



Digest

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“To Save Wheat, Beef, and Bacon for the Men at the Front”

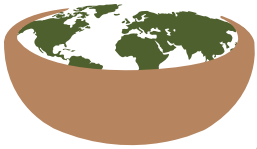
WWI “War Menus” in the *St. John’s Evening Telegram*¹

By: Brittany Roberts

The sacrifices which war entails are not restricted to the men who go forth to join the colours, but extend to their women and children at home. These sacrifices are for the most part borne uncomplainingly [...] it is noticeable that in Newfoundland the largest number of volunteers come from homes where the women have put selfishness aside and not placed obstacles in the way of the men, doing their public duty conscientiously (Horwood 1916:1).

Between December of 1917 and February of 1918, one of Newfoundland’s most popular daily newspapers, the *St. John’s Evening Telegram*, published a short-lived series of twenty “War Menus.” Succinct, businesslike, and pragmatic, many included a list of dishes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and some included a handful of recipes alongside. Others simply highlighted an important ingredient and provided tips and encouragement on how to use it creatively. All were textually brief, ranging from sparse and almost poetic lists of food items, to utilitarian sets of a few instructional paragraphs. The shortest clocks in at a skeletal 57 words, while the longest is a mere 350. It’s clear that within the menus’ mission, there was no space, time, or tolerance for writers who wanted to wax poetic about gastronomy.

In light of this brevity, one is tempted to ask: how much information can they really contain? On the surface, the documents can appear bland and prosaic. Even worse, they may seem like trivial footnotes that minimize the devastation caused by the Great War. But when examined closely, they hold compelling information about what life was like in early twentieth-century Newfoundland. They also contain thought-provoking data about the associations, organizations, and movements that were affiliated with their production. By analyzing the contours of the menus it is possible to come to a deeper understanding of how food operated as a tool for communication during a period of crushing and silencing grief. Furthermore, they can reveal how foodways



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functioned as a barometer of Newfoundland's economic, cultural, and political pressure systems. In short, taking a closer look at these menus can help to usher the contemporary reader into the marketplaces and kitchens of wartime Newfoundland.

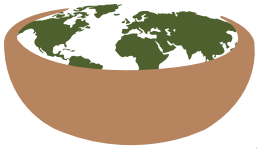
In light of this significance, it is important to note that the study of historic foodways can be difficult to tackle. Gleaning an understanding of what food meant to those in the past can be a complex process, and there are many potholes along the way that a researcher can stumble into. Food historian Sandra Oliver illuminates this in her examination of American historical foodways scholarship. She explains that academics who delve into the culinary past often get tangled in thorny issues, such as:

[...] a lack of understanding of underdocumented food, that is food prepared without the benefit of cookbooks; premature interpretation of past tastes and culinary habits; and an inadequate understanding of what early Americans learned from the Native Americans about food, or about the contribution of African American cookbooks [...] The study of food history is burdened by too much reliance on cookbooks, the overrepresentation of the elite, and an underrepresentation from material culture and the craft of historic cookery (2006:92).

It was with these warnings in mind that I carried out the research for the following essay in as careful and inclusive a manner as possible. I eschewed the study of cookbooks in favour of newspapers, which, as Oliver states, “[...] are great sources because they reveal more about everyday eating habits” (2001:96). In addition, I focused on how class differences have impacted historic culinary tradition in an attempt to move beyond the glut of foodways studies that are solely centered on the upper and middle classes (Oliver 2001:97).

Admittedly, however, it has been a struggle to get close to the daily eating practices of early twentieth-century Newfoundlanders. As a study by Maura Hanrahan and Marg Ewtushik reveals, “The simple truth is that we don’t have a long-running picture of how things were, food and nutrition wise, through the history of Newfoundland and Labrador” (2001:xi). This can serve to make research into the island’s historic food culture quite challenging. Despite this, there is one detail that we can be relatively certain of: hunger was rampant in Newfoundland.

Thanks to a spate of nutrition studies on the Great Northern Peninsula in the first half of the 1900’s [...] we do know that the diet there was deficient in a number of respects. It likely was elsewhere. We know from oral history,



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much of it not recorded, and other sources that malnutrition and hunger were possible and probable in certain regions [...] (Hanrahan and Ewtushik 2001:xi).

This fact is particularly significant when considered in relation the great economic stress brought on by the First World War. Between 1914 and 1918 the financial rigors of wartime combined with mounting social and political pressures to place a large burden on the shoulders of Newfoundlanders as whole; hunger was merely one piece of a larger puzzle of pressing issues. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of the strain - culinary and otherwise - was foisted upon those in the working class. As divisions based on class and gender deepened throughout wartime, foodways became a tool in fights both for and against various kinds of societal separation. Food distanced individuals of privilege from those who had been pushed to the margins of society, but it also provided a means of subtly signifying solidarity with marginalized groups.

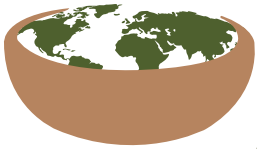
The relationship between foodways and class definition is of particular significance to this discussion because it reveals just how powerfully food can communicate social and cultural beliefs. Folklorist Judith Goode explains:

As one of the basic human drives, the need to eat provides many opportunities for communication. Human groups select raw foods from nature, transform them through cuisine, compose meals, create cycles, of meals to punctuate seasons and stages of life, and create rituals of etiquette for meal performance. With each of these steps they use food to mark social status, power relationships, and group identity. Food transactions and sharing underscore major social relationships. Domestic events reveal relationships of dominance and subservience between [...] groups (1992:244).

By closely examining the “War Menus” in the *Evening Telegram*, it is possible to understand just how food shaped the group identities of many Newfoundlanders. But before that analysis can be achieved, it is necessary to establish the historical context of the menus themselves.

The Context of Conflict: Newfoundland’s Role in the Great War

During the First World War, what is now the province of Newfoundland existed as the British Dominion of Newfoundland. Often, it was simply referred to as “Britain’s Oldest Colony” (Duley 2012:52). The island functioned as an autonomous outpost of a waningly powerful Empire, and was controlled under British sovereignty (Cleverdon



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1975:208). A British pamphlet addressing the natural resources of Newfoundland describes the island's governmental structure in the early twentieth century:

The Government consist of a Governor, who is nominated by the Crown, his salary being paid by the Dominion; an executive council, chosen by the party commanding the majority in the Legislature, and consisting of nine members; a legislative chamber of about twenty-four members, nominated by the Governor in Council; and a House of Assembly, at present consisting of thirty-six members, elected every four years by the votes of the people. (Great Britain, High Commissioner of Newfoundland 1921:5).

Newfoundlanders had the ability to voice their political opinions, but the island was still intimately tied to British rule.

While the rest of Canada grappled with the demands of war, Newfoundland struggled even more as a result of its strong ties overseas. In 1914, the war was met with blind optimism by the English: "Britain was swept with flag-waving jingoism befitting its great Empire, and those who had been raised in the patriotic ethos - be they men or women - wanted, indeed considered it their duty, to do *something* for the war effort" (Storey and Housego 2010:5). For many of Newfoundland's men and women, the patriotic propaganda associated with the fight "For God! For King and Empire" propelled them headlong into the carnage of war (Fig.1).

As historian Margot Duley explains, this flight took an incalculable toll on the island, and culminated in a "profoundly altered Newfoundland society" (2012:51). Duley states further: "Thirty-six percent of the men of Newfoundland and Labrador between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five served in some way, roughly half (6,241) with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment" (2012:51). Accordingly, many women in Newfoundland had a profoundly intimate interest in supporting the war effort.

Early in the war effort the government of Newfoundland struggled and failed to take advantage of the growth in demand for the materials of battle - in particular, they were unsuccessful in capitalizing on the need for ships and munitions (O'Brien 2011:47). The island's finances faltered, and though the demand for fish increased, the fiscal return that resulted was insufficient. As a consequence of mounting budgetary pressures Newfoundland's class divide began to open into a wide chasm, and the upper crust was viewed with great scrutiny by those whose pockets were bare. Compounding the issue was the fact that some wealthy Newfoundland merchants turned to wartime profiteering, forcing the prices for imported retail goods to unstable heights (O'Brien 2011:58).



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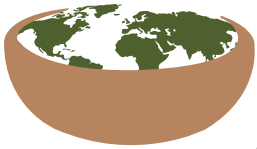
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The financial gains from this illicit enterprise were staggering, and many members of the public began to suspect that merchants who participated in price inflation were using their profits to indulge in luxuries during a time of great need (Evening Telegram 1916:7). In particular, accusations were heaped upon those who owned and operated the large and successful Reid Newfoundland Company (O'Brien 2011:60). In 1917, the Fishermen's Protective Union newspaper *Evening Advocate* accused the Reid family and their company managers of imposing a "starvation embargo" on Newfoundland, and excoriated the government for their cowardly inaction (Evening Advocate 1917). Similarly, an article in the *Evening Telegram* referred to the actions of Newfoundland's coterie of merchants as "cold blooded and heartless" and stated that "to raise the price of goods, held before the rise is robbery, nothing less" (Evening Telegram 1916:7). Measures that had previously been put in place to prevent this problem were poorly enforced and proved impotent in practice. Historian Mike O'Brien explains:

In early September 1914, in response to these public demands, the House of Assembly passed an anti-profiteering measure, the Food Stuffs Act, which gave the Governor in Council the power to seize any food supplies that he believed were being "unreasonably withheld from market" and, if necessary, to fix maximum food prices. Despite the passage of this act, the Morris government would prove reluctant to take any concrete action against profiteering (2011:58).

In addition to the grossly inflated cost of imported food items, Newfoundland also experienced serious fuel shortages. By 1915 coal was in worryingly short supply (O'Brien 2011:60). Because public opinion of retailers was under such open scrutiny, fuel scarcity was also blamed on the greed of the merchants. It is very likely that this resource shortage had a significant effect on cooking as many homes in early twentieth-century Newfoundland were furnished with coal fed stoves (Gray 1977:116). For the most part, only the homes of the affluent and upper middle class would have had the luxury of a gas range. Members of these comfortable sectors of society would have been able to afford the rising cost of fuel, and would have experienced little change in their already stable diets. Conversely, it is possible that those struggling in the grip of poverty would have had to switch to cooking their food over an open flame, and perhaps would have had to abandon their coal heated stoves altogether.

By 1917, however, Newfoundland's economy began to benefit from some of the gains of wartime production. Fish prices rose alongside employment rates



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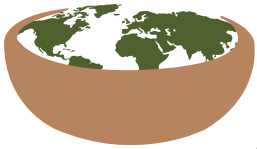
(O'Brien 2011:61). Unfortunately, this financial increase was tempered by the fact that profiteering had continued to result in a steep incline in the cost of daily living. O'Brien states: "Prices of some necessities had doubled or tripled since the beginning of the war, resulting in a declining standard of living for many of the less wealthy inhabitants of Newfoundland" (2011:61).

Putting an end to the damage of profiteering served as a prime motivator for the formation of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association or NIWA, and the parallel Ladies Branch of the NIWA, in 1917 (Cullum and Baird 1999:104). Both groups functioned as broad-based industrial unions for all individuals employed in manual or clerical labour. In particular, the Ladies NIWA was concerned with examining how rising commodity costs were impacting women in the workforce: "Price increases were particularly hard on women workers, most of whom made less than four dollars per month and who were, in most cases, without paid overtime or sick leave for work that was often harder than that done by men" (O'Brien 2011:62).

Not long after their formation both sections of the NIWA partnered with other Newfoundland labour organizations and pressured the government of Newfoundland to establish a Food Control Board (O'Brien 2011:63). Similar institutions had already been successfully installed in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, and these served as models for Newfoundland's nascent organization. Though the request to form the Board was largely met with derision, the government did acquiesce to the appointment of a High Cost of Living Commission (HCLC). The results of this commission were inflammatory, but unsurprising to NIWA members:

[The HCLC's] first report in May 1917 found that consumer prices had risen at a much higher rate than import costs, and that such increases were completely unwarranted. Rates of profit on flour, for example, had increased by more than 600 per cent [...] (O'Brien 2011:63).

A study published and distributed in 1917 by the Canadian Department of Labour starkly illustrates this predicament. Though the information and statistics are specific to a Canadian context, they can be viewed as a relatively close approximation of circumstances in Newfoundland. Some of the most provocative findings within the CDL pamphlet are included in a table that tracked the rise in the average cost of foods in sixty Canadian cities over the four years since the outbreak of the war. The numbers are based on the approximate amount of food that a family of five would consume over a week. The chart reveals that the price of 15 pounds of plain white bread rose from 63 cents in 1914 to \$1.10 in 1917, two pecks (or half a bushel) of potatoes rose from 50 cents to \$1.18, and ten



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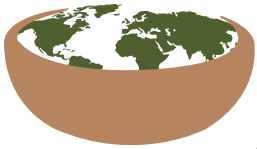
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pounds of flour rose from 33 cents to 70 cents (National Service Board of Canada 1917:17). Though St. John's would not have been included as a sample city, many of the prices would have been even higher than those listed in the Canadian study (O'Brien 2011). The dramatic rise in cost of staple foods like flour and potatoes are particularly significant as these items would have constituted the majority of many working class diets, especially in Newfoundland (Gray 1977: 130). High prices could greatly diminish the quality of life for the poor and marginal. In an effort to curb these effects, cutting back on wheat consumption became a major campaign for food organizations in many countries affected by the war.

One month after the HCLC report, the government of Newfoundland finally installed a Food Control Board (or FCB). Unlike similar organizations, the FCB did not focus on rationing food (a necessary practice in Britain and Europe, and to a lesser extent a voluntary measure in the US). Instead, the FCB chose to manage food shipments, curb profiteering, and put a cap on prices (O'Brien 2011:64). The gains that were made as a result were limited, but they were important for those who were most vulnerable to starvation.

When examining the structure of Newfoundland's wartime food system, applying Kurt Lewin's influential "gatekeeper theory" can be beneficial (1947). By utilizing Lewin's approach, it is possible to frame the difficulty to control imported commodities as a struggle to define precisely who gets to be the gatekeeper of the "buying channel" that all commodities must pass through (Lewin 1947:143). Initially, it was Newfoundland merchants who were the gatekeepers. They were concerned with raising prices and procuring handsome financial gains. Conversely, the NIWA - which was appalled by this behaviour - advocated that the government should enact reform to stop the process. As such, the NIWA attempted to take over the control of the passage through which foodstuffs reached Newfoundland's marketplace. The government begrudgingly agreed to the NIWA's demands and established the Food Control Board, thus ousting profiteers and placing social advocates in charge of gatekeeping duty. Simultaneously, war posters, government pamphlets, and community organizations encouraged individuals to act as their own gatekeepers through the "gardening channel" (Lewin 1947:145). Newfoundlanders were urged to take control of their food production by growing and foraging for their own food, saving everything last scrap that they could, and doing their utmost to eliminate waste in their kitchens.

At the very heart of this preoccupation with food was a plan to staunch the economic bleeding caused by the devastation of war. The loss of battle was acutely felt in Newfoundland, where nearly a whole generation of promising young workers were swept away by the butchery of the fight overseas. Margot Duley explains:



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The casualty rate of the all-citizen Newfoundland Regiment was among the highest of any country, with 37 percent wounded and another 21 percent killed. The Regiment's death rate was over twice that of the Canadian Expeditionary Force or the British Empire as a whole, and it exceeded that of France, Germany, the Russian Empire, Austria- Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire (2012: 52).

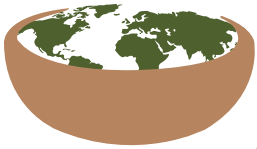
The staggering toll of this conflict would forever change Newfoundland and its people. It would also have a profound effect on the women of the island.

Serving on the Homefront: The Women of Newfoundland

Mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters in Newfoundland mourned for the loved ones they lost and shared the crushing burden of their grief with each other. But they also funnelled their rage, loneliness, agony, and heartbreak into something practical: they mobilized themselves into a force for social change. Newfoundland's women devoted untold hours of unpaid labour to the war effort (Duley 1999:30). They pledged their time, patience, caring, resources, and determination to the cause of repairing their country and communities. As historian Gale Warren has revealed, it was the rallying cry of 'patriotism' that - more than any other factor - united Newfoundland's women in action (2005:8). This was especially true in the city of St. John's where British connections were strongest (Warren 2005:9). Though the majority of Newfoundland women were far from the battlefield, their contributions proved to be of essential importance.

As a means of organizing female labour, in 1914 a group of influential ladies living in St. John's formed the Women's Patriotic Association, or WPA (Warren 2005:13). By the end of the year the WPA had founded 26 outport branch associations in addition to their main headquarters in St. John's, and enrolment in the organization had ballooned to over 15,000 members island-wide (Warren 2005:14).

The WPA focused their efforts on the production of domestic handiwork, mustering funds to send overseas, aiding the work of the Red Cross, and facilitating programs to promote community support (Duley 2012:60-61). The organization was heavily involved in fundraising, and by the end of 1918, WPA events had raised an impressive \$500,000 - which amounts to roughly \$6.5 million today - in support of the war effort (Warren 2005:33). Members also knitted tens of thousands of socks, scarves, hats, and waistcoats (colloquially referred to as "comforts") for



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soldiers overseas. In addition, the WPA established a “Visiting Committee” that would call upon and tend to those who had lost loved ones, those who were sick and ailing, and wounded soldiers who were recuperating (Warren 2005:7).

Historian Gale Warren explains that prior to the war, women’s work had been largely unrecognized due to its “relative invisibility”: it took place privately in the home, and it was not accounted for in traditional economic models (2005:17). Knitting, sewing, and baking were daily activities for working and middle class women, and it was “[...] only when this work [was] quantified, as it was during the war, [that the] magnitude of the work performed was actually revealed” (Warren 2005:17).

Crucially, the type of women’s wartime work promoted in Newfoundland was far different from that which was encouraged overseas. In Britain, for example, women lent their strength to work in munitions factories, heavy industry, and the Women’s Land Army (Storey and Housego 2010:13-14). Conversely, women’s war work in Newfoundland remained, in large part, traditional - or domestic - in nature (Warren 2005:17). This domestic work was framed as essential to maintaining national strength on the homefront. Historian Susan Grayzel states: “No matter what type of organised volunteer activity or paid employment women performed during the war, their wartime nations also assumed that they had a vital second role: managing their homes” (2002:49). This was part of an overarching pattern of female responsibilities during wartime. Social historian Amy Bentley explains that throughout history, women have “[...] been called on to intensify their traditional role as keepers of civic virtue, to contribute to the war effort through their domestic endeavours, and to raise patriotic and civic-minded sons and willingly send them off along with their fathers to war” (1998:2).

In addition to these responsibilities, women in wartime Newfoundland were urged to revolutionize their domestic routines. The application of thrift, resourcefulness, and ingenuity to household work was lauded as one of the most noble contributions a woman could make to the war effort (Bentley 1998:20). However, many individuals who promoted austerity in the home were aware that it was a tall order. A brochure published in 1917 by the National Service Board of Canada (NSBC) entitled *How to Live in Wartime* stated: “Thrift is not a natural instinct. It is an acquired principle of conduct. It involves self-denial - the denial of present enjoyment for future good - and subordination of natural impulse to reason, forethought, and prudence” (1917:3). While this stern encouragement was explicitly directed at Canadian women, it provides a useful parallel to the unsolicited advice that was heaped upon housewives in Newfoundland.



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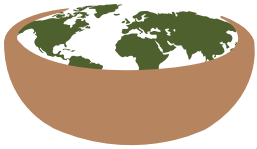
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Those who championed austerity claimed that the reward for this kind of prudence was patriotic pride. Media sources were saturated with messages instructing Newfoundland women to tighten their own belts - and those of their family members - and “put selfishness aside” to make life better for those overseas (Horwood 1916:1). Once again, it is helpful to turn to Canadian examples as a means of approximating the language that would have been used in a Newfoundland context. The brochure produced by the NSBC staunchly promoted household thrift and stated that frugality would lead to moral decency, charitable goodwill, and “domestic happiness” (1917:7). When the promise of fulfillment was not enough to motivate women to change their daily home-maintenance routines, the rhetoric of paralyzing guilt was employed. Take for instance this statement: “It has been calculated that on the average each Canadian family wastes enough to feed a soldier!” (National Service Board of Canada: 1917:7). If that was not jarring enough, perhaps this would do: “[...] it is the wastefulness of individuals which occasions the impoverishment of states. So that every thrifty person may be regarded as a public benefactor, and every thriftless person as a public enemy.” (National Service Board of Canada 1917:3). Even more terrifying is this admonition:

[...] look about us. Thousands, tens of thousands, millions of our men, women and children are engaged in silly and idle services or in production that is for mere luxuries and comforts and that helps nothing in the conduct of the war. Such people, though they work fourteen hours a day, are but mere drones in the hive as far as the war is concerned. Every crippled soldier that comes home and looks upon our streets feels this by instinct, with something, perhaps, like hatred in his heart... (National Service Board of Canada 1917:9).

Though the NSBC brochure was not specifically targeting the Newfoundland public, it does accurately reflect an ideology of thrift that spread throughout nations affected by the war. The message it brings is clear: remain conscious and vigilant about your own personal consumption of goods, services, and foodstuffs, or risk becoming an object of hatred for beloved war heroes and an enemy to the public at large. Those were frighteningly high stakes.

The lifestyle that was prescribed to women who wished to avoid such a fate was spartan in nature: “Save every cent. Live plainly. Do without everything. Rise early, work hard, and content yourself with bare living” (National Service Board of Canada 1917:11). In order to accomplish this, Miss B. M. Philip of Macdonald College urged women to assess their daily spending habits, eliminate luxuries, and to only attend to



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the “physical necessities of life”, shelter, food, and clothing (National Service Board of Canada 1917:7). She advised women to switch off electricity when not in use, run the stove economically, and to turn off gas immediately after cooking. Furthermore, it stated: “Watch the bread box. Waste there is criminal” (National Service Board of Canada 1917:7). It is almost certain that women in Newfoundland would have been bombarded by very similar statements. The message was clear: engage in sacrificing household comforts or risk “criminalizing” yourself and your family.

Missives of frugality, thrift, and altruism have been lobbed at women - and working-class women in particular - throughout history, both in times of conflict and in times of peace. Some of the most forceful supporters of domestic selflessness were nineteenth-century advice gurus like Catherine Beecher, who helped to popularize the notion that self-sacrifice was a uniquely feminine characteristic: “Zealous homemaking was suggested as a route to self-assertion for women of all classes, conferring purpose on the ‘aimless vacuity’ of rich women, ennobling the ‘unrequited toil’ of poor women, and improving the status of middle-class women” (Hayden 1981:56). Beecher was writing in a time that was exempt from the social, economic, and political pressures brought on by industrialized international battle. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Great War served to inflate these kinds of traditional messages to truly gargantuan proportions. Women’s unwavering dedication to household thrift, even at the expense of their own health and wellbeing, took on the mantle of a “sacred calling,” a “moral obligation,” and an ultimate expression of noble virtue (Stone 1997:78). For early twentieth-century women in Newfoundland and throughout war-torn nations, messages that promoted an empty stomach and staunch determinism were particularly resonant.

The Politics of Food: Social and Cultural Implications of Wartime Meals

As the war progressed, the threat of starvation was a specter that loomed large. By 1916, worldwide food shortages resulted in escalating commodity costs. Those who could not afford the inflated prices of staple groceries were struggling to make ends meet. In light of this issue, conserving scarce commodities and eliminating waste in the kitchen became a vitally important task - particularly for those who were most prone to wasteful habits. Accordingly, affluent and upper middle class individuals became targets of reform. In 1917, the United States Secretary of Agriculture addressed the American public, stating:



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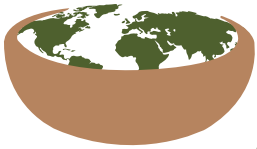
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In many homes there is a strong feeling that it is ‘only decent’ to provide more food than will be eaten and that it is demeaning to reckon closely [...] The food waste in the household, the experts assert, results in large measure from bad preparation and bad cooking, from improper care and handling, and, in well-to-do families, from serving an undue number of courses and an overabundant supply, and failing to save afterwards and utilize the food not consumed (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1917:1).

This dismissal of luxury and entitlement would likely have struck a chord with many Newfoundlanders. For an island population that spent much of its time in the grip of hunger, the concept of wealthy individuals indulging their appetites to the point of wastefulness during a time of great need would have been particularly ludicrous.

The most direct means of reducing kitchen waste was to steer clear of food items that were in high-demand in favour of those that were readily available. People were urged to rely upon vegetables for a large portion of their daily nutrition. This was difficult in Newfoundland where the soil was rocky, the weather cold, and the growing season short. As such, the island’s vegetable farmers sensibly focused their attention on nurturing high yields of hardy crops such as turnip, cabbage, parsnips, potatoes, beets, and carrots (Gray 1977:22). These long-lasting and resilient vegetables became an integral part of the wartime diet. If plant based dishes were supplemented with Newfoundland’s plentiful and protein-rich seafood - as many nutritional guidelines suggested - stomachs could stay full for longer and the conscience could be free of the guilt of wasting scarce resources.

Some of these guidelines and regulations could be confusing for homemakers who were well established in their daily routine. In response, the Domestic Science School on Harvey Road in downtown St. John’s became involved in teaching young women the appropriate way to “pitch in” in the kitchen. Founded in 1912, the institute was an open, interdenominational space that served the female students of the Methodist College, the Roman Catholic convent schools, and Bishop Spencer College (Riggs 2000). Pupils from a wide variety of economic backgrounds were admitted and instructed together; progressively, the children of the rich were taught side by side with those of the working class (Riggs 2000). While the central mission of the institute was to provide guidance in nutrition education, cooking, and baking, wartime teachers focused their curriculums on efficient domestic practises and frugal kitchen techniques (Riggs 2000). A quote from the WPA’s 1917 journal *The Distaff* reveals precisely what students were learning:



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Speaking generally, their efforts are confined to *plain* cooking (unless the one candy lesson at Christmas can be styled *fancy*), for our aim is to teach the food values of the common food materials always at hand, and how to use them to the best advantage. Special stress is laid on economy, and how to prevent waste [...] A visitor dropping into the school during the last few weeks has seen the pupils making bread and buns, while among our different visitors during last school year, one saw a class making soup stock and vegetable soups, another watched a lesson on “left over meat dishes,” still another heard a lesson on vegetables, while another enjoyed the practical results of a lesson on ‘eggs and omeletes [sic],’ and so on. (Dickinson1916: 11-12).

Not long after this passage was written, the WPA partnered with Newfoundland’s newly established Food Control Board to produce a set of “War Menus” for the St. John’s *Evening Telegram*. These menus were delivered cheaply to the masses in the form of the ubiquitous daily newspaper, and thus were intended to reach a large audience of Newfoundlanders. In total, 20 menus were published between late December of 1917 and late February of 1918 (Fig.2).

Though the menus are somewhat formulaic in nature, they also have distinct variations in structure. Three examples simply lay out a menu of dishes for a single days breakfast, dinner, and supper (also referred to as luncheon or tea), 12 include recipes alongside a menu (of these, two include menus and recipes for two consecutive days), and five consist of only a handful of recipes.

Within the documents it is possible to see tangible proof of how the domestic advice on cooking in a conscious, ‘patriotic’ way was put to use. They reflect an effort on the part of their writers to augment the use of wheat with more accessible alternatives such as cornmeal and oats, restrict sugar, use red meat in moderate amounts, and emphasize vegetables and fish as the bulk of the diet. By encouraging the moderate use of scarce ingredients like meat, fats, and sugar, the menus attempted to push Newfoundland closer to the intended goal of using rare or expensive foodstuffs to their most productive effect. Throughout nations effected by wartime, every housewife was urged to “[...] ‘do her bit’ in augmenting the food resources available for the boys overseas [and] assist less fortunate families to buy food at lower prices” (National Service Board of Canada 1917:19).

However, a breakdown of the food items used in each of the menus reveals that, in fact, many of the ingredients would have been accessible only to those in the upper classes (Fig.3-5). The menus are peppered with dishes like cheese souffle, tomato scallop, macaroni and cheese, lemon snow, baked bananas, and dark raisin pudding. Additionally,



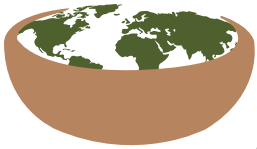
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flour - a staple that was outrageously expensive and fiercely rationed in many wartime nations - appears as an ingredient in nearly every meal and in many recipes. Take for example the menu for January 19, 1918, which includes bread and butter for breakfast, "Potato Pasties" containing a quarter pound of flour for dinner, and "Johnny Cake" that includes two cups of flour for tea (Fig.6). The rationing of wheat appears to have been a largely conceptual concern for those in the WPA recommending augmented wartime foods. The few recipes for flourless dishes like "War Bread" (containing oats, cornmeal, molasses, and butter), "Oatmeal Pudding" (a mixture of oats, apples, raisins, sugar, and cinnamon), and "Corn Pudding" (made of corn, milk, butter, and corn flour) hardly make up for the superfluity of bread, flour-filled baked goods, and wheat-heavy desserts.

It is also significant to note that the menus were published during the winter season; a time of frigid weather, meagre resources, and food scarcity for members of the island's working class. Often, Newfoundlanders referred to February and March as "the hungry months" (Hanrahan and Ewtushik 2001:xi). In an effort to combat this shortage, many individuals would hunt and gather seasonal wild foods and preserve them for the long, cold, hungry nights in the future (Gray 1977:11). This was especially true in the outport communities where imported commodities were often scarce, even in times of plenty (Hanrahan and Ewtushik 2012:86). Food items that working class women would have been familiar with such as moose, partridge, caribou, turr, seal, goose, and duck were not included in any of the menus (Gray 1977:13). Neither were commonly foraged foods like blueberries, partridgeberries, or bakeapple (Gray 1977:13). There were, however, familiar dishes such as fish and brewis, creamed fish, boiled cod, mashed turnips, herring and potatoes, fish cakes, codfish balls, cabbage and beet salad, and pea soup included in many of the documents.

Despite this, the menus rely heavily upon a litany of specialty goods and fresh ingredients. Take for example the menu for February 24, 1918, which includes a recipe for "Jellied Tomato Salad" that requires store-bought ingredients like canned tomatoes and vegetable gelatine, and fresh produce like celery and lettuce leaves (Fig.7). Or the menu for February 3, 1918, which details a recipe for "Apricot Jam" that contains one pound of dried apricots, one-and-a-half pounds of sugar, and once ounce of blanched chopped almonds (Fig.8). (It is also interesting to note that the dinner to be had on the same day as the "Apricot Jam" was "Roast Beef" - a particularly luxurious indulgence.) As such, while the "War Menus" purported to be useful to a wide range of Newfoundland homemakers, in practice, they were helpful only to those already well established at the top of the economic ladder.



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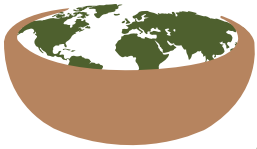
This fact did not go unnoticed. Jas. E. Dempster, a resident of St. John's, wrote a scathing letter to the *Evening Telegram* on the afternoon of December 29, 1914, just after the first "War Menu" was published. Dempster's letter states:

Dear Sir - The menu published in this morning's 'News' is nothing short of an insult to at least 90 p.c. of the people. Hoover says that 'If the **more fortunate** of our people will avoid waste and eat no more than they **need**, the high cost of living problem of the **less fortunate** would be solved and the shortage of food would no longer be a menace', and he knows. Let the idle rich cut out their dinner parties and afternoon teas and then they can talk to their less fortunate but just as intelligent brethren with much greater force (1917:3 Original emphasis).

The critique is pointed and astute: it explains that in the harsh light of everyday life, the "War Menus" reveal little in the way of an attempt to reduce kitchen waste or carry out ingredient conservation. Quite the opposite, they appear bloated and luxurious when compared to the daily fare of many Newfoundlanders (Hanrahan and Ewtushik 2001: xi). The menu that Dempster was addressing in his letter was intended specially for New Year's, and it included a diverse array of items: fruit, cornmeal porridge, potato bread, butter, coffee, tea, sugar, and milk for breakfast; cabbage and beet winter salad, bread and butter, preserved fruit, a floury spice and raisin war cake, and cocoa for luncheon; and tomato soup, roast chicken, jelly, mashed potatoes, peas, a chocolate and citrus fruit pudding, coffee, sugar, and milk for dinner. Even to contemporary eyes, the menu leans towards the cushioned realm of decadence. Perhaps this element of hypocrisy provides a reason for why there were only twenty "War Menus" ever to be published.

The WPA, however, vehemently denied the accusations of disingenuousness. By contrast, they embraced the elitism of the menus. A defensive response to Dempster's criticism was issued by the organization in the same edition of the *Telegram* that contained his letter, and in an article entitled "The Matter of Menus," they state:

It may not be plain to many at first sight that [the menu] is an exceptional one, and not intended for an everyday precedent. Even so, it is not obligatory, and if any cannot afford to follow it in its entirety they need not do so. We quite agree with Mr Dempster that the 'rich' ought to cut out their 'dinner parties and afternoon teas' but by suggesting that the first duty falls upon those whom he has in mind we think he misses the whole vital point of the situation... It is not in any way a question of rich and poor, but if it is made



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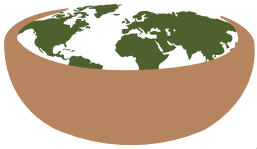
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so, we are compelled to say the far greater duty lies on the poor, and not the rich. For the thousands of our poorer people these very foods [flour and meat] constitute almost their sole dietary. How much of the total flour and meat supply of this country is consumed in the 'dinner parties and afternoon teas' of the rich? An infinitesimal portion... We have not got to save money, but to save flour and meat. If we do not do so, the whole country will go short, desperately short, by next spring. Consequently, those persons who should pay most heed to the w a r n i n g are those who use the g r e a t e s t proportions of those commodities, and they are not the 'idle rich' (Women's Patriotic Association of Newfoundland 1917:4 Original emphasis).

Despite the fact that those who wrote the menus were inspired by lofty ideals of patriotism, sacrifice, and recognition for women's domestic labour, their advice was directed at a small and privileged audience, and as such their culinary guidance seems to have gone largely unnoticed by the majority of Newfoundlanders. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not any wheat, beef, or bacon actually made it to the "men at the front" as the aspirational lead caption on many of the menus claims; nonetheless, the "War Menus" did draw attention to the bid for increased food awareness, and they enabled women to stand at the forefront of the worthy - if poorly managed - cause of food awareness in Newfoundland.

Conclusions

In the end, what can we take away from these "War Menus"? Most importantly, perhaps, is an acknowledgement of the fact that during the Great War food was used a weapon. The battle on the homefront was fought not only by busy hands, but by frugal stomachs as well. What one ate and the ways in which they ate it acted as deeply powerful tools of informal communication. Wasting food was framed as deceitful, harmful to the nation, and downright criminal. Those who did so were derided as individuals who basked in luxury while their morally upright and patriotic brethren sacrificed, starved, and died. Throughout the war, the resentment of working class Newfoundlanders towards greedy well-fed merchants and profiteers provided a key rallying point in the fight for change. But the animosity was short lived. In the decades after the war the persistence and valorization of hunting and gathering methods associated with traditional foodways subsumed some of the frustration over luxury import goods and



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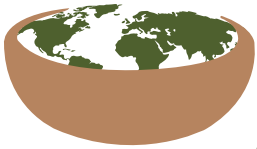
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decadent upper class lifestyles. Maura Hanrahan reveals: “[...] the sumptuous eight course meals enjoyed by the hated merchants of Newfoundland history do not loom large in the collective psyche. It is as if they are deliberately pushed to the side and the table spread with roast caribou, salt fish, and fresh berries” (2012,91).

In addition, the compilation and dissemination of the “War Menus” provided a much needed space for Newfoundland women to fight for the importance of domestic labour. The discussion of kitchen thriftiness acted a safe way to support the fight for female social, economic, and political freedom. It enabled women to get involved with the cause of suffrage from the confines of their own home, and within the socially sanctioned auspices of “feminine domestic work.” Margot Duley explains that after the Great War: “[...] women [in Newfoundland] emerged with a new-found sense that their traditional skills and community work had public and economic value, and they demanded full citizenship in the form of the vote, thus moving into the male sphere of politics” (2012:70). Thus, the “War Menus” can be seen as one very small facet of the overall battle for women’s emancipation.

This study is obviously only a brief foray into the full significance of wartime cooking in early twentieth-century Newfoundland. Further research would be greatly bolstered by the examination of diaries, letters, cookbooks, detailed economic reports, material culture analyses, and oral histories. The topic of foodways during the Great War is rich and varied, and there is a rich pool of information to support future in-depth explorations.

It is important to devote scholarly attention to such simple looking documents as the Evening Telegram “War Menus.” It is fruitful to study what appear to be banal recipes. This is so because underneath the bland textual exterior, it is possible to unearth a campaign for gender equality, justice for the marginalized, community cooperation, and recognition for “invisible” labour. Though the ‘War Menus’ may have missed their target in 1917 and 1918, they have certainly been useful in illuminating the complexities of the social and cultural climate lived by those who are now one century removed from us.

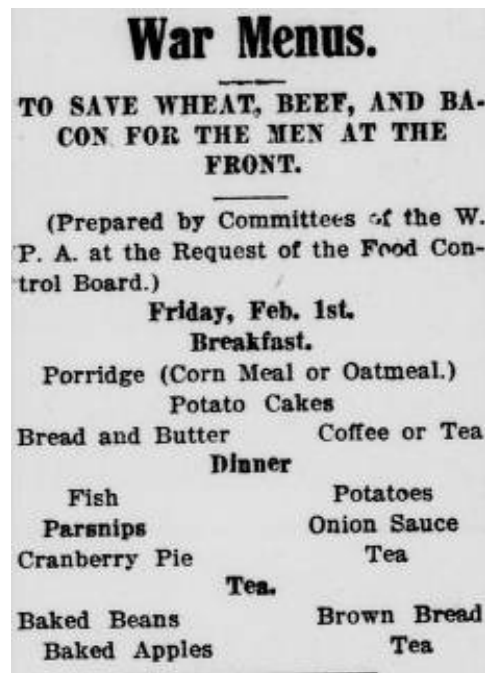


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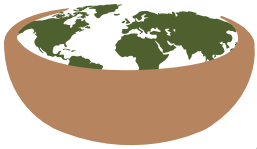
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(Fig.1) Newfoundland recruitment poster courtesy of the Virtual Reference Library, Toronto Public Library.



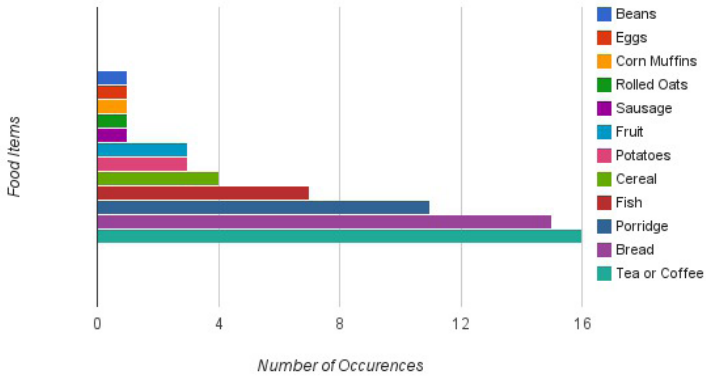
(Fig.2). Menu for February 1, 1918. Image courtesy of the Memorial University Digital Archives Initiative.



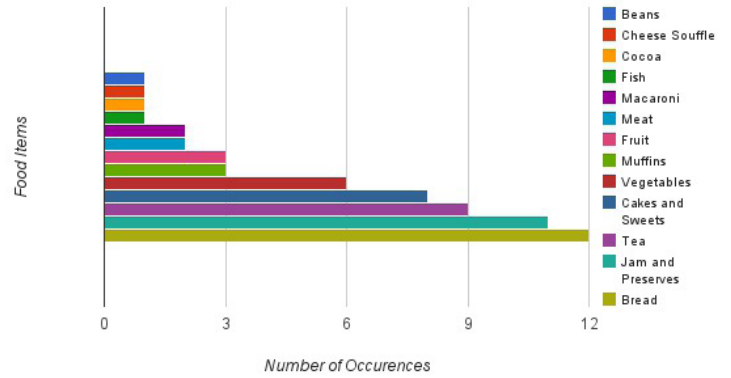
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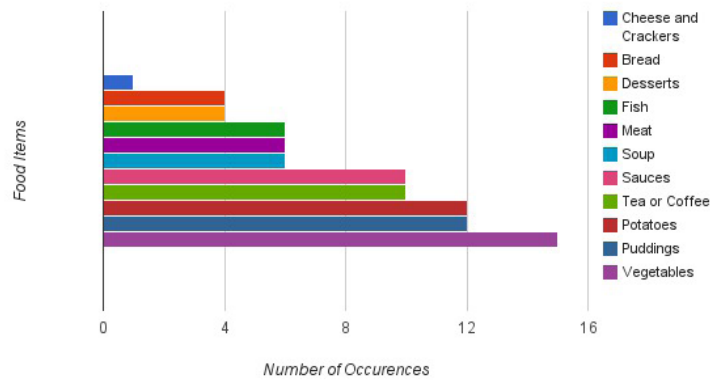
Breakfast: Food Item Breakdown



Supper, Luncheon, or Tea: Food Item Breakdown



Dinner: Food Item Breakdown



(Fig.3-5) Charts created by the author.



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War Menus.

TO SAVE WHEAT, BEEF AND BACON FOR THE MEN AT THE FRONT.

(Prepared by Committees of the W. P. A. at the Request of the Food Control Board.)

Suggested Menu for Saturday, January 19th, 1918.

SATURDAY.

Breakfast.

Porridge	Creamed Fish
Bread and Butter	Coffee or Tea

Dinner.

Pea Soup	Potato Pasties
Baked Apple Dumplings	Hard Sauce

Tea.

Corn Pudding	Hot Johnny Cake
Jam	Tea

Receipt for Potato Pasties:— $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. potatoes, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. flour, 2 ozs. butter or dripping, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful baking powder, pinch of salt. Mix with milk and water. Roll out $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Cut in rounds and fill with $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of any minced or cooked meat. Season with salt and pepper, 2 or three spoonfuls of gravy. Put a spoonful of meat in each round.

Corn Pudding:—Cook 1 can corn in double boiler till tender, add 1 pint milk, little salt and pepper, lump of butter. Thicken with a heaped deserts spoonful of corn flour mixed with a little milk, turn into a pudding dish, cover with bread crumbs and a little butter. Bake till brown.

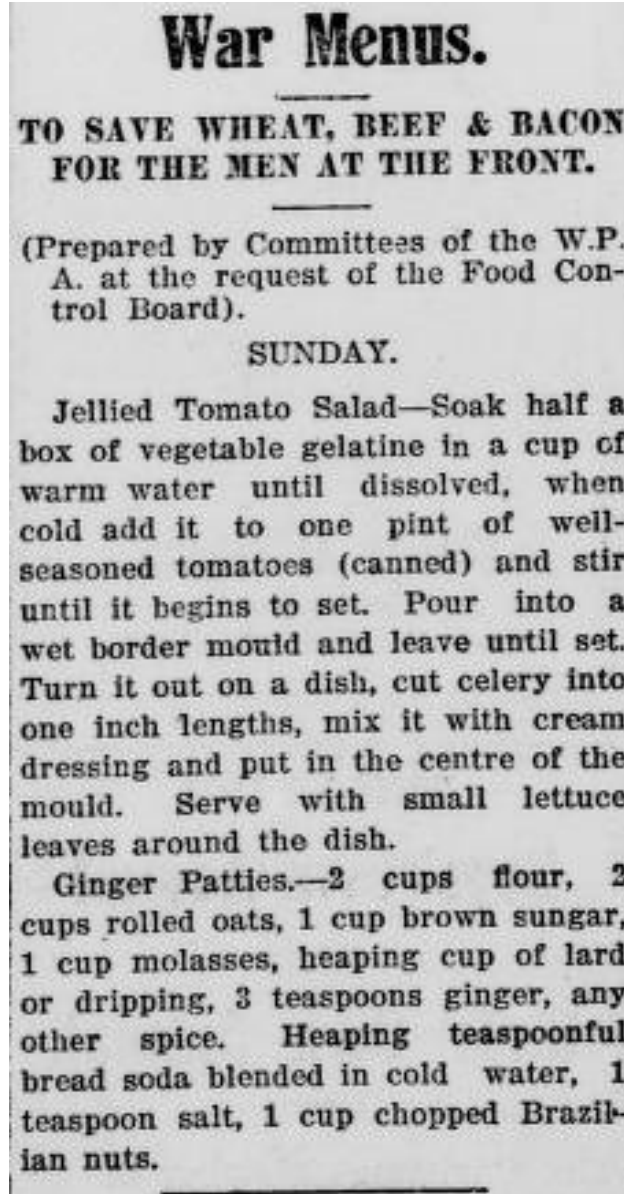
Receipt for Johnny Cake:—1 cup corn meal, 2 cups flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar, 2 teaspoonfuls baking powder, 1 or 2 eggs. Mix with milk and water.

(Fig.6) Menu for January 19, 1918. Image courtesy of the Memorial University Digital Archives Initiative.

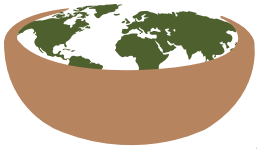


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(Fig.7) Menu for February 24, 1918. Image courtesy of the Memorial University Digital Archives Initiative.



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War Menus.

TO SAVE WHEAT, BEEF, AND BACON FOR THE MEN AT THE FRONT.

(Prepared by Committees of the W. P. A. at the Request of the Food Control Board.)

SUNDAY, February 3rd.

Breakfast.

Brewis	Fish or Marmalade
Toast	Tea or Coffee

Dinner.

Roast Beef	Potatoes	Carrots
Caramel Pudding		Peas
Cream or Custard		Tea

Tea.

Apricot Preserve	Brown Bread
Cake	Tea.

Caramel Pudding:—1 pint milk, ½ cup brown sugar burnt, 2 tablespoonfuls corn flour, a little salt, 1 tablespoonful corn flour, a little salt, 1 teaspoon vanilla. Cook until smooth, add a little more sugar, if not sweet enough. Put in a mould to set, serve with cream or custard.

Apricot Jam:—1 lb. dried apricots, 3 pints water; wash apricots and let set over night. Boil next morning in the water they have been soaking in, till tender (about 2 minutes) shred and return to liquid, adding 1 pound and a half sugar and one ounce blanched and chopped almonds. Boil for two or three minutes.

MONDAY, February 4th.

Breakfast.

Porridge	Hashed Potatoes	
Toast	Brown Bread	Tea or Coffee

Dinner

Tined Salmon (Heated)	
Potatoes	White Sauce
Dark Raisin Pudding (Steamed)	Tea

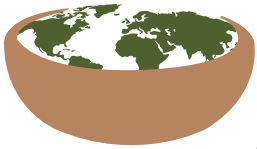
Tea.

Macaroni and Tomato	Stewed Prunes
Graham Gems	Tea

Graham Gems:—1 tablespoonful butter, 2 tablespoonfuls sugar, one egg, half cup milk, one teaspoonful soda level; one and a half teaspoonfuls cream of tartar, pinch of salt, graham flour to make a stiff batter. Bake in deep patty pans.

VESSELS SAIL.—A number of vessels which have been detained in port owing to weather conditions, left yesterday for market.

(Fig.8) Menu for February 3, 1918. Image courtesy of the Memorial University Digital Archives Initiative.



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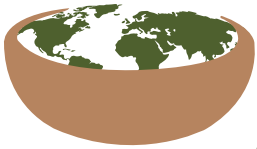
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Notes

¹ This paper was originally submitted as an assignment in Memorial University's spring 2014 course "Food and Culture," and it has benefitted from many rounds of class discussion and review. I want to thank instructor Paul Smith for his generous supply of source material, and to also acknowledge my anonymous peer reviewers for their thoughtful feedback