

HOMELAND STORIES: Helping Hands Across Canada

Character Education

- Empower youth to contribute to society
- Reinforce principles of sustainability
- Value work traditionally considered “women’s” work

Facts

- There were 209,200 Victory Gardens in Canada in 1943 that on average produced 250 kg of vegetables each; there were 24% more home gardeners in 1943 than in 1940
- During WWII to promote salvage campaigns Canadian women were told .45 kg of fat/grease saved made .45 K of dynamite and 7,700 pots and pans made one pursuit plane
- Canada’s 11 million people raised \$8.8 billion in war stamps, certificates and bonds

Before the Reading

- Have you ever considered growing vegetables either on your family’s property, in a community garden that rents space or even on your school grounds? Why or why not?
- The concepts “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” were heavily promoted during WWII. Why would these concepts have been important during times of war?
- Children and teens often feel that they can’t make a difference in society until they’re grown up. Think of examples of where young people could make a difference

Reading 1: Our Food is Fighting: Canada’s WWII Victory Gardens

The Canadian Victory Garden campaign didn’t start until the growing season of 1943 and then only because of pressure on the Minister of Agriculture. As the need to ship more food to war-devastated Britain increased, some

HOMELAND MINUTES



Kate Aitken (Mrs. A.)
www.virtualmuseum.ca

And Here’s Mrs. A.

To the women working away in their kitchens across Canada during WWII, Kate Aitken needed no introduction. They recognized her familiar voice as she dispensed household hints, gossip and current events 16 times a week on her CBC Radio *Your*

Good Neighbour show. Kate’s Monday broadcasts provided a week’s menu based on the considerations of rationing and the produce in season from Victory Gardens. She wrote all the material herself even when at a peak she was presenting three broadcasts a day.

Having started her own successful canning business at Sunnybank Farms on the Credit River near Streetsville in Mississauga, Kate was not only a radio celebrity, she was also sought after as a speaker, interviewer, demonstrator, educator and writer for newspapers, cookbooks and autobiographies. (She wrote 52 cookbooks in her life.) She had cooking classes in Montreal, headed the cooking school at the CNE and lectured for the provincial and federal Departments of Agriculture on practical farming techniques for the specialty gardener.

foods became limited in Canada and labour shortages for harvesting threatened to disrupt the Canadian food supply, the Canadian government finally overcame its fears that amateur gardeners would waste precious resources such as fertilizer and garden tools.

With the encouragement of radio and press notices by the Federal Agricultural Supplies Board and a free pamphlet, "The Wartime Garden" new gardens sprouted on private property where children and seniors could dig in and in community gardens where Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, church and school groups could do their part for the war effort.

The Health League of Canada started a "Vegetables for Victory" campaign to plump for the nutritional benefits of getting the proper amounts of vitamins and minerals in the daily diet, "to have the maximum amount of pep and energy to do our wartime jobs". The National Film Board made a series of films about nutrition and *Canadian Horticulture and Home* ran a regular feature on Victory Gardening. There were even recipes for the new bounty that sprang up out of the soil and tips on canning and preserving the on average 250 kg of produce reaped per garden.

Slogans such as "A Garden Will Make Your Rations Go Further" and "Help Feed Those Freed from Axis Rule" kept the purpose of the Victory Garden movement in the public eye and reinforced the dedication to grow even more. The Victory Garden at the RCAF Station Summerside in P.E.I. harvested 2,903 kg of produce in the 1944 growing season.

Without a doubt, Victory Gardens contributed to the local food supply but even more significantly they boosted morale as each gardener, young, old, frail or in training for wartime service, could do his or her small part.

Reading 2: Bones to Beat Hitler: Canada's National Salvage Campaign



Children gather rubber for wartime salvage 1942
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
Conrad Poirier / P48, S1, P7495

In February 1942, Canada's War Services Minister announced a national salvage campaign to mobilize Canadians to save bones, bottles, rags and other waste materials for the war effort. According to a period newspaper, in 1941 Canada had imported \$13 million dollars worth of scrap steel and iron for its smelters, about four million dollars worth of rags and over one million dollars worth of scrap paper.

Like a grasshopper, to which she compared herself, Kate hopped from venture to venture with energy and enthusiasm encouraging others to try new things and to never give up. She often had the 400 women in her cooking classes sort magazines that would go to service personnel to encourage wartime volunteerism.



Kate Aitken visiting London's bombed dockside area in 1945. Children relate experience of being both bombed and buzz-bombed. www.virtualmuseum.ca

Kate was the Conservation Director for the Federal Wartime Prices and Trade Board that regulated prices and rationing. Her slogan "Use it up, wear it out, make over, make do" became a poster; her "Remake Revue" which travelled across Canada with new ideas for remaking clothing became a way of life. Her wartime popularity became so great that by 1945 Kate received 260,000 letters a year which she answered with the help of over 20 secretaries. She created broadcasts, pamphlets, books and columns in response to needs she perceived among her listeners and followers. Mrs. A. truly was every Canadian homemaker's good neighbour.



Canadian Women and the Second World War
www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/008004/t2/H-37_en.pdf

"That is to say, Canada spent nearly \$20,000,000 last year for SCRAP! This year we might have spent as much or more in the same way. We have, lying around on Canadian dump heaps, and in Canadian attics and basements and garages more than enough of these three kinds of scrap materials alone to supply the domestic demand Now is your chance to do something more for Canada's war endeavour that is not going to cost you money."ⁱ

Collection committees and procedures were set up locally with many of the collection drives run by Scouts, Guides, service organizations or the Women's Volunteer Services. War Services Minister James Garfield Gardiner stressed, "To be of benefit, the salvage materials must be donated and must be gathered by voluntary organizations free of charge and the net proceeds utilized for some war service purpose under the direction of the organization conducting the local salvage campaign."ⁱⁱ



Safe all waste
www.wyatheritage.com

Canadians eagerly did their bit to “Dig in and Dig Out the Scrap”. The well advertised campaigns indicated where drop-off points were, which for grease and bones meant the local meat dealers. An ad in the *Summerside Journal* of February 11, 1943, indicated, “Fats make glycerine and glycerine makes high explosives. Bones produce fat. Also glue for war industry. Don’t throw away a single drop of used fat—bacon grease, meat drippings, frying fats—every kind you use. They are urgently needed to win this war. Strain all drippings through an ordinary strainer into a clean wide-mouthed can. Save your scrap fat (cooked or uncooked) and all types of bones—cooked, uncooked or dry. When you have collected a pound or more of fat dripping, take it to your meat dealer who will pay you the established price for the dripping and the scrap fat. Or you can dispose of them through any Municipal or Salvage Committee collection system in effect in your community. Be a munitions maker right in your own kitchen. For instance, there is enough explosive power hidden in ten pounds of fat to fire 49 anti-aircraft shells. So—every day, this easy way, keep working for Victory for the duration of the war.”

Bacon grease, meat drippings, frying fats—every kind you use. They are urgently needed to win this war Be a munitions maker right in your own kitchen. For instance, there is enough explosive power hidden in 4.5 kg of fat to fire 49 anti-aircraft shells. So—every day, this easy way, keep working for Victory for the duration of the war.”

Scrap metals were collected for aircraft, tanks and weapons; boiled bones could make glue for aircraft; kitchen wastes were to be saved for pig, goat and chicken feed; paper and grease were for the munitions industry. For the Amity-Red Cross Rubber Salvage Campaign of Hamilton, “Victory Rides on Rubber!” one hundred gas stations across Hamilton cooperated as drop off depots. Children gathered elastic bands; women took the rubber seals off their preserving jars, and Scouts organized old tire drives. The salvage drives created tremendous community enthusiasm.

Nothing seemed too small to consider: toothpaste tubes, shaving cream tubes, old socks and batteries were on salvage lists. Children even handed in their metal toy soldiers to be melted down. As the press said, “The campaign gives every man and woman and young person in Canada a chance to strike a personal blow right in his or her own home for the preservation of democracy.”

Recycled materials took the pressure off industries for raw materials, they generated revenue for service organizations to support the war effort with everything from dried milk to Bolingbroke bombers, they empowered young people to participate in the war effort and they were tremendous community-builders.

Reading 3: Children’s Savings Campaigns: Propaganda or Empowerment?



Stamp program aimed at children
www.wyatheritage.com

War savings stamps and certificates were an ideal way for children to contribute to, and participate in, the war effort. The children’s war savings stamp pledge included the points, “We pledge to do all we can as young Canadians to help win the war

and to buy as many War Saving Stamps as we can—either out of our allowances or with money earned throughout the year.”

Sixteen stamps purchased at 25 cents each equalled a \$4 certificate and each certificate could potentially be redeemed seven-and-a-half years later for \$5. Children flashed around their War Savings Passbooks for bragging rights.

Not surprisingly schools were caught up in the enthusiasm as classes and grades competed to see who could raise the most money for campaigns such as the 1943 “Stamp out the U-Boat” campaign. One Depth Charge to destroy an enemy U-boat required \$90, or 360 stamps. The poster, “You Can Sink a U-Boat!” declared that, “\$90 in War Saving Stamps and your Stamp-O-Gram, with a personal message to Hitler is attached to an actual depth charge which the men of our Navy will personally deliver to a German U-boat.”



Stamp out the U-BOAT!
www.albertasource.ca
University of Alberta Libraries

Children were bombarded with war propaganda such as this U-boat campaign. Gum cards carried war scenes, biscuit advertisements featured comic book representations of children on salvage campaigns, victory gardens flourished on school grounds, Guides and Scouts supported an entire range of war endeavours, the War Stamp campaign called on children to equip a soldier for war service.

Children were surrounded with messages to give and do their part. But, children also felt empowered.

Reading 4: "We Lend a Hand": women and youth do their part



Women farm workers picking cucumbers at a farm service camp, [ca. 1941]
Ministry of Agriculture
Reference Code: RG 16-20-0-3
Archives of Ontario, 10006635

As Canada's Armed Forces and war industries pulled in available person power, bringing in harvests became a problem. By 1941 the women, children and seniors holding down the fort on family farms, the fruit growers and the dirt farmers, were worn out. They took hope from the prospect of thousands of helpers

from the Farm Girls Brigade made up of young women up to 26 years-of-age, the Farm Cadets and Farmerette Brigade of summer students and teachers, the Women's Land Brigade manned by volunteer housewives, The Farm Commandos of spare time adult helpers and the Children's Brigade of youngsters up to 15 years of age.

In the summer of 1942, 10,000 young female Farmerettes, 10,000 young male Farm Cadets and 10,000 youngsters in the Children's Brigade made up over half of the 55,000 workers in the Ontario Farm Service Force, OFSF.

The OFSF which was under the supervision of Ontario's Departments of Agriculture, Labour and Education led the way in mobilizing urban youth for farm service. In 1942 Ontario high schools delayed their fall opening for three weeks to allow students to finish the job of bringing in the harvest. In 1943 "experienced" Farm Cadets and Farmerettes were excused at Easter without loss of academic standing on the proviso they complete 13 weeks on a farm.

The youthful farm help sometimes lived on the farms and worked as regular hands. Others lived in supervised camps situated near the producers they would assist. In the summer of '42 most of Ontario's 29 summer camps for Cadets and Farmerettes were located in Ontario's fruit belt.

The government supervised the facilities which ranged from schools, fall fair buildings, disused factories to renovated barns and stables; they also paid for the camp staff. The YMCA and YWCA handled food, discipline, recreation and health concerns. In each camp the youngsters elected a camp council to be part of the process of running the camp and to experience democracy at work. Young francophone women from northern Ontario and young urban women from the south worked and slept side by side in camps that accommodated between 60-100 persons.

The farmers and growers provided the transportation to the crops and paid 25 cents an hour. The young people in turn paid room and board and unemployment insurance out of their earnings. There was no uniform but the youngsters proudly wore their Farm Service Force badge sporting the motto, "We Lend a Hand".

For the first time in many young lives young people from all over the province experienced independence and learned from one another in an atmosphere that stressed helping out in a time of need. Young men could step out from behind the shadows of older brothers in service to show that they too were contributing to the war effort. Every person could do his or her part. One young Farmerette summed up the dedication, "I would rather drive a tractor than eat."

Reading 5: Fabric, Fixing and Fashion



The War and Your Underwear
www.wyathheritage.com/homefront

Canadian women didn't really require the slogan "Use It Up, Wear It Out, Make It Do or Do Without" to remind them of the value of fabrics and clothing. From early on in WWII as members of service organizations they had contributed to rag drives for the munitions industry and for clothing collections for bombed out families in Britain. Women's Institutes and the IODE groups consistently made clothing for the Red Cross Society.

As shipping restrictions reduced the quantity and variety of fabrics available, sewing, darning, mending and remaking were the order of the day. Silk and nylon stockings were long gone.

When popular radio show broadcaster Kate Aitken who was on the radio three times a day, five days a week with no-nonsense recipes and down-to-earth advice took her "Remake Revue" across Canada, women thrilled to the new ideas to wring the most out of what they had and to do it fashionably.

As women's editor for the *Montreal Standard*, Mrs. A. knew a thing or two about the fabric-saving fashion trends that showed narrower lapels and shorter hemlines. She'd also seen the practical socks, trousers and head scarves that women self-designed and made to suit their new roles as workers. Socks were knit, trousers re-worked from those of husbands, brothers and fathers at war and bandanas

were sewn from scraps. Children's clothes were cut-down from adult clothes. Mrs. A. was full of good advice.

Women responded to the stimulus with more innovation. To help sell war bonds, women assembled "warsages" made of war stamps to be worn in place of floral corsages at Easter or on formal occasions. They sold the warsages in war bond booths in public places. Wearing a warsage instead of a floral corsage became a fashion statement.

When the Ottawa Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), introduced the idea of using "Miss Canada" girls to sell war stamps on busy street corners and at baseball games, the WVS wisely gave the attractive young women a striking look: a red wedge cap and a red apron with bold white letters saying "Miss Canada". Port Arthur beauty Penny Petrone who was selected as a "Miss Canada" girl said, "I exuded a youthful exuberance. I had style. I hustled and sold a lot of stamps. I was so proud to be helping my country. I loved being seen in my uniform."

In October 1945 in spite of the fact that their clothing had already been re-worked and their fashion look re-modeled Canadian women collected millions of kilos of clothing to assist the war-ravaged people of the countries liberated by the Allies. P.E.I. alone collected almost 5.5 million kilos of clothing in 1945. In 1946 Canadian women heeded the call for another clothing drive.

From fixing their clothes to changing their look, to collecting clothing, Canadian women responded. Knitting, sewing, quilting and collecting did not stop as long as there were families in need.

After the Readings

- Look through the readings for points that demonstrate the principles, "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle"
- Homeland stories tend to focus on women and youth as the men were off fighting. Find examples in the readings where young and old men could make a difference
- Of all the ideas raised in these readings, prioritize three that would be useful today. Be prepared to defend your choices

Extensions

- During WWII bones were collected. Cooked under steam pressure fatty bones yielded gelatine for glue and glycerine for explosives and medicines. The calcium phosphate from bones became the fertilizer called bone meal. Treated with dilute sulphuric acid, calcium phosphate became a phosphate fertilizer. Bones heated to carbonization were used to refine sugar cane. Heated

beyond carbonization bone ash was used to assay gold and silver ores and alloys. Sterilized and ground into bone flour, bones became animal feed. Which of these processes are used today? Which have been replaced and by what?

- First Lady Michele Obama started a Victory Garden at the White House. Investigate the new interest in Victory Gardens in Canada and the Slow Food concept. Present their pros and cons
- Analyze the women and children's work that was valued during WWII and determine how it is valued now. What has changed?
- Select one WWII idea that you feel should be promoted today and write a letter to a local politician using the history of that idea to develop your points

Sources

- Banks, W.J. "Canada's High School Farmers", *The Rotarian*, April 1943, pp 31-33
- "Bones to Beat Hitler", Margaret Konantz Fonds, MSS 1, Box 6, Folder 2, University of Manitoba Archives, www.umanitoba.ca
- Cole, Catherine. "Every Kitchen is an Arsenal", Homefront in Alberta, Alberta Online Encyclopedia, www.albertasource.ca/homefront/feature_articles/every_kitchen.html, reprinted with permission from *King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War*
- "Patriotism on the Home front", Canada: A People's History, CBC learning, www.cbc.ca/history
- Petrone, Penny. *Breaking the Mould*. Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2001
- Pierson, Ruth Roach. *Canadian Women and the Second World War*. The Canadian Historical Association booklet No 37, Public Archives of Canada, 1983, www.collectionscanada.gc.ca
- "Save All Waste fats & bones", *Summerside's War Effort During WWII*, www.wyatheritage.com/homefront/images.asp?ImageID=198
- "Victory", *Summerside's War Effort During WWII*, www.wyatheritage.com/homefront/relatedarticles.asp?Type=victorygardens

"Any Rags, Bottles or..."Saturday June 21, 1941 clipping in the Konantz Fonds, University of Manitoba Archives, www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/canada_war/konantz/website

"Salvage Drive to be Started Across Nation", *The Globe and Mail*, February 6, 1941, Canadian War Museum online exhibition "Democracy at War" Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War", www.warmuseum.ca