cost," *Star Phoenix*, Feb. 8, 1933.

⁸¹ This incident is discussed briefly in "Prayers, Pamphlets and Protest: Women and Relief in Saskatoon, 1929-1939" and in more detail in: Oral History Interview #S0049 Oral History Interview with M.F. May 14, 1996. M.F. recalls her father being forced to sign this agreement under the threat of having the children removed from the family. "We literally had no food...came to the house and they were going to take us away. That's how they made him sign. I only ever saw my father cry on three occasions, and that was one of them. I'll never forgive them for that."

⁸² "Women Want Cash Relief. Unemployed Present New Demand to Relief Committee." *Daily Province*, June 20, 1933.

⁸³ The women's analysis clearly rejected the political grounds of the relief agreement arguing the Civic Relief Board, author of the document and, had no legal or moral constitutional authority to frame the terms and conditions of relief. "City Hall Vigil", *Star Phoenix*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 3.

⁸⁴ "Relief Handling Under Spotlight at Parley Monday." *Star Phoenix*, July 15, 1933.

⁸⁵ CSA, City Clerk's Records, City Council Minutes, Jan. 15, 1934.

⁸⁶ CSA, Archives, Minutes of City Council, September 10 - 24, 1934, covers the debates on the cash system and the plebiscite and the results. Interestingly, the original hand written

drafts of the plebiscite questions are included. See also: C.O.S. Archives, City Clerk's Records, Uncatalogued, Box 5864, File 308, Plebiscite Among the Unemployed, September 1934.

⁸⁷ CSA, City Clerk's Records, City Council Minutes, July 31, 1933.

⁸⁸ Presentation by Mr. Gerald Dealtry, of TLC, on formation of mass organization. CSA, City Clerk's Records, City Council Minutes, Aug. 21, 1933.

⁸⁹ CSA, City Clerk's Records, City Council Minutes, Dec. 4, 1933 for the successful gain of Xmas allowance and CSA, City Clerk's Records, City Council Minutes, Oct. 30, 1933 for the argument against publishing the names of those on relief.

⁹⁰ The food relief allowance in Vancouver was increased on March 17, 1934 by 10%. The allowance for minors was increased by \$1.00 on April 15, the same year. It remained at these levels until 1940. "Food Relief to Increase" Nov. 18, 1940. CVA, Newspaper Clippings, M79081-1 "Relief", 1931-1940.

⁹¹ Wardhaugh Report on Civic Reorganization to Date," CVA, City Council Minutes, Vol. 31, Jan. 19, 1931.

⁹² CVA, City Council minutes, Vol. 32, Oct. 26, 1931. Meeting of the Relief & Employment Committee Oct. 19, 1931, Report Oct. 26, Meeting of City Council.

⁹³ For example, as far as I can ascertain, only one question was asked of the Vancouver Employment and Relief Committee in the whole of 1931.

⁹⁴ This is not to say that groups and individuals did not try. Delegations and individuals approached other committees of council in order to make their case. In some cases, they received hearings, but the result was usually to refer the case to the Employment and Relief Committee or the Relief officer.

⁹⁵ See: "Women Want Cash Relief: Unemployed Present New Demand to Relief Committee," *The Daily Province*, June 20, 1933. The origin of the successful chain of events in Saskatoon, discussed briefly above, is more fully explored in "Theresa Healy, "Engendering Resistance: Women Respond to Relief in Saskatoon, 1930-1932" Dave de Brou and Aileen Moffat, eds. *Other Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995,) p. 94-115. The transition to a cash for relief system began at City Council level with a notice of motion by the Mayor that the relief store be abolished, and cash relief given if permission of Provincial and Federal governments was obtained. CSA, City Council Minutes, June 25, 1934, p. 15889.

Conclusion

The numbers of unemployed in Canada continue to mount and their conditions steadily become worse. Relief given is the absolute minimum and many are refused any relief whatsoever. Thousands of workers are facing the winter without adequate clothing, and in a half starved condition. ORGANIZE AND FIGHT FOR NON-CONTRIBUTORY UNEMPLOYMENT AND INSURANCE! FIGHT AGAINST WAGE-CUTS, SHORT TIME AND LAY-OFFS! DEMAND THE REPEAL OF SECTION 98, AND THE RELEASE OF ALL WORKING CLASS PRISONERS!...NO DISCRIMINATION NOR INVESTIGATION! UNEMPLOYMENT THE ONLY NECESSARY QUALIFICATION PREPARE TO DEMONSTRATE IN THOUSANDS FOR YOUR DEMANDS!

The Unemployed Worker. Dec. 1931

It is not common to give the unemployed women and men of the 1930s credit for the birth of the Canadian Welfare state - limited as that entity might be. Rather, we seem to be more interested in dismantling it. This study has, in the process of seeking to understand how those who survived the devastating effects of the 1930s might have understood themselves and their circumstances, discovered other important factors about the 1930s.

Many argue the depression reinforced and strengthened traditional gender roles. Rather, I would argue, the depression reveals clearly the fragility and flexibility of traditional gender roles. While many aspired to and subscribed to the desirability of the ideals, the potency of the roles to impose conformity in people's lives was limited, diminished and moderated by other, more potent influences.

The impact of the depression was mediated by social categories, race, age, gender, locality, health, and class. These, as well as other social markers were more than means by

which individuals knew and understood themselves and others. They filtered the experiences of the depression. Both genders found themselves trapped between competing moral codes of what women and men should be and what they had to do. The stay-at-home wife, the breadwinning husband, with the relevant and expected status and behaviours associated with class, found the boundaries of these moral certainties blurred. Women found themselves balancing competing and contradictory moral and social codes. In doing so, they found dignity and strength in redefinitions. Their individual struggles, shared as part of a common larger one, helped redefine the respectable. Middle class women substituted themselves, literally their bodies and labour, for income. Working class women balanced available resources, waged work, domestic skills, relief and charity systems with a new sense of entitlement to state help not state oppression.

One of the major arguments advanced here is that those people who were most severely affected by the impact of the depression years were not helpless victims dependant upon, or controlled by, the social policy of relief. I support this first by showing that the relief policies of the 1930s reflected a flawed and ineffective legislation further complicated and hampered by a variety of material and fiscal factors. The policies, delivered through an inefficient bureaucracy staffed by untrained and inexperienced administrators who held only a limited comprehension of the consequences of the Depression, were ill-equipped to deal with the exigencies of human need created by economic disaster. The politics of place ensured relief policy could never, regardless of how many changes to language or legislation were attempted, actually control local conditions.

Factors such as these ensured a gap existed between the reality assumed by the policy

and the actual realities experienced by relief recipients. It is in this unintended space, the “reality gap” between ideals and realities, that individuals and groups were able to challenge and resist the imposition of a largely ineffective system. In many cases, individuals worked to change and improve the relief system while developing a variety of strategies to avoid or mitigate its worst failures. Further, I argue that many of the categories and factors that policy makers and bureaucrats used to impose relief policies were not only fluid categories in and of themselves but that both the relief department and relievers themselves were content to reorder the expectations associated with such notions of identity as gender and class whenever it suited their interests.

Social policy generally, and relief policy in particular, has historically striven to reinforce middle class ideals of the family. These ideals are framed by gender role expectations. With a male breadwinner as the family head, and with a dependent female as full time home maker, the ideal family is nuclear and independent of the state. In this model, women and children are presumed dependent, assumed to be cared for adequately by the efforts of their respective husbands and fathers, and subservient to the decisions of the wage earning male head of the household.¹ The Relief system was an institution designed to reinforce these ideals and gender roles through a process of regulation and punishment.

While such assumptions have informed the fabric of social policy, they have failed to reflect realities of most families and, as a consequence, are doomed to failure. The experience of the relief system in the depression years exemplifies this. The Depression called into stark contrast the differences between policy assumptions and the actual experiences of those on relief. The failures of policy to impose itself with success on the

population was rooted in this primary discordance: even under the most ideal circumstances the gap between what policy believed existed and what it reinforced was too far removed from the realities of daily life. While the reality gap had existed prior to the Depression, it was the Depression which made it stark and undeniable.

The most important issue which undermined state policy was the flexibility of gender roles that existed in real life. Primarily, most women and men did not restrict themselves to the gender defined roles assumed to be such a fundamental part of the normal family.² Many women shared, or shouldered alone, the financial responsibilities for their families through choice or circumstance. In many cases, children contributed to the household finances and carried responsibilities beyond those ideally expected of their age group. And men found themselves unable to live up to the ideals expressed in policy. Unable to carry the burden of financially supporting families alone, they relied upon the efforts of wives and children to make ends meet; thus, regardless of governmental policy definitions or societal expectations of, normal age and gender behaviours, women, children and men undertook activities, or avoided others, in order to support their notions of family. Such notions may not have subscribed to, or only coincided with, the ideals of policy makers or they may have only shared some superficial similarities.

In some cases, individuals and families may have wished to subscribe to the gender roles idealized in relief policies but circumstances allowed them no other choice than to adopt non-traditional postures. In the attempt to fully understand the relief system of the 1930s, it is important to remember whether the particular gender roles assumed with a particular family were taken up voluntarily or imposed and that Canadian family exerted

also their own influences and choices within the framework of the social and economic opportunities available.³

To bolster the concept of individual and familial agency, was the fact the state was unable to enforce the definitions of family embedded in policy. This was partly due to the fact that the reality most people on relief faced was so vastly different from the realities the policy described and presumed. Absent or irresponsible fathers could not live up to the expectations of the role of male head of family. Sick or dying women could not be the emotional anchor of the family. If there was no work available locally, men could not maintain their families without state help.

Another complication was the fact that the policy incorporated mutually contradictory and exclusive objectives. The over-riding objective for relief policy was to ensure the financial independence of the traditional family, under the direction of a financially independent male, and presumed this as the shared ideal of those on relief; however, neither the relievers themselves, nor the Relief Department was entirely wedded to the concept. Whenever it suited either party, the definition of family and its attendant roles and expectations, would dramatically shift. Relievers were quite willing to use the rhetoric of the independent family unit, or to argue for alternative family forms when it suited their purposes. Likewise, the Relief Department was quite willing to rewrite gender roles and family roles wherever it served a financial advantage.

The traditional notion of the family was based on a sexual division of labour. The male head was to be employed outside of the home for wages, the female home maker to be employed inside of it. The Depression eroded perceptions of static gender roles and revealed

contradictions within the idealized notion of the “nuclear family”. The traditional sexual division of labour was readily discarded if the only employment opportunities available locally were for women. That is, the principle of a male head of household as sole breadwinner was readily sacrificed if the financial independence of the family could be ensured by cloaking some other member of the family with that status. Thus a working wife, an older child, a wife's mother, could be arbitrarily assigned as family head and made responsible for the financial support of the family.

Exploring the experienced reality of individuals on relief allows for a broader analysis of social policy as both a theory and a practice.⁴ It allows for a gender analysis of both the policy and of those who came under its purview.⁵ Contrasting what policy expected with what people actually did allows an understanding of the ways the policy expected men and women to behave, and in what ways men and women responded to policy. As relief policy also described the ideal of family and the roles within families, it is also possible to examine men and women as family members and as individuals. The way in which the policy affected individual families as well as individuals within families permits not only a comparative gender analysis but also an analysis of the policy in practice.

In addition, an understanding of class relations is also possible because many of the relief recipients would not necessarily have considered themselves to be working class, or of a class that would need relief. The impact of mass unemployment caused great upheaval in the circumstances and status of many families. Additionally, many other groups and individuals, while not directly affected by the unemployment of the Depression, became involved in the political struggles around relief because of their commitment to certain

values and ideals. For example, many middle or upper class women were not greatly affected, economically, by the Depression so they may not have had direct experience with the relief system as women who were actually on relief. Yet, many of these women became involved in providing necessities through women's organizations or on an individual level. Many middle class women responded to the issues raised by relief because they were affected by the ideals and notions expressed in relief policy, particularly around issues such as motherhood and family life. Prior to the depression, some middle class women had found an acceptable and respectable escape from the home life through volunteer work. This volunteer work had at once been a reinforcement of, and an escape from, the confines of the middle class home and provided many women with a sense of commitment and involvement in society beyond their families. Through this work many women came into contact with a lifestyle and culture very different from their own. In dealing with these realities, so different from their own, some women developed a sympathy and identification with women in poorer circumstances. Across a class divide some women found they shared similar ideals around motherhood and family, they were willing to question the assumptions which underlay their own lives and political perspectives. The ideological revulsion toward relief, played in a role in everyone's lives. For the woman on relief, who had developed aspirations and expectations of what her life might hold, the Depression wiped away her dreams and left her with nightmarish responsibilities. Middle class women experienced relief second hand, but there was also a sense of fear engendered by the economic insecurity of the depression years. In attempting to cope with the daily realities of relief, or the fear of going on relief, many women came to a new political and critical appreciation of their society. Women

began a new form of mass organizing around the concrete realities of relief and unemployment.

Developing an analysis of social policy that sees the interaction of the governed with the governing in this way has meant deconstructing assumptions of what is political and what is activism. Notions of power, influence and prestige have to be reconsidered and examined for what they meant to the actors concerned, not for how they fit into an historical categories of analysis. Both female and male, worker and bureaucrat, parent and child are considered in a complex equation of how social relations were manifested, constructed and changed during the thirties. As men and women shared certain ideals about family or work life they were able to organize across gender boundaries as, for example, in the neighbourhood councils, or around the rights of children. At other times, gender differences were utilized to justify political involvement. For example, working class women were not always perceived as political activists. The Vancouver Mother's Council, working to challenge the relief system and in support of the Relief Camp "boys", successfully used the language and rhetoric of motherhood to clothe their political activities in socially acceptable terms. In turn, this propelled them into strategies that were less respectable - public protest on the streets of Vancouver.

What issues united or divided men and women, what strategies were used, how ideologies were perceived and articulated reveals the differences and similarities that underlay the struggles of the thirties. There was no simple gender division of labour generated by the experiences of the Depression with unemployed men on the streets while women suffered nobly and silently in the home. There was no simple class division either,

with the middle class averting their gaze and involvement from unemployment issues. Both class and gender became fluid categories where individuals assumed class postures or gender roles according to their perceptions and interpretation of necessity.

It is in this focus on the interaction of policy, experience and change, that the dynamics of place, class, race and gender, as active historical categories, can be examined. It is clear these categories were not only fluid in and of themselves, but they were also unstable in usage. Conflicts emerged in the clash between the practice and expectations of relief policy and the realities of individuals and families both on and off relief. Relief policy spoke to both women and men, and to both those who were on relief and those lucky enough to avoid it.

While the experiences of relief and its policy had a politicizing effect, it did not affect all Canadians all the time in always the same manner. For most Canadians of aboriginal descent the response “What depression?” exemplifies the dire poverty which meant the 1930s was not marked in any significant way as worse than what went before. For many urban poor Canadians, the Depression may have decreased opportunities for employment but poverty had been too long a companion to mark the Depression years as worse economically speaking. For minority groups and immigrants, the Depression made things harder, it did not necessarily make them worse, because things had been so bad before the depression began. Further, many individuals were excluded from receiving relief because of their ethnic or racial background. For this reason, the majority of the individuals, events and cases discussed here involve mostly white Canadians. There is a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, other than the “preferred” English background, as racial groups such

as Ukrainians, were distinguished from English. That is, for many Canadians, the experiences did highlight the historical circumstances under which alliances could be built across the barriers of historian's hermetically sealed categories of race, class and gender. Where women chose to act in solidarity with other women, or with men, or with other classes, or with those from different ethnic, religious, or racial groups different from their own, has great implications for any analysis of the past. What has been underestimated and unaccounted for in the historical record is an appreciation of the complexity of experiences in the Depression and of both women and men's experiences. Apart from the direct political protest by single unemployed men, there has been little account of the emotional and ideological life of masculinity. As well, the political nature of women's activities and beliefs has been misinterpreted or has been neglected.

While definitions of what is political behaviour exist - incorporating such things as the vote, strikes or riots - the infrastructures women built, used and maintained do not register. The important influence of women on the social and cultural scene is missing. Further, the value and the importance men placed on home and family is also undermined, leaving an unbalanced view of men as active only on the public front, in the paid workforce or in violent political protests, a fact which denies their contributions and existence as family men, as husbands and fathers. In fact, for "ordinary" men and women the division between "public" and "private", so beloved of historians for too long, may not have existed. As family members, women had been committed to their husbands' work place struggles for concrete pragmatic reason, just as men's commitment to those struggles had a profound grounding in their commitment to their obligations and roles as family men.

The incongruencies between relief recipients and civil servants can be traced to the definitions, language and attitudes in the behaviour and events which shaped both middle-class and working-class women and men across the decade. By comparing the cities of Vancouver and Saskatoon, two cities which suffered greatly but in very different ways during the Depression years, it is also possible to ascertain what differences and similarities in relief policies existed between the two. The value of the in-depth study of a local history is expanded by the comparative approach.

Through this research process the gender roles presumed as the basis for relief policies and generally socially accepted (though not always adhered to) began to shift. In 1933, 25 women and their children occupied Saskatoon City Hall to protest the introduction of a relief “agreement”, which relief recipients had to sign under duress. If they refused to sign they would be cast off the relief rolls.⁶ In 1935, at a demonstration in Stanley Park, Vancouver, the women of the Vancouver Mother’s Council forced themselves into the shape of a giant heart, which surrounded and embraced a gathering of “our boys, the unemployed men on strike from the relief camps.”⁷ What can we read from the actions of the women in these two events in the two cities? How did definitions of self, of class, of gender or of race, of respectability, of acceptable public behaviour change to bring women into the forefront of street actions. How were women able to establish symbolic boundaries which allowed them to place their own bodies, in the shape of a heart, around the bodies of unemployed men in a Stanley Park protest? What boundaries shifted so that working class women placed their bodies in the heart of civic government in a sit down strike in Saskatoon City Hall?

Vancouver and Saskatoon, two cities with common experiences of the depression,

but with very different physical and economic characteristics in the depression years, provide the context for exploring these questions. While a comparative study of two cities over a single decade may appear to be a straightforward piece of historical research, this analysis addresses much more than a comparison of experiences using the politics of place. While this work has a strong grounding in traditional historical methodologies, there are objectives beyond a contribution to the history of the Depression or the history of women in Canada. State policy in action became a series of conflicts and compromises reached through the adaption of individuals and bureaucracies during a period of intense political and personal stress. The complicated picture of power and process, language and meanings, definitions and experiences demonstrates an interdependency and complexity not generally recognized by historical research that focuses on monocausal theories or emphasising one category of experience over all others: the metanarrative. On the contrary, in recognizing and exploring the complexities of historical experiences and the variety of categories available to people in the past, we stand a better chance of understanding and accessing a fuller picture of historical experiences. With this in place, the historian's fundamental task of imposing order on chaos becomes clearer. In this case, for example, a very different picture of relief recipients, of both sexes, and of those responsible for delivering relief, emerges. Both sides are seen as exercising power in the interactions of relief. Passivity and aggression, rejection and conformity to social standards are seen on both sides of the relief counter.

ENDNOTES

¹ Jane Lewis, ed. *Women's Welfare, Women's Rights*. (London: Croom Helm, 1983). p.1. See also: Cora Baldock and Bettina Cass, eds. *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia*. (Sydney, London and Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), Elizabeth Wilson. *Women and the Welfare State*. (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

² Scholars in vastly differing areas of history are beginning to explore this phenomena. Women in the military, for example, provide a heightened context for questioning gender roles and military historians are beginning to examine this in some detail. Recently, a discussion on the H-Net List for Women's History raised the issue of women fighting when their husbands had fallen during battles in the American Revolution acting, Theresa Kaminski argues, as "Deputy husbands". While this discussion was exercised by the question of naming these women as feminists, I read gender role flexibility in examples such as these. See: H-NET List for Women's History (H-Women@msu.edu) Wed. 22 May 1996. This discussion and others like it may be accessed through the world wide web at: <http://h-net.msu.edu/~minerva>.

³ Bettina Bradbury, "Gender at Work at Home: Family Decisions, the Labour Market, and Girls Contributions to the Family Economy," in Bradbury, Bettina, *Canadian Family History*, (Toronto: Copp, Clark, Pitman, 1992), pp. 177-198. This article presents an excellent summary of the variety of external factors which contribute to the family decisions regarding waged employment.

⁴ This would be in contrast with the general approach to social policy, which generally assumes a top down process with little or no recognition of the fact that social policy is an interactive process involving those the policy seeks to govern. The traditional approach obscures the conflicts and challenges that infect the process of developing and implementing policy.

⁵ Commonly, critiques of policy have focused on the idealized expressions of policy as if these equate with the actual conditions of those under the policy. Unfortunately, such work falls short of actually evaluating the translation of policy into practice, and how effective the governing of policy actually was in achieving its objectives. See Chapter one, following for a fuller discussion of this.

⁶ See Theresa Healy. "Engendering Resistance: Women Respond to Relief in Saskatoon, 1930-1933" in Dave de Brou and Aileen Moffat, *Other Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995), pp. 243-296, for a full discussion of this event.

⁷ Irene Howard, "The Mother's Council of Vancouver: Holding the Fort for the Unemployed, 1935-1938". in *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social history, Vancouver Centennial Issue of B.C. Studies*. (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1986), pp.249-287. Note the language used by the women, which labels the unemployed men as boys needing, and justifying, the care and protection of mothers. Mothers, in this case, is a code word for women.

Appendix 1 Oral History Process

Number of interviews

A total of 88 interviews were carried out for this project, over a five year period. Most of these were with one individual, for a period of 2-3 hours and were audio-taped. Several interviews were with more than one person, and a small number involved more than one interview. A number of people were interviewed by alternate means. Where potential interviewees lived in other provinces or cities I could not easily reach, they were mailed copies of the questions used in the interview and invited to write their responses. In other cases, interviews were conducted by phone and the transcript sent for correction. The interviews are shown by sex and location in Table 2.1.

Table A1.1
Number of Interviewees, by city of residence in the 1930s
and by sex of interviewee

Vancouver			Saskatoon	
Women	Men		Women	Men
35	16		34	25
Total: 51			Total: 59	
Total interviewees in sample: 110				

Not all of those interviewed were on relief or on relief for the whole period (see Appendix 5 for description of Interview sample). Nor did they always live in the same place during the depression. Everyone interviewed for this research, however, had experience with the struggles of survival associated with the period and a desire to contribute those experiences to the historical record. The difference in experiences with relief is noted in the footnotes where interviews are cited and will identify interviewees as either resident or as relief recipient as appropriate.

Outreach

The oral history stage of the research began with an outreach program. Letters and posters were sent to groups and organizations, such as the Canadian Legion and local nursing homes. Advertisements were sent to local newspapers and articles written and published in newspapers and in local community interest columns. All who responded were contacted, the project explained, consent forms and lists of questions supplied. Each person who was interviewed was asked if they knew of anyone else who might be willing to participate. If they did, they were asked to contact that person and ask permission for me to contact them.

Oral History Outreach - Contacts

SASKATOON

MEDIA

Star Phoenix Cover letter, letter to the editor, classified

Western Producer Same

Saskatoon Sun Classified

Saskatoon Shopper Classified

Personal Appearance: T.V. interview "Saskatoon at Noon"

ORGANIZATIONS

All received cover letter, request for coverage in any publication, and request to post attached poster

Church groups - especially women's auxiliaries

Army & Navy Vets

Royal Canadian Legion

Pioneers & pensioners

Nursing Homes

Parkridge

Luther Towers

Sherbrooke

Other

Presentation: Pioneers and Pensioners Meeting

Western Development Museum, Saskatoon.

Article, Sask. Seniors Newspaper

Posters - public libraries.

Langham, presentation Seniors History Group

ORAL HISTORY OUTREACH

VANCOUVER

MEDIA

Archibald Rollo, "Column One", *Vancouver Sun*

Co-op Radio Seniors Show - 411 Seniors Centre

Nadine Grey, *Vancouver Sun*

SERVICES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

411 Seniors Centre

411 Seniors Outreach Programme on co-op radio

BC Old Age Pensioners' Organization

Elders Network/South Granville, [newsletter]

Little Mountain Senior Live Wires

Marpole Oakridge Services

South Vancouver Seniors Network Society

West End Seniors Network Barclay Manor
Al Mattison Retired Citizens Lounge, Britannia Community Services Centre
Brock House Society Senior Citizens
Centennial Centre
Century House
Collingwood Senior Citizens Centre

Interview process

At the first meeting, all the material was reviewed, the consent form explained and the eventual destination of the tapes explained. (For a copy of the consent form, see Appendix 2). All respondents were offered a copy of the tape and asked to review transcripts of the interview and make any corrections, deletions or clarifications they deemed necessary. All interviewees were offered anonymity as a matter of course. Use of names or other directly or indirectly identifying features are not used without direct specific permission obtained as a discrete part of the consent process. All correspondents were very clear that their recollections would become part of the historical record and accessible to other researchers. They also understood and accepted that, once their memories were on deposit in the archives, very little control over what use might be made of their material, other than any limitations they declared during the consent process. Despite such caveats, every respondent was keen to have their voice, their stories, become part of the Canadian historical record.

Informed Consent

The most important issue in the oral history stage of the research was the question of consent. The consent form for this project was developed with the help of students at the University of British Columbia's Legal Clinic. They took a great interest in the question of ownership and we argued long and hard over the question of consent. I was convinced, ultimately, by their arguments that informed consent involved a legalistic and complicated document, something I had wanted to avoid, because I did not want to intimidate potential interviewees. Their arguments were compelling. I have come to hold strong opinions on allowing people to determine for themselves what and how they will contribute to academic research projects. In this case, it is clearly understood from the outset that the "voice" (that is, the experiences, recollections, opinions, insights and reflections) of individuals who volunteer to be interviewed will become, without question or reservation, part of the historical record. The tapes and transcripts will be deposited in archives and made accessible to other researchers. Other than any limitations spelt out by interviewees to be enforced by the archives, there is no guarantee that control can be exerted by the interviewee after the deposits are made.

Apart from these archival restrictions, which archivists are careful to implement, there are only two other protections in place. First, identity can be concealed. That is, I make a distinction between information which is open and accessible to all, and the identity of the informant which is revealed only under the express and separate wish of the interviewee. Accordingly, the identity of all interviewees is presumed to be confidential, unless expressly stated otherwise. The consent form reflects this by having two sections. In part one, interviewee's consent to the use of their information in any shape or form determined by subsequent researchers. The second part covers

consent to the use of name or any identifying characteristics. Each section requires a separate signature and I developed a structure to make it very easy to decline consent. Through this process, many interviewees decided to sign part one but wait until later, until after a review the tape and transcript before deciding whether to sign the second section. I did not hesitate to suggest this as an option if I sensed any reluctance on the part of potential interviewees. In these cases I did not bring up signing part two again. I leave this to the initiative of the interviewee.

Issues arising from the consent process

An important component of informed consent, which emerged in the course of carrying out the interviews, is that the simple placing of a signature on a piece of paper at the outset of the research process is simply not enough. I have ensured that my interviewees “revisit” the issue of consent at different points during the interview process. For example, as my skills with oral history interviewing have increased, I have found that I must ground my interviewees. I sense the person leaving the present, the room as it were, and returning to or reliving some past event. At this stage I feel it is imperative that I interrupt. It is my responsibility to ensure that the person is still choosing to place material into the public record.¹ I believe an oral history interviewee who is reliving a scene or an event may well be sharing rich and detailed information for the researcher and perhaps experiencing a vital and important therapeutic process, but a cathartic intervention style of interview is breaching, I think, an ethical boundary. By interrupting I run the risk that the person will choose not to continue. At the same time, I think the interview benefits from ethical practice. The interviewee can consider whether she or he wishes to pursue the topic. I believe this particular practice protects the interviewee from potential abuse. It also protects me, the researcher, from problems later on when, upon reflection, the interviewee may feel used or uncomfortable with what happened.² Of the 88 interviews conducted, 12 asked to have identity concealed. It is important to note that concealing identity does not in any way affect verifiability. Should it prove necessary, legitimate researchers will have access to the records which can be matched to consent forms and biographical forms by cross referencing the numbers assigned to interviews.³

To extend the practice of consent beyond the consent form, I also ensure that interviewees receive a copy of the signed consent form, and a copy of the tape as soon as possible following the interview, except for those cases where individuals have requested no further involvement. I also send a copy of the interview transcript when completed. Interviewees are asked to revise these for accuracy and to make any corrections, deletions, additions, or clarifications that they deem necessary. Without fail, I have found the interviewees who take advantage of this use the opportunity to add to their records. They set out to correct spellings, dates, locations and, in some cases, or to add other details that have occurred to them since the date of the interview. The only deletions to date have been requests to remove names of third parties or comments considered spiteful or mean spirited in retrospect. I also send copies of the chapters using material from the interviews to those interviewees who have been quoted, whose experiences have been analysed or who have expressed an interest in being involved beyond the interview itself.

Learning how to interview

Some of the early interviews appear to have little to do with the topic of this dissertation. Partly out

of fear that I would have no interviews at all, and prepared to change the topic if I had to, and partly out of a strong working class ethic of never turning down anything offered to you - this would be rude and would deter people from offering material you might want or need in the future - I developed a research strategy of interviewing anyone who would sit still long enough. This desperate and humble approach has had several unexpected and remarkable payoffs. First, on a very basic level, my understanding and contextual positioning of the period has been remarkable improved. Secondly, much important information and directions would have been denied to me if I had excluded these individuals because of imposing a preordained category of appropriate respondent. Further, I was challenged to expand my understanding of my topic in ways I had not anticipated.

Acknowledgements

I must admit that the initial interviews are poor. In spite of considerable research and preparation, the difference between reading about oral history and actually doing it is vast. I must thank all my interviewees whose patience and good humour when faced with an apprentice historian was unfailing as the early interviews were training sessions.

End notes

¹ The interviewee's rights to decline to give information, or to share information but request it not be used must be clearly respected. The need for privacy, or for control of their information is paramount and supersedes the objectives of the research. This point emerges from a discussion of the work of Joy Parr in researching *The Gender of Breadwinners*, in a seminar led by Dr. Parr under the auspices of the Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations, March, 1993.

² See: *Port and Prairie: A Catalogue of Oral History Interviews* carried out by Theresa Healy, to be deposited at Vancouver City Archives and the University of Saskatchewan Archives.

³ Please note, all interviewees were quite comfortable with revealing their identities to the examining committee for the purposes of the dissertation defence. Also, both the Vancouver City Archives and the University of Saskatchewan Archives both impose reporting guidelines on potential researchers.

Appendix 2

List of interviewees

A copy of a catalogue of all oral history interviews carried out for this dissertation has been self published and copies deposited with the Vancouver Public Library, the Vancouver City Archives, the Saskatoon Public Library, the Saskatoon City Archives, the University of Saskatchewan library and the Simon Fraser University library. The catalogue includes details on religion, class, marital status and some key details of each interview.

Interview number	Name (where allowed)	Place of residence, 1930s
S000	Joan MacRae	Saskatoon
S001	*****by request	Saskatoon
S002	Ellen Catherine Gaunt	Saskatoon, rural
S003	Ewanda Boehr	Saskatoon, rural
S004	W.B. Kimpton	Saskatoon
S004b	G.W. Bateman	Saskatoon
S005	George Bourgeault	Saskatoon, rural
S006	Thelma Pepper	Saskatoon
S007a	Edna Hutchinson	Saskatoon
S007b	Doug Eagle	Saskatoon
S007c	W.J. MacDonald	Saskatoon
S008	Dr. Edith R. Simpson	Saskatoon
S009	Harry Giles	Saskatoon - rural
S010a	Marie Bendas	Saskatoon
S010b	Orest Bendas	Saskatoon
S011	Vivianne Ranger	North Battleford
S012	***** by request	Saskatoon
S013a	Ruth Crichton	Moose jaw
S013b	Margaret Ingles	Saskatoon

S013c	*****by request	Saskatoon
S014	Estella Berta Morrison	Saskatoon
S015	Lorne C. Paul	Saskatoon
S016	Wanda Young	Sasaktoon
S017	Rev. Don Leitch	Saskatoon, rural
S018a	Eva Benson	Saskatoon, rural
S018b	Harold Benson	Saskatoon, rural
S019	Dorothy Farnell	Saskatoon, rural
S020a	Effie MacIntosh	Winnipeg
S020b	Don MacIntosh	Saskatoon
S021	Sarah Wall	Mennonite Community
S022	Stan Morris	Saskatoon
S023	Pat Pattison	Saskatoon
S024	Bill Atchinson	Sasaktoon, rural
S025	Sandy Garnett	Rocanville, SK.
S026	Florence Bentham	Saskatoon
S027	Lloyd Putnam	Watson, Sk.
S028	Jo Ferguson	Saskatoon
S029a	Ken Fisher	Rural Sask./Saskatoon
S029b	Evangeline Fisher	Rural Sask./Saskatoon
S030	Pat White	Rural Sask.
S031	Frank Schneider	Rural Alberta
S032	Jean Fawcett	Saskatoon
S033a	Ester E. Silski	Saskatoon, rural
S033b	Magda Berntsen	Saskatoon, rural
S034	Lawrence Whiteman	Sasaktoon, rural
S035a&b	consent forms not returned	

S036	Miriam Fletcher	Saskatoon
S037	Evelyn Ballard	Saskatoon, rural
S038	Edith Carpenter	Rural Sask.
S039	Caroline Imsir	Rural Sask.
S040	Amy March	Rural Sask.
S041	Joyce Bell	Saskatoon
S042	*****not interviewed yet	
S043	Jack Elstyre	Saskatoon
S044	Donald MacGregor	Saskatoon
S045	Ellen Pearce	Saskatoon
S046	Borge Sorenson	Saskatoon
S047	do not use identity	do not identify home
S048	Evelyn Fingarson	Saskatoon
S049	Mae Findlay	Saskatoon
V001	***** by request	Vancouver
V002a	Lilian B. Kehl	Vancouver
V002b	Manuel Kehl	Vancouver
V003	Esther Casperson	Vancouver
V004	Lousie Amaro	Vancouver (Mallairdville)
V005	Mary Woodland	Vancouver
V006a	Samuel Dumaresq	Vancouver
V006b	Edith Dumaresq	Vancouver
V007	Edward Galloway	Vancouver
V008	Margaretha Dyck	Various
V009	Steve Bjornson	Vancouver, rural area
V010a	**** by request	Vancouver
V010b	**** by request	Vancouver

V011	Evelyn Harris	Vancouver
V012a	**** by request	Vancouver
V012b	**** by request	Vancouver
V013a	Gwyneth Lindsay	Rural Sask.
V013b	Vera Eckert	Rural Sask.
V014	Win Manning	Vancouver
V015	*****by request	Nanamio
V016	Marjorie Russell-Bender	Vancouver
V017a-f	Members of Single Unemployed Girls Club	Y.W.C.A. Vancouver
V018a	Anne Bailey	Vancouver (East End)
V018b	Roy C. Bailey	Vancouver
V018b	Joyce Franklin	Vancouver
V019	*****by request	Vancouver
V020	Ruby Hood	Vancouver
V021	M.J.A.M. de La Girodey	Vancouver
V022	Norm (by request)	Vancouver
V23a	Frances Leask	Vancouver
V23b	Arthur Leask	Vancouver
V024	Jack Geddes	Vancouver/All over
V025	John Moonen	Saskatoon/Vancouver
V026	Elof Kellner	Vancouver/All over
V027	Florence Strachan	Vancouver
V028	Ruth Phillips	Vancouver
V029	Elsie Railton	Vancouver
V030	Sylvia Murphy	Vancouver
V031	Bob Arnold	Vancouver

V032	Jan(ette) Cawley	Burnaby
V033	James MacLachlan	Vancouver
V034	Not assigned	n/a
V035	Shirley Whiteside	Vancouver
V036	Gordon Stemson	Vancouver
V037	Cora Parker	Vancouver
V038	Clare Way	Vancouver
V039	Vera Jones	Vancouver

Appendix 3
Oral History Interview Forms

On letterhead:

CONSENT FORM

Interview #: _____

1. I understand that Mary Theresa Healy is conducting a study of the effects of the depression in Canada between 1929 and 1939, in preparation of a Ph.D. dissertation at Simon Fraser University, and is interviewing a number of persons with respect to their experiences during these years.

2. This consent is given on the understanding that Mary Theresa Healy and Simon Fraser University shall use their best efforts to ensure that my identity is not revealed, whether directly or indirectly, unless I have signed paragraph 5.

3. I understand and agree that the information I have given to Mary Theresa Healy in our interview(s) of _____ may be:

- (a) recorded and reproduced;
- (b) used by Mary Theresa Healy in the production of a doctoral thesis;
- (c) stored as part of the archives of Simon Fraser and made available to researchers for study, reproduction and recording.
- (d) used in a published work by Mary Theresa Healy or Simon Fraser University.

4. I hereby waive any claim against Mary Theresa Healy, Simon Fraser University, their employees, directors, officers, agents and publishers with respect to the use of said information, provided it is used in accordance with this agreement. I do this freely and with full knowledge of the legal consequences of this consent.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signed: _____ Witness: _____

5. I hereby give my further consent to the use of my name, and/or details about my life which may directly or indirectly reveal my identity.

Date: _____ Signed: _____ Witness: _____

On letterhead: Note: this is a shortened version. The original provided more space for responses.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

Record #: _____

Interviewee name: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Birthplace: _____

Religion: _____ Ethnic Heritage: _____

Mother's Name at birth: _____

Occupation/s: _____

Father's name at birth: _____

Occupation/s: _____

Class/status: _____

Places lived:

Dates:

Education:

Dates:

Employment (Waged and other):

Dates:

Name of spouse/s: _____

Occupation's: _____

Date of marriage/s: _____

Children's names and dates of birth:

Present Occupation: _____

Interview Date: _____ By: _____

NOTES:

On letterhead:

Oral History Interview Summary
1929-1939

Interviewee: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
Phone #: _____
Date of interview: _____
Place of interview: _____
Interviewed by: _____

Restrictions: _____

Time:

Tape #: _____
_____ of # _____
Side #: _____

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Introduction

- 1. What is your most vivid memory of the depression years? (event, person, feeling)**
- 2. Where were you when the crash happened? (work, home, expectations)**

Home and Family

- 1. Where did you live during the depression years? Describe home.**
- 2. Who was in the family/household?**
- 3. What were common/shared activities within the home?**
- 4. Describe an average week day?**
- 5. Describe an average weekend at home?**
- 6. How were responsibilities within the home shared? did children take on household tasks? If so, which ones? How did decisions around household work get made?**
- 7. What special occasions did the family celebrate? How?**
- 8. What were the rules and expectations of behaviour within the household/family?**

Work and money

- 1. Did you work for pay? If yes, what jobs did you do? Hours?**
- 2. What were conditions like? How much did you earn? Is it what you would have chosen to do?**
- 3. Did your workplace have a union? How active was the union? How useful?**
- 4. Did you do volunteer work? Where? What motivated you? What did you do?**
- 5. What lessons did you learn from your work? Did you have any career goals different**

from what you were actually doing in the depression years? Were you able to pursue them?

School

1. Where did you go to school? What was a typical day like?
2. What were relationships like between teachers and students? Between students?
3. Did the student body break down into social groups? If yes, how?
4. How did your family feel about schooling? How important was schooling to you? did you have any particular goals around education?

Social Activities

1. What did you do for entertainment? What were your favourite things to do? Who would you go with? Friday evenings? Saturday afternoons? Sundays?
2. What hobbies did you have? Did you belong to any clubs? Describe?
3. Were you involved with sports? Which ones?
4. Describe your circle of friends.
3. Romance: When did you start dating? Where did you go? How did family feel about this activity?
4. Courtship: When did you start to get serious? Propose? Marry?
5. Children? When did you have your first child? What changes did this bring to the family?
6. What - if any - decisions about child rearing were affected by the thirties?

Gender

1. Where did you look for role models of what it was to be male or female? [parents/ relatives/advertisements/movies/etc]
2. What do you think were the messages about being male or female?

3. Were there times when you felt you did not fit in? Or when you resented the roles/expectations imposed with the roles of male/female?
4. Did you have any sense of inequality between the sexes? If so, in what ways?

Politics/Current Affairs

1. What were the political leanings in your family? Were politics discussed in your home?
2. How politically active was your family? What form did activities take?
3. How aware were you of local, national and international events in the period?
4. Were you, your family, or any one you knew on relief? Feelings, reactions about being on relief? Supplies, process?

Church/Religion

1. What church/religion did your family belong to/practice?
2. How active was your family in the church? In church-sponsored activities?
3. How active were you in the church? How important was the church to you/your family?

Closure

1. Looking back: what do you think is the same today as it was for you then? What is different?
2. What lessons do you think we have to learn from the depression? What lessons did you learn?
3. Overall, what are your feelings about the depression years, for yourself, for Canada.

Appendix 5

Oral History Interviews: Sample Description

(Numbers may not total 100% due to missing responses)

Total numbers in the sample

Forty eight interviews were carried out in Saskatoon and thirty nine were carried out in Vancouver. The total number of interviewees involved was greater, as 19 interviews involved more than one interviewee. Thus the total number of respondents was 59 for Saskatoon and 51 for Vancouver. Four interviews are not complete (consent form missing) and these are not tabulated other than as part of the total of interviews carried out. Three Vancouver interviews are duplicates (3 individuals interviewed as part of a group consented to a follow up, in depth interview). Again, characteristics from these three individuals are only tabulated once.

Characteristics of the sample

All respondents were asked to self identify for the following characteristics.

Age

The majority of interviewees in the sample were between 15 and 30 years of age in 1935. The ten year age groups present the range of ages.

Table A5.1: Age of respondents in 1935, ten year groups				
City	Aged ten years & under	Aged 11 to 20 years	Aged 21 to 30 years	Aged 31 to 40 years
Saskatoon	3	33	15	1
Vancouver	9	17	14	3
Total #	12	50	29	4
Total: 95 Missing: 15				

The average age in 1935 for the entire sample was 18.7 years. The average age in the Vancouver sample was slightly above this, 19.3 years, while the Saskatoon sample was slightly below at 18.3 years.

Education

Table A5.2 Educational Levels attained in the 1930s							
City	> Grade 6	Grade 6-8	Grade 9-11	Grade 12	Technical ¹	University	Missing ²
Saskatoon	2	9	14	4	11	2	17
Vancouver	2	15	4	10	8	0	12
Total	4	24	18	14	19	2	29

¹ Includes Business Schools, Military College, Normal School and Nursing Colleges

² Includes not given or unspecified responses such as "left early" and higher levels attained post 1930

Almost a quarter of the overall sample reporting educational status do not receive education beyond grade 8, though this is proportionately higher for the respondents from Vancouver than those in Saskatoon. Of those who did report educational attainments, the largest number report completing between grades 6-8. 21% of the sample in Saskatoon and 43% of the Vancouver sample. This represented 28% of the total sample.

Occupation

The largest number of respondents reported working through the depression years. Only 2 of these were steadily employed. however, and some of these did have recourse to relief of different kinds for short periods. "Relief" refers to those in receipt of municipal relief as the major source of support for the decade. "Profession" includes mostly teachers and nurses with one engineer and one social worker. "Business" refers to those who owned their own businesses, for the most part this is landladies and store owners. "Combination" refers to those families who combined work and relief for most of the depression years. "Other" includes those who were not allowed to work by parents or too young to work.

Table A5.3: Occupational Status in 1930s					
Work	Relief	Profession	Business	Combination	Other
30	17	15	9	9	11

For women, domestic service was the most frequent source of work which frequently including room and board as part of the wage. Women moved from the rural areas to the cities, and vice versa, to obtain these positions. In many respects, this was the female equivalent of riding the rails though American contemporary statistics suggest as many as 1 in 20 hoboes

were female.¹ There were a number of men who rode the rails in search of work.

Class

For the most part, respondents were very clear on what they meant by class and qualified their statements with descriptive qualifiers. Working class or middle class alone was insufficient for some respondents, to be working class with a trade or middle class with a profession was different from simple working or middle class alone.

Further, respondents who identified themselves as poor also had caveats. "Poor with Culture" or "poor in cash but not other things" for example. Some working class respondents noted their families had status as leaders in their communities, a public presence that was part of the class status. On the other hand, many middle class respondents also identified poverty as part of their lifestyle, though "they never let the flag down" as one respondent put it.

Table A5.4: Class Status of Respondents								
Class	Poor	Working class	Trade	Middle class	Professional	Upper class	Changed class	Not given
Saskatoon	23	4	2	11	4	4	3	8
Vancouver	13	7	1	15	2	4	3	6
Total	36	11	3	26	6	8	6	14

¹See: Thomas Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America* (New York, 1934) cited in Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1982,) pp.33-34.

Politics

By far the largest number of respondents for this characteristic declined to give a response. However, those who did respond did so with vigour. One was not simply a liberal but a “red hot liberal” or a “Tory, through and through.” Furthermore, those on the left of the spectrum were very specific about their identification. These affiliations reflect family as well as individual leanings as, in some cases, politics appears to be a familial inheritance.

Table A5.5: Political Affiliations		
Political affiliation	Saskatoon	Vancouver
Not given	30	40
Conservative	4	1
Liberal	7	1
CCF	7	2
Changed	3	3
Communist	0	2
Co-op	1	0
Pacifist	1	0
Socialist	1	1
Feminist	1	0
Left	0	1
Union	0	1
Non-Partisan	1	0
Totals	59	51

Some individuals recalled changing political affiliations (from liberal or conservative to CCF, and in one case from CCF to Socialist).

Religious Affiliation

People were more forthcoming about their religious affiliations; only a total of 11 individuals declined to respond.

Table A5.6: Religious Affiliations		
Religious Affiliation	Saskatoon	Vancouver
United Church	13	8
Protestant	10	11
Presbyterian	7	3
Roman Catholic	4	6
Anglican/Church of England	9	2
Ukran. Greek Orthodox	3	0
Mennonite	2	1
Christian Science	0	3
Methodist	3	1
Lutheran	1	2
Baptist	2	1
Jewish	1	1
Unitarian	1	0
Non-conformist	1	0
Salvation Army	1	2
Atheist	0	1
Not given	4	7

The Vancouver sample appears to have a greater diversity of religions than the Saskatoon sample.

Ethnicity

Vancouver reflected a wider diversity of ethnicities than Saskatoon in the sample. Most respondents replied to this question with no difficulty. However, a small number wanted to know what “ethnic” meant. I explained this as the cultural influences dominant in the home in terms of traditions, cuisines, rituals observed. This explanation appeared to clarify the issue.

Table A5.7: Ethnic Background of families		
Ethnicity	Saskatoon	Vancouver
English/British	15	11
Scots	8	5
Irish	0	1
Combination of E/S/I	9	6
Mixed heritage	6	1
Canadian	4	2
Ukrainian	3	0
Dutch	1	1
Russian	1	2
Polish	1	1
Norwegian/Swedish/Danish	2	2
French Canadian	1	1
Jewish	1	1
Aboriginal/European	1	1
Chinese	1	0
Italian	0	1
German	0	1
Icelandic	0	1
French	0	1
Not given	5	1

Marital Status

The depression years, and possibly the war years had a distinct impact on average age at marriage for both women and men in Saskatoon but less so in Vancouver.

Table A5.8: Average Age of interview respondents at marriage				
	Saskatoon		Vancouver	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Age at Wedding pre-1939	21.87	25.6	23.9	28
Age at Wedding post-1939	30**	31.8	23.9	30

Note: these figures based on those individuals reporting age. A total of 12 responses did not include age.

A number of women (6 in Saskatoon, 2 in Vancouver) and a smaller number of men, (1 in each city) were never married. Each of the women were working in professions that did not allow women to marry and expressed the desire to pursue career rather than marriage. Notably, the oldest age at marriage was 62 for a female Ph.D.

Appendix 6 **Facsimile of Application for Relief Form, Vancouver City Relief Department¹**

WELFARE AND RELIEF DEPARTMENT **VANCOUVER B.C.**

I, Name _____,
 Address _____, of the
 Province of British Columbia, do solemnly declare that my reason for application for Relief is _____
 My Social State is _____ My nationality is _____ My religion is _____

DOMICILE

I have resided in Vancouver _____ in B.C. _____ in Canada _____ and
 previously at the undermentioned addresses: I was born (date)
 at _____
 Town or City Province Country

Street and No	City	From

THAT THE HISTORY OF MY CASE IS

FIRST NAME	Date of Birth	Age	Occup or School	Debts	Income	Rent	Amt. Date Ins. Policy	Equity or Prem	Compens/ Pension	Physical or Mental defects
Man										
Woman										
Children (home)										

That I am boarding or Lodging with _____

Kinship _____

¹Original printed on face of legal sized manilla file folders, See: C.V.A. City Clerks' Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932. Relief I.

That I have Relatives as Designated Below

Name	Address	Kinship

That I have a monthly revenue as follows from:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. My children \$ _____ | 2. My Boarders \$ _____ | 3. My other Relatives \$ _____ |
| 4. My Lodge \$ _____ | 5. Insurance or pension \$ _____ | 6. Workman's Compensation \$ _____ |
| 7. Rent \$ _____ | 8. Military Service Eg. No. \$ _____ | 9. Pension \$ _____ 10. My wife \$ _____ |

That I am a member (in good standing) of, Union or Lodge _____

_____ My last Employer was _____
 _____ My wages were _____ I worked for
 _____ years, _____ months _____.

That I further affirm I have no property or means except as follows:

Cash in hand _____ Amount in bank _____

Other property _____

(Give legal description on Inside sheet)

That I have a car _____

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath, and by the virtue of the CANADA EVIDENCE ACT

DECLARED BEFORE ME AT THE CITY OF VANCOUVER }
 in the Province of British Columbia, this _____ day of _____

 _____ A.D., 193 _____

Appendix 7

Application Form for Relief, City of Saskatoon

Date..... Serial No.....

**CITY OF SASKATOON
CIVIC RELIEF BOARD
APPLICATION FOR RELIEF**

Application No.....

Phone No.

Name in full.....
(SURNAME) (CHRISTIAN)

Residence.....

I am years of age of sex Married, Single, Widow, Widower.....

If married during last twelve months give date

Previous occupation of wife.....

I was born at Nationality.....

I have resided in Canada.....years In Saskatchewan.....

In Saskatoon.....months.....years

I came to Saskatoon from..... and place of naturalization..

I have the following persons dependent on me for their livelihood and their ages, health and relationship are as stated and they each reside with me.

Name	Age	Health	Relationship

I am in Health and capable of doing the following work.....

.....

My habits as to the use of Liquor and Narcotics are..... Have been previously.....

State briefly schooling, naming school, college, etc.....

EMPLOYMENT RECORD

I have been employed or engaged during the past five years as follows (account fully for occupied time)

Name and address of employer	Position	Commencing Month/Year	Ending Month/year	Monthly wage
.....
.....
.....
.....

RECORD OF MILITARY SERVICE

Country.....

Battalion..... Regiment..... Service.....

I am a member of the following Associations, Churches, Clubs, Unions and no other:

Name	Reference to	Address
.....
.....
.....

HISTORY OF RESIDENCE

My residence during the past two years has been as follows:

Date		Address	Owner	Board	Amount Paid	Yearly
From	To			Weekly	Rent Monthly	Taxes
....
....
....
....
....
....

End of page 1.....

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP

My dependents or myself own, or have an interest in the following and nothing else:

Household effects	Description (give details)	Amount owing and to whom
Bedroom
Dining room
Kitchen
Miscellaneous
Other Assets		
Horses
Cows
Poultry
Other livestock
Automobile
Truck
Wagons
Other equipment
Land - lots
Houses/other buildings
Pensions
Bonds. Stocks, debentures
Mortgages or notes,
Insurance policies
Other possessions of value
Cash on hand
Coal or wood on hand
Land - lots
Food

I hereby authorize any bank, financial institution or person, having monies to my credit or holding assets for me to give to the Saskatoon Civic Relief Board full information concerning same.

I have never received any relief before from any City, Government or Organization, except as follows:-

Name	Address	Amount
.....
.....
.....

I am unable to provide my dependents with the necessities of life.

No other person has contributed or is contributing toward the expense of my home excepts as follows:.....

.....

STATEMENT OF INCOME OF SELF AND FAMILY

Neither myself or any member of my family has any income except:

.....
.....
.....
.....

I am indebted as follows:

	To whom	Amount	To whom	Amount
Board	Rent
Water & Light	Fuel
Groceries & Meat	Interest.....
Taxes			

I, the said do solemnly declare that I have read over the statements, questions and answers in the above form, that I fully understand same and the statements to questions set out above are true in substance and in fact, that I have fully disclosed there in all my assets of every nature and all my sources of income. AND I make this declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing that it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath and by virtue of "The Canada Evidence Act."

DECLARED before me at the City of
Saskatoon, in the province of Saskatchewan,
this Day of
 A.D. 193

A Commissioner for Oaths in and for the
Province of Saskatchewan

}
.....

End of page 2....

PERSONAL REFERENCE

Name	Address	Relationship
.....
.....
.....

AGREEMENT

I, We, of Saskatoon, hereby covenant, promise and agree to and with the City of Saskatoon that should the said City of Saskatoon by itself or its civic Relief Board give to myself or my dependents relief either in kind or in money:

- (1.) THAT I will diligently seek and will take any position that presents itself or is offered to me either in the City of Saskatoon, in the bush or on a farm or any place outside the City of Saskatoon.
- (2.) THAT any member of the Civic Relief board or any of its duly authorized employees may at any time enter and inspect any and all premises occupied by me or my dependents.
- (3.) That I will on demand pay to the City of Saskatoon the value of relief supplied to me or my dependents after the date of this agreement, AND I agree that a certificate by the Civic Relief Board or the City of Saskatoon or by the Treasurer of said City of Saskatoon shall be conclusive evidence of as to the making of such allowance and the amount thereof.
- (4) THAT should said City of Saskatoon or its Civic Relief Board either now or at some future date require a mortgage or deposit of title or a bill of sale of any of my assets as security for relief advanced after the date of this agreement I will on demand give such mortgage or deposit such title or give such bill of sale.
- (5.) I FURTHER AGREE THAT all monies earned by me or which may come into my possession, except for statutory exemptions, shall be the property of the City of Saskatoon and I hereby transfer, assign and set over unto the City of Saskatoon all such monies to the value of relief advanced after the date of this agreement by the said City of Saskatoon or its Civic Relief Board to me or my dependents.
- (6) AND I further agree that I will from time to time, or as required by the Civic Relief Board report all monies earned or received by me or my dependents.
- (7) IT is also agreed that wherever the singular pronoun is used throughout this agreement the same be construed as meaning the plural where the context so requires.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto affixed my hand and seal thisday of..... A.D. 193....

Signed, sealed and delivered
in the presence of

}
.....

INVESTIGATOR'S CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that I have interviewed the aforesaid and that the statements, questions and answers above set forth are as stated to me by.....

.....

NOTE:- Where interpreter used have the interpreter sign the following:-

INTERPRETER'S CERTIFICATE

I,..... of SASKATOON, do hereby certify that I translated
to into thelanguage all the statements, questions and answers
in the above form and before the said form was executed by him I read same over to him in the
..... language and he appeared to perfectly understand the same.

.....
Witness

.....
Interpreter

Investigator's Remarks :

Relief Officer's Recommendations :

end of page 3.....

RECORD OF RELIEF GIVEN

[illegible]

Reinvestigations :

[illegible]

This space for use of Relief Board Only

Considered thisday of..... 193.....

APPLICATION

Approved for

Refused for

Approved by.....

APPENDIX 8
Numbers on relief
VANCOUVER AND SASKATOON, Jan. 1932

Relief Category	VANCOUVER	SASKATOON
Married unemployed	2588	1674
Women, unemployed	175	3
Family relief	807	21
Single unemployed	3394	not given
Single relief	646	not given
Total number of cases	7610	1698

Total number of cases comparing seasonal fluctuations:

Vancouver: Jan., 1932 - number of cases 7610
 July, 1932 - number of cases 8710

Saskatoon: Jan., 1932 - number of cases 1698
 July, 1932 - number of cases 1605

Notice: In Vancouver, once a single man establishes his application, future issues of relief are routine. Married and family unemployment require multiple attention.

Source: Letter from W. R. Bone to Mayor, re Relief Department Staff Increase, dated July 19, 1932. C.V.A. City Clerks Files, 33-B-2, Vol. XI, 1932, Relief I. City of Saskatoon Minutes, Report of the Relief Department, Feb. 15, 1932 and August 15, 1932

APPENDIX 9

WOMEN'S GROUPS IN VANCOUVER, 1930S

NEW ERA LEAGUE founded 1916
Leading Advocate for social legislation
 Calls for coalition meeting, 1935

ACTIONS	GROUPS
<p>Conference</p> <p>24 women's groups 74 Representatives</p> <p><i>adopts resolution of Local Council of Women for an "Action Committee"</i></p>	<p>Committed to the Actions</p>
<p>Action Committee</p> <p><i>meets one week later, with 37 women present, organizes tag day</i></p>	<p>Local Council of Women (L.C.W.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federation of local reps from nationally affiliated groups Affiliated to National Council of Women Submits resolution to Unemployment sub committee of the National Council
<p>Mother's Day Committee</p> <p><i>Organizes parade and rally for May 3, 1935</i></p>	<p>Women's Labour League</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communist party women's group. affiliates to L.C.W. IN 1936 Originally founded 1906, England. Canadian federation emerges Toronto, 1924.
<p>Vancouver Mother's Council</p> <p><i>Advocates for unemployed, moving left of original group</i></p>	<p>C.C.F. Women's Central Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Founded, fall, 1934
<p>Vancouver Women's Emergency Committee (1938)</p> <p><i>Supports unemployed strikers: short term Pressure on government for change: long term</i></p>	<p>Women's and Girls' Clubs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communist party political education groups East End Vancouver group especially active
<p>Vancouver Housewives League (1938)</p> <p><i>Nonpartisan (though opponents accuse them of being communist front)</i></p>	<p>Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.)</p> <p>Liberal Women's Association Women's Church Auxiliaries; Civilian Pensioned Mothers Association; Women's Auxiliaries of the Unions; Women's Unions</p> <p><i>Other Groups offering in-kind support to groups and actions: eg: S.P.C.A., Young Communist League, Parent Teacher's Federation, C.C.F. Provincial Council, etc.</i></p>

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BCMSS	-	British Columbia Ministry of Social Services Library
CSA	-	City of Saskatoon Archives ¹
CSEA	-	Centre for Socialist Education Archives
CVA	-	City of Vancouver Archives
NWH/VPL	-	North West History Room, Vancouver Public Library
PABC	-	Public Archives of British Columbia
PAS	-	Public Archives of Saskatchewan
SFUA	-	Simon Fraser University Archives
SPL	-	Saskatoon Public Library
UBCA	-	University of British Columbia Archives, Special Collections
UBCL	-	University of British Columbia Library
USA	-	University of Saskatchewan Archives
USL	-	University of Saskatchewan Library - Special Collections
VPL	-	Vancouver Public Library

¹Please note: Much of Saskatoon's archives are under the care of a private record storage company and are in the process of a systematic removal to the care of a full time city archivist. Therefore, cataloguing references may be changed from those recorded here. Also, due to the development of a database at the City of Vancouver archives, a similar problem with reassignment of numbers may develop. I am reassured by both archivists that, though clumsy, it will be possible to access records using these reference numbers.

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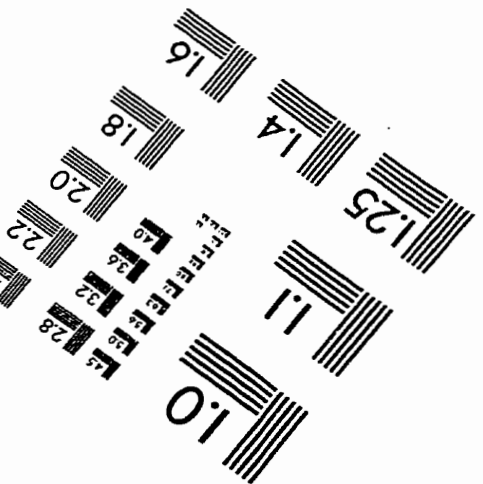
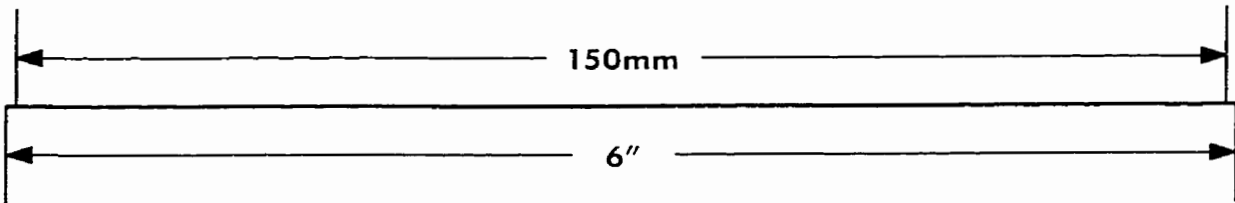
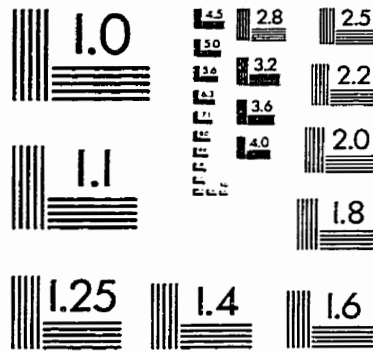
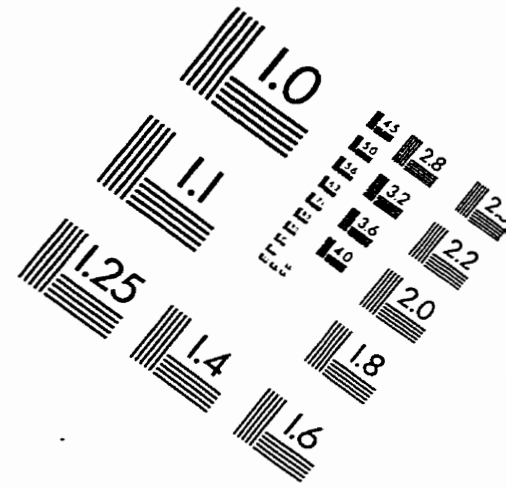
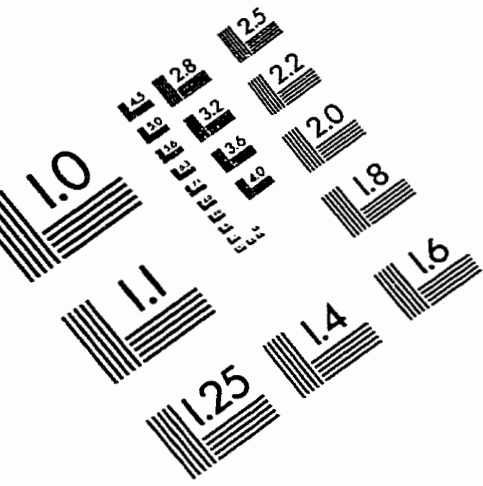
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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