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The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945

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CHRISTINA SIMMONS

"Helping the Poorer Sisters": The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945

IN LATE 19TH CENTURY HALIFAX a substantial church-like structure shared space with brothels and a Salvation Army Corps on Brunswick Street, just below the Citadel and the famous Clock Tower. Founded in 1868 by Halifax businessman and Methodist Edward Jost to serve the city's poor, the Jost Mission in the early 20th century became an important centre of activity for Halifax women. The Mission established a placement service for charworkers, a day nursery for the workers' children, and clubs and educational programmes for working-class mothers and adolescents. The Mission served as a meeting-ground for women from several phases of "women's sphere": the Mission's services were intended primarily for the working-class mothers of the city's North End, and they were coordinated by trained religious workers employed by the Mission and by unpaid women volunteers from the city's Methodist churches.[1]

Each of these groups of women had a place in the Mission's hierarchy and brought to their role a particular experience informed by social class and gender. Working-class women, pushed into the labour force by their husbands' death, disability, desertion, or unemployment, went out from the Mission by day to clean the homes of middle-class families. The deaconesses, lay matrons, and teachers, who administered the Mission's activities, were among the more advantaged female paid workers, early representatives of the many women who would enter social work as the century progressed. The churchwomen who managed the Mission acted in one of the only public roles available to them — charitable work — and in so doing they reaffirmed the bonds of female friendship and the Christian concern of the well-to-do for the poor. Within the limits of a vision of Christian sisterhood and of women's essential domestic and maternal identity, between 1905 and the mid-1940s the programmes of the Jost Mission evolved primarily in response to the participation of working-class women in the labour force and to the middle-class women's commitment to helping their "poorer sisters".[2]

1 I use the terms paid work, employment, wage-earning, and unpaid work, rather than work and nonwork, to avoid the implication that domestic or volunteer labour is not "work". The research for this paper was done with the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1981-1983. I wish to thank Susan Porter Benson, Mari Jo Buhle, Judith Fingard, Ernest Forbes, Frances Early, Riva Krut, Ian McKay, John D. Thomas, and the *Acadiensis* readers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of the paper. I thank Margaret Campbell and Judith Fingard for sharing research which touched on the history of the Mission.

2 Primary sources for this study include the *Annual Reports* of the Toronto Deaconess Home and

The services for women and children at the Jost Mission succeeded earlier evangelical activity. The original inscription on the building read: "And He said unto His servant, Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in". Under the interdenominational leadership of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1868 to 1878, and subsequently under Methodist direction, the Jost Mission had operated as a city mission. Revivals and worship meetings, Sunday Schools, and sewing classes for women and girls were established. However, the Mission was closed in the 1890s while Jost's will was being settled. The estate's legal problems were finally resolved in 1904, and by spring 1905 a graduate of the Toronto Deaconess Training School had arrived at the Mission.[3]

The two deaconesses assigned to the Mission and the nearby Brunswick Street Methodist Church cooperated in beginning programmes which were almost exclusively directed toward women and children. They instituted "kitchen garden" (domestic science) and sewing classes for little girls, "fresh air" work with the girls at a cottage on the shore, and charitable visiting in the neighbourhood of the Mission.[4] In 1910 the Mission began a day nursery for the children of wage-earning mothers and by 1913 was operating an employment bureau to place women in domestic work. Other activities included a kindergarten, mothers' meetings, a sewing class, Sunday afternoon and evening religious meetings, and clubs for adolescent girls. The matron provided emergency relief to needy families from a store of food and clothing contributed by Methodist churches. These activities constituted the bulk of the Mission work until the 1940s.[5]

Halifax, the commercial centre for the Maritime region and a major port, was experiencing a limited economic boom during the first decade of this century,

Annual Reports of the Deaconess Aid Society (after 1906 the Deaconess Society) of the Methodist Church, [*Deaconess Annual Reports*], Archives of the United Church of Canada, Toronto, and the *Annual Reports* of the Woman's Committee of the Jost Mission (from 1918 simply called the Jost Mission Committee), 1915-1945, [JMAR], and surviving Minutes of the Jost Mission Committee, October 1920 to November 1931, [JMC Minutes]. The trustees of the Jost Mission have voted to place the records in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, but at present they remain in the hands of the trustees.

3 Margaret Campbell, "The Jost Mission," in "No Other Foundation", manuscript history of the Brunswick Street Church; *Deaconess Annual Report*, 1904-05, p. 21, and *Christian Guardian* (Toronto), 19 April 1905. *Deaconess Annual Reports*, 1894-1920, give information on the founding of the order and list annual appointments of deaconesses. Additional articles specifically on Halifax deaconesses (at Brunswick and Grafton Street Churches as well as at the Jost Mission) appeared in the *Christian Guardian*, 27 January 1904, 26 July, 1 November 1905, 9 July 1913, 8 March, 23 August 1916.

4 *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913. The matron during the 1940s was still providing relief to needy families: monthly report of the matron, deaconess Edna Pearson, March 1941, Jost Mission Records.

5 *Deaconess Annual Report*, 1906-07, p. 93. In 1906-07, the four Nova Scotia deconesses (three in Halifax, one in Sydney) secured work for 23 persons. Figures increase in successive years but do not show at what institution(s). The first definitive account that the Jost Mission is running an employment service is in the *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913.

when the Jost Mission was being reopened. Investment in manufacturing grew, traffic through the port increased, and the rate of population growth increased. Unfortunately, after the First World War, manufacturing declined, and a period of depression began in the 1920s and lasted until the next world war.[6] Poverty and the unemployment of working-class men left many working-class mothers in need of the services offered by the Mission.

In its daily operations the Jost Mission was a women's institution. Except for the religious services, which ended after the 1910s, programmes at the Mission were directed toward women or children, and the staff and immediate managers were all female. This pattern, which grew out of the separation of male and female spheres in 19th-century life, characterized much of both charity and social reform work in Canada and the United States.[7] A group of male trustees held formal control over the Jost bequest but exercised little direction over daily affairs. The trustees were a group of four (later five) men, who administered the investments, paid the salaries of workers at the Mission, and oversaw major repairs and alterations of the building such as those which were made in 1917 to accommodate more children in the nursery.[8] The Woman's Committee (also informally called the Ladies' Committee and later simply the Jost Mission Committee) was established in 1915. Its purpose was to raise funds by keeping the cause "constantly before the churches", but the women also took over management of routine finances formerly handled by the deaconess in charge. Through appeals to the various Methodist churches and through classic female fundraising events like pantry sales, garden parties, and musical teas, these women raised the remainder of the budget (for food, materials, heating, and clothing and linens for the nursery). Barrels of apples, quilts, jars of preserves, baby clothes, and cash donations poured in from churches and individuals around

6 David A. Sutherland, "Halifax, 1815-1914: 'Colony to Colony' ", *Urban History Review*, No. 1 (June 1975), pp. 7-11; L.D. McCann, "Staples and the New Industrialism in the Growth of Post-Confederation Halifax", *Acadiensis*, VIII, 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 60-61, 66, 79.

7 D. Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in 19th Century Montreal", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 6 (1973), pp. 215-16, and Linda Kealey, "Introduction", in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s - 1920s* (Toronto, 1979), p. 2, and other essays in the volume. See also Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, 1977), Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York, 1978), pp. 220, 231, Susan Porter Benson, "Business Heads and Sympathizing Hearts: The Women of the Providence Employment Society, 1837-1858", *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1978), pp. 302-12, and John Cumbler, "The Politics of Charity: Gender and Class in Late 19th Century Charity Policy", *Journal of Social History*, 14 (1980), pp. 98-111.

8 *JMAR*, 1917, pp. 5-6. Alterations were almost completed when the Halifax Explosion occurred on 6 December 1917, when a munitions ship collided with another vessel in the harbour, producing an explosion which devastated two square miles of the city. The building was damaged but usable. Women from the Halifax Old Ladies Home were housed in the building for some time after the Explosion and the nursery and employment work were carried on from two cottages on the Commons provided by the Halifax Relief Commission for part of 1918.

Nova Scotia. The majority of donors, especially of in-kind contributions, were women.[9] In 1923 the trustees began to pay a regular amount of the investment income directly to them, and they took over payment of salaries as well.[10] The Committee met monthly to hear the matron's report and plan its own work. Meetings began with Scripture and the Lord's Prayer. Each month members were delegated to make weekly visits to the nursery. Female rituals such as sending flowers to the sick and condolences to the bereaved among the Committee members and Christmas and wedding gifts to employees were regularly noted in their minutes. Christian sisterhood meant showing friendship and concern among themselves and the staff as well as "helping the poorer sisters".[11]

The trustees and members of the Woman's Committee were financially comfortable but do not appear to have been part of Halifax's wealthiest class. The trustees whose names are known, serving in 1918 and 1927, comprised the owner of an insurance company, a chartered accountant, the presidents of a dental supply company and a lumber contracting firm, and the proprietor of a downtown restaurant. Three of them were married to women on the Woman's Committee. After Presbyterians and Methodists joined to form the United Church in 1925, the trustees began regularly to include a clergyman appointed by the Conference.[12]

The members of the Woman's Committee were active churchwomen of secure middle-class backgrounds. The great majority were married. More than half of the 21 members in 1916 were the wives or daughters of accountants or proprietors of businesses. Other husbands included a minister, the president of the Technical College, a city official, and a skilled artisan at the Dockyard. By 1927 more Committee women were married to professional men — a dentist, a lawyer, a minister, and three engineers — but businessmen still predominated. In this year the Committee, expanded by the addition of formerly Presbyterian churches, did include the wives of a few lower-status men — a locksmith, a streetcar operator, and a police sergeant. One Committee member, an unmar-

9 *JMAR*, 1915, pp. 5, 6, 8. Every *Annual Report* listed donors and their gifts.

10 JMC Minutes, January and April 1923.

11 JMC Minutes, *passim*; *JMAR*, 1915, p. 5; Interview with Janet Barkley [pseud.], daughter of a Committee member who served from 1920 through the Second World War, p. 8. I interviewed six people connected with the Mission: the woman cited above, a domestic worker who used the nursery and placement service, her son who attended the nursery, a woman who worked as a nursery maid, a woman who had attended the nursery as a child, whose mother was a domestic worker and who herself became a domestic worker, and a Committee member who served during and after the Second World War. All are white. I have changed all the names in this paper to protect their privacy. The tapes and transcripts (of all but the last named, who did not agree to taping) are available in the Sound Archive of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

12 *Halifax City Directories*, 1915, 1927; David Sutherland, "The Personnel and Policies of the Halifax Board of Trade, 1890-1914", Lewis R. Fischer and Eric W. Sager, eds., *The Enterprising Canadians* (St. John's, 1979), pp. 205-29. I am indebted to David Sutherland for help in assessing the class background of the trustees and husbands of the Committee members.

Figure One: The view from the Citadel, Halifax, c. 1890. The Jost Mission building on Brunswick Street appears in the foreground, second from the left.
(Source: Notman Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia)

ried woman, was employed as a postal clerk, and at least one married member worked with her husband in the family business. Women who served as officers for five years or more between 1915 and 1940 and whose influence was probably greatest, were all married to men in business, insurance, or accounting. They also belonged to the Methodist churches in the oldest and most prosperous residential areas of the city. The Committee and its leaders were composed of the wives and mothers of Halifax's comfortable business class.[13]

As married women, the Jost Mission Committee members could not act with complete independence, but no evidence suggests that either trustees or husbands controlled the women directly. The Committee consulted formally with the trustees primarily over major expenditures on the building. The relative autonomy of the women in managing the Mission, their large role in raising operating expenses, and the cultural background of separate male and female spheres meant that women controlled the Mission. Its programmes and atmosphere reflected the ideas of the churchwomen and the staff as they encountered the women of the neighbourhood.[14]

Directors of the Mission's daily operations were the deaconesses or matrons, who lived in the building, and the kindergarten teachers or other assistants, all single or widowed women. One or two deaconesses were in charge of the Mission until 1920, when a Salvation Army nurse became the matron. Two widows, one of unknown education and one a former teacher, followed the nurse in the position; the second worked from 1924 until her death in 1940, when a deaconess replaced her. The deaconesses cared for the children directly in the 1910s, led clubs and classes, and dealt with the domestic workers. By 1920 the matron was supervising young nursery "maids" hired to watch the children.[15] She also kept

13 Barkley's mother worked with her father in his business after the Explosion: Barkley Interview, p. 3. The officers of the Committee who served terms longer than five years belonged to the Grafton St. Church and Robie St. Church (later combined to form the United Methodist, then St. Andrew's United Church), the Brunswick St. Church, the Kaye St. Church (later Kaye-Grove, then United Memorial), and Fort Massey Church (formerly Presbyterian). St. Andrew's and Fort Massey served congregations from the wealthy South End, and the Brunswick St. and United Memorial served mixed-class neighbourhoods in the North End. The interview with Barkley made it clear that middle-class members of the United Memorial congregation tended to run the organizational life of the church though all classes attended worship services: p. 21. The members of the Committee who could not be clearly identified tended to offer the most possibility of being lower in social status. Sometimes their husbands' first names or initials were never given in Annual Reports. They also tended to be on the Committee for shorter periods of time than the prominent women. Those who were less well-off would have had less money for domestic help to free them for the Committee work.

14 Benson, "Business Heads", and Cumbler, "The Politics of Charity", suggest clearly how distinct the ideas and activity of male and female charity workers could be even when they came from the same class and were married to each other.

15 Maids may have been hired to care for children by 1918. The rebuilt and expanded Mission building had space for 40 children, too many for two deaconesses to care for and also carry on other activities: *JMAR*, 1918, p. 8.

daily accounts, distributed relief, did public speaking to raise money, and mediated between the Committee and lesser employees. The Committee asked the matron in 1931 to attend their meetings throughout rather than merely to present a report.[16] This action suggests the growing importance of the employee in this position.

The history of the Deaconess Society shows the background of some of the women who filled this managerial position at the Mission. Founding the Order of Deaconesses in 1894 was a hesitant step toward giving women professional roles in the Methodist Church. It also reflected jealousy of the Roman Catholic Church, which "has won its victories in America far more by its white-capped sisters than its black-cassocked priests", explained an article on "The Secret of the Success of the Deaconess Movement" at the turn of the century. The "secret" was that "The world wants mothering". Deaconesses wore a dark navy-blue uniform and bonnet with white tie which set them apart in appearance like nuns and Salvationists. Until 1917 they received maintenance only from the institutions employing them. At that time they became salaried, after a period of conflict between advocates of traditional feminine self-sacrifice and proponents of women's right to be paid for their work. Some deaconesses were trained nurses and others performed religious work; all were supposed to combine traditional female religious commitment with modern, social scientific method. The deaconesses assigned to the Jost Mission worked in several recognized specializations: settlement and industrial work, which aimed to bolster domestic skills among immigrants or rural Canadians new to the city; nursing, which involved both active care and educating people in the "laws of health"; and kindergarten work.[17]

Deaconesses, matrons, and teachers at the Mission were well-educated, self-supporting women for whom the work at the Mission constituted a career. Two deaconesses, Amy Sherwood and Mabel Newsome, were high school graduates, and two others, Bertha Shier and Leone Winter, had partially completed high school. Elda Caldwell, the kindergarten teacher from 1915 to 1925, came from a comfortable Halifax family. She left the Mission to become superintendent of the women's department of a government bureau and remained single into the

16 JMC Minutes, September 1931.

17 "The Deaconess Society", United Church Ministry Personnel and Education leaflet, April 1976, United Church Archives; Deaconess *Annual Report*, 1900-01, p. 9, *ibid.*, 1903-04, p. 21, *ibid.*, 1906-07, p. viii, *ibid.*, 1901-02, p. 13, *ibid.*, 1902-03, pp. 6-12. Deaconesses enjoyed one month of vacation per year and were moved from assignment to assignment every few years. A good common school education was initially required of applicants, but by 1914 the Training School preferred one or two years of high school. In addition to Bible study and personal spiritual development, the training included progressively more sociology, social gospel theology, and practical settlement house experience between 1910 and 1920. For a good explanation of the origins and development of the order and the change from maintenance to salaries, see John D. Thomas, "Servants of the Church: Canadian Methodist Deaconess Work, 1890-1926", *Canadian Historical Review*, XLV, 3 (September 1984), pp. 371-95.

1930s. E. Bryon, the Salvation Army nurse who was matron from 1920 to 1923, could well have been from a working-class background as many of her sect were, but as a nurse she had a good education and a strong occupational identity. Lillian A. White, a widow and once a schoolteacher, returned from Saskatchewan to her native Nova Scotia to work at the Mission in 1924. She thought of herself as a committed worker in the field as well as a dedicated Christian. She attended with pleasure and reported to the Committee on two meetings of the National Conference of Day Nurseries in New York City in 1929 and 1931. The salary levels of the women in these positions reflected their identity as professionals. Bryon's remuneration was raised to $50 per month in January of 1921 (in addition to room and board). Caldwell, who did not live at the Mission, received $60 per month as kindergarten teacher and assistant to Bryon.[18]

The nursery maids and the cook, local working-class women, constituted the lower echelon of Mission workers. One maid, Mary Carr, came from a nearby Catholic family. Her father did manual labour for the city, and her mother worked as a dressmaker but occasionally served at fancy teas in the homes of the wealthy. When Carr's mother worked out, she placed her children in the Mission nursery. Carr was in grade eight when her mother took her out of school and sent her to work at the Mission about 1921. Carr's co-worker was a 16-year-old "Salvation Army girl" from Newfoundland with a brother "on the boats". These young women shared a "spotlessly clean" room at the Mission. Each day they "pottied" and put nursery clothing on 18 to 25 or more children, changed babies, prepared formula, gave bottles, served lunch to older children, and washed dishes. They washed diapers and clothes daily and scrubbed down the entire nursery weekly. They were allowed time off every other evening, one afternoon a week, and Saturday afternoon through Sunday every third week. Carr received $20 per month by the winter of 1924, and her friend, as "head girl", was paid $25 per month in 1925. This work was harder than caring for one child in a wealthy home, recalled Carr, yet easier than her later married life as

18 I am grateful to John D. Thomas for information on the background of four of 14 deaconesses who worked at the Jost Mission. Caldwell taught kindergarten in 1918 at the Community House started by the Halifax Welfare Bureau after the Explosion: Halifax Welfare Bureau (formerly Bureau of Social Service), *Third Annual Report*, 1918-19, p. 27, Jost Mission Records. On Caldwell see *JMAR*, 1925, p. 4. The information on White comes from personal conversation with Janet Barkley and a memoir, "Lillian Agnes Burgess White", by her daughter Frances Lillian White Preston, September 1984, in possession of this author. The large number of single women officers in the Salvation Army suggests that it was a route to independence for a number of women in the early 20th century. Information on the Salvation Army comes from the regularly published *Disposition of Forces*, 1902-1950, which lists officers, and from interviews with three retired female Salvation Army officers, Public Archives of Nova Scotia. In 1923 a deaconess's salary would have been $65/month excluding board: JMC Minutes, April 1923. Veronica Strong-Boag gives average annual wages of various female occupations in "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), pp. 147, 149. On average, employed women's annual wages were one-half of men's in Halifax in 1920.

the mother of eight.[19]

The women who used the nursery and employment service came from the surrounding area, a mixed business, industrial, and residential neighbourhood which included clothing, candy, cigar, boot and shoe, and paper box factories, a bakery, a brewery, and the city market.[20] Women found some factory work there, but domestic and personal service remained by far the largest category of female work in the city throughout the period under consideration. Although domestic servce was a common occupation, it was unpopular especially when living-in was required. Since at least the 1880s, single women in Canada had been refusing service whenever other work was available. Discrimination and domestic responsibilities, however, confined married women primarily to domestic work, in the form of charwork (day work) up to the Second World War. In Halifax, the proportion of women employed in domestic and personal service remained higher than the national averages but was declining more rapidly. Between 1911 and 1941 this category dropped from 47 to 37 per cent of the female workforce in the city (compared to 37 and 34 per cent nationally). Halifax offered increasing numbers of teaching, nursing, sales, and clerical positions for single women during these years, and the relatively few married women in the paid labour force found plentiful if ill-paid domestic jobs in the city's middle- and upper-class homes. Nationally, wages ranged from an average of $7.75 per week employed in 1931 to $8.45 in 1941. Many women, of course, worked neither six days per week nor throughout the year.[21] Ellen Blackwood, a

19 Interviews with Mary Carr[pseud.], 15 February 1982 and 15 March 1982, pp. 17, 24-34, 42-44. This hierarchy of workers was typical of day nurseries at the time: see Patricia Vandebelt Schulz, "Day Care in Canada: 1850-1962", in Kathleen Gallagher Ross, ed., *Good Day Care: Fighting for It, Getting It, Keeping It*, (Toronto, 1978), p. 142. Domestic service wages in Ontario in 1916 were $18-20/month plus room and board: Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, "Women during the Great War", in Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, and Bonnie Shepard, eds., *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto, 1974), p. 278.

20 Betty Smith [pseud.], who attended the nursery around 1918 to 1920 while her mother did day work, told of friends in the 1930s working at Clayton's (clothing), Moir's (candy), and Ben's (bakery): Interview with Smith, 15 June 1983, pp. 18-19. See also McCann, "Staples and the New Industrialism", pp. 73, 77. All but two of the mothers who used the nursery in the early 1920s were married, according to Mary Carr. She recalled two single mothers who worked at Moir's and left their babies at the nursery: Carr Interview, 15 February 1982. After 1945 some unmarried and divorced mothers were applying to the nursery, but no information exists on the earlier period.

21 Charworkers contained by far the highest proportion of women workers aged 35 and over (hence, probably married) of any category of female work in the early 20th century. The number of recorded female charworkers in Halifax grew from 38 in 1911 to 109 in 1921 and 137 in 1931, dropping to 73 in 1941. Some women may have been included under the predominantly single "domestic servant" category. See the following volumes from the *Census of Canada*: 1911, Vol. VI, Table VI, pp. 326-67; 1921, Vol. IV, p. xi, and Table 5, pp. 396-97; 1931, Vol. VII, Table 43, p. 277; 1941, Vol. VII, Table 9, pp. 245-55. Other information on women's work and the decline of domestic service appears in Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920", in Acton *et al.*, eds, *Women at Work*, pp. 74, 76, 86-90, Helen Lenskyj, "A 'Servant Problem' or a

Jost Mission domestic worker who placed her children in the nursery, reported earning $2 to $2.25 per day in 1937, plus carfare and frequent donations of used clothing.[22]

Many of the charworkers were widowed, deserted, or married to unemployed men. Susan Smith, for example, had been left with three children in 1916 when her husband, an Army man, deserted her. Ellen Blackwood, born in a Nova Scotia outport, immigrated to Halifax in 1929 when she was single and pregnant. The man she lived with and later married was unemployed for much of the 1930s, but for some time she earned good money serving noon and evening meals to sailors and dockworkers in her modest downtown dwelling. When her third child followed 11 months after the second in 1934, she could no longer manage the cooking. Whether earning wages or not, her husband did not assist her in the business, and in desperation she turned to the Jost Mission to get day work. Lack of education was one of this long-suffering woman's greatest regrets because, as she recalled: "I couldn't choose anything. There was only the one thing left for me, and that was the hard work, like cleaning".[23]

The Woman's Committee, the matrons and teachers, and the working-class women and children of the neighbourhood together shaped the life of the Jost Mission. The churchwomen and the professional workers held obvious authority in planning Mission programmes. Yet the needs and realities of working-class lives limited and directed what the managers did. The Mission managers' commitment to Christian sisterhood, the charworkers' need for employment, and the children's demand for care, centred the Mission's work increasingly on the needs of wage-earning mothers.

Despite a reputation for social and political conservatism, Halifax participated in the currents of reform and radicalism which affected the nation as a whole. The Methodist Conference of Nova Scotia accepted the collectivist ideas of the social gospel and participated in the Social Service Council which was formed in 1909. The Halifax Board of Trade supported an "uplift" campaign in 1911 in which reforms like public housing and child welfare were discussed. Two socialist parties flourished briefly in the city in the pre-war years. Female activists supported suffrage and took new public roles in volunteer work during the

'Servant-Mistress Problem'?: Domestic Service in Canada, 1890-1930", *Atlantis*, 7 (Fall 1981), pp. 3-11, David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana, 1981), pp. 44-94, 144-5, Wayne Roberts, *Honest Womanhood: Feminism, Femininity and Class Consciousness Among Toronto Working Women, 1893-1914* (Toronto, 1976), p. 14, Peter D. Lambly, "Toward A Living Wage: The Minimum-Wage Campaign for Women in Nova Scotia, 1920-1935", Honours Essay, Dalhousie University, 1977, pp. 26-7, 96, Ramkhalawansingh, "Women During the Great War", pp. 263, 269, 280, 289-94, Strong-Boag, "Girl of the New Day", pp. 132, 138-9. Married women constituted the following proportions of the female work force: 1921, 7.2 per cent; 1931, 10 per cent; 1941, 12.7 per cent.

22 Interview with Ellen Blackwood [pseud.], 21, 22 November 1982, p. 56.

23 Smith Interview, 25 May 1983, pp. 2-3; *Presbyterian Witness*, 7 July 1917, p. 5; Blackwood Interview, pp. 38-40, 45-48, 52-56, 6.

First World War.[24] The Halifax Welfare Bureau, begun in 1916 to promote cooperation among social welfare agencies, churches, and institutions, exemplified the change "from the old idea of charity to philanthropy . . . to the thing we call 'social justice'".[25] The work of the Jost Mission was influenced by some of these ideas but remained essentially within the tradition of 19-century women's Christian charity.

The outlook of the Woman's Committee approximated what historians have variously called social, domestic, or maternal feminist.[26] Unlike women who sought equality for women as a natural right, maternal feminists attempted to extend the boundaries of women's public roles on the basis of their differences from men. They often did so through campaigns for pure milk, playgrounds,

24 E.R. Forbes, "In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900-1967", *Acadiensis*, VIII, 1 (Autumn 1978), pp. 3-21; "Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia", *Acadiensis*, I, 1 (Autumn 1971), pp. 14, 24, and "Edith Archibald and the Feminist Movement in Halifax, Nova Scotia", unpublished manuscript 1983; David Sutherland, "Halifax, 1815-1914", p. 10, and "The Halifax Board of Trade", p. 214; David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes, 1899-1916", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), p. 94.

25 Halifax Welfare Bureau, *Third Annual Report*, 1919, pp. 7, 10.

26 William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave* (Chicago, 1969), pp. x, 49-54; Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America", in Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds., *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a Social History of American Women* (New York, 1979), pp. 236, 239. See Kealey, "Introduction", *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, for a useful discussion of all three terms, p. 7. For examples, see O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave*, pp. 77-106, Suzann Buckley, "Ladies or Midwives? Efforts to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality", in *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, pp. 131-50, and Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism", *ibid.*, p. 155. The advantage of the maternal feminist perspective was that, at its best, it took seriously the social importance of domestic labour and childrearing and the needs of women and children whose subordination within an already subordinate class made their vulnerability extreme. The limits of this view were in its failure to confront the roots of female dependency in women's exclusive responsibility for children and inequality in the paid labour force as well as in its often class-bound vision of reform. Very few women during this period, even socialists, seemed able to make a critique of women's reproductive roles, perhaps because most women's lives were materially rooted in motherhood and so few alternatives were available. Linda Gordon has argued that in the late 19th and early 20th century women's sense of greatest dignity stemmed from their role as mothers, and their consciousness reflected the importance of the work of mothers. Certainly the WCTU's success in wooing "conservative" women to suffrage suggests how many women saw their domestic roles as the basis for their claims to wider social power. See Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York, 1976), p. 133, and Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920", *American Historical Review*, 89 (1984), pp. 634-5, 637-8. See also Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914", *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 77-100. Women who did point to family roles as a source of female inequality included American feminists Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Crystal Eastman and Canadian Flora MacDonald Denison. Margaret Conrad comments helpfully on these issues in "The Re-Birth of Canada's Past: A Decade of Women's History", *Acadiensis*, XII, 2 (Spring 1983), pp. 147-50.

and better housing, intended to assist working-class mothers and children, and through reforms such as temperance, which were attacks on a male culture seen as harmful to women.[27] They did not challenge women's identity as mothers, or women's primary responsibility for domestic labour and child care, but they often addressed the conditions of women's work in the home and attempted to increase respect for what women did. The women of the Jost Mission Committee were not creating new roles for women. Most were married; few were employed; they appear to have done no political lobbying (though they supported temperance); and the church had been a sphere of public work for women for decades. They shared the social mothering roles of maternal feminists, however, and like them also, sought to ameliorate the conditions of poor women and children. Committee members' sympathy for the charworkers seems to have been rooted in the churchwomen's own material situation as married women and mothers, and the programmes they offered were intended to help women carry out their family responsibilities. Girls' classes and clubs, the nursery, the employment bureau, and the mothers' meetings affirmed the value of women's unpaid domestic work at the same time that they helped some mothers obtain paid domestic jobs. The Mission workers did not address the conditions of the paid work itself.

The first deaconesses, assisted by "lady workers from the churches", carried on evangelical work. Missionary calls to people's homes initially served as advertising for Bible classes, worship services, and other programmes. Deaconess Bertha Shier in 1904 saw conversion as an antidote to pauperism. Although affirmation of the Christian life remained central to all the Mission's work, the emphasis on revivals and conversion had ended by 1918. Training receptive young children became the dominant form of religious outreach. Mission workers hoped families who received material aid could then "send their children regularly and respectably clad to Sunday School".[28]

Domestic education for young girls became an early emphasis in the Mission's classes and clubs and reflected the influence of the movement for domestic science. Courses in domestic science were beginning in schools and colleges as an effort to upgrade the status of women's domestic labour by giving its skills the legitimacy of science. While this movement was distinct from proposals for schools for domestic servants, some potential employers may have hoped that the Mission's kitchen garden classes would produce better servants. Reported one deaconess: "How to lay a table, how to serve food, and how to clear away and wash dishes" were skills taught little girls, who at the annual Nova Scotia Exhibition in 1905 demonstrated their agility before an admiring audience, many of whom were said to be "victims of slovenly and careless servants". No further references to servants appeared, however, and after the early 1920s no

27 On temperance, see JMC Minutes, January 1931.

28 *Christian Guardian*, 27 January 1904, 9 July 1913. Deaconess *Annual Reports* list the number of calls made, and the *JMAR* make clear the shift in emphasis of the programmes by 1918.

instruction in cooking or cleaning took place.

In the early years deaconesses took groups of girls for a week each to a cottage at the shore in the summer. They spent most of their time playing and swimming but also practised housekeeping skills. Such activities expressed a vision that good health and domestic skills benefited the working-class family. A good homemaker would keep the family together and set standards for home life. The deaconess wrote in 1905 that "the environments of these children are such that the lessons cannot be practised at home in their entirety, but the principles . . . will influence even the poorest surroundings".[29] Clubs for young girls, which began in 1918, offered time for sewing, knitting, reading, and socializing. Sewing and knitting not only prepared girls to fulfill future maternal responsibilities but also allowed them to make for themselves stylish clothes too expensive for them to buy ready-made. In the 1930s girls in the club made several garments for themselves each winter. This domestic orientation was common to the culture and female education as a whole.[30]

Between 1920 and 1925 the Mission offered a club for workers at the Moir's candy factory, one block from the Mission. It, too, illustrated the domestic orientation of the Mission. The club began as a series of Friday noon meetings with speakers and musical soloists, and expanded to include a class on home nursing one evening per week. Later the club sponsored noon-time hymn-sings, religious meetings, sleigh rides, and festive suppers for up to 80 young women. YWCA and Salvation Army workers also cooperated in these activities with club director Elda Caldwell. The club ended in 1925 when the factory owner refused for unknown reasons to allow the programme to continue. The Moir's club combined support for Protestant religious culture, recreation, and instruction in skills for wives and mothers. The Mission workers gave no evidence of supporting unionization or demands for better wages.[31] The owner's opposition

29 *Christian Guardian*, 1 November 1905; Deaconess *Annual Report*, 1906-07, p. 94; Robert M. Stamp, "Teaching Girls their 'God Given Place in Life' ", *Atlantis*, 2 (Spring 1977), pp. 18-34; John G. Reid, "The Education of Women at Mount Allison, 1854-1914", *Acadiensis*, XII, 2 (Spring 1983), p. 30. John Thomas did not find that training servants was a major motivation of deaconess work, and David Katzman notes that any domestic science programme suspected as training for servants drove students away: *Seven Days A Week*, pp. 134-5, 244, 255. Strong-Boag says the 1919 Technical Education Act promoted "domestic service for poorer students" and "domestic careers for all": "Girl of the New Day", p. 135.

30 Stamp, "Teaching Girls", pp. 25, 31-3; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, 1978), p. 171; *Christian Guardian*, 1 November 1905, *JMAR* 1918, p. 7; *ibid.*, 1938, p. 5. Ages of the girls in clubs are never stated but seem likely to have been early adolescent. I am indebted to Janet Guildford for sharing chapter 3 of her M.A. thesis, "Technical Education in Nova Scotia, 1880-1930", Dalhousie University, 1984, and for the idea about the importance of fashion as a factor in the popularity of sewing.

31 JMC Minutes, December 1920 to September 1925. There are no hints as to Moir's reasons, but in January 1925 the work was reported to be "at a standstill".

may suggest, however, that even social ties among the workers could be threatening.

The nursery, a service to both wage-earning mothers and their children, began in 1910 at the instigation of the Golden Rule Society of Fort Massey Presbyterian Church, a group led by May Sexton. Sexton had graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was married to F.H. Sexton, president of the new provincial technical college. A member of the Local Council of Women, May Sexton advocated technical education for women to improve their marginal position in the labour force. The Council supported her but was rebuffed by the provincial legislature when the women lobbied for an industrial school for women. Few politicians were ready to support proposals which assumed that women were serious or permanent paid workers. However, the nursery provided a more acceptable kind of assistance to female wage-earners who were mothers. A report in the *Wesleyan* asserted: "So many babies are left at home with improper food and care. We know from what mothers have told us . . . how worried they are through the day. . .".[32] When the Woman's Committee of the Jost Mission was formed in 1915, Sexton served on it briefly.

The Mission nursery provided extensive and flexible childcare. It was open to children from the age of three months and there was a charge of 10 cents per day or "by arrangement". By 1913 the Mission was also providing lunches and after-school care for older children. The annual total of childcare-days rose from about 2,000 in 1915 to about 9,000 in 1925. In 1912-13 the deaconess and her assistant cared for 22 children per day. The building was renovated and expanded in 1917 to make space for more children. In 1923 the number arriving daily sometimes reached 60, and the matron and Committee set a limit of 40 because the two nursery maids could manage no more. The Committee hoped for more space and workers to accommodate all who needed the service, but the nursery continued to take 30 to 40 per day, plus nearly as many school children, until the late 1930s. Many children paid reduced or no fees for the nursery. The service was sometimes closed for one or two weeks due to epidemics of measles and other diseases, but it usually remained open throughout the year. The numbers of children fluctuated regularly according to the cycle of domestic work; September through December and April through June (spring cleaning) were the busiest times.[33]

32 Forbes, "Edith Archibald", pp. 13-15; *The Wesleyan* (Halifax), 9 March 1910. Betty Smith reported just such an incident. Her mother left Smith's brother with a neighbour during the workday and one day returned to find him unattended: Smith Interview, 15 June 1983, p. 4.

33 *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913, p. 15, and 8 March 1916, p. 17. In 1931 the Committee discussed plans for extension of the space and for opening a section for sick and convalescent children of employed mothers, and Mrs. White asked for a third nursery maid. The same year a major fund drive paid for expensive renovations of the nursery quarters. The Convalescent Room with 24-hour care was opened in 1938. The operation of the Jost Mission nursery was similar to that described by Schulz in "Day Care in Canada". Records showed, however, that the Jost Mission nursery opened in 1910, not during the First World War, as Schulz states. Calculations made

Figure Two: Matron Lillian A. White with children of the Jost Mission
(Source: Frances Lillian White Preston)

The children's daily routine reflected the goals of the Mission — training in manners, familiarity with Protestant ritual, cleanliness, and proper food, rest, and play. In 1916 the deaconess began receiving babies at 8:15 a.m. All the children under three were bathed and dressed in clothes belonging to the Mission. Older children played in a yard outside with a sandbox when the weather was good. Dinner (lunch) included soup and pudding, bread and molasses, milk and water or cocoa. Naps followed. For the three- to five-year-olds an hour or two of kindergarten filled part of the afternoon. Mary Carr recalled that the Mission was very clean and well-stocked with food and baby clothes. The workers were not allowed to strike the children. However, staff to child ratios between 1:10 and 1:20 meant they could rarely lavish individual attention on the children. A custodial function predominated outside of the kindergarten. The babies were restricted to high chairs while they were awake.[34]

The Mission provided special events such as summer picnics in the country and the Public Gardens as well as camping (in the 1910s and again in the 1930s). Wealthy patrons offered automobile rides in the warm season. Christmas parties with a tree and a Santa to distribute gifts for about 150 children took place regularly. Mrs. White so missed her "graduates" that in 1935 a second Christmas party was started for school-age children who had come to the nursery as babies. From 70 to 100 children also partook of a chicken or turkey dinner every Christmas. The special events particularly expressed the churchwomen's tender feelings for the children, whom they often referred to as "little ones" or "kiddies".

The Committee and the Mission workers hoped to instill Christian values and orderly behaviour in the children. The deaconess noted in 1913 that the children "come to us sometimes so uncontrolled, so unaccustomed to regular habits of living. But after being here a little while they are quite glad to stay". Religion and mental development were combined in the kindergarten. There she was teaching the children "to pray to Jesus, to sing His praise, and to have all their life brightened because every faculty is stimulated by use". The Woman's Committee may have had views closer to the communal orientation of the social

from Mission reports of children's fees collected suggest that many children did not pay full rates. In 1915, for example, for every two children who paid 10 cents a day, one came for free. It is unclear when black children were first admitted. The records do not mention race until 1944 when the *Annual Report* notes "colored and white" women at the Christmas dinner. Betty Smith recalled black children in the early 1920s, but Mary Carr did not. Ed Taylor [pseud.], Blackwood's stepson, said there were black children attending in the late 1930s: Taylor Interview, 3 May 1982, p. 8.

34 *Christian Guardian*, 8 March, 23 August 1916; Mary Carr Interview, 15 February 1982. An account in 1916 reported that 30 children were enrolled in the kindergarten not only from the nursery but also from the neighbourhood. Although the kindergarten was important, when resources became scarce in the late 1920s, a paid kindergarten worker was dropped. Over the Depression and Second World War years volunteers seem to have been used, but the records do not make this clear. The nursery clearly had priority.

gospel: They referred to their efforts in 1918 as "settlement or community work". The formally religious content of nursery routine seems to have declined after 1920 when deaconesses were no longer employed as matrons. Raising "the standard of Canadian citizenship" was a goal in 1925. Despite the secular phraseology, as late as 1930 the Committee and matron were still concerned about getting children to Sunday School. Churchgoing and citizenship were closely related.[35]

Increasingly, nursery workers stressed physical well-being, through medical care, food, rest, and fresh air, as the basis of spiritual welfare, an emphasis of the social gospel in ideas about child welfare.[36] The nursery employed a trained nurse between 1915 and 1923 and subsequently co-operated with nurses at the city's Massachusetts Health Centre, established with relief funds from Massachusetts after the Explosion in 1917. The Centre at one point informed the Mission that the children needed more milk, and the Committee set up a Milk Fund. In addition, the nursery and the mothers' programmes both provided instruction on diet and "habits of health and hygiene" such as toothbrushing. The summer picnics and drives combined recreation and exposure to the healthful country air.

The nursery served as an arena for missionary effort. The neediness of the children provided well-to-do Christians with "opportunities for service" as they sought to fulfill their sense of Christian obligation.[37] Picnics at the shore, lavish holiday celebrations, and the programmes for health, education, and moral training were all attempts to assert a universal Protestant community where good will extended beyond class divisions. Scientific standards of hygiene and education reflected the influence of the social gospel and modern social welfare.

In caring for the children, the nursery also served the needs of the mothers who were resposible for them. The nursery, the employment bureau, and the

35 *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913. In 1916 most of the children were Roman Catholic. The matron reported to the Committee in 1925, though, that only three families were Catholic. Mary Carr was Catholic. The importance of the religious training lies more in the assumption that Protestant culture is *the* public culture than in definite aims to convert Catholics. My thanks to Susan P. Benson for discussion on this point. The deaconesses may have tried to convert Catholics during the 1910s, but for the early 1920s Carr recalled only grace at meals and Smith remembered no hymns, only children's games and songs: Carr Interview, 15 March 1982, p. 35; Smith Interview, 25 May 1983, p. 14. A surviving nursery schedule for 1945 suggests grace before meals was the only religious ritual. Apart from rituals, however, Christian values surely suffused teaching. Nationalism and Christian commitment had been closly linked in the vision of the Methodist church leaders during the First World War: J.M. Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I", *Canadian Historical Review*, XLIX, 3 (September 1968), pp. 213-33.

36 The Social Service Council of Canada, a social gospel organization to which the Methodist Church belonged, affirmed in 1913 the "right of children to birth, happiness, and mental and moral education" as well as freedom from exploitation in child labour: Methodist Board of Evangelism and Social Service, *Annual Report*, 1912-13, p. 11. See also Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto, 1971), p. 66.

37 *JMAR*, 1924, p. 4; *ibid.*, 1915, pp. 5, 6.

mothers' meetings formed the heart of the Jost Mission's programme for adult women. Committee women offered charity to both wage-earning and non-waging-earning mothers, but they believed it was best for mothers to stay at home with their children. As late as 1927 the Committee asserted: "Our problem, is not to fill the Nursery with children, but to aid and teach the Mother, so she may be able to care for her own children at home".[38] They hoped women's need for assistance would be temporary. By 1940, however, the emphasis of Mission work had shifted toward the wage workers, whose need to earn cash grew even more urgent during the depressed 1920s and 1930s. Although state provision for social welfare grew during the 1930s and mothers' allowances began in Nova Scotia in 1930, the levels of support were very low and qualifying was difficult. The Mission reported constantly increasing numbers of women seeking wage work during the 1930s.[39]

The employment bureau may have begun as early as 1906; it was definitely operating by 1913. Through the 1910s the number of women placed grew steadily. Days of work per year jumped from 218 in 1912-13 to 2,633 for 1915. The bureau was distributing charworkers for more than 6,000 days of work by 1925. The actual number of women being employed is unclear, but in 1940, a busy year, 75 women were on the active file.[40] The bureau operated to bring together potential employers and the women who were judged in greatest need. Employers phoned the Mission the night before they wanted workers. Each morning the women who wanted work gathered at the Mission, left the children, received assignments, and went out to work between 8:00 and 9:00. Often employers asked for particular individuals, and regular weekly arrangements were set up. The women worked until about 4:30 or 5:00, usually returning by 5:30 to pick up the children.[41]

38 *Ibid.*, 1927, p. 5. Early nurseries in 19th-century Montreal also had placement services: Cross, "Neglected Majority", p. 209.

39 Strong-Boag, " 'Wages for Housework': Mothers' Allowances and the Beginnings of Social Security in Canada", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14(Spring 1979), p. 27; James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXII (1981), p. 169. Blackwood received some relief during the 1930s but noted that it was never enough: Blackwood Interview, p. 61.

40 *Deaconess Annual Report*, 1906-07, p. 93; *Deaconess Annual Report*, 1913-14; *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913. Demand for charworkers from the Mission appeared to meet or exceed the supply of workers available throughout most of the period except in 1919 and 1920: *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913. *JMAR*, 1919, 1929, 1940, 1944, and JMC Minutes, November 1920 and May, December 1926.

41 *Christian Guardian*, 23 August 1916; Carr Interviews, 15 February 1982, and 15 March 1982, pp. 30-1; Blackwood Interview, pp. 54-6. The relative impersonality of the job placement service tempted two brothels on Morris St. to request day workers in the 1930s. The Mission matron was suspicious and asked the charworker, Ellen Blackwood, to leave if it were a "bad place". Blackwood stayed all day each time because she needed the money but reported what she saw to the matron: Blackwood Interview, pp. 66-8. This occurred again in 1941: Deaconess Edna Pearson's monthly report, March 1941, Jost Mission Records.

Toward the working-class mothers the Mission Committee and staff showed both sympathy as women and the judgmental eye of social superiors. Because women's right to work in their own homes when mothering children was assumed, men who deserted, neglected, or abused their wives were considered villains. The deaconess in 1913 echoed the sisterly concern of the female temperance movement: "In almost every home the demon of drink has entered, and the father (and sometimes the mother) is his slave. To those homes where the wife has been forced to struggle for actual food for herself and her little ones the mission has been of very real help".[42] In stressing that most of the mothers were sole breadwinners, the churchwomen conveyed their respect for women trying to survive without male support. Married women's vulnerability in their dependence on men was familiar to Committee women as well. In the context of the Protestant emphasis on self-sufficiency, mothers, usually expected to be financially dependent, appeared especially worthy when they were struggling to support themselves.[43]

Yet the privileged position of the givers of aid allowed them to impose their values on the recipients. The expectation that mothers should be at home meant that only the most desperate circumstances warranted giving them outside employment, and the deaconess or matron called at women's homes to determine who was neediest and distributed jobs to those she judged most deserving. The goal reported by deaconess Leone Winter in 1916 — "to encourage habits of thrift among parents" — suggests the basis for judging the worthy. Pure charity remained suspect. Stated the Committee in 1929: the employment bureau was to help the women "help themselves".[44]

The Committee's benevolence was limited, too, because they were serving the needs of middle- and upper-class Haligonians who wanted domestic workers. The rapid increase in placements of women during the 1910s showed the considerable demand. Although the Woman's Committee seriously considered eliminating the employment bureau in 1930, possibly because the service was duplicated elsewhere, they did not do so. The Mission workers also imposed standards of work-discipline. The deaconess in 1916, for example, tried to get the women to work by 9 a.m.: "the lesson we must oft repeat is the necessity of being honest with their employers' time and being punctual". Mrs. White complained to the Committee in 1925 about "her problems in placing women who were not capable of giving a good day's work, yet who came day after day and thought they were unfairly treated". Most importantly, the Mission does not appear to have set wages. The Mission staff and benefactors supported women by providing childcare, clothing, and emergency relief and medical care. Address-

42 *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913. See also Mitchinson, "The WCTU", p. 155.

43 *JMAR*, 1925, 1930, 1932, 1938. The *Annual Report*, 1941, for the first time mentions women working to *supplement* family income as well as sole breadwinners.

44 *Christian Guardian*, 8 March 1916; *JMAR*, 1929, pp. 4-5. See JMC Minutes, November 1920 and *JMAR*, 1932, on distributing work to the neediest.

ing charworkers' need for better wages, however, would have challenged both women's prevailing identity as non-wage-earners and the conception that domestic labour itself stood essentially apart from the world of the market.[45]

Mothers' meetings were the most prominent of the Mission's social programmes and were initially directed toward mothers at home. In the 1910s the meetings included religious talks and sewing lessons. Scripture reading and prayer, readings, music, and a minister's address on motherhood were all mentioned in Mission reports. On Wednesdays, the deaconess and one of the Committee ladies taught sewing with materials donated or provided at cost by the Mission. The meetings, attended in 1921 by an average of 22 women, ended with a "bountiful tea" provided by the Committee members on an alternating basis. Annual summer picnics, one for participants in the mothers' meetings and one for the employment bureau women, supplemented the winter gatherings. In 1924 and 1925 dieticians and nurses from the Health Centre gave "practical talks" and demonstrations on topics such as stew-making. The advice on food and the physical care of children disseminated modern notions of child care (which middle-class women would have read in books and magazines) and complemented the medical supervision of the nursery tots. In November 1924 newspaperwoman E.M. Murray, a participant in the suffrage campaign and a member of WCTU, spoke to the group. A woman missionary back from India spoke in 1929 and "showed to our mothers some of whose lives are hard and uninteresting that there are others in far parts of the world whose lot in life has even less of happiness than theirs".[46] These meetings reflected Protestant values and maternal feminist ideas. Most presentations were intended to upgrade and rationalize mothers' work in the home.

In 1928 the Committee asserted the importance of the employed mothers by beginning a "Working Mothers' Club" in which 20 to 25 women met on Mon-

45 *Christian Guardian*, 8 March 1916; JMC Minutes, October 1925. In the *Annual Report*, 1919, p. 6 the Committee noted an "improvement in the class of workers now being sent out". The Woman's Committee affiliated in 1922 with the Local Council of Women, which had been quite vocal on the "servant problem" in the 1910s and later opposed the minimum wage for female factory workers because it might reduce the supply of domestics: Lambly, "Toward a Living Wage", pp. 60-65. The Committee never recorded any discussion of wages or any Council issue except temperance, but some of them (or prominent supporters) may have agreed with the Council's position. Blackwood did not know if the Mission set wages. She knew only that she took what employers gave: Blackwood Interview, p. 58. The Mission charged employers 50 cents per year for use of the service in 1915 but seems to have stopped charging by 1931 after several years of wrangling with recalcitrant employers who refused to pay the fee despite its charitable purpose. This exemplifies how employers could limit the benevolent aims of the Mission volunteers. One 19th-century example of women's charity, the Providence Employment Society, did set wages: Benson, "Business Heads", p. 303. My thanks to John Thomas for discussion on this point.

46 *Christian Guardian*, 9 July 1913, 8 March 1916; JMC Minutes, November 1924; *JMAR*, 1929, pp. 4-5; Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto, 1975 [1950]), p. 157.

day nights. The distinction between employed and home-bound mothers disappeared at this point, for this was then the only mothers' club, and a single annual mothers' picnic was held for all "Jost Mission mothers". Soloists and readers, games, and refreshments furnished by the various churches, attracted local women. Pastors of the various United Churches and the ladies of the Committee graced the club with their presence, and all joined in singing and devotions. The ladies must have worn themselves out in the winter of 1928-29, for they changed from weekly to monthly meetings the following year. Institution of a special Christmas dinner for the nursery mothers in 1930 was further evidence of the growing attention paid to this group.

The meetings for mothers, like the events for children, demonstrated Christian charity and a vision of community that crossed class lines. The Committee believed that the mothers' meetings, for instance, were for many of the mothers the "only entertainment or social gathering ever attended" and the picnics "to many the only holiday of the year". These activities provided further opportunities for Christian service and for positive contact between social classes, as when a businessman took time to drive the mothers out along the shore in his automobile. The social events were among the more visible of the Mission's good deeds: "We would not have the public think that we regard these mothers as machines and so on a wonderful summer's day we took forty-five of them and one hundred of the children to Dartmouth".[47] Despite the continued assumption that mothers ought to be at home, the change of emphasis after 1928 from all mothers to "working mothers" suggests a recognition of many women's ongoing need for paid work.

The working-class women and children at whom the Mission programmes were aimed made good use of the services but participated in limited ways in the Protestant community envisioned by Mission workers. The nursery served a basic need well. Blackwood commented that the nursery was a "godsend" for her when she used it in 1937 and 1938: "what would I have done with those children only for the Mission and Mrs. White. She was such a wonderful person, you know. The children couldn't help but like her. . . she was the mother type". The kindergarten gave the oldest child a bit of education — "her ABCs and her one, two, threes" — and the clothes, shoes, and overcoats were of considerable help. Blackwood's children enjoyed the Mission: "You know, you'd go in there with them in the morning, and it was the same as if they were going home, you know, they were right eager to get there". Her stepson, Ed Taylor, one of the school children who received lunch and spent half-days at the Mission, recalled the regular rests, good food, and the swings, sandbox, and supervised play in the yard. The food, cleanliness, and sense that no child was neglected impressed him: "I can't think of anything bad that happened at that Jost Mission. There was always a friendly . . . a nice feeling. Like today, even, when I get talking about it, I still have a nice feeling". (This was in contrast to his feelings about St.

47 *JMAR*, 1923, p. 5; *ibid.*, 1929, pp. 4-5.

Paul's Anglican Church, for example, where he often got hot breakfasts but where he resented being made to sit in the balcony for Sunday services. There he felt "outside" because of his shabby appearance.) Enjoyment of the food at the Mission was especially vivid in Taylor's memory of the late 1930s when meals at home were meagre. Betty Smith, a nursery child from about 1918 to 1920, had been impressed with the food as well as the games and songs led by the kindergarten teacher.[48] The nursery exemplified the sort of childcare available in Canada at that time — mostly custodial but increasingly concerned with education and moral training and influenced in the 1920s by new standards of medical care, food, rest, and exercise. The Mission nursery seems to have provided reliable care of a good quality for the times, a service essential to employed mothers.

Working-class mothers who used the nursery and employment service also experienced middle-class intrusion in their lives. The domestics who were complaining of ill treatment in 1925 must have resisted employers' standards of "a good day's work". Employers routinely asked about Blackwood's family circumstances. Whether friendly or not, the questions presumed a right to personal information that would not have been completely reciprocal. On the other hand, some women appreciated the interest shown them. Ellen Blackwood called matron Lillian White "very understanding", and Betty Smith reported that while the mothers waited for children to be dressed on winter afternoons, "the matron always had something nice to say to the women and asked them . . . how they were getting along".[49]

Smith and Blackwood frankly recognized their class status, wished for better, and judged employers and givers of charity alike according to moral standards based on working-class needs. Both women numbered themselves among "the poor", and both expressed a sense of entitlement to charity. They resented it if churches or charitable institutions charged anything, however nominal, for used clothing. Employers were appreciated if they paid on time, including extra for longer hours and carfare, and showed generosity and basic respect for the worker. Smith, who became a domestic worker herself in the 1930s, especially disliked wearing a uniform or eating in the kitchen. Good treatment, however, could not compensate for the hard work, low wages, and degraded status of domestic work as an occupation. Both women would have liked to work in sales. Blackwood worked on the cleaning staff of Simpson's department store in the 1940s and preferred the sociability and equality among the workers there to what she found in private homes.[50]

48 Blackwood Interview, pp. 62, 63; Taylor Interview, 3 May 1982, pp. 7-8, 11-12, 27-8. Betty Smith spoke very positively of the food and of matron Bryon, who was "strict but nice". Smith Interview, 25 May 1983, pp. 13, 14, 19, 15 June 1983, pp. 9-10, 43.

49 Strong-Boag, "Wages for Housework", p. 28; Blackwood Interview, pp. 60, 109-10; Smith Interview, 15 June 1983, p. 10.

50 Blackwood Interview, pp. 19-22, 58, 60-61, 93, 95, 96, 125-7; Smith Interview, 25 May 1983, pp.

Women and girls attended the social clubs and sewing classes in substantial numbers and with enthusiasm. In 1921 an average attendance of 20 was reported for the girls' club. The Moir's workers came in large numbers, though they did not meet in the summers, when they preferred to eat lunch outside. The girls of the late 1930s Sewing and Reading Club were reported to "love Mrs. Rathkins", the volunteer leader. The neighbourhood women seem to have expected and genuinely enjoyed the mothers' meetings, especially the sewing classes and picnics. Attendance was high. The Committee reported that social events were "greatly enjoyed"; the summer outings rendered the mothers "deeply grateful for all that had been done for their comfort and pleasure". The Committee hoped for and tended to perceive a positive response, but the attendance figures and persistence of the clubs suggest that the programmes were successful. The poverty and domestic responsibilities of working-class women, especially married women, limited their leisure severely, and probably made the Jost Mission events attractive. A mothers' meeting offered women a chance to sit quietly, sing, talk with other women, and partake of "a substantial lunch" [small late-evening meal].[51]

It is not surprising that sewing classes were well attended, since sewing was a much-desired skill among Nova Scotia women. Evening classes in dressmaking were also well-subscribed during this period. Women in a quilting class in 1920 and 1921 asserted themselves by asking to sew garments as well as quilts; clothes may have been more useful. (By then quilting was less economically necessary since factory-made blankets were cheaply available.) When the class ended, the women presented the deaconess with two plants as a token of their appreciation. Women's economic contribution to the household in unwaged labour was still substantial at this time, and sewing exemplified this. Ellen Blackwood regretted having had little time to attend the classes: "it would have been helpful if you had of been able to 'tend it up, you know, because there was lots of things you could learn; lots of things that you could make over, you know, if you could attend the classes. It would have been wonderful".[52]

Finally, the religious appeal of the Mission's programmes attracted some

9-10, 23-25; 15 June 1983, pp. 7, 10, 12, 18, 20-23, 25, 35, 42. Smith thinks domestic workers need to be unionized: 15 June 1983, p. 19.

51 *JMAR*, 1921, pp. 5-6; *ibid.*, 1923, p. 5; *ibid.*, 1924, p. 6; *ibid.*, 1938, p. 5; *ibid.*, 1940, p. 6; JMC Minutes, May and June 1922, February and April 1923. Kathy Peiss explains that working-class culture and leisure as treated by recent historians have largely meant a public male culture associated with extrafamilial institutions such as taverns, lodges, and unions, in which women were absent or marginal because of sex segregation and women's family responsibilities: "Working Class Gender Relationships and Leisure in the United States, 1890-1920", paper presented at the Sixth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Smith College, 2 June 1984, pp. 1-8.

52 Blackwood Interview, p. 129; Patricia Mainardi, *Quilts: The Great American Art* (San Pedro, Calif., 1978), pp. 9, 12; Guildford, "Technical Education in Nova Scotia", chapter 3; M. Patricia Connelly and Martha MacDonald, "Women's Work: Domestic and Wage Labour in a Nova Scotia Community", *Studies in Political Economy*, 10 (Winter 1983), p. 48.

women, but a distinct social distance remained between them and the middle-class churchwomen. Religious rituals such as praying and singing hymns included Protestant women in a religious community that was of value to them. Blackwood had gone to the Baptist church in her home town and would have liked to go to church more often in Halifax had her family duties not been so heavy. The minister of the Brunswick Street United Church, near the Mission, came to her home and invited her to church. "God was a poor man", he said, "Don't stay away from church because you're poor". She enjoyed church services as a time to be off her feet and to think about her life. She concluded that "what I was doing was all wrong by blaming somebody else for my troubles. . . . I was blaming the rich for taking . . . our opportunity away from us, which was all wrong. We didn't have an opportunity to take away. We had to work for our opportunity". She never spoke to anyone at the services except one of the church workers. Blackwood certainly remained a fighter despite her reflections: she summoned the courage in 1942 to divorce her alcoholic and abusive husband. Later she worked two jobs to buy a car and was able to marry the sweetheart of her youth. Smith, on the other hand, criticized "church people" (though not the deaconesses) for insensitivity: "they would come on a Sunday morning wanting Mother to go to church . . . [and] used to find her washing and they'd say, well, why are you washing, my goodness, this is Sunday, this is the Sabbath. Well, Mother got cross one day and she said, well, she said, if you paid me, she said, to go to church I'd go for my day, you know, I could leave this go and send it to the laundry and pay for it that way but, she said, I've got to clean and wash and cook on Sunday, that's the only time I have". She wanted to attend church but could go only to evening services after chores were finished. These experiences turned Smith herself against organized religion.[53]

During the 1940s the Mission's focus shifted. During the Second World War more married women entered the paid work force. The Mission's employment bureau could not meet all the calls from private homes. Mothers were working instead in "office, factory, store, restaurant"; they also cleaned the troopships in Halifax harbour. During the war, according to the *Annual Report* of 1945, the nursery and the kindergarten had become "the most important part of our work". As the opportunities for women's work became more diverse and the federal government assumed greater responsibility for management of the labour market, the Mission's employment bureau closed.[54] The day nursery became the sole focus of the work. Continuing in operation to this day, the day

53 Blackwood Interview, pp. 133-4; Smith Interview, 15 June 1983, pp. 44-5.

54 *JMAR*, 1944, pp. 4-5; *ibid.*, 1945, pp. 4-5. On women's labour force participation, see Connelly and MacDonald, "Women's Work", p. 49. In Ontario and Quebec, where the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement had been in effect, women pressed for extension of government support after the war because they still needed the child care: Ruth Pierson, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Labour Force in World War II", *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1976), pp. 160-1.

nursery was perhaps the Mission's most important legacy to the women of Halifax.[55]

Years of devoted work gave the women of the Committee rewarding and significant if unpaid roles outside the home, while the "Jost Mission mothers" resorted to the Mission to aid in their struggle for survival and self-improvement. Although the Jost Mission Committee believed that mothers ought to work only in their own homes, they assisted working-class women to find employment and cared for their children. Like many other philanthropists and reformers of the early 20th century they did not envision women as serious or permanent wage-earners and did not help them improve their position in the paid work force. But as married women continued to seek employment, the managers of the Mission responded, expanding the nursery and turning their attention more toward the wage-earning women. Defining their role as a mothering one in the larger social sense, the Committee and matrons addressed what they saw as the needs of poor children and their mothers. The churchwomen's dedication to personal charity and cross-class contact may have sharpened their understanding of the "poorer sisters" even if it could not bridge the social gap between them.

55 The nursery operated in the original location until 1976, when the Jost Mission building was destroyed in order to make way for the new Metro Centre. This fact was noted with outrage in all of the interviews conducted for this study. The Jost Mission nursery is now located at the Bethany United Church.