

A Family Home for Toronto's Aged Poor:
The Social Service Mission of Strachan House, 1925-1958

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the origins, leadership, and occupants of Strachan House, a home for Toronto's aged poor that was founded in 1925 by Mabel Cartwright and the Toronto Diocese Women's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (WA). While the national WA was established in 1885 to support foreign and domestic missions, Strachan House emerged as a local activity of the Toronto diocese that, beginning in 1921, expanded its mandate to include social work. Through an investigation of the WA's social Christian undertaking, this project spotlights how the social problem of old age became a significant alternative mission of the women's organization. Assisting the needy elderly encouraged the WA's public engagement in social reform. The thesis rethinks the periodization of the first half of the twentieth century as a time of waning religious influence. It also writes the women of the WA into the historical narrative of the emerging welfare state.

Utilizing a range of documents from the home's superintendent and committee of management, this thesis examines the interplay between the home's religious leadership, elderly residents, workers, committee of management members, and physical structure. Strachan House evolved from a home offering shelter and comfort to one extolling the virtues of productivity, yet paternalism toward the elderly residents remained a constant. Contradictions in the home's family mission were evident in strict screening procedures, lack of privacy, and eviction in cases of illness. Occupants inhabited a deteriorating building that was not compatible with safety. Discrepancies between the institutional setting and rhetoric of the family home were pronounced.

Following the home to 1958 presents a revisionist history of the era of postwar reconstruction. Neither stability nor prosperity were realities for Strachan House occupants, who struggled, sustained injuries, and faced illness. The thesis also shows how elderly men and women challenged authority, adopted non-traditional roles, and took up workers' duties. This study observes the active agents that carried out the Strachan House mission in practice, including how they worked to ensure the home's survival.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Illustrations	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	
The Founder and the Founding	51
CHAPTER TWO	
The Management Plan	94
CHAPTER THREE	
The Workers	135
CHAPTER FOUR	
O’Grady’s Residents	166
CHAPTER FIVE	
The Community	207
CONCLUSION	246
Bibliography	256

List of Illustrations

Image 1: Strachan House, 790 Queen Street West, Toronto. Undated_____93

INTRODUCTION

“The Women’s Auxiliary of the Church of England, with the assistance of city council, have succeeded in providing Toronto with an institution that has long been one of the city’s outstanding needs. A home for the aged poor, where those who have the misfortune to be destitute in the winter of their lives may find shelter and comfort, is shortly to be opened under the name of Strachan House.”¹

The first recorded residents of Strachan House were admitted in October 1925, several months before the home’s official opening was announced in the press, and a full year before the Bishop of Toronto offered his benediction.² Mr. and Mrs. Allan were so gravely in need of housing that Mabel Cartwright, president of the Toronto Diocese of the Women’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (WA), agreed to admit them early, leaving the finances to be worked out later. Mr. and Mrs. Jones arrived shortly thereafter, settling in to a small main-floor bedroom as the noisy work of alterations took place around them. The arrival of the two couples, months before the home for old people was formally equipped to receive them, reflected the dire poverty facing many of Toronto’s oldest citizens.³

Strachan House’s beginnings highlight the experiment in social work that the home for old people became, as well as the activism of its women Christian leadership. While the national WA was principally established in 1885 to support foreign and domestic missions, Strachan House emerged as a locally-focused initiative of the Toronto diocese that,

¹ “Will Provide Home for Aged Destitute: Women’s Auxiliary of Church of England Establish Strachan House,” *Toronto Daily Star*, January 8, 1926, 21.

² “Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1926,” Forty-First Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England and to Diocesan Missions, May 1927, Box 45, File 1, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 59.

³ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, October 5, 1925, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 1, File 4, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto. See also E. Vance, Letter to Cartwright, Undated, Cartwright and Wood Families, Series 3, Box 6, File 1, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

beginning in 1921, officially expanded its mandate to include social work.⁴ Assisting the city's needy elderly, through the founding of Strachan House, became a significant alternative mission of the Toronto WA, one that forced its membership to confront a new phenomenon: the social problem of old age.⁵

Establishing the old age home demanded organizational prowess (including research into similar institutions), a management agenda, and leaders to implement it. The home needed a matron, cook, domestic workers, and residents. It needed a committee of management to oversee and customize the operation's admissions process, finances, house maintenance, and resident programs. Strachan House needed a roof and walls, as well as furniture and objects to fill bedrooms and workspaces. The WA might have grown exponentially since the 1880s, developing a finely-tuned organizational bureaucracy in the process. But the WA's entrance into the field of old age management represented a departure for the diocese of Toronto, and an important test of its newly formed social service department.⁶

This examination of the WA's venture into social work affords an opportunity to explore the home as a site of competing, divergent narratives: the motivations and professional development of its religious founder, Mabel Cartwright; the origins and mission

⁴ Emily Willoughby Cummings, *Our Story: Some Pages from the History of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, 1855 to 1928* (Garden City Press: Toronto, 1928), 109.

⁵ Ontario's crisis of old age emerged out of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and intensified throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Factors included population aging, and worsening economic conditions spurred by the recession in the early 1890s. Greater numbers of old people sought shelter in Ontario's county poorhouses. See James Struthers, "Home, Hotel, Hospital, Hospice: Conflicting Images of Long-Term Residential Care in Ontario, Canada," in *Care Home Stories: Aging, Disability, and Long-Term Residential Care*, Sally Chivers and Ulla Kriebner, eds. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 284. See also James G. Snell, *The Citizen's Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Edgar-André Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government?: State Responsibilities, Family Obligations, and the Care of the Dependent Aged in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Lisa Dillon, *The Shady Side of Fifty: Age and Old Age in Victorian Canada and the United States* (Montreal, Ithaca N.Y.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

⁶ Cummings, *Our Story*, 109.

of the home's committees and management plan; the lives and environments of Strachan House workers and residents, as well as the trials of living in—and maintaining—a building built for other purposes. How did the central function of the WA, as supporters of mission work, translate to Strachan House? How did residents and workers fare under the WA leadership? In what ways did the home's promise of offering "shelter and comfort" materialize and evolve in practice? More broadly, an investigation of Strachan House to 1958 provides a window into the WA's public engagement in social reform, including the manner in which its women members exercised influence in the context of an emerging welfare state. The thesis explores Strachan House to ask what it reveals about shifting historical perceptions related to old age, institutionalization, and elder care, and how occupants internalized, accepted, and challenged prevailing views about old age.

I seek to highlight Strachan House as a site of protest, contestation, and adaptation, as an institution in a constant state of debate and reinvention. Strachan House reflected the WA's uncertainty over the Church's future reach in a secular city. This uncertainty found expression in a heightened public engagement with social agencies, old age advocates, and city workers in the name of collaborating more widely, and as representing itself as authorities on social issues. From these collaborations, the WA actively adapted and deliberated its mission for the home in accordance with changing attitudes and practices related to old age institutions. The thesis observes these negotiations and conversations, debates and conflicts, changes to WA policies, as well as the context in which change was sometimes defied. Strachan House gradually evolved from a home offering shelter and comfort, to one extolling the virtues of leisure, productivity, and social interaction. Paternalism towards the elderly residents, however, remained a constant.

Limited as we are in exploring their worlds through the lens of the home's administrators, I observe the residents' agency through documented problems, such as worker shortages, resident injury and illness, requests for supplies, building damage, and maintenance requests. I follow residents and workers as they questioned the matron's authority, left the home without permission, or refused to leave when asked. I observe reports of sickness, trips and accidents, and instances when the home's physical spaces (including stairs, bathrooms, and bedrooms) interrupted health or mobility. I aim to show the house as an agent, how its history and design often proved an impediment to occupants' continued tenancy or employment. In a similar vein, this thesis seeks to underscore how the building's design and subsequent deterioration—combined with the financial pressures of the committee of management—provided an opening for workers and residents to shape the home in their own image. By the mid-twentieth century, the line between public and private spaces, workers and residents, became increasingly hard to distinguish, as residents and workers stepped into new roles.

While this study shares with Canadian histories of aging a desire to make old men and women of the past visible, to highlight their agency and diversity, and to explore the social construction of old age, it also departs from them in key ways.⁷ Studies of charitable and religious old age institutions have been largely assessed in a nineteenth century context, when the ill, infirm, or jobless turned to charities and churches for food, fuel, or shelter, and Ontario's Houses of Industry were first constructed to accommodate the poor.⁸ In contrast,

⁷ Megan Davies, *Into the House of Old: A History of Residential Care in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), Snell, *The Citizen's Wage*, Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government?*; Dillon, *The Shady Side of Fifty*; James Struthers, "'A Nice Homelike Atmosphere': State Alternatives to Family Care for the Aged in Post-World War II Ontario," in *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, ed. Anne Lorene Chambers, Edgar-André Montigny (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1998).

⁸ Cheryl DesRoches, "Everyone in Their Place: The Formation of Institutional Care for the Elderly in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 15, no. 1 (2004): 49-70; Sharon Anne Cook, "A Quiet Place to die... Ottawa's First Protestant Old Age Homes for Women and Men," *Ontario*

studies of old age institutions in the twentieth century have tended to focus on status, welfare reform, as well as the rise of modern homes for the aged after the Second World War.⁹ The effect has been to foreshadow the decline of religious influence in society, and to emphasize the emerging welfare state. My interest is in rethinking the periodization of the first half of the twentieth century as a time of waning religious influence, by illustrating how, as Canadian historians of religion have shown, social reform after the First World War was far from a “purely secular process.”¹⁰

Strachan House is a study about women, as founders, chairwomen, volunteers, matrons, domestic workers, and residents. It is a study that provides a corrective to the historical understanding of aging, challenging where old women, in particular, are “found” in—or absent from—history, and assigned to what roles.¹¹ While older women made up the majority of Strachan House residents, they were also among its workers and volunteers. Women’s labour made the venture of Strachan House possible, not only through volunteer social service, but waged labour too. Increasingly by the mid-twentieth century, elderly women were employed as domestic workers at Strachan House, reinforcing that the institution was more than a home for old people, but also a workplace. I explore how ideas about masculinity and femininity took shape in Strachan House and the WA, how residents,

History 81, no. 1 (1989): 25-40; Cook, “A Helping Hand and Shelter: Anglo-Protestant Social Service Agencies in Ottawa, 1880-1910,” (M.A. diss., Carleton University, 1987); Bettina Bradbury, “Elderly Inmates and Caregiving Sisters: Catholic Institutions for the Elderly in Nineteenth-Century Montreal,” in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, ed. Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

⁹ Norma Rudy, *For Such a Time as This: L. Earl Ludlow and a History of Homes for the Aged in Ontario, 1837-1961* (Toronto: Ontario Association of Homes for the Aged, 1987); Davies, *Into the House of Old*; Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*; James Struthers, “Grizzled Old Men and Lonely Widows: Constructing the Single Elderly as a Social Problem in Canada’s Welfare State, 1945-1967,” in *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700-1975*, eds. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004); Dillon, *The Shady Side of Fifty*; Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government?*

¹⁰ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), xi.

¹¹ For a study exploring men’s historical relationship to labour and productivity, for instance, see Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America* (Lanham, Md: University of America, 2012).

workers, and volunteers moved through the home in gender-distinct ways, and how the home itself upheld, and contributed, to notions of sexual difference in its practices. Strachan House was a highly gendered space. “Gendered experiences and structures,” explains Adele Perry, are “produced and reproduced in intimate partnership with other social divisions.”¹² Race and class further informed how old age was managed and experienced.

The Opening

Strachan House opened in the former St. Hilda’s College residence on Queen Street, a building built in 1899 to resemble a large private house. It had formerly accommodated women undergraduates attending Trinity College. Set on the original campus grounds, the building had also been home to St. Hilda’s principal, Mabel Cartwright, who, after the college’s federation with the University of Toronto was formalized, accompanied her students to their new residences on St. George Street. It was Cartwright’s idea, in her role as president of the Toronto WA, to convert the former college residence into a home for old people.¹³

From the outset the plan was simple: Cartwright and her WA colleagues envisioned Strachan House as a family home for elderly people of limited means, regardless of religious denomination. The home, however, was Anglican in practice and character. Chapel services were held daily, and religious holidays and customs strictly observed. A deaconess managed the home as matron, and a committee of management, consisting largely of married women of British origin and WA membership, led the home’s bureaucracy. Fundamental was that

¹² Adele Perry, *On the Edge: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 8.

¹³ “Blessing to Aged is Strachan House,” *Globe*, January 15, 1926, 13; “Strachan Houses’ Appropriate Name: Gathering of Anglicans Considers Establishment of Home for Aged People,” *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

Strachan House—as a model of Christian values— was to be a “homelike” place for married couples who faced separation in the majority of Toronto’s old age homes.¹⁴ Under the City’s new ownership, Cartwright received permission for the WA to lease the former St. Hilda’s College for \$1 annually. While a few residents paid little or even nothing in rent, most of the home’s first residents paid \$15 a month for their board, a nominal fee at the time. Accepting roughly forty residents to start, the home was intended for the “well and ambulatory,” those elderly Torontonians free of physical and mental health impairment, and who required no special medical or nursing care. A plaque, affixed to the wall inside the home’s entranceway, captured the home’s aim and sensibility: “This Home was established to the Glory of God and for the consolation of the aged through the inspiration and devotion of the President, members of the Toronto W.A. and others who love their fellowmen, October, 1925.”¹⁵

Strachan House was a welcome addition to Toronto’s old age institutional geography. Old people without family or other means had few options when seeking accommodation or assistance, and before the 1920s, had no choice but to turn to private charity, local jails, or the poorhouse. As James Struthers writes of their predicament, “poverty, not age, was their only claim to support from the community.” By the second half of the nineteenth century, in recognition that elderly persons were becoming “a progressively degenerating underclass,” aged people’s homes and refuges, such as Toronto’s Belmont Homes, were constructed in larger Canadian cities. Their emergence helped to set old people

¹⁴ At the Aged Men’s and Women’s Home, for instance, couples could be admitted together but were forced to reside and sleep in separate quarters. Strachan House celebrated the fact that it was the only Home in Toronto where husbands and wives were not separated. To my knowledge, one other private refuge in Toronto, the Jewish Old Folks’ Home, accepted married couples at the same time. See James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 54. See also “Old Folks Entertain at Strachan Houses,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Jun. 15, 1928, 25.

¹⁵ “Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1950,” Sixty-Fifth Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England and to Diocesan Missions, May 1951, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 52-55.

apart, branding the aged among the “deserving poor,” a special group seen as worthy of shelter in their final days. The appearance of institutions also represented a desire to deal with burgeoning social problems by “physically segregating the population in question from society at large and by creating a surrogate institutional family structure.”¹⁶

The founding of Strachan House was a reaction to the scarcity of accommodation, as well as the highly institutional, congregate dwellings that old people so often tried to avoid. In 1925, there were over forty private refuges for the aged across the province, housing approximately 3400 people. The institutions were subsidized by the provincial and municipal governments, an acknowledgement of their function in relieving public authorities of responsibility for housing indigents.¹⁷ Strachan House joined a small group of nine private refuges in the city. With the exception of the Julia Greenshields’ Memorial Home and the Church Home for the Aged (two other homes west of downtown), institutions that catered to old people were generally found further east. The Protestant-run Aged Men’s and Aged Women’s Home were at 51 Belmont Street and 55 Belmont Street, respectively, just north of Queen’s Park. The Jewish Old Folks’ Home was on Cecil Street. The Catholic-run House of Providence, the largest shelter accommodating those with a range of physical and mental disabilities, was on Power Street near Adelaide Street East and Sherbourne. The interdenominational House of Industry, sheltering a range of the city’s needy, was located in Ward One, an area commonly referred to as “The Ward.” Set at the corner of Elm and Elizabeth, it operated out of one of the city’s poorest neighbourhoods.¹⁸

¹⁶ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 53.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Most of Toronto’s charitable institutions or private refuges, operating through municipal and provincial subsidy, could accommodate between 30-60 residents or “inmates” at a time, while the House of Providence, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph, could accommodate upwards of 400. See Struthers, *Limits of Affluence*, 53. See also “Might’s Greater Toronto City Directory, 1926,” Internet Archive, accessed 6 August 2021 <https://archive.org/details/torontocitydirectory1926/page/24/mode/2up> For more on Toronto’s social geography see James T. Lemon, *Toronto since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, National

Other institutions near Strachan House, such as the Mercer Reformatory (a women's prison), and the Ontario Hospital (formerly the Provincial Lunatic Asylum), likely had elderly people in their care.¹⁹ In general, institutions were diverse and standards fluctuated widely depending on the size, sex, ethnicity, religion, or arrangement of the population or level of charitable support.²⁰ In the House of Industry, old people slept eighteen to a room, and were forced out during the day. At the Jewish Old Folks' Home, residents slept four to a room, and had access to a medical doctor. Their accommodation included recreation, occupational therapy, and access to both a library and synagogue.²¹ Although by the early twentieth century old people were living longer, "their cultural and material position had worsened," explains Struthers. Old age became increasingly seen as a time associated with poverty, dependency, and disease. The environment out of which Strachan House emerged was grim for the institutionalized elderly. "They were expected to rest, not cause trouble for the matrons or superintendents, and prepare for death."²²

St. Hilda's Legacy: The Home

Modeled after a family home, Strachan House was an ambiguous space, both a private dwelling and a public space, a workplace and a home, an institution, and a philanthropic venture. For the duration of its operation, it was an assemblage of different, competing

Museums of Canada, 1985), 51. For more on the Julia Greenshields' Memorial Home see "History of the Julie Greenshields' Memorial Home," City of Toronto Archives Collection, Fonds 2, Series 1099, Box 387681, File 8, City of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

¹⁹ For more on the House of Industry, and how older people were committed to jails, See Danielle Terbenche. "More Than 'Prisoners': Discovering Welfare History in Holy Trinity Cemetery, Thornhill, Active History, accessed 17 July 2021 <http://activehistory.ca/2015/02/more-than-prisoners-discovering-welfare-history-in-holy-trinity-cemetery-thornhill/>; J.M.S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Lorimer and National Museums of Canada, 1984), 187-190; Bryan D. Palmer and Gaetan Heroux, "'Cracking the Stone': The Long History of Capitalist Crisis and Toronto's Dispossessed, 1830-1930," *Labour* 69 (2012): 9-62; James Snell, *The Citizen's Wage*, 42.

²⁰ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 53.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

²² Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 55.

identifications. Above all, it was a particular space with a particular history. If, as Michel de Certeau argues, *place* is “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence,” *space* “exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables.” The space of Strachan House was “*a practiced place*,” “situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts.”²³ Strachan House inherited a built environment, and with it, stories, memories, and a physical world, what de Certeau describes as the “presences of diverse absences.”²⁴ Walking in the city (“*Here* there used to be a bakery. *That’s* where old lady Dupuis used to live”), formed his discussion of “memorable things,”²⁵ but the “presences of diverse absences” characterized the stationary Strachan House as well.

Here there used to be a college residence for women, designed by Eden Smith, to give young women shelter from a dangerous world.²⁶ *Here* there used to be St. Hilda’s college principal, Mabel Cartwright, who occupied a main-floor bedroom, and whose adjoining office was filled with the chatter of undergraduates. Set back from the main Trinity College building, its design epitomized the private sphere. Strachan House residents were allied to the students of before, as subjects in need of management and protection, and as occupants of the private-looking house, tucked behind the trees. The very word “house,” the “classic location for both family and private life,” comes from the Old English *hus*, “from *huden*, meaning hidden.”²⁷

²³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ King discusses architect Eden Smith’s design for St. Hilda’s. See Alyson E. King, “Centres of ‘Home-Like Influence’: Residences for Women at the University of Toronto,” *Material History Review* 49 (Spring 1999): 42, 47.

²⁷ Leonore Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide’: Public and Private in British Gender History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no.1 (Spring 2003): 18.

There were legacies of St. Hilda's in the design and layout of rooms, in the "public" rooms at the front of the house, and the "private" rooms at the back. Architectural historians have shown how the front-facing communal rooms represented the "public face" with a formal entrance and higher quality finish," while the back of the house (including the kitchen) "had a more utilitarian aspect."²⁸ With the exception of the matron's room and two additional bedrooms on the main floor, most of the approximately forty residents (like the students before them) occupied bedrooms on the upper floors, joined by "easy stairs." Outside, a large verandah overlooked the greenery of Trinity Park, and was at a safe distance from street traffic. The "family" ambience that Smith's design gave the young women, argued Cartwright, made it exceptionally suited as a residence for old people.²⁹

The structure of Strachan House was also reminiscent of its predecessor, St. Hilda's. As St. Hilda's live-in-mentor and head of household, Cartwright had been responsible for fostering a rigid daily schedule of prayer, study, community service, as well as instilling in students a sense of duty towards others.³⁰ At Strachan House, the home also assigned a female head of household to rule a tightly-observed group of inhabitants, who this time, included both women and men. Strachan House was not unlike St. Hilda's, where residents lived in a disciplined environment, and adhered to strict regulations. Moreover, both St. Hilda's and Strachan House were celebrated by the founders as markers of progress. Where St. Hilda's residence had opened in 1899 "in the spirit of progress and reform," and promised, as Provost Welch declared, that "the daughters" would be given the "advantages

²⁸ Ruth Madigan and Moira Munro, "The More we are Together: Domestic Space, Gender and Privacy," in *Ideal Homes?: Social Change and the Experience of Home*, eds. Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 62. See also King, "Centres of "Home-Like Influence," 40.

²⁹ "Strachan Houses Appropriate Name," *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

³⁰ These were the principles Cartwright had inherited through her own education as a student at both Cheltenham Ladies' College, and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. For more on women's education see, Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 171, 185.

of residence in a college, with all that that means of common corporate life.”³¹ Strachan House’s appearance represented a turning point, a new era, when married couples would be welcomed, its founder maintained, and residents would be treated like “family,” regardless of sex, religion, or income.³²

In practice, the residence and its elderly tenants were often incompatible; safety and comfort did not always materialize as promised. A matron monitored residents’ health, and inspected rooms. Like the matron, domestic workers lived and worked alongside the residents, and intruded upon residents’ privacy in the performance of duties. The home was meant to attract married couples, but the majority of its occupants were single female residents who lived in small, shared bedrooms. A curtain, suspended from the ceiling, divided single bedrooms in two. Bathrooms (one per floor) were also shared. Elderly residents contended with stairs, and until 1955, lived in a large house without an elevator. The bulk of bedrooms were situated on the upper floors, and residents with any degree of mobility challenges were all but confined to their bedrooms.³³

Sheltering the needy in the domestic home hid Strachan House’s institutional character, its contradictory spaces. As Willcocks, Peace, and Kellaheer explain, the “ideal philosophy” of managers, in which “residents retain control of their private world,” is an illusion. Institutional life could become “a battleground between individual and organizational needs.”³⁴ Strachan House resembled what Michel Foucault terms *heterotopia*, that is, a “counter-site,” “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the

³¹ “T’was Truly Laid: Corner-stone of St. Hilda’s College in Position,” *Globe*, April 15, 1899, 26.

³² See Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 54. See also “Old Folks Entertain at Strachan Houses,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Jun. 15, 1928, 25.

³³ Whether to install an elevator in Strachan House was an ongoing debate for the home’s committee of management. See for instance, See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, March 19, 1952.

³⁴ Dianne Willcocks, Sheila Peace, & Leonie Kellaheer, *Private Lives in Public Places: A Research-Based Critique of Residential Life in Local Authority Old People’s Homes* (London and New York: Tavistock Publication, 1987), 1.

other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” Strachan House was a *crisis heterotopia*—a space reserved for those in crisis—as old age “is a crisis.”³⁵

Offering the comforts of home was the WA’s reaction to growing poverty and institutionalization, particularly as societal and state awareness of “‘the elderly’ as a new ‘social problem’” intensified.³⁶ In the 1920s and 1930s, the state viewed the “family” as the central pillar of support, and the most appropriate solution to growing social problems.³⁷ In Strachan House, the semblance of family support had to be constructed, through both “cozy” furnishings and decoration, and by encouraging independence. The latter was done by installing kitchenettes on each floor, for example, in order to bypass highly institutional practices, such as communal eating.³⁸ Despite appearances, private spaces and workplaces overlapped. As Atzl and Depner illustrate of historic home-care, in the professional, “ambivalent” spaces where support was offered, the distinction “between workplace and private zone” was impossible to maintain.³⁹

Strachan House, modeled after the private residence, was also incompatible with sickness and death. Matrons and committee members commonly referred to residents as “family,” and the residence as a “home” or “house.” But the sick and dying were regularly evicted, highlighting contradictions in the home’s family mantra. One of Strachan House’s most striking regulations stipulated that applicants be healthy, and that, once admitted, they remain so. Residents who grew too old or ill were no longer eligible to stay in the home, a

³⁵ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), 24.

³⁶ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “Will Provide Home for Aged Destitute: Women’s Auxiliary of Church of England Establish Strachan House,” *Toronto Daily Star*, January 8, 1926, 21.

³⁹ Isabel Atzl and Anamaria Depner, “Home Care Reflections on the Differentiation of Space in Living and Care Settings,” in *Care Home Stories: Aging, Disability, and Long-Term Residential Care*, eds. Sally Chivers and Ulla Kriebenberg (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 269.

policy that was regularly enforced through residents' removal. In contrast to contemporary residential institutions, where "accommodation of deterioration" is made through a variety of means,⁴⁰ Strachan House, in ways celebrated by the WA, embodied the characteristics of an idealized "home." The home as a "haven" (a word often employed in reference to Strachan House in its time), was "a reaction to the anxiety provoked by rapid urbanization," "the rapid influx of immigrants into the urban areas," and the "visible concentration of poverty in the cities." As Tamara Hareven explains of Western society, from the early nineteenth century on, "the home began to be viewed as a utopian community, as a retreat from the world — one that had to be consciously designed and perfectly managed."⁴¹ No "accommodation for deterioration" was extended to the sick at Strachan House, apart from the occasional engagement of nurses, who were employed on a temporary basis, at the resident's expense. Ailing residents were removed permanently from the domestic space, and admitted to rest homes, boarding homes, or hospitals.

Jenny Hockey explains that changing notions of "home" are integral to understanding why the presence of the sick and dying were no longer acceptable in domestic spaces. Growing secularization, as well as the effects of central heating on corpses, have been articulated as factors.⁴² Cleanliness and order, legacies of a Victorian modesty, were also consistent attributes of Strachan House, and incompatible with bodily excretions, foul odours, and the "dirtiness and indecency of death." Ariès suggests that the "war against dust" was the first duty of the Victorian housewife. Christian missionaries required their

⁴⁰ Accommodation can include sick bays, removable carpet tiles, laundry service, etc. See Jenny Hockey, "The Ideal Home: Domesticating the Institutional Space of Old Age and Death," in *Ideal Homes?*, 110.

⁴¹ Tamara Hareven, "The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective" *Social Research* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 263.

⁴² Hockey points to factors such as secularization, to the effects of central heat on the dead, to explain the shift in death practices. See Hockey, "The Ideal Home," 110.

catechumens to “have cleanliness of body as well as the purity of soul which it is the outward sign.” Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, death became seen, not as “beautiful,” but rather, “ugly,” “dirty,” and “hidden.”⁴³

The WA’s views of old age were important considerations in crafting policy for the sick at Strachan House. The sick and dying were expelled chiefly because Strachan House was a home for the aged poor, poverty being the central qualification. By encouraging independence, the WA also relinquished responsibility for the medical treatment of residents. The home was meant, integrally, to offer shelter and comfort, not “care,” for which the WA had neither the financial nor professional resources to arrange. Its private sphere appearance underscored perceptions of old age as a time of rest. Romantic perceptions of old age were keenly suited to the “home” that welcomed them, which was inadequate (in practice and policy) to offer mobility or medical support.⁴⁴ As Snell explains, perceptions of old age of this time were both inconsistent and contradictory, viewed in both negative terms (as a period of life marked by problems), and romantic terms (that reaching the “sunset” of life marked one as privileged, a sign that myriad of obstacles had been somehow overcome).⁴⁵

Over the span of its operation, the WA’s perceptions of old age evolved, as a result of its vigorous interest in social issues, as well as its ongoing collaborations with social agencies, old age advocates, the Toronto Welfare Council, and the City’s Department of

⁴³ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), 568-569. See also Ariès, *L’homme devant la mort* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977).

⁴⁴ Press coverage accentuated Strachan House’s domestic qualities. See “A Cozy Nook in Strachan Houses,” *Globe*, February 16, 1926, 11; “Aged Couples Enjoy Life in Cozy Home: Dr. Mabel Cartwright Presides at Strachan House Annual Meeting,” *Globe*, February 9, 1934; “Strachan House has 34 Residents: Happy Atmosphere Continues, Reports for Year all Indicate,” *Globe*, March 28, 1939, 11; “W.A. Social Work Much Increased: Reduced Incomes Make More Responsibility,” *Globe and Mail*, May 1, 1941, 11.

⁴⁵ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 11. See also Carole Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America’s Past* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search of Security*.

Public Welfare.⁴⁶ Through this engagement, Strachan House progressed from a site of shelter and comfort to one of activity and entertainment. Chapel service continued daily, as did weekly prayer and study groups. Yet radios and TVs were gradually acquired, and became new, popular pastimes. Occupational therapy was introduced to engage residents and to encourage leisurely pursuits. “Recreation and crafts” were seen as vital to the home as “money and material,” wrote Beatrice Thorne, chairwoman of the home’s committee of management.⁴⁷ Annual meetings of the Ontario Association of Managers of Homes for the Aged were attended by members of Strachan House’s committee of management, as were various public lectures, some featuring international speakers, on relevant issues related to old age, including nutrition, pensions, workers, and community planning. By the mid twentieth century, Strachan House managers were engaged as a multi-faceted effort to tackle the social problem of old age, by informing themselves of current topics of interest, and by contributing to the ongoing dialogue in their own organized events and talks. In 1956, Strachan House hosted a group from Ukraine, who were “interested in starting a home for their senior people,” and wanted to gain “as much information and experience from houses such as this.”⁴⁸

Evolving perceptions of old age did not translate into new policy for the sick. Fresh interest in addressing old people’s unique needs had the effect, contradictorily, of suppressing them. As a reaction to negative tropes of old age, by the late 1940s chairwoman

⁴⁶ In the early 1950s, Strachan House’s committee of management worked closely with Jean Goode, executive secretary of the Toronto Welfare Council’s Old Age Division, who attended committee meetings, and gave “talks” on old age. See “In the minutes read by Mrs. Goode the following figures were quoted,” Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, undated. The WA also worked closely with other agencies including the Downtown Church Workers’ Association, and Neighbourhood Workers’ Association. During the Depression, the WA’s social service department sent young women and children to the Downtown Church Workers’ “fresh air” camps. See “Mothers, Children Will Forget Want in Summer Camps,” *Globe*, July 5, 1930, 15; “Tags are the Work of Crippled Tots,” *Globe*, May 13, 1930, 15.

⁴⁷ “Strachan Houses,” Bulletin of the WA, October 7, 1948.

⁴⁸ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 11, 1956.

Thorne was stressing that old people were no different from any other age group, even sharing similar needs as younger people.⁴⁹ Others on the Strachan House committee disagreed, arguing that the time had come to include a sick bay in the residence, as an alternative to eviction.⁵⁰ Despite rigorous debate on the Strachan House committee, views that downplayed the needs of old people—by championing greater equality—remained oddly compatible with the decades-old policy of removing the sick.

Far from being a history of decline, the limitations of Strachan House—including a rapidly deteriorating building that, by the mid twentieth century, required major repair—highlighted the active agents who lived and worked within its spaces. Strachan House’s occupants, often out of financial necessity, collaborated to shape the home in their own image, rescuing, borrowing, trading, mending, and constructing items of their own accord. In the process, they met their own practical needs, and the needs of others. As we will see, their creations contrasted sharply with the Kleenex, candy and other goods that arrived in donation boxes.

This study reveals the house itself as an agent, including the historical processes that infringed upon occupants and demanded their attention. As anthropologist Daniel Miller explains, “a home’s occupants develop a kind of negotiated compromise between that which is expressed by the house,” and that which the occupants seek to express “through the medium of the house.”⁵¹ The house that Strachan House inherited was not a static habitat, but a shifting and evolving set of problems, complications, and opportunities. Occupants’ autonomy, including their interactions with the house and its objects created a “structurally

⁴⁹ “Annual Report of Strachan Houses,” Sixty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1949, 57-58.

⁵⁰ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1952.

⁵¹ Daniel Miller, *Home Possessions: Material Culture Beyond Closed Doors* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Berg, 2001), 10-11. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

defined space.”⁵² Homing in on these spaces allows for an assessment of how the occupants perceived their own spaces, including their roles within them. A diversity of old people emerges in the process—workers, volunteers, and residents.

The Women’s Auxiliary and Social Work

The Women’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC) has been assessed peripherally in wider historical studies exploring mission work, the Anglican Church, and Anglican identities in North America.⁵³ While it is the Toronto diocese’s foray into social work that is the focus of this study, a brief historical sketch of the missionary society, to which the women served as auxiliary, is necessary, in order to situate the WA, and Strachan House, in a wider context.

The predecessor to the MSCC was the London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS). Formed in 1799 by a group of laymen and clergy of the Eclectic Society, the founders were concerned with exploring evangelism, forming philanthropic groups, and developing missionary work. They departed from the two Anglican missionary societies working before the late eighteenth century in key ways. They viewed the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) as too connected to high church principles. The distinction between high and low church was critical to the formation of the society, which occurred during a period of conflict in the Anglican Church between high Churchmen and evangelicals. Emerging within a climate suspicious of prestige and status, the founders of the CMS

⁵² Atzl and Depner, “Home Care Reflections on the Differentiation of Space in Living and Care Settings,” 270.

⁵³ See Alan L. Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada: Controversies and Identity in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); William Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

believed they should be free to work outside traditional Anglican structures, that missionaries, for instance, should not have to be ordained. In short, they envisioned an Anglican Church that was more abreast of its parishioners.⁵⁴

In 1820, the society's first representative, John West, arrived in the Red River Settlement. The salary of the Anglican clergyman was paid for by the Hudson's Bay Company, which had civil authority at Red River. In starting a school for Aboriginal children in the colony, West reportedly relayed his utter dissatisfaction with the conditions in the Red River settlement, depicting it as a "Heathen land."⁵⁵ Alan Hayes has shown how West's mission journal, *The Substance of a Journal during a Residence at the Red River Colony*, captivated an English audience, and won public favour. With overly romantic language, descriptions of the Canadian landscape as huge and rugged, and tales of heroic male missionaries toiling under harsh conditions, the journal offered readers dramatic stories that were widely appealing. Indigenous peoples of the territory were intriguing stories of a people and history relayed through the quasi-anthropology of missionary reports. At the same time, the journal revealed something of the Church's understanding of its identity: there was no greater philanthropy than the saving of souls.⁵⁶ While the initial work of the CMS in North America was quite tempered, an endowment, made possible by a former Hudson's Bay chief factor, led the society to expand gradually.⁵⁷

Mission work in North America flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, led by both Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The latter group sent missionaries to British Columbia's Gnotuk plateau to assess the "religious needs" of the Carrier peoples

⁵⁴ Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁵⁶ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 17.

⁵⁷ Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God*, xv.

(Dakelh-ne), establishing a permanent station in 1860. In the 1850s the Oblates of Mary Immaculate worked among the Dene, establishing themselves along the Mackenzie (Deh Cho) River. Anglicans grew increasingly more active as well. By the 1850s, the SPG had expanded from eastern Canada to southern British Columbia, with a focus on Vancouver Island.⁵⁸ Evangelicals continued to work through the CMS, accumulating influence in and around Toronto and London, and through nondenominational organizations such as the Religious Tract Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁵⁹ By the early twentieth century, the CMS was working steadily in mission stations throughout the Yukon, northern British Columbia, and the Mackenzie valley.⁶⁰

The sponsoring of women missionaries by the Church Missionary Society was opposed by its male leadership, despite the appeals of hundreds of single British women, who expressed their desire to pursue mission work. Those who went did so as the wives or relatives of male missionaries, according to CMS regulation. Anglicans believed that women should abide in the private sphere. Concurrently, a growing belief in maternal feminism gained prominence in Victorian society, that was guided by the idea that women's moral superiority, observed in the ethical stewardship over family life, should be brought to the public sphere.⁶¹ In the American context, Ann Douglas has argued that "feminine missionaries actively, manifestly, and prominently engaged in saving souls from terrible ignorance dramatized and vindicated the housewives' importance." Nineteenth-century American women gave thousands of dollars to the missionary effort, while educators like Catharine Beecher and Mary Lyon told housewives that their role was to "form immortal

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities*, 25.

⁶⁰ Rutherford, *Women and the White Man's God*, xvi.

⁶¹ Ibid., 15.

minds.”⁶² As Leonore Davidoff has shown in the British context, the binary concepts of “public” and “private” are “extremely complicated and shift according to context.” In the late nineteenth century, “notions of respectability and sexual protection surrounded middle- and upper-class women with a net of prohibitions and psychological barriers to venturing alone over the threshold of the private home. Their conformity to the putative public/private divide was a crucial element in their gentility.” Still, many women in the late nineteenth century evaded such conventions. Women-only clubs and organizations developed, offering varied publics into which women could brave.⁶³

When the Woman’s Auxiliary was formed in 1885 in Ottawa, it was originally connected to the Domestic and Foreign Mission Society (DFMS), established in the diocese of the ecclesiastical Province of Canada, which, from 1860, included what is now Ontario and Quebec. In 1872 the provincial synod created a new missionary diocese called Algoma, which took in a vast region that extended north of Toronto to an area between Winnipeg and Lake Superior. Attempting to raise funds for both Algoma and foreign missions (the latter being an area of increasing interest in the Protestant world), the provincial synod created two mission boards, one for domestic missions and the other for foreign missions. Forced to rely on donations from the Anglican laity, the decision was eventually made to combine the two struggling boards into one. The DFMS was established in 1883.⁶⁴

The initial aim of the WA, when it launched in 1885, was to “encourage women’s work at the parish level and to promote missionary zeal by writing to missionaries and by gathering and sending clothes to mission stations for dispersal among converts.”⁶⁵ Initiated

⁶² Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 106.

⁶³ Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide,’” 19.

⁶⁴ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 29.

⁶⁵ Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 19.

by Roberta E. Tilton and a “small deputation of Churchwomen” in Ottawa, the sincere wish of the WA’s first members, Tilton expressed in her address to the DFMS Board of Management in 1885, was to “labor more abundantly, to consecrate all their talents to the Lord’s work,” to do whatever the Board considered wisest “for the promotion of Missionary effort, and the advancement of our Master’s Kingdom.” There were women from Victoria to Sydney, Tilton argued, the “Marys,” “Marthas,” “Dorcases,” and “Pheobes” who wanted only “the opportunity to do something for Jesus.” She asked that, just as the “Apostles of old recognized the women of their day,” that the “beloved Fathers of Christ” give consent to the establishment of, “in connection with your Board, a Woman’s Auxiliary.”⁶⁶

The DFMS raised money for Algoma (and to a lesser extent, the Northwest), held mission meetings, published a monthly magazine, and sent its first foreign missionary to Nagano, Japan, in 1891. It found little support, however, among evangelical Anglicans, who associated the DFMS with tight bureaucracy and high church principles, and who favoured alternative missionary societies.⁶⁷ When the Canadian Church Missionary Association formed (a society connected to the CMS in England, originating with the Wycliffe College Alumni Association, and later named the Canadian Missionary Society), in 1894, the DFMS found itself in competition with the Canadian arm of an English mission society. It was only with the creation of a national Anglican mission society, the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC), that consolidation took place. In 1893, the Anglican diocese and provinces of Canada merged into a single organization, directed by an assembly called the General Synod, and the Canadian Missionary Society merged into it. The MSCC was officially formed at a meeting of the General Synod in 1902.⁶⁸ Over the next two decades,

⁶⁶ Cummings, *Our Story*, 10-11.

⁶⁷ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 29-31.

⁶⁸ Hayes, 30.

the CMS gradually retreated from mission work in Canada, and the MSCC took responsibility of the northern mission field. As Myra Rutherford explains, many of the mission staff, methods, and ideologies remained identical.⁶⁹

When the DFMS dissolved in 1911, the WA became the auxiliary to the MSCC, and the women's organization gradually began to assume the autonomy and influence it desired. The WA had long been pushing for greater authority in implementing its own educational and recruiting programs, sponsoring missions, supporting missionary training, and developing its own organizational regulations and policies.⁷⁰ Confusion from the DFMS Board of Management over the WA's purpose, however, had caused "much confusion and even differences of opinion" between the DFMS Board and the WA. As Cummings recalled, the Board assumed that, in offering to be their auxiliary, the women would "undertake to collect the money required by the Board from house to house in the Parishes, while of course the women never had such a thought in mind, nor indeed would ever have been willing to work in that way."⁷¹

Under the MSCC, the WA grew to a national membership of over 94,000 women by the mid 1920s, which included 28 diocesan boards actively supporting and funding the work of women mission workers.⁷² As Alan L. Hayes has written, "in virtually all dimensions of the Church's life save the sacraments, the work of the Women's Auxiliary paralleled the work of the men in General Synod and on its boards." By the 1930s the activities of the organization were diverse and wide-ranging, and included supervising missionaries in Canada and overseas, producing and publishing periodicals and study books, planning special

⁶⁹ Rutherford, *Women and the White Man's God*, xix.

⁷⁰ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 169.

⁷¹ Cummings, *Our Story*, 17.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 148.

conferences, sending parcels to northern missions, delivering food and clothing to the needy, facilitating groups for women and girls, providing assistance in mental health facilities and nursing homes, conducting hospital visits, raising funds, and performing administrative duties, such as managing correspondence.⁷³

It was in the early 1910s, soon after Cartwright was elected president of the Toronto WA, that she began to express concern with Toronto's mounting list of social problems. Captivating her attention was the city's moral undernourishment.⁷⁴ Having studied abroad in the late 1880s, Cartwright had been exposed to Britain's settlement house movement, the social reform activism in London's East End that had led middle-class women to work among the needy.⁷⁵ In Toronto, she had grown steadily more interested in homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and a slate of other social welfare causes, joining both the national and diocesan social service councils. From 1917 she sat on the executive committee of the Council for Social Service of the Church of England in Canada, often representing the Anglican council at annual meetings of the Social Service Council of Canada.⁷⁶ The SSC, a national body comprised of the Protestant churches, social agencies, and women's groups such as the National Council of Women, had formed in 1908 with the aim of conducting social research, and influencing social policy at the federal level.⁷⁷ Cartwright sat on multiple

⁷³ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 170-171. See also Hayes, "Repairing the Walls: Church Reform and Social Reform 1867-1939, in *By Grace Co-Workers: Building the Anglican Diocese of Toronto 1780-1989*, ed. Alan L. Hayes (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1989), 43-96.

⁷⁴ Marjory MacMurchy, "Representative Women: Miss Cartwright: Principal of St. Hilda's College," *Globe*, August 13, 1910, A2.

⁷⁵ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 221-224.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council for Social Service, May 22, 1931, Council for Social Service Fonds, Box 4, File 3, page 4, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto.

⁷⁷ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 77-78.

committees with the Council for Social Service, including unemployment, British immigration, and women's welfare.⁷⁸

Like Cartwright, who was both an educator and Christian reformer, many of her colleagues on councils and committees represented both the church and the university. Professors, social scientists, progressive reformers and clergymen gave talks on public welfare at numerous conferences, and published articles on social investigation and sociology in the *Canadian Churchman*, the *Presbyterian*, the *Christian Guardian*, the *Canadian Baptist*, as well as the Social Service Council of Canada's journal, *Social Welfare*.⁷⁹ Cartwright shared with E.J. Urwick, later head of the University of Toronto's Department of Social Service, and member of the Social Service Council of Canada, a belief in the "harmonious reconciliation between science and religion in the common pursuit of a higher social good."⁸⁰ She maintained with J.A. Dale, Urwick's colleague at the University of Toronto, that social service consisted of "the modern practice of the principles of the Good Samaritan, worked out in a scientific way, as the result of centuries of experience and study."⁸¹ How to "make religion count in social work and the present day" was a recurring theme in Cartwright's personal writing through the 1920s, where she reflected extensively on her belief in the power of modern social work to salvage the individual through "patient investigation."⁸²

The rise in the professionalization of social work did not spell the decline of the churches in the 1920s. As William Katerberg maintains, the 1920s and 1930s, in particular, "can be viewed as the high point of protestant influence in Canada," when organizations

⁷⁸ Fern Wood, "Miss Cartwright," Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Box 11, File 5, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

⁷⁹ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 205.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸¹ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 148.

⁸² Cartwright, undated, Quiet day notes, 1923-1924, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, F2182, Series, 4, Box 8, File 5, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

such as the Social Service of Canada yielded particular sway over the development of the welfare state.⁸³ The twentieth century professionalization of social work “was founded and professionalized through the efforts of the Protestant churches,” Christie and Gauvreau explain, and “the moralism sustained by social evangelism not only dovetailed with, but was also the prime mover in the emergence of a social scientific perspective.”⁸⁴ The training of social workers reflected the universities’ strong association with Protestantism; until the 1930s, it was overseen by university professors who were either clergymen or social scientists. Both groups “reinforced the primacy of the churches because their social philosophy was grounded in Christian idealism.”⁸⁵

It was in the name of Christian social reform that Cartwright led her diocesan colleagues to social work, a mission she hoped would address the moral impoverishment that she and the WA had diagnosed. If mission workers laboured among Indigenous populations, Cartwright ventured, the WA could work “among the white population of our land as need requires.” Despite consistent expressions of caution from the MSCC that social work would only distract from mission work in the foreign and domestic fields, Cartwright and her diocesan colleagues proceeded in earnest, developing their first social service department in 1917. It was through the department’s social research that its workers wanted to address the needs of the “dependent aged in the city,” and, more broadly, to study the “social and welfare movements of the day.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities*, 143.

⁸⁴ Gauvreau and Christie point to McGill’s Department of social service, which closed in August 1931 after financial support from the theological colleges was withdrawn. See *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 131.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

⁸⁶ Mabel Cartwright, ed., *These Fifty Years, 1886-1936*, Woman’s Auxiliary, Series 18.27, Box 46, File 9, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 79.

Historiography

This project draws from, and contributes to, three interrelated bodies of historical scholarship: age and aging, religion, and postwar reconstruction. The historiography of age and aging encompasses an increasingly wide-range of topics such as retirement, labour, social reform, residential institutions, dementia, and medicine.⁸⁷ Georges Minois' *History of Old Age* was among the first social histories to explore the previously unmapped terrain of old age, delving into longevity, the social function of old people, and attitudes about aging from ancient Israel to the Renaissance. Its sweeping analysis demonstrated that, across Western society, old age had been viewed pessimistically, as a time associated with illness and death.⁸⁸ Thomas R. Cole's *The Journey of Life* was similarly expansive, tracing the evolution of Western ideals of late life from Northern Europe in the late Middle Ages, culminating in the rise of the scientific ideals of "successful" aging. Cole argued that Max Weber's *Spirit of Capitalism*, and the "civilizing process" articulated by Norbert Elias best captured the burgeoning interest in the "career" of individual lifetime. "Envisioning each individual life from birth to death as a sacred career," Cole explained, "developed alongside new commercial ideas about

⁸⁷ By no means exhaustive, some examples include Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers: Gerontology Emerges as a Science* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Peter Townsend, *Building Decent Societies: Rethinking the Role of Social Security in Development* (Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). William Graebner, *History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980); Brian Gratton, *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare Among Boston's Aged* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Thomas R. Cole, Ruth E. Ray, & Robert Kastenbaum, eds., *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does it Mean to Grow Old?* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010); Luba Vikhanski, *Immunity: How Elie Metchnikoff Changed the Course of Modern Medicine* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2016); Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998); Lynn A. Botelho and Pat Thane, *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Education, 2001); Gregory Wood, "Forty Plus Clubs and White-Collar Manhood During the Great Depression," *Essays in Economic & Business History* XXVI (2008): 21-32; Laura Davidow Hirshbein, "'The Senile Mind': Psychology and Old Age in the 1930s and 1940s," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 43-56; Marjorie Silverman, "Dementia-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Canada: A Carer Perspective," *Canadian Journal on Aging* 40, no. 3 (September 2021): 451-462; Peter Collings, "Housing Policy, Aging, and Life Course Construction in a Canadian Inuit Community," *Arctic Anthropology* 42, no. 2 (2005): 50-65.

⁸⁸ Georges Minois, *History of Old Age: from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

time and work, together with specifically Protestant notions of salvation and the gradual postmedieval shift of social controls from the community to the individual.” Like Minois, Cole drew from literary and medical texts to capture broad cultural changes, arguing that in Victorian America, the “civilizing process” reached a “high-water mark.” Aging bodies posed insurmountable challenges to the ideology of self-control, ushering in an era of new methods in science and medicine.⁸⁹

More recently, historians have turned from the large-scale intellectual landscapes carved by Minois, Cole, and others, to discussions of power relations, race, ethnicity, and gender.⁹⁰ Corrine T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett have pushed historians to pay “greater attention to age as a category of analysis, especially as it relates to how men, women, and children of various races and ethnicities have been differentially accorded the rights of citizenship.”⁹¹ Madeline Bourque Kearin’s nuanced analysis of racially segregated institutions in the United States, for instance, shows how administrators’ attempts to cultivate “family” in the Home for Aged Colored Women “partly reflected an inheritance from the paternalism of slavery.”⁹²

While the tendency to universalize perceptions or conditions of old people has been critiqued by feminists, anthropologists, family historians, and women’s and gender historians, the threat of perpetuating trends or “norms” about aging persists. This study

⁸⁹ Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge, England; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹⁰ Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men*, Gisela Bock, Pat Thane, eds., *Maternity and Gender Policies and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London: Routledge, 2016); Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Corinne T. Field, *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁹¹ Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett, “AHR Roundtable: Age and the Construction of Gendered and Raced Citizenship in the United States,” *American Historical Review* 125, no. 2 (April 2020): 438.

⁹² Madeline Bourque Kearin, “Domesticating the Institution: Strategies of Alienation and Control in the Shelter for Colored Children and the Home for Aged Colored Women, Providence, RI,” *The Historian*, 81, no. 4 (2019): 632.

engages with the Strachan House founders' broader role in the project of colonialism, and their belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race" to raise the moral tone of society. The "social work" of religious workers involved colonizing the slums and educating new immigrants.⁹³ As Anne McClintock makes clear in *Imperial Leather*, women in positions of power were not the "hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting."⁹⁴ In the context of Strachan House, the WA's perception of the "deserving poor" carried racial and religious assumptions. For the lifespan of the operation, its residents were principally white, elderly Anglicans, and the successful applicants of an invasive screening process.

Following James Struthers, I believe histories of old people must be local ones.⁹⁵ Fitting examples include Sharon Anne Cook's study of Ottawa's Protestant Home for the Aged, which housed men, and the Refuge Branch of the Protestant Orphan's Home, which catered to aged women. Cook explores the context of the late-nineteenth century institutions, which were marked by strict rules and discipline, and whose mandates encouraged obedience and piety. Gender, notes Cook, influenced the range of care extended to the aged poor. Women received greater attention, and in surroundings devoted to fostering a family environment.⁹⁶ Similarly, Bettina Bradbury's study of Montreal institutions, run by the Grey Nuns and Sisters of Providence in the nineteenth century, assesses the lives of the elderly inmates, through the "spiritual and material concerns" of their caregiving nuns. Bradbury explores how the elderly inmates were "living evidence of the Church's charity

⁹³ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 116-118, 139.

⁹⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 6-7.

⁹⁵ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 62.

⁹⁶ Cook, "A Quiet Place to die..."; Cook, "A Helping Hand and Shelter."

work among the poor,” and how their visibility in the Catholic institution confirmed the “crucial importance of a good Catholic death,” and legitimated the Church’s wider role in Montreal’s religious and political economy.⁹⁷

At the same time, broad social and cultural changes affected myriad older Canadians, particularly with respect to social reforms and institutionalization. Canadian historians generally agree that the status of old people declined across the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ Norma Rudy’s *For Such A Time as This* captures the Dickensian conditions of early poorhouses, illustrating how the house of refuge became a “catchall” for the old, sick, blind, and mentally ill. Rudy examines the evolution of old age homes in Ontario, attributing institutional changes to the advocacy of L. Earl Ludlow, the first Director of Homes for the Aged in the province. Gradually, Rudy argues, a shift to a “new kind of home for the elderly,” developed under Ludlow’s watch.⁹⁹ Like Rudy, James G. Snell shows how between the early twentieth-century and the 1940s, state-run institutions went from being “fall back” residences for “the homeless, needy, and indigent elderly who had no other place to go,” to places that adopted new health and hygienic standards, including the addition of infirmaries, and better training for staff. Changes included pseudo-scientific medical examinations to determine admittance, as well as amendments to the institutions’ very names. The St. John’s Poorhouse, once deemed the “saddest place in Newfoundland,” became the Home for the Aged and Infirm to reflect its new function.¹⁰⁰

Beginning in the early twentieth century, old people were increasingly recognized as members of a distinct social group. Snell’s *The Citizen’s Wage* captures foundational changes

⁹⁷ Bradbury, “Elderly Inmates and Caregiving Sisters,” 130, 148.

⁹⁸ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 4.

⁹⁹ Norma Rudy, *For Such a Time as This: L. Earl Ludlow and a History of Homes for the Aged in Ontario, 1837-1961* (Toronto: Ontario Association of Homes for the Aged, 1987), 35, 53, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 54.

to Canadian pension legislation, shifting attitudes towards old people, and the evolving sense of old peoples' collective self-worth, and their claims on society. Snell exposes the contradictions of the era, arguing that government policy worked to redefine old age, offering financial assistance for the retired on one hand, but solidifying a belief that old age and paid work were mutually exclusive on the other.¹⁰¹ This transformation is invaluable to this study, both for understanding the structural changes that old people experienced, and appreciating the surrounding climate of paternalism that persisted, one that cannot be understood apart from larger state action. For similar reasons, James Struthers' collected body of research on social reform provides insight into the myriad social conditions of old people in the midst of changes to social welfare policy across the twentieth century. Struthers' overwhelming preoccupation with Ontario, however, departs from the wide-scale, or "national" approach of Snell, prioritizing instead the "peculiar wrinkles" of local settings.¹⁰²

Struthers' work has assessed Ontario's residential institutions, as seen through an examination of the postwar Homes for the Aged Act of 1947, a provincial funding program that saw a major investment in institution-building following the Second World War, and whose construction in various municipalities and counties symbolized the state's recognition of aging as a growing policy problem.¹⁰³ Struthers' picture of postwar Ontario highlights the overcrowded, dangerous conditions of the province's country houses of refuge, the "overpowering odour...of human excrement" that hovered in the air, the beds stuffed into hallways and basements, the outmoded buildings without proper ventilation or adequate

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 62.

¹⁰³ Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 336.

plumbing.¹⁰⁴ The new institutions, in contrast, were emblematic of postwar affluence. They represented a new approach to caring for old people that stressed cheerfulness, and promised to provide residents with the comforts of a family home. Struthers reveals how Ontario's new policy concealed growing hospital-bed shortages, increasing numbers of the "bed-ridden elderly" confined to chronic care wards, and emerging conversations about state alternatives to care, ones that might have considered different policy paths, including community services over investments in new construction.¹⁰⁵

Over the last three decades, Canadian historians have built upon the rich and emerging historiography of age and aging, seeking to rescue their subjects from historical obscurity, and to call attention to all the ways that old people were, in fact, more visible, healthy, capable, or independent than once thought. Edgar-André Montigny's *Foisted Upon the Government?* offers a critical reading of Ontario's old age "crisis." He argues that governments' positioning of old age as a "social problem" in the 1890s not only contradicted the "true" experiences of families, but also justified reduced government spending on social-welfare expenditures and advocated increased familial responsibility.¹⁰⁶ Lisa Dillon's *The Shady Side of Fifty* offers a corrective to historical generalizations of old age, providing a discourse analysis of Canadian and American census data in 1870/1 and 1900/1; Dillon explores how age was conceptualized, revealing a diversity of old people—what Dillon calls the "hidden history"—across class, race, gender, and region.¹⁰⁷

Historians have questioned the use of archival data to disseminate universally-held social perceptions of old age, or to indicate evidence, in the case of Dillon's analysis, of age

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 337.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 342, 346.

¹⁰⁶ Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government?*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Dillon, *The Shady Side of Fifty*, 31.

consciousness.¹⁰⁸ Despite their justified criticism, Montigny, Dillon, and other Canadian historians were among the first to pay attention to ageism, the social construction of age, the role of governmentality, and the social production of knowledge in historical studies of old age. The influence of theorist Michel Foucault has been integral to encouraging a reinterpretation of archival sources, and wider discussions of power relations as they relate to old age. Foucault's work on the governmentality of the population, and the medicalization of the body have informed topics including gerontology's professionalization.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the work of Erving Goffman has influenced historical interpretations of the Canadian old age home "as an instrument of social control."¹¹⁰ Megan Davies' work on British Columbia's Homes for the Aged, and Snell's exploration of the St. John's Poorhouse, are examples of what Goffman calls "total institutions," in which the rules, daily schedules, staff governance, and inmates' vulnerability worked together to create a distinct culture that reshaped inmates' understanding of aging, and even of their own identity.¹¹¹

Canadian historians have argued that appreciating the "crisis" of old age today, as well as the cultural spaces of old age institutions, involves understanding their historical origins. For Montigny, this involves interrogating the historical "social problem" of aging, the policy initiatives behind its construction, and governments' role in shaping myths about old age.¹¹² For Davies, it requires looking at institutions as more than cultural or political

¹⁰⁸ Bettina Bradbury, "The Shady Side of Fifty: Age and Old Age in Late Victorian Canada and the United States (review)," *The Canadian Historical Review*, 90, no. 3 (September 2009): 558-561; David G. Troyansky, "History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance (review)," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (December 1991): 1506.

¹⁰⁹ Katz draws from Foucault's *Birth of a Clinic*, and *History of Sexuality*. See Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1996).

¹¹⁰ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 11. See also Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Peter Townsend, *Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales* (London: Routledge, 1962).

¹¹¹ Snell, *The Citizen's Wage*, 47; Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 11. See also E. Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago, 1961), 1-124.

¹¹² Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government?*, 17.

spaces, but as places with “old men and women beyond the doors.” Looking at old age in any setting involves engaging historically with what it means to grow old, grappling with different historical approaches to poverty, illness, and death. The history of aging is also, she asserts, “a feeling and an experience, not a statistic.”¹¹³

My aim in assessing Strachan House is to write the women of the WA into the historical narrative of the emerging welfare state, to historicize their interest in treating old age, and to emphasize their role as workers throughout a period that witnessed rapid changes to the policies, perceptions, and social conditions of old people. Highlighting their work offers a reinterpretation of histories of pension reform and retirement, narratives overwhelmingly imagined as male. The history of aging must also be connected to the rise of social reform in the 1920s, including the varied expertise on social problems that originated from both the social sciences and social Christian reformers. Strachan House reflected this shared intellectual terrain.

The themes emanating from this thesis draw from the Canadian historiography of religion. There was perhaps no greater reflection of the WA’s reach into social causes than naming the home for Toronto’s first Anglican Bishop. It was Strachan who had founded Trinity College in 1851 with the promise of protecting the bond between religion and education, a commitment that solidified when the University Act secularized the provincial university of King’s College.¹¹⁴ While it emerged over seventy-five years after the founding of Trinity College, Strachan House reflected a reinvention of sorts, a desire on the part of the WA to claim its public role and social responsibility, in new ways. Strachan House

¹¹³ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 13.

¹¹⁴ William Westfall, *The Founding Moment: Church, Society, and the Construction of Trinity College* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 19.

represented the church's commitment, as William Westfall writes of Trinity College, "to minister to a new and changing world."¹¹⁵

Yet Mabel Cartwright has been all but absent from historical study,¹¹⁶ overshadowed by figures such as John Strachan, and by studies assessing myriad ministers, writers, and intellectuals like George Munroe Grant, Stephen Leacock, and Adam Shortt.¹¹⁷ Richard Allen's influential *Social Work in Canada* underscored the intellectual influences of American social gospel writers including Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden.¹¹⁸ Research has explored the cultural influences of the churches on Canadian society; modernity and secularization; family life; and moral reform.¹¹⁹ William Katerberg's intellectual history of the

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁶ An exception is Johanna Selles-Roney's article on Cartwright's education at Cheltenham. See Johanna Selles-Roney, "A Canadian Girl at Cheltenham: The Diary as an Historical Source," *Historical Studies in Education* 3, no. 1 (1991): 93-103. See also M. L. Friedland, *The University of Toronto, Ont.: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 231.

¹¹⁷ Examples of research assessing the intellectual influences of Grant, Leacock, Shortt, and other Canadian writers, political scientists, historians, and ministers include Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Doug Owrarn, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark and W.A. Macintosh, 1890-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Norman Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton: A Portrait of Canadian Ambition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Richard Allen, *Social Gospel in Canada* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975). In contrast, Christie and Gauvreau argue that Canadian clergymen were also influenced by British and American social scientists. See *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 87- 88.

¹¹⁹ For the cultural influence of the churches see Robert J. Coumts, *The Road to the Rapids: Nineteenth-Century Church and Society at St. Andrew's Parish, Red River* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000); John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 2nd ed. (Burlington: Welch, 1988); Richard W. Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003); John Moir, "The Canadianization of the Protestant Churches," *Canadian Historical Association Report* 37 (1956): 46-52; William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). For examples of research assessing modernization and secularization see Edward A. Pulker, *We Stand on Their Shoulders: The Growth of Social Concern in Canadian Anglicanism* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1986); David A. Lyon and Marguerite Van Die, eds., *Rethinking Church, State, and Modernity: Canada between Europe and America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Solange Lefebvre & Lori G. Beaman, eds., *Religion in the Public Sphere: Canadian Case Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); William H. Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950*; Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*. For research on religion and family life, for example, see Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Denise Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, trans. Yvonne Klein (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1999). For analysis of moral reform, for example, see Marguerite Van Die, "Protestants, the Liberal State, and the Practice of Politics: Revisiting R. J. Fleming and the 1890s Toronto Streetcar Controversy," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 24, no. 1 (2013): 89-

Canadian churches focuses on pivotal figures such as H.J. Cody, William Manning, and Carl Grammer to examine how North American Anglicans formulated “new identities during an era of great anxiety.”¹²⁰ In emphasizing the roles of Christian social reformers, including Peter Bryce, J.G. Shearer, and C.W. Vernon, historians have pointed to the Church’s influence through organizations such as the Social Service Council of Canada.¹²¹ Although Cartwright moved in the same professional circles as these men, as a faculty member of Trinity College, and a member of several councils and committees devoted to social service, her intellectual contributions have been largely overlooked. On the occasion of Cartwright’s death, W. E. Mann, secretary of the Council for Social Service, remarked that Cartwright had known “more about social and economic problems than any woman in Canada.”¹²²

The WA has received peripheral scholarly attention, both in connection to women’s historical role in the Anglican Church of Canada, and in the context of mission work. In the former, the origins and subsequent growth of the WA are briefly traced in Alan Hayes’ *Anglicans in Canada*, a work that more broadly examines the “Canadianization of the Canadian Church” by exploring six of the central questions that have shaped the debates of Canadian Anglicans, including “gender in Anglican life.” While the public character of the Anglican Church “was an overwhelmingly male institution,” Hayes argues that women were also “providing leadership or participating in almost every dimension of the work of the Church.” The extent of their influence, however, is “largely hidden,” writes Hayes, and can

129; Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*; Renée Laferty, “Modernity and the Denominational Imperative: The Children’s Aid Society of Halifax,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 13, no. 1 (2002): 95-118; James Opp, “Re-imagining the Moral Order of Urban Space: Religion and Photography in Winnipeg, 1900-1914,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 13, no. 1 (2002): 73-93.

¹²⁰ Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950*, 8.

¹²¹ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 160, 169, 184, 218. See also Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 21-22, 24, 33, 39, 267.

¹²² *Canadian Churchman*, Apr. 21, 1955, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 9, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

be “extremely hard for historians to discover.”¹²³ Hayes himself leaves race, class, and the social construction of “Canadian” identity rather untroubled, even as he posits that the process of “creating an approach to Christianity that was both recognizably Anglican and recognizably Canadian was fraught with controversy.”¹²⁴ Particularly after 1870, women who were “eager to support the mission movement” began to form organizations in support of it. The WA, says Hayes, was “the most important and enduring of the women’s organizations, and therefore the one that proved most generally threatening to the men of the Church and raised the most controversy.”¹²⁵

As in the historiography of aging, Canadian historians of religion have employed gender as a category of analysis, expanding our knowledge of women’s motivations for entering religious vocations, as well as the gendered hierarchies of specific religious communities.¹²⁶ Since the 1980s, the intersecting historiography on postcolonialism and gender has further uncovered how the gender dynamics of imperialism have interacted with sex, class, and race.¹²⁷ This scholarship has focused on women mission workers in specific settings, exploring their work in foreign and domestic mission fields, and reflecting on

¹²³ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 166-168.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹²⁶ Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987); Rosa Bruno-Jofré, *The Missionary Oblate Sisters: Vision and Mission* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill/Queen’s University Press, 2005); Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*; Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *Christian Churches and their Peoples, 1840-1965: A Social History of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Carmen Nielson Varty, “The City and the Ladies: Politics, Religion and Female Benevolence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Hamilton, Canada West,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 38, no.2 (Spring 2002): 151-171; Benjamin Bryce, “Entangled Communities: Religion and Ethnicity in Ontario and North America, 1880-1930,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 23, no. 1 (2012): 179-214.

¹²⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Adele Perry, *Colonial Relations: The Douglas-Connolly Family and the Nineteenth-Century Imperial World* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Lisa Chilton, *British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Ann Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Antoinette Burton, *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and Through the Nation* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003).

women's perceptions and experiences.¹²⁸ Myra Rutherdale's *Women and the White Man's God* was among the first to privilege the experiences of women mission workers in Canada, demonstrating how "preconceived ideas about empire, colonialism, race and culture, travel, gender, and religion were often in conflict with actual experience, and how these were reflected in the missionary discourse."¹²⁹ On the mission field, gender differences became more fluid, Rutherdale explains, as they were shaped by the mission experience. "Social perceptions of femininity and masculinity became more fluid as a result of the circumstances in which missionaries found themselves."¹³⁰ Although *Women and the White Man's God* predominantly focuses on the mission workers themselves, Rutherdale concludes that "while women's status within the Anglican church was continually being redefined and contested, it was women who supported and maintained missions through their volunteer efforts within home mission societies and later through their work in the mission field."¹³¹

The WA's volunteer efforts were not limited to supporting mission societies. In Toronto, its social service work only expanded after the 1920s. It is difficult now to support Douglas Owram's claim that, in the early twentieth century, "religion was largely finished as the guardian of society."¹³² The belief, expressed by one writer to the Editor of the *Telegram* in 1928, that science had permanently "ousted" the church from the realm of social service

¹²⁸ For example, see Rosemary Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1992); Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-1969* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2002).

¹²⁹ Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God*, xiv. Rutherdale's privileging of women's experiences departed from previous scholarship assessing male workers. Some examples include Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary John Booth Good and the Confluence of Cultures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Kenneth Coates, "'Send Only Those Who Rise a Peg?': Anglican Clergy in the Yukon, 1858-1932," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Association* 28 (Spring 1986): 1-17.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³² Owram, *The Government Generation*, 26.

work, was simply not true, nor was the assertion that the church had “retired from the field,” making way for professional social workers.¹³³ This is a sentiment underscored by Owrarn, who claims that “by the end of the 1920s the social scientists and others with a claim to special expertise in matters of public affairs had largely displaced the amateur while loudly proclaiming their secular nature.”¹³⁴

Toronto was in fact home to an assemblage of religious workers, professional social workers, church organizations, and social agencies alike, all hoping to address the city’s serious lack of social welfare provisions by assisting children and families. A study of Strachan House highlights the extent to which Cartwright and the WA contributed both intellectual and organizational labour to the effort. In an address to a group of social agencies and advocates in 1922, Cartwright cautioned about the “discreditable meaning” attached to the word “amateur,” arguing that “great scope for this type of worker existed at the present time in the social welfare field and politics.” Women, she argued, “should be seen oftener in municipal politics, should be school trustees, Aldermen and Controllers.”¹³⁵ As Christie and Gauvreau explain, “there is an unwritten assumption that the modern interventionist state reflected men’s interests and that it encroached upon and controlled the lives of women.”¹³⁶ Cartwright disagreed, viewing the state’s expansion as a means of providing better opportunities for women in the public sphere.

In the same vein, William Katerberg posits that “a historical case can be made that North American Anglicans adapted effectively until the 1960s,” and that modernity and

¹³³ “Science Ousts Church from Social Service,” December 15, 1928, *The Telegram*, Neighborhood Workers Association 1914-2000, Fonds 413, Series 1810, File 2, City of Archives.

¹³⁴ Owrarn, *The Government Generation*, 122.

¹³⁵ “Warns of Danger in Abusing Sunday: Miss Cartwright Addresses Glen Mawr Old Girls,” *Globe*, May 25, 1922, 18.

¹³⁶ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 122.

disestablishment encouraged a “competition for identities in a pluralized, modern social and cultural setting.”¹³⁷ Westfall would doubtless agree. Trinity’s founding marked “a watershed in the history of the church,” and revealed a “new representation of the relationship between religion and public life.”¹³⁸ As Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue, the church’s public influence in social reform work expanded into the twentieth century, “under the dynamic leadership of the churches.”¹³⁹

This thesis, finally, contributes to the body of literature on postwar reconstruction. As Ooram has written in *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, the era following the Second World War was a period fueled by “a powerful search for stability,” a time when suburbs transformed cities, and social psychologists, politicians, and religious leaders trumpeted marriage and children as “the young adult’s route to respectability.”¹⁴⁰ But the postwar period is, as Mona Gleason warns, often falsely construed as “‘a golden era’ in the history of the family, when prosperity, happiness, innocence, stability, and confidence reigned.” While the picture of Ooram’s Canada is not altogether inaccurate, Gleason writes, a range of factors undermined it, including Americanization, rapid modernization, rising immigration, and threats to the family, such as marriage breakdown, and women’s employment.¹⁴¹

At mid-century, Strachan House’s committee of management continued to explore programmes and services that they could employ for residents. Yet Strachan House was at the mercy of a tight budget and an aging building. Practical concerns and limitations often

¹³⁷ Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities*, 5.

¹³⁸ Westfall, *The Founding Moment*, 14.

¹³⁹ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 109.

¹⁴⁰ Doug Ooram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

¹⁴¹ Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 6.

trumped creative ideas that included the installation of an infirmary for ailing residents or the addition of a workroom for occupational therapy classes. Strachan House's operation involves a parallel journey towards the era of postwar reconstruction, when, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Ontario government progressively invested significant resources in rebuilding the province. Homes for the Aged were built, along with highways and expensive "megaprojects."¹⁴² Suburban developments were born: Hamilton Mountain, and the Don Mills subdivision in Toronto, communities that changed the provincial landscape, and fostered insulated worlds, in Owrām's phrase, "without old people."¹⁴³ It was a child-centered world, a society bombarded with advertisements and expert advice geared towards young parents, a time when the "ideal" family was represented as white, urban, Anglo-Saxon, and included a breadwinner husband and female housewife.¹⁴⁴ "The family" posed a central concern in postwar Ontario. Older people had also earned their right to a "citizen's wage," even if the reality for many older people living in Toronto was far from the postwar image of stability.¹⁴⁵ During the 1920s, Strachan House's emergence had been welcome and innovative. By mid-century, the home struggled to stay afloat at a moment of wider societal affluence and reinvention.

The dominant literature has explored families, the economy, women, psychological discourses, and the state's intervention in family life. Historians such as Franca Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek have reimagined the history of the era. Iacovetta did so by situating southern Italian immigrants in postwar Toronto, Korinek by exploring women's roles,

¹⁴² Joy Parr, "Introduction," in *A Diversity of Women: Women in Ontario since 1945*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 4-5.

¹⁴³ Owrām, *Born at the Right Time*, 81.

¹⁴⁴ Owrām, *Born at the Right Time*, 81.

¹⁴⁵ The old age security pension came into effect in 1952. See Snell, *The Citizen's Wage*.

opportunities, and agency through a critical reading of *Chatelaine*.¹⁴⁶ In *Household Politics*, Magda Fahrni similarly presents a revisionist history, interrogating the postwar family model of a “breadwinning husband and dependent wife and children” to uncover the range and complexity of postwar Montreal families, which included working children, divorced parents, families living with in-laws, parents with numerous children, widows and widowers serving as heads-of-household. Families lived “in crowded walk-up apartments and brick triplexes,” including a range of other formulations, Fahrni states, adding, “not all postwar North American families were nuclear, prosperous, or suburban.”¹⁴⁷

This study tracks Fahrni, Iacovetta, and Korinek in presenting a revisionist history of the era. It does so by shifting our focus to an urban old age institution, and homing in, not on families, but on old people living communally, within a society and culture that privileged youth. It considers the experiences of a range of old persons who passed through Strachan House’s doors, including aging women workers, an often glossed-over demographic in the historiography of postwar Canadian life. At the same time, the thesis explores how the era’s emphasis on family and home intersected at Strachan House. By mid-century, Strachan House still championed a humane approach to accommodating its “family,” even though it struggled with an aging, unfit building demanding constant repair.

While the postwar period was marked by progress, new construction, a universal pension, and shifting attitudes about old age, it was also marked by poverty, as exemplified by the physical spaces of Strachan House. The thesis considers, as does the work of Joy Parr, what the home’s ephemeral objects (furniture, appliances, donated goods) reveal of the

¹⁴⁶ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1992); Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁷ Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 15.

occupants' daily lives, including their perceived needs.¹⁴⁸ Donated goods were gendered, and included items like candy and warm clothing. Often out of financial necessity, the home's residents and workers also worked together to assemble the home to their own liking, fixing and building items in service to themselves, and to each other.

Sources and their meanings

This study draws on a diverse set of sources, including the records of the Toronto Diocese WA, the home's committee of management and superintendent's reports, government records, newspapers, and the Cartwright papers at Trinity College. The latter contains a vast collection of Cartwright's personal and professional records spanning her upbringing in Toronto, her college years in Britain, and her principalship at St. Hilda's. Collectively, the Trinity documents help us to trace Cartwright's early influences, including her growing interest in women's education and social advocacy. Her handwritten reflections, diaries, and letters, spanning from the 1870s to the time of her death in 1955, chart a time of sweeping change in Toronto. The records bring to light the social issues that drew Cartwright's attention, as well as her many roles: daughter of a prominent Toronto family with loyalist roots; eldest sister to Stephen, Ralph, Edwin, and Winifred; devout Anglican; highly educated, professional woman and advocate of women's education; perceptive and avid reader; English professor, St. Hilda's principal, and president of the Toronto WA. While not widely known today, Cartwright was well-recognized in her time, a respected leader at both Trinity and the WA. Her varied lives aid in appreciating the era's range of changes and challenges more fully.

¹⁴⁸ Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

The documents of the Toronto WA, held in the Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, include annual and social service department reports, presidential speeches, executive committee meetings, and bulletins. The collection illuminates a highly coordinated organization that operated with several focused departments and committees and conducted a variety of initiatives across the diocese, from performing hospital visits, to preparing packages for Toronto's poor. The WA records reveal a focused operation of churchwomen volunteers and trained deaconesses, who encompassed a wide-range of experiences, skillsets, and ages, and who, alongside the city's secular social workers, delivered a variety of social services, including assistance in accessing relief, jobs, and housing. The papers highlight the administration of F.C. Kingstone, the social service department's first secretary, including the reports articulating interest in old age homes across Ontario and visits to institutions in New York state. The archival evidence offers a window into the WA's specific vision for the home, and how it came to fruition. While this thesis remains focused on Strachan House as an activity of the WA's local social welfare work, the reports of the social service department explore the surrounding context, including the department's key priorities, the work that its membership performed, and what problems the workers hoped to address. The reports capture the anxieties expressed by WA workers over diminishing Church influence and rising state intervention into family matters.

The annual reports of Strachan House, from the time of its opening in 1925 to 1958, provide the details of the home's operation, such as its rules and bylaws, admissions procedures, and house policies; they also show what remained paramount to the home's management at specific moments in time, such as changes that befell the building, residents, and workers. The yearly summaries outline how many residents were admitted, removed, grew ill, or died; when workers were hired or dismissed; what maintenance of the building

was required; how many times communion was celebrated; and how and what donations found their way to the home. The annual reports, while detailed, are also limited. Committee members and the home's matron selected, and often celebrated, only those details deemed worthy of mention: new programs, new alterations, new plans for fundraising, and new admissions.

From 1950 and spanning a period of eight years, the committee of management reports, as well as the superintendent's reports, provide the most complete set of archival evidence from inside the home. The historian is treated to consistent monthly records from the committee of women that managed the institution, and, in the case of the superintendent's records, meticulous reports written by Kathleen de Courcy O'Grady, the home's matron, who lived alongside residents for more than a decade. Similar records from preceding years do not exist. O'Grady's arrival to the home marked a shift in the quality of documents that record the home's operation.

Submitting regular reports to the committee of management, matron O'Grady recorded the preceding weeks' events in staggering detail. She outlined the trials and successes of workers and residents; the litany of daily chores and challenges of maintaining a charitable home; the ongoing trials of the rickety building; the daily demands upon her time; the trips to clinics and hospitals with residents; the lists of donations accepted by the home; the furniture and appliances in need of mending or replacement; the growing problem of maids who abruptly quit; the incidences of worker injuries; and the physical and mental condition of the ailing residents, especially those who became frail or forgetful. In a home designed only for the "well," O'Grady was a careful observer of the sick, measuring how and at what point ailing residents would be asked to leave. Where Cartwright had been the "head of household" to St. Hilda's students, O'Grady, like the matrons before her, set the tone for

those under her charge. The records are therefore invaluable in spotlighting O'Grady's investment in the home's residents and workers, her staunchly and often complex paternalistic view of old people, and the sense of professional obligation that informed her governance of the institution.

The committee of management reports offer an alternative view of Strachan House, but from the vantage point of the home's central, albeit distant, volunteer managers. Unlike O'Grady, committee of management members did not live or work in the home, and they were less invested in the minutiae of the home's day-to-day operation. Reporting to Cartwright and the executive committee of the Toronto WA, the group of approximately twenty volunteer women nonetheless held a broad range of responsibilities, such as interviewing and admitting applicants, operating the home's budget, organizing the annual fundraising campaign and bazaar, making monthly inspections, addressing maintenance issues, arranging repairs, finding clergymen to officiate at Sunday evening service in the home's chapel, and organizing entertainment, which included friendly visitors, car rides, and musical programmes.. The committee addressed pertinent issues (such as resident admissions or removals), and handled official correspondence, including letters from the City concerning the building. The records provide the most detailed information on the home's governing bylaws and regulations, as well as the ongoing debates within the committee, on proposed amendments to both the building, and the home's policies.

While the Cartwright papers offer details of the founder's origins, and the WA administrative records provide a sense of the climate, structure, and vision of Strachan House, the committee of management and superintendent's reports offer a unique vantage point, leading us up the stairs and into the home. Through their records we observe the daily preoccupations of the women who ran Strachan House, the eyewitnesses to this story. And

yet, as Magda Fahrni warns, the piecing together of daily life is a “hazardous undertaking.” Drawing from sources we know to be fragmentary, and partial, and armed with the critiques waged by poststructuralist scholars that unearthing a “pure” experience of the past is complex if not impossible, Fahrni stresses that experience is mediated, or understood “through culturally constructed sets of meanings (‘discourses’) specific to their time and place.”¹⁴⁹ Although true, this study is preoccupied with how the home’s principal leaders viewed and invested themselves in the project, not with the purpose of illuminating a “true” picture. Rather, the thesis aims at situating how the women workers themselves viewed the stories and the old people attached to Strachan House. The superintendent’s reports relay the daily movement, concerns, and successes of the charitable institution, as well as the intimate, sometimes tedious details of the home: chairs in need of mending, a room too drafty for the arthritic Mrs. Peasgood, the trials of an aging cook, and the predicaments and histories of residents who came and went, who were shuffled from room to room, who lived congenially with their counterparts, or who, in contrast, railed against authority. The superintendent’s reports offer particularities that were beyond the scope of the WA, or even the committee of management. O’Grady referred to residents by name, bringing into sharp focus the anonymous faces so often linked with broad external changes brought by policies and structure, committees and subcommittees.

This thesis also draws on newspapers that covered the activities of the WA, though confined, as they often were, to the “woman’s daily interests” pages of the press. As a women’s organization, press coverage of the WA’s social welfare work, including news of Strachan House, was often interspersed among advice columns, recipes, beauty tips, and toothpaste advertisements. An article about Strachan House’s annual reception of 1928, for

¹⁴⁹ Fahrni, *Household Politics*, 27.

instance, appeared on the same page as announcements for “June Weddings,” and an advertisement for “Lovers-Form” corsets, an undergarment that promised to take “years off your figure.”¹⁵⁰ Newspaper coverage conceals the monumental labour of the Toronto WA, and reduces its community work to fundraising updates, notices of annual garden parties, or other social functions. This study nevertheless takes press coverage of the home seriously, and, following historian Valerie Korinek, does not dismiss women’s pages as mere “pap,” or “backward” snapshots of then “popular debates” on women’s issues.¹⁵¹ The press coverage offers a vital means of contextualizing the work of the WA, situating its workers in a time when social causes, such as assisting old people, were so often conflated with “women’s interests.”

Structure

Chapter 1 explores the origins of Strachan House by assessing its founder, Mabel Cartwright. It examines Cartwright’s upbringing, education in Britain, and appointment to the principalship at St. Hilda’s as factors that propelled her interest in social causes. The chapter explores the home’s beginnings in a local social purity movement that aimed at addressing the moral condition of the larger society, and explores the WA’s burgeoning interest in social work. The chapter argues that Strachan House was an expression of Cartwright’s professional life, and that it inherited both the legacy of St. Hilda’s, and the WA’s public engagement in social welfare causes.

Chapter 2 canvasses the home’s early years, the creation of the Toronto WA’s social service department, and the external influences that informed the particular management

¹⁵⁰ “Old Folks Entertain at Strachan Houses: Silver-Haired Residents are Welcome Guests at Committee’s ‘At Home,’” *Toronto Daily Star*, June 15, 1928, 25.

¹⁵¹ Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*.

style and mission of Strachan House. It reviews the rules, regulations, and admissions process, as well as the complications that arose between the Toronto WA and the home's first committee of management when it came to launching and sustaining the operation during its first years. Cartwright found inspiration for Strachan House's management style in Britain, while the social service department turned to Protestant-run Homes in New York City in devising a plan for the home and conducting its implementation.

Chapter 3 situates Strachan House workers in the larger environment of the Depression. It exposes the working conditions and practices of the home, and the uneven class system that existed between deaconesses and domestic workers. Set against the backdrop of Toronto's unemployment crisis, it demonstrates that, while the home's deaconesses and domestic workers faced different pressures, they were answerable to the WA, thus reinforcing the home's complex worker hierarchy. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates that the labour of Strachan House was distinctly gendered. Trained for mission work, the relentless duties of the home's deaconess were regularly validated by the WA as evidence of selflessness and devotion to the Church. While Strachan House domestic workers fared better financially than those in similar working conditions, they performed domestic chores for long hours and under strict conditions. Women had few employment options, and little access to shelter if they became jobless.

The final two chapters go inside the home, viewing the worlds of residents and workers as observed by the committee of management and superintendent. They follow the progress of a substantial renovation, one that afforded the home's management an opportunity to reflect on whether the building truly fit the needs of its occupants. The chapters explore whether resident illness challenged the home's initial mandate, and what concessions, if any, the home made for those experiencing decline. The complex ways that

the home could resemble both Cartwright's "home" and an institution are in play. In the 1950s, the home, like the world beyond it, was full of contradictions. Residents worked to keep the home afloat, while workers aged and grew sick. Programmes, recreations, and entertainments were introduced, while the home struggled financially. An occupational therapist took the role of matron, displacing the deaconesses of decades-past.

An important note should be made about the names and terminology of aging that are used in the thesis. I have tried to refer to Strachan House managers, residents, and workers as they appear in the archive, bringing to light the people in this study as they were known to those writing the reports. In many cases, this was by prefix and last name only, for example, "Mrs. Peasgood." The same holds true for the terminology used to describe the aged. Old people of the past were often lumped together into anonymous categories, including "the aged," "the elderly," or "the aged poor," that disguised diversity and agency. Here too, I have found myself turning to the categories as they appear in the archive, employing and underlining terminologies that were specific to the historical period under study. Old age was loosely defined by the WA and committee of management, and generally referred to applicants aged 65 and over. Lastly, workers and residents referred to the home as both "Strachan House," and "Strachan Houses." While the building next to Strachan House was later pulled down, the plural "Houses" never fell out of usage. I have used the singular "Strachan House" for clarity, but the workers and residents used both names interchangeably.

CHAPTER ONE

The Founder and the Founding

The cornerstone for Trinity College was laid in the late-spring of 1851. It was a beautiful site for the Anglican college: twenty acres on a northern lot on then-fashionable Queen Street, with a view of Lake Ontario and Toronto Harbour. Scores of witnesses lined the procession route on foot or in carriages. They stood on their toes, craning their necks. They strained to hear the Bishop's speech. "It became a matter of necessity, as well as a duty," John Strachan declared, "to establish a University from our private resources, in close connexion with the Church to which we had the happiness to belong."¹ Designed by architect Kivas Tully, and opened to students in 1852, the completed building was a grand brick structure with stone trim, three towers, and Tudor detailing. In describing the new college's architectural style, Strachan likened it to the old colleges of England.²

The founding of Trinity College, and its founder, have been the subject of several historical investigations. The history of the University of Toronto has similarly attracted lively scholarly interest.³ Much less known are the roots of the Trinity grounds' northwest corner, which was first the site of St. Hilda's College, the residence for women students

¹ William Westfall, *The Founding Moment: Church, Society and the Construction of Trinity College* (Kingston-Montreal: Queens-McGill Press, 2002), 7. See also M. L. Friedland, *The University of Toronto, Ont.: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 30.

² Westfall, *The Founding Moment*, 29, 39.

³ Some examples include Westfall, *The Founding Moment*; Friedland, *The University of Toronto, Ont.: A History*; George Terence Smith, "Federation and Fullness: A History of the Early Years of Federation at the University of Toronto from the Viewpoint of the Three Denominational Colleges (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1997); Sylvia Boorman, *John Toronto: A Biography of Bishop Strachan* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1969); Chris Fahey, *In His Name: The Anglican Experience in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991); Ivan Malcolm Timonin, "John Strachan and King's College, Upper Canada, 1799-1843 (PhD diss., Carleton University, 1961); James Tyler Robertson, "The "'Children of Nature' and 'Our Province'" The Rev. John Strachan's View on the Indigenous People and the Motives Behind the American Invasion of Upper Canada, 1812-1814 *Ontario History* 104, no.1 (Spring 2012): 53-70.

attending Trinity College, and second, Strachan House, the home for old people founded by Dr. Mabel Cartwright, principal of St. Hilda's, in 1925.

Cartwright's two professional roles, educator and social advocate, were constants throughout her life, buttressed by a strong religious conviction. To understand the origins of Strachan House, we must not only sketch the founder's evolving interest in social work and education, but also the wider social concerns and movements present during her lifetime. She was one of many middle-class Anglo-Saxon women who tackled Toronto's growing list of social problems by serving on a number of women's organizations in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Working in tandem, women educators and students were at the forefront of a social reform movement, both as its advocates and subjects. As principal of St. Hilda's, a highly-regulated residence modeled after the middle-class family-home, Cartwright's level of responsibility for the younger generation often stood in sharp relief to the discrimination she and other women faced within the university itself. Strachan House's establishment came at a time when the university's true purpose was debated and when there was growing interest in serving the community beyond its walls, and an evolving attachment to the social sciences. While women like Cartwright were often excluded from university initiatives such as the settlement house movement, they held considerable influence inside and outside the university, although in ways not traditionally understood. It was no coincidence that Strachan House was born on the Trinity grounds, or that it originated with an educator. When the elderly residents entered Strachan House in 1925, they entered a physical dwelling brimming with legacy, and historical roots stretching back to John Strachan's King's College, the founding of the University of Toronto, and the erection of Canada's first women's college. More crucially, its residents became the focus of a wider social purity movement aimed at lifting the moral condition of the larger society.

Early Years

Born the sixth of April, 1869, Mabel Cartwright was the first daughter of John Robinson Cartwright and Emily Boulton. At the time of her birth, she joined a family lineage of “leading men,” and inherited a wealth of stories related to her ancestors’ professional service and achievement.⁴ From childhood she learned of her great-great grandfather’s emigration from England to New York in 1742, the prosperity that followed from his business pursuits in Albany, and his involvement in the community and with the Church of England. His son, Richard Cartwright Jr., escaped to British territory during the American Revolution, settling in Kingston with an eminent member of another loyalist family, Magdalen Secord. Richard Jr. launched himself into the development of the colony, serving as businessman, entrepreneur, politician, and education advocate. He brought a young John Strachan over from Scotland in 1799.⁵

Richard Jr.’s twin sons, Robert and John Solomon, also left their historical mark, Robert, as an Oxford-educated Anglican minister, and John, as a lawyer, militia officer, and Tory politician. Robert’s son, Richard, became an influential politician, first under John A. Macdonald’s Conservatives, next as an independent, and finally, as a Liberal. He served as finance minister under the government of Alexander Mackenzie, and finance critic under Wilfrid Laurier. He was a fierce opponent of Macdonald’s national policy while in opposition. Awarded a knighthood in 1879, Sir Richard Cartwright served as Laurier’s

⁴ Cartwright’s uncle, Richard J. Cartwright, was one such leading man. See Sir Richard Cartwright, *Reminiscences* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912). See also Lloyd Bryce and A. Peniston, *Both Sides of the Tariff Question by the World’s Leading Men* (New York: Alonzo Peniston, 1889), HathiTrust Digital Library, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101068131224&view=1up&seq=1>

⁵ “Sir Richard John Cartwright,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography, accessed May 5, 2020, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cartwright_richard_john_14E.html

English-Canadian lieutenant, and became a key Liberal figure during the contentious election of 1891, whose campaign Macdonald successfully framed as a battle for Canada's survival.⁶ With a lengthy career in politics during a period of considerable change, Cartwright's uncle would later become a figure of scholarly and historical interest.⁷

Cartwright's maternal great-grandfather, D'Arcy Edward Boulton, and his wife, Sarah Anne Robinson, built the Grange as their family home in Toronto. There, they had eight children, including Cartwright's grandfather, D'Arcy, a lawyer who would serve as mayor of Cobourg, and William Boulton, who would become mayor of Toronto. The Grange would eventually pass to Harriette Mann Dixon, William's widow, who would later marry the historian and anti-feminist Goldwin Smith.⁸ On both her mother's and father's sides, Cartwright was descended from a long line of missionaries, ministers, lawyers, politicians, and thinkers, educated figures of great influence, who committed their professional lives, at least in part, to the service of the country. Fueled by a Protestant Christianity that linked social, religious, and moral obligation, the threads of service and education were woven through the Boulton and Cartwright family histories.⁹ It was Cartwright's great-grandfather who, in making John Strachan guardian of his twin sons, hoped that they "should have such an education as will qualify them for being useful to their

⁶ Pennington discusses Macdonald's attempt to cast Cartwright and other leading Liberals as treasonous, effectively conspiring to force the annexation of Canada. The Liberal platform of "unrestricted reciprocity" became synonymous with its strongest champion: Richard Cartwright, while Macdonald touted protectionism. See Chris Pennington, "The Conspiracy That Never was: The Surprising Lessons of 1891," *International Journal* vol. 66, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 719.

⁷ See for example, Kenneth McLaughlin, *Race, Religion and Politics: The Election of 1896 in Canada* (Waterloo: Centre of Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2019); Pennington, "The Conspiracy that never was," 719-730.

⁸ Smith was formerly the Regius professor of History at Oxford, and an eminent social critic in Canada. See A.B. McKillop, *The Spinster and the Prophet: Florence Deeks, H.G. Wells, and the Mystery of the Purloined Past* (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 2000), 58.

⁹ William Westfall discusses Protestant views of creation, including Christianity's role in teaching followers how to lead virtuous lives. See *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1989), 23.

friends, their country, and by a taste for literature ensure them an unfailing source of personal employment.”¹⁰

Cartwright’s first professional aspirations were inspired by the battles that raged in her youth. In those formative years in the 1880s, her greatest desires coincided with those of her heroes, who were by and large male soldiers fighting for Britain. Her favourites were General Charles George Gordon and Colonel J.D.H. Stewart, who were fighting in the Mahdist War, and Sir Henry Montgomery Lawrence, who had died during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. As resistance loomed in the Northwest Territory, and as sixteen-year-old Cartwright watched even more volunteer soldiers board the C.P.R. trains bound for the Prairie West, she felt a flourishing and urgent desire to serve God in battle, to fight like her hero General Gordon, and to become a soldier. Her Uncle Charlie and Uncle Bowen joined the soldiers headed west, so why couldn’t she?

“Oh how I wish I were a man!” she wrote in March of 1885. “I should be happy if I felt I had struck one blow for England.” In Cartwright’s late nineteenth-century world, this was a secret wish that she declared only in the private pages of her diary, and only with the repeated caveat that she “ought not to write these sort of reflections.”¹¹ She nonetheless watched with impatience as two battles played out that year: the Mahdist War, and the North-West Resistance. They were, for her, tangible expressions of the fight for civilization being played out across the world. They too seemed to highlight her inability to contribute in an active way: “just because I am a girl I can’t do anything,” she confessed, adding, “I want to be free.”¹² While the conflicts took place in different parts of the globe, they only

¹⁰ “John Solomon Cartwright,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography, accessed May 5, 2020, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cartwright_john_solomon_7E.html

¹¹ Mabel Cartwright, Diaries, March 9, 1885, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, F2182, Series 4, Box 6, File 11, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹² Ibid.

intensified her desire to “serve God on earth,” which, for a few brief years in her youth, manifested itself on the battlefield.¹³

The diaries that Cartwright kept as a young girl describe a tightly-knit family. She was close to her father, John Cartwright, a Toronto lawyer and Clerk of the Process at Osgoode Hall from 1878, who became Deputy Attorney General of Ontario in 1889. Her mother, Emily Boulton, conducted community work and district visiting for the church, “getting some clothes for the sufferers,” and asking drunkards to take the pledge.¹⁴ It is possible she volunteered with the Church Woman’s Mission Aid, an early missionary society that sent supplies to missions in the Diocese of Algoma.¹⁵ Life inside the Cartwright home at 102 McCaul Street bustled with chatter and news of the city and the outside world; domestic and international affairs were regular topics of discussion. Cartwright, like her father, devoured newspapers, and was encouraged to engage in political discussion. She joined her father on trips to Trinity College to meet with professors, all intimate friends of the family. Provost Body, Dr. Clarke and others from the college frequently joined the Cartwrights for dinner, where “the conversation was always interesting and good.”¹⁶ The Cartwrights were members of St. Thomas’ Parish in Toronto. Cartwright attended service regularly in her youth, including Evensong, and recorded her favourite Bible passages in her diary. The social sensibility of the Cartwright family was anything but insular, and from childhood Cartwright inherited a strong sense of duty from both her family and her Anglican faith. As a young girl,

¹³ Cartwright, Diaries, June 10, 1885.

¹⁴ As part of the prohibition effort, “taking the pledge” was a promise of temperance. See Cartwright, Diaries, December 12, 1884. See also Sharon Anne Cook, *“Through Sunshine and Shadow”: The Woman’s Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 21-22.

¹⁵ Cartwright, Diaries, February 19, 1885. See also Emily Willoughby Cummings, *Our Story: Some Pages from the History of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, 1855 to 1928* (Garden City Press: Toronto, 1928), 8.

¹⁶ These are the reminiscences of Fern Wood, a friend and former student of Mabel Cartwright. See Fern Wood, “Miss Cartwright,” Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 7, Box 11, File 5, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

her favourite Bible character was Paul, notable because he was “consumed by zeal and enthusiasm,” which to her young mind were the secrets to success.¹⁷ It was not only prayer but action that would “do something for my fellow men’s souls.” Even at sixteen, Cartwright longed to do parish visiting, though she was not yet old enough to be permitted to do so.¹⁸

After her parents lost their first child, John, “dear little Jack,” when he was five, Cartwright, the second-born, assumed the role of eldest child.¹⁹ Like her favourite Bible character, she possessed an enthusiastic nature, and thrived under pressure. In the mid-1880s, when she was sixteen, her young brother Stephen went off to boarding school, and siblings Ralph, Aubrey, and Winifred, all under eight years of age, remained at home. Their mother was frequently unwell. Cartwright served as a serious but caring elder sister, stepping in to help her young siblings with lessons, taking them to Church service, and sending for a doctor in case of illness. She took her brothers to Cobourg to stay with their grandparents when scarlet fever struck her household in 1885.²⁰ Like a teacher, she revelled in Stephen’s accomplishments at school, and was keenly devoted to her siblings’ wellbeing. Of Aubrey, her youngest brother, she reflected, “He is very willful and determined and headstrong, but he will be a splendid fellow if he is managed right.”²¹

In an increasingly volatile world, Cartwright wrote regularly in her diary between 1884 and 1889. She recorded lists of books she was reading, or planned to read, including her thoughts on her favourite characters, storylines, and authors. She appreciated a good narrative, assessing literature as a professional critic might. Kingsley’s *Two Years Ago* featured

¹⁷ Cartwright, Diaries, March 7, 1885.

¹⁸ Ibid., April 10, 1885.

¹⁹ Ibid., August 16, 1884.

²⁰ Ibid., April 10, 1885.

²¹ Ibid., August 2, 1885.

characters “not so prominent as some, but finely drawn.”²² *In the Golden Days* was disappointing, for “the plot rather breaks down at the end.”²³ Alone with her thoughts, Cartwright considered the state of the world and her place in it, leafing through newspaper articles and admiring photographs of British war heroes. She relished books by Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, and biographies of “great men” such as Lord Lawrence. While women historians of the nineteenth century sculpted their histories in the tradition of biography with a focus on politics, histories of the “great woman” do not appear to have captured Cartwright’s interest during this time.²⁴

Patriotic protagonists who fought nobly on the battlefield or who aided the poor, such as George MacDonald’s *Robert Falconer*, appealed to her most.²⁵ Her favourite writers were, by and large, English, Anglican, and male, their narratives often recounting the histories of civil and military heroes. Such was the work of history, to relay the “fortunes of nations.”²⁶ For Cartwright, national identity was closely linked with her belief in the Anglo-Saxon mission to “cast light into all the ‘dark’ corners of the globe.” Like many Victorians in English Canada, she shared a conception of “history” as the “unfolding of God’s eternal purpose.”²⁷ As she read news reports of the very real battles erupting in the spring of 1885, she plowed through *Westward Ho!* and *Robinson Crusoe*, and Reginald Bosworth Smith’s volumes on Lord Lawrence, novels overflowing with male protagonists and colonial and

²² Ibid., July 2, 1885.

²³ Ibid., May 4, 1885.

²⁴ Beverly Boutilier, “Women’s Rights and Duties: Sarah Anne Curzon and the Politics of Canadian History,” in *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History*, eds. Beverly Boutilier and Alison L. Prentice (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 58.

²⁵ Cartwright, Diaries, March 17, 1885.

²⁶ Boutilier, “Women’s Rights and Duties,” 58.

²⁷ Dianne M. Hallman, “Cultivating a Love of Canada through History: Agnes Maule Machar, 1837-1927,” in *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History*, eds. Beverly Boutilier & Alison L. Prentice (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 26-27.

imperialist heroism. At the time, her childhood hero, General Gordon, appeared in the partisan newspapers that celebrated the British soldier's mission to Egypt.²⁸

Newspaper reports of the period idolized General Gordon, pointing to his “natural simplicity and steadfast devotion to duty.”²⁹ Soldiers were cast as heroic, solitary, fearless, and even God-like figures. Describing a photograph of the General, Cartwright remarked that he looked like “some saint or martyr, with earnest searching eyes, lofty brow and something impossibly pure about his face.”³⁰ As Cynthia F. Behrman explains, on the symbolic level, men such as Gordon, “standing against beleaguering hordes — those masses of anonymous black, brown, and yellow humanity that peopled the Empire — personified the English task in the modern world. He stood for Enlightenment, Freedom, Justice, and Civilization.”³¹ To Cartwright, he had answered the highest of Christian callings. She believed that “his death, at such a time may do more good than his life, for the death of martyrs is the life of the Church.”³²

While the Cartwrights followed Gordon's mission to Khartoum, the Canadian militia headed west to a landscape that was shifting in startling ways. Cartwright and little Aubrey joined the crowds of supporters lining King Street to cheer on the soldiers as they marched towards the train station headed for the Prairie West. She settled him onto her lap in a window “over Hooper's” where they could watch the men and band marching by. “I held onto A.,” she wrote, “and couldn't take my eyes off the 600. Oh! How I longed to be going too!”³³ While she disliked Lieutenant Governor Dewdney (he had not kept faith with “the

²⁸ For example, see “Khartoum, The Three Hundred and Twenty Days' Siege, Gordon's Gallant Defence,” *Globe*, February 28, 1885.

²⁹ Cynthia F. Behrman, “The After-Life of General Gordon,” *Albion* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1971), 49.

³⁰ Cartwright, *Diaries*, March 20, 1885.

³¹ Behrman, “The After-Life of General Gordon,” 51.

³² Cartwright, *Diaries*, March 20, 1885.

³³ Cartwright, *Diaries*, March 30, 1885.

Indians” who referred to him as “Old Tomorrow”), and sympathized with the Indigenous peoples (who could not be blamed for rising up “against their oppressors and plunderers, can they?”), her support for the Canadian effort to suppress the resistance was unwavering.³⁴ As she had with Gordon, Stewart, and Lawrence, she devotedly cheered the “brave sons” advancing toward the “rebels,” seeing in their mission the same heroic qualities that had led General Gordon into Khartoum to suppress the Mahdi rebels.³⁵

Cartwright followed the resistance in the Northwest Territory in earnest, walking to the news office daily for her copy of the *Evening Globe*. Editorials stirred anxiety about the “serious state of affairs,” and the “lively times ahead,” while speculating over the possibility of an “insurrection among the halfbreeds” or a full-blown “Indian war.”³⁶ Speeches by Cartwright’s uncle, the Liberal finance critic, appeared regularly in the papers. She read how he blasted the Government’s “carnival of corruption” in the Northwest, arguing that incompetency, ignorance, and mismanagement had led to a “second Tory rebellion.”³⁷ Never before had there been “a more wanton waste of public money,” never before had such great opportunities been “thrown away” while the Conservatives “controlled the administration of this country.” In Richard Cartwright’s estimation, the “Halfbreeds were more sinned against than sinning,” for when “they found the surveyors going through the lands... when they were informed that they would have to move out of their little homesteads, there was great excuse for them taking up arms.”³⁸ While the Government had had “every kind of warning that men could have,” discontentment had been inflamed by Louis Riel, the “dangerous agitator,” who had slipped into the country, all while the Conservatives “omitted to take the

³⁴ “Old Tomorrow” was a reference to John A. Macdonald. See Cartwright, Diaries, April 2 and 15, 1885.

³⁵ Cartwright, Diaries, July 27, 1885.

³⁶ Ibid., March 30, 1885.

³⁷ “Sir R. Cartwright’s Speech,” *Globe*, Oct. 2, 1885, 4.

³⁸ “East Durham,” *Globe*, August 17, 1885, 5.

most ordinary precautions.” The rebellion, Richard Cartwright warned, would result in “a very considerable amount of mischief to the future of this country.”³⁹ She wrote that “the earth is filled from east to west, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe.” The only consolation, she hoped, pointing to scripture, was that “He that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.”⁴⁰

Cartwright shared her uncle’s deeply critical view of the Canadian response to the resistance, but reflected on consequences beyond the political, perhaps one of the first signs of her burgeoning interest in the nation’s moral health. “Is there anyone worthy to govern our beautiful land?” she wondered.⁴¹ Profoundly skeptical of Governor Dewdney and John A. Macdonald, she saw the Dominion Government as largely “blameable for the present disasters.” “The whole world is in a ferment,” she wrote.⁴² But far from being sovereign political actors with diverse identities, Cartwright viewed Indigenous peoples, as well as the larger colonialist expansionist process, through a nationalist lens undergirded by her religious faith. If history unfolded by “God’s will,” then Indigenous peoples needed the “love of God.”⁴³ “We must send clergymen to teach the poor Indians,” she instructed young Aubrey. It was only through mission work that new hearts could be given to them, but they had to be “taught.”⁴⁴ Indigenous peoples, were, for Cartwright, not part of a fluid or active world with a long history, but were straight out of Longfellow’s poem, mythical figures who inhabited a

³⁹ See “Sir R. Cartwright: Reply to Sir John’s Attack on Archbishop Tache,” *Globe*, Apr. 1, 1885; “Canada’s position: Speech of Sir. R. J. Cartwright at Lucknow,” *Globe*, Oct. 20, 1885, 5; “Sir R. Cartwright’s Speech,” *Globe*, Oct. 2, 1885, 4. For more on Louis Riel, including his legacy, see Michael Witgen’s fascinating epilogue, “Louis Riel, Native Founding Father,” in *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). See also Doug Owrarn, “The Myth of Louis Riel,” *Canadian Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (June 2021): 181-198; Anthony Patrick Michel, “The Nile Voyageurs: Recognition of Canada’s Role in the Empire, 1884-1885,” (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2012).

⁴⁰ Quoted from Ecclesiastes 5:8. See Cartwright, Diaries, April 12, 1885.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, December 28, 1885.

⁴² *Ibid.*, April 2, 1885.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, December 28, 1885.

⁴⁴ Cartwright, Diaries, April 23, 1885.

“wild and unpeopled continent,” and were idly awaiting instruction.⁴⁵ Her religious sensibilities, however, also cast Indigenous peoples as her “brothers,” whom she believed had been wronged by the Canadian government. The “enormous enthusiasm and exultation” she felt for the soldiers fighting “the rebels,” were, for her, always mingled with “an undercurrent of pain.”⁴⁶ She viewed the rebellion through the prism of nationalism, and was deeply devoted to her Christian teachings, but she also saw the hanging of eight Indigenous men in November of 1885 as a profoundly unchristian act on the part of Canadians. “The Indians will hate us and despise our word,” she wrote, pointing to the hypocrisy of a government that could be both “followers of His Son,” and executioners.⁴⁷

Cartwright’s perspective, while reflexive, took for granted the superiority of Christianity, including the larger Christian mission to civilize Indigenous peoples across the globe. An undercurrent of Christian mission work ran throughout her professional life, from her time in Britain, to her role as principal at St. Hilda’s, and later, in her social services advocacy. Strachan House became an extension of this calling to cast “light” on to the dark corners of the city. Key to this sensibility was Cartwright’s Whiggish interpretation of history, which branded English Canadians as the true descendants and rightful leaders of a Canadian nation. In the late summer of 1885, how she would serve God, and when, still remained to be decided, but her engagement in social and political affairs soon found an outlet in the halls of a university. “People wish Gordon had never gone to Khartoum,” she wrote after the General’s death, but “I don’t think he would say so. He would say that

⁴⁵ Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations*, 9.

⁴⁶ Cartwright, *Diaries*, March 30, 1885.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, December 28, 1885.

‘Infinite wisdom directed the whole affair, so now it is not you that sent me hither but God.’”⁴⁸ Perhaps the same could be said of her own path.

Education in Britain

In the summer of 1885, Cartwright set sail for Britain with her cousin, Maud Cayley, and her Uncle John as chaperone. Universities in both the United States and Great Britain began to accept women in the 1860s, though Oxford and Cambridge did not grant degrees to women until after the First and Second World Wars, respectively.⁴⁹ Cartwright received her education during years of major reform, a time when the debate on women’s education focused on what would be taught (academic subjects, moral and social values), how it would be taught (in large or small schools, or day schools), and by whom (the level of training of teachers, and their sex). Feminists argued for an education for young women that would be as close to young men’s as possible, while others, especially parents, worried about their daughters following too “narrow” a curriculum.⁵⁰ An English friend of the Cartwrights, with a position of “educational authority,” had encouraged Cartwright to undertake her education at the distinguished Cheltenham Ladies’ College.⁵¹ And so, along with Maud, Cartwright began her studies under the headship of Dorothea Beale, a “rather short, stout, gray-haired” woman with “kindly eyes.”⁵² Beale, Cheltenham’s Principal since 1858, was a prolific writer

⁴⁸ Cartwright, Diaries, March 22, 1885.

⁴⁹ Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 188.

⁵⁰ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 169. See also Shirley Foster, *Victorian Women’s Fiction: Marriage, Freedom, and the Individual* (London: Routledge, 2016); Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public, 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women’s Movement* (London, Routledge, 2013); Susan Hamilton & Janice Schroder, eds., *Nineteenth-Century British Women’s Education, 1840-1900* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁵¹ Marjory MacMurchy, “Representative Women: Miss Cartwright: Principal of St. Hilda’s College,” *Globe*, August 13, 1910, A2.

⁵² Cartwright, Diaries, August 31, 1885.

and educational reformer who viewed teaching as a “sacred vocation” and “spiritual calling.”⁵³ She believed firmly in the moral, intellectual, and physical training of women, and was a proponent of academic standards connected to gentility and religion. While Cheltenham teachers fostered rigorous and serious work habits, life in the connecting boarding house was meant to be an “intimate” and family-like space. Yet “professionalism and domesticity,” Martha Vicinus explains, “were kept sharply divided,” and remained an important element in each woman’s day.⁵⁴

Though Cartwright studied briefly at St. Hilda’s College in Toronto, most of her formal training took place in Britain. After Cheltenham, she attended Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, majoring in History with a focus on the Crusades. In lieu of a degree, she graduated as a “Lady Licentiate in Arts.”⁵⁵ There, she studied under Elizabeth Wordsworth, a Principal who viewed the hall and her “ladies” as a large upper-class family.⁵⁶ But, like Cheltenham, women’s education at Lady Margaret Hall was filled with contradiction. While reformers were committed to building the importance of corporate values, and instilling a sense of public duty in students, they emphasized “family” behaviour and values.⁵⁷ Subjects of study and the writing of official examinations made their scholarship “equal to” men’s, yet women students were required to uphold the conventions of feminine respectability. Colleges nurtured women’s independence while in residence, but they were frequently operated by women of remarkably conventional social outlooks.⁵⁸

⁵³ Josephine Kamm, *How Different From Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 40.

⁵⁴ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 167-169.

⁵⁵ Marjory MacMurchy, “Representative Women: Miss Cartwright: Principal of St. Hilda’s College,” *Globe*, August 13, 1910, A2.

⁵⁶ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 129.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

The private world of Cartwright's college boarding house was managed by a headmistress who ran a tightly-regulated ship, and promoted in boarders a strong sense of duty to others in the group. Fundamental to the home's smooth operation was fostering an "esprit de corps" among students, which included upholding high academic standards, physical health, and self-discipline. Even within the home's private walls, a "public mask" was donned, and good public behaviour was practised and nurtured.⁵⁹ Cartwright adored lectures and teachers, but was less keen on her fellow pupils. Her boarding house was run on the "year system," an arrangement that gave each "year" responsibility for the class (or year) directly below them.⁶⁰ "The girls here seem to think (some of them) that rudeness is a prerogative of school girls," she wrote, "and I never heard any girls use the slang they do... The head girl uses language unfit for any lady's mouth, and it's such a pity because she is exceedingly clever."⁶¹ Cartwright had expected to find "future Mrs. Adams' here," she wrote disappointingly, possibly referring to the teacher and education reformer, Mary Electa Adams.⁶² Slang and "unladylike expression" were reported to the headmistress. In one case, the student was asked to write a letter of apology to her mother.⁶³ Cartwright nonetheless felt it was "good for us to be here, away from home sympathy, and among uncongenial companions." "I shall be able now to sympathize better with my brothers than I could

⁵⁹ Ibid., 171, 185.

⁶⁰ Margaret Ham, "Timor Dei Principium Sapientiae," in *Sanctum Hildam Canimus: A Collection of Reminiscences*, ed. Barbara Sutton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 18-20.

⁶¹ Cartwright, *Diaries*, November 4, 1885.

⁶² Mary Electa Adams, teacher and reformer, founded the Brookhurst Academy in Cobourg, Ontario, in 1872. She taught at Wesleyan Academy in Sackville, New Brunswick, and later, was the Principal of Wesleyan Female College in Hamilton, Ontario. It is also possible that Cartwright was referring to Abigail Smith Adams, wife of second U.S. president, John Adams, and mother to sixth U.S. president, John Quincy Adams. See Cartwright, *Diaries*, October 23, 1885.

⁶³ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 186.

before,” she wrote, referring to Stephen, who for long stints in his youth remained at boarding school.⁶⁴

“We study hard,” Cartwright wrote, “but we enjoy the work,” adding that the “literature lectures are delightful.”⁶⁵ Her British education, however, extended well beyond the walls of the university. She took excursions to explore old churches and universities, and wrote of their architectural beauty at length. She took the train to London, and walked around Buckingham Palace, which she found underwhelming, but, she was swept away by the natural world beyond it, the “clear blue sky” of Henfield, and the beauty of the Downs. In contrast to the rich architectural history, and natural beauty around her, she also stole her first young-adult glimpses of poverty, social distress, and human despair. There were the dirty streets, the children who seemed to “live in an atmosphere of filth.” “I never saw anything like the dirt round here,” she wrote of Liverpool. The people were “deplorably dirty, their clothes literally falling to pieces,” but she admired the “factory girls” who looked so neat in their “short homespun petticoats.”⁶⁶ She read of the riots of unemployed workmen in London, who were “breaking windows” and “causing damage.” She thought their actions “childish,” but felt sympathy for their plight.⁶⁷ And she visited pockets of the country that felt like “another world” entirely. “Everything impressed one with a feeling of the wrong and misery of life,” she wrote of a carriage drive to New Kent Road. “The people’s faces were so depraved and wretched.” Of some places, she heard that even the policemen would not venture there alone.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Cartwright, Diaries, November 4, 1885.

⁶⁵ Ibid., October 23, 1885.

⁶⁶ Ibid., September 22, 1885.

⁶⁷ Ibid., February 12, 1886.

⁶⁸ Ibid., December 23, 1885.

Beyond poverty, Cartwright also encountered the bane of alcohol. It was frightful to see, the children “carrying jugs of beer across the streets” every day at noon hour. The “trade of spirits” was deplorable to Cartwright, who remarked on the “brilliantly lighted up” gin palaces everywhere. They were “great attractions” for men who knew little better, she thought.⁶⁹ Adamant that all people, including “drunkards” should abstain, she attended meetings of Christian mission workers, where they discussed the “awful curse of drink” and the “enormous influence possessed by woman,” presumably as moral regulators.⁷⁰

As she had done in Toronto, she plunged into her books as a means of making sense of the world around her. In Britain, she read less about military heroes than social advocates, saintly figures who helped the poor and destitute. She found beauty in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, *Excelsior*, because the youth “presses on in spite of opposition, giving his life, as God’s heroes so often do, in pursuit of truth.”⁷¹ She read Frederick Denison Maurice’s *The Conscience*, a collection of lectures by a Christian Socialist who believed that religious and social progress were one and the same.⁷² She began steadily to sow the seeds of her own advocacy potential. “I prefer the religion of the man who said he was so busy in caring for the souls of his neighbours that he had no time to think of his own.”⁷³

Glimpses of her future work in Toronto can be found in her early years in Britain. Here, her roles as teacher and social advocate were given their first form. Lucy Soulsby, whom Cartwright had known at Cheltenham, became the Head Mistress at the Oxford High

⁶⁹ Ibid., September 15, 1886.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., February 21, 1886.

⁷² Ibid., April 26, 1887. Frederick Denison Maurice contributed the “Lectures for Ladies” which would form his book at King’s College, London, beginning in 1847. The lectures were apparently so popular that they led to the creation of a regular institution, Queen’s College for Women, with Maurice as its head. See Kamm, *How Different From Us*, 13.

⁷³ Cartwright, Diaries, February 13, 1886.

School for Girls, and invited her to work for her as a mistress.⁷⁴ She worked too as a volunteer in the East End of London.⁷⁵ While the specifics of her volunteer work are unclear, we do know that she remained connected to mission workers throughout her time in Britain. She visited patients in the hospital, at one time bringing flowers to a “dying boy,” who was the “saddest sight” she’d ever seen. “I don’t know that I believe much in institutions,” she recorded following the visit. She regretted the “utter lack of personal care” given to the patients.⁷⁶

But it is also possible that she volunteered with the emerging settlement house movement. This could have been either through Lady Margaret Hall, which had underscored the “womanly virtues of public life,” and had opened its first settlement in Lambeth in 1887, or through the Cheltenham Ladies’ Guild, which inaugurated “St. Hilda’s East” in London’s East End in 1889, the same year that Cartwright finished her studies.⁷⁷ Situated in the city’s poorest neighbourhoods, settlements were run by educated, middle-class women who, through their close work among the poor, were committed to helping the most helpless improve their lives. For the settlers (as the workers were called), work in the settlements provided both “womanly work” and the opportunity to become public leaders.⁷⁸ The Cheltenham Ladies’ Guild formed to connect former students, and to provide work experience in the Guild’s “corporate capacity.”⁷⁹ By working among the needy and downtrodden, educated middle-class women like Cartwright could gain valuable experience

⁷⁴ Ibid., April 20, 1887.

⁷⁵ Fern Wood, “Miss Cartwright.”

⁷⁶ Cartwright, *Diaries*, July 24, 1889.

⁷⁷ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 221-224.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 224.

in public affairs. They could also contribute to a “higher good” by serving God and country.⁸⁰

The settlement house movement attracted many middle-class women of the late nineteenth century, who, through charitable work, gained experience in specific areas, such as assisting elderly women, children, new mothers, and those with physical disabilities. Valuable experience could also be found in starting clubs and organizations, and in doing case work.⁸¹ In an autobiographical account, one settler insisted that the work provided her with the patience to help her aging father.⁸² While many women like Cartwright had watched their male relatives contribute to God and country through military service, missionary work, or politics, settlement work promised to fulfil an important sense of purpose for women settlers. With their ideological roots in charitable organizations such as the Charity Organization Society, the women’s settlement movement based its work on social outreach, individual friendship, and neighbourliness, and remained focused on “women’s issues.”⁸³

Settlement work especially attracted students who had been to college, where “esprit de corps,” as well as a sense of communal duty, was vital to the boarding home’s operation.⁸⁴ In the years before social welfare, the personal commitments of individual women strengthened both the settlement house and its larger social outreach initiatives. The “public mask” that had been nurtured in college bore fruit in the city’s slums. “In a slum, a lady became tougher, more capable – and more public.”⁸⁵ As Vicinus explains, middle-class volunteers adopted metaphors of disease and of empire; colonialism was “an even more

⁸⁰ Ibid., 213.

⁸¹ Ibid., 215.

⁸² Ibid., 222.

⁸³ Ibid., 212.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 213, 240.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 216.

pervasive metaphor.” With her presence she “purified” the “stained slums of England,” colonizing the “natives” where she went, and educating them in the new standards of hygiene, deportment, and manners. Underlying her actions was an assumption that equated uncleanliness with “moral depravity.” More than that, she moved through the streets feeling welcome seemingly everywhere, and in this way “conquered” the slums without resistance.⁸⁶

While it is unclear whether Cartwright worked directly in the settlement house movement, she lived in London in the founding years of the Women’s University Settlement, when the joint-college initiative first planted its roots in Southwark.⁸⁷ She was certainly aware of Octavia Hill’s housing projects for the poor, and the training and employment aid that was offered to women through the Working Ladies’ Guild.⁸⁸ Cartwright was a fervent admirer of the social reformer, philosopher, poet, and philanthropist John Ruskin, known for his connection to Toynbee Hall and the Arts and Crafts Movement. She seems to have carried Ruskin’s influence with her throughout her sojourn in Britain. Her long diary entries extoll the virtues of architecture, and testify to her growing concern for the plight of factory workers. She declared Ruskin’s Lecture on Work “magnificent.”⁸⁹ Ruskin too was a close friend and colleague of Hill’s, and helped to finance Hill’s Charity Organization Society, as well as other initiatives for poor and immigrant populations in south London.⁹⁰ Underlying these formative years in Britain were figures and movements tackling a range of social interests, from poverty, housing, education, and elderly people, to struggling and disadvantaged workers. “Wise work” that was “honest, useful, and cheerful”

⁸⁶ Ibid., 219-220.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 218.

⁸⁸ Judith Friedland, *Restoring the Spirit: The Beginnings of Occupational Therapy in Canada, 1890-1930* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2011), 31-33.

⁸⁹ Cartwright discusses child labour and the “sweating system.” See Cartwright, *Diaries*, January 17, 1885, May 9, 1889.

⁹⁰ Ruskin founded the London Workingman’s College. See Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 216. See also Friedland, *Restoring the Spirit*, 32-33.

was right in line with Cartwright's own evolving views of her place in a changing, industrializing society.⁹¹ "Study to be quiet," she wrote on New Year's Day, 1888, "study to be cheerful."⁹² Indeed, her "idea of happiness," by the fall of 1889, was in being "useful" to others.⁹³

Serving others, she had learned abroad, gave her joy and solidified her aspirations. "I know now my favourite occupation," she wrote, "waiting on people I love."⁹⁴ She began to question her views and values, changing her mind on prohibition. "You can't drive men into doing right, and if you tie up their hands so that they can't steal, you will never reach the ideal state," she noted. "Men," she believed, needed to be led, or "taught."⁹⁵ She was a diligent student, remarkably focused and curious, excelling in a multitude of subjects. Cartwright would long benefit, one woman writer suggested in 1910, from an education under "the finest type of university-trained English women."⁹⁶ By the time she returned to Canada, she had not only received a university education and teaching experience, but she knew for certain that her life would be devoted toward social advocacy.

St. Hilda's

Cartwright returned to Toronto, where its population was growing substantially, and with it came social problems and concerns over sanitation and housing.⁹⁷ She also returned as the

⁹¹ Mabel's references to cheerfulness and usefulness may have been inspired by Ruskin's Lectures on Work. See John Ruskin, "Lecture 1, Delivered before the Working Men's Institute, at Camberwell," *The Victorian Web*, accessed June 4, 2020, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/crown.html>

⁹² Cartwright, *Diaries*, January 1, 1888.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, undated entry (likely fall of 1889).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 7, 1887.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, undated entry, (likely fall of 1889).

⁹⁶ Marjory MacMurchy, "Representative Women: Miss Cartwright: Principal of St. Hilda's College," *Globe*, August 13, 1910, A2.

⁹⁷ In Toronto, the population grew from 180,000 to nearly 400,000 between 1891 and 1901. See Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 19.

city's network of women's groups expanded. Guided by influential leaders such as Emily Murphy, Sarah Curzon, and the radical feminist Flora MacDonald Denison, Cartwright joined others forming themselves into women's groups, and determined to take part in political and professional life.⁹⁸ She joined the Toronto Local Council of Women, where she served as Corresponding Secretary as early as 1894. The Council's interests and aims went from prison, parole, and sentence reforms, to "supervised playgrounds, prevention of crime, citizenship, medical inspection in schools, prevention of tuberculosis," and support for "feeble-minded women," and the "aged and infirm."⁹⁹ As Carolyn Strange writes, the Toronto Local Council of Women followed the lead of women in places like New York and Chicago in implementing vice surveys to investigate the causes of social problems. Urban progressives more generally adopted a social scientific approach to their studies of the city, believing that, through social action, data collection and rational management, problems of the immoral city could be isolated and addressed.¹⁰⁰

In 1897, Cartwright joined the Toronto Diocese Woman's Auxiliary and was elected to the position of Recording Secretary.¹⁰¹ Formed in connection with the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Church of England, the WA was founded to promote the missionary effort. It recruited women for the missionary work of the Church, and provided support and education to missionary workers in Japan, India, and on Indian reserves.¹⁰² In the early twentieth century its membership and initiatives gradually expanded. The

⁹⁸ For more on the proliferation of women's groups in Toronto at this time, see McKillop, *The Spinster and the Prophet*, 32-25.

⁹⁹ For examples, see "Council of Women: Annual Meeting Held in Normal School – A Successful Session – Work Accomplished," *Globe*, June 5, 1894; "Women were at Work; What the Local Council Did during the Year," *Globe*, Jan. 30, 1907, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 102-104.

¹⁰¹ "Women's Auxiliary: The 11th Annual Meeting of the Toronto Diocese," *Globe*, 6 May 1897, 12.

¹⁰² Cummings, *Our Story*, 15.

Missionary Society of the Church of Canada (MSCC) was formed in 1902, replacing the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, and the Canadian Church Missionary Society. The WA then became the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada. Cartwright would eventually serve as president of the Toronto Diocese beginning in 1911. The Diocesan motto, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," reflected the steady growth and committed character of its membership.¹⁰³

The return to Toronto was marked by a flurry of activities. Cartwright found like-minded women concerned with the moral and social improvement of society. She also returned to teaching, accepting a position at Bishop Strachan High School for Girls in 1899. But as she increasingly carved out professional spaces where she could contribute, she suffered personal loss. In the same year, her young brother, Ralph, died suddenly of Bright's disease.¹⁰⁴ At only twenty-three years old, the loss was devastating for the Cartwright family.

Ralph's death, along with a new teaching position, occurred in a period of local and national transformation. The social problems brought on by immigration, urbanization, and industrialization stirred anxiety and apprehension. Newspapers documented stories of "working girls," high levels of alcohol consumption, and the city's slum conditions. Materialism and greed were rampant. As Donald Wright explains, while the "great transformation" included a transcontinental railway, an expanding industrial economy, and more heavily populated cities, change spread too through the intellectual communities. The university, once a beacon of moral philosophy and religious instruction, continued its steady shift toward empiricism and the social sciences. By the beginning of the twentieth century,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁴ "Bishop Strachan School," *Globe*, 19 May 1899, 7.

the religious origins of the university appeared oddly out-of-step with the broader society.¹⁰⁵ Cartwright resigned from the teaching position from Bishop Strachan High School, and in 1903, was appointed principal of St. Hilda's, the women's residence and "Sister Institution" for Trinity College in Toronto. She was thirty-four.

Cartwright's photo appears in the *Globe* announcing her appointment. Her gaze is firm, and in every way she looks the part of a stern teacher: wearing a stiff, high-collared blouse, her expression, though not unkind, is serious and authoritative. Cartwright was introduced as "the daughter" of John R. Cartwright, Deputy Attorney General of Ontario.¹⁰⁶ She brought with her the "flattering testimonials" of her former headmistress, Torontonians learned, and had "obtained a certificate equivalent to a degree."¹⁰⁷ As one former student recalled, Cartwright might have been unknown to many in Toronto at this time, but she was "no stranger" to Trinity College and its traditions. Her three brothers had been educated there, her mother and father had intimate friends on its faculty, and from a young age she had joined her father on trips to visit with Trinity friends. While the appointment to St. Hilda's marked a fresh start, she was deeply attuned to Trinity's history and its legacies.¹⁰⁸

When Cartwright accepted the post of principal, St. Hilda's was still a relatively new addition to the Trinity college grounds. Built in 1899, there were only twenty women students in residence.¹⁰⁹ Yet it was not just St. Hilda's relative seclusion that set it apart from the other buildings on the Trinity grounds. As a former St. Hilda's student noted, the residence was situated "in a large park, surrounded by an iron fence."¹¹⁰ Encircled by

¹⁰⁵ Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 24-25.

¹⁰⁶ "Miss Mabel Cartwright," *The Globe*, May 19, 1903, 8.

¹⁰⁷ "Miss Cartwright Principal: To Succeed Mrs. Rigby as Head of St. Hilda's College," *Globe*, May 13, 1903.

¹⁰⁸ Fern Wood, "Miss Cartwright."

¹⁰⁹ Melinda H. Seaman, "My Life with the Saints and Others," in *Sanctum Hildam Canimus*, 138.

¹¹⁰ Margaret McDougall, "St. Hilda's, 1915-1919," in *Sanctum Hildam Canimus*, 11.

gardens, with windows on the north and east sides overlooking the Gore Vale ravine, Eden Smith's design was smaller in scale than the men's residences, had ample common-room space, and looked in every way like a large private house.¹¹¹ In one photograph St. Hilda's appears behind the trees. It is three-storeys tall, with a large verandah.¹¹² The women's residence was surely designed with its female residents in mind. Large common rooms, set apart from the bedrooms, were situated on the main floor, along with principal Cartwright's quarters.¹¹³

In a 1914 brochure, St. Hilda's College is described as "bright, well ventilated, and full of sunshine."¹¹⁴ The home was equipped with a chapel, library, and rooms off a central hallway. If the folding doors of the dining room and common rooms were left open, dancers could "...twirl uninterruptedly from one end of the building to the other."¹¹⁵ "St Hilda's was a comfortable building," Margaret McDougall, class of 1919, recalled. "A few of the rooms had fireplaces and these were reserved for senior girls. There was a small chapel with services morning and evening, the girls taking turns reading the lessons and playing organ."¹¹⁶

As principal, Cartwright, or "Carty," lived, taught, and worked alongside her students, whose education, she firmly believed, would include both moral and social instruction. Just as her own education had been infused with the strong currents of public duty and shared obligation, she imparted her own cultural legacies and traditions onto a new

¹¹¹ Alyson E. King, "Centres of 'Home-Like Influence': Residences for Women at the University of Toronto," *Material History Review* 49 (Spring 1999): 42, 47.

¹¹² Photographs, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 8, Box 12, File 1, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹¹³ King, "Centres of 'Home-Like Influence,'" 40.

¹¹⁴ Trinity College, "Trinity College and St. Hilda's College," 1914 brochure, Internet Archive, accessed March 10, 2020, https://archive.org/details/cihm_77088/page/n31/mode/2up

¹¹⁵ Donald Jones, "St. Hilda's 'saints' marched first on the road to higher education," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 23, 1982, F14.

¹¹⁶ McDougall, "St. Hilda's, 1915-1919," 11.

generation of women.¹¹⁷ Chief among them was the “year system,” a rule in which each year (or class) was responsible for the “manner and morals of those in the year directly below them – seniors, juniors, sophs and freshies in descending order of the scale.” This was a point of pride for the college, meant to arouse in its students a sense of responsibility and duty for the younger ones. Protocol was equally important, from dress codes and schedules, to rules of conduct.¹¹⁸

Cartwright, as the head of household, was meant to be both a model to her students and their intellectual supervisor. This complemented Smith’s architectural design of St. Hilda’s, for it was meant to mirror the model middle-class home.¹¹⁹ In the words of one student, Cartwright’s task had been to make “Christian ladies of pagan rowdies.”¹²⁰ Mary Strachan, who worked alongside Cartwright (and was granddaughter of Trinity’s founder), put it equally succinctly: “Poor children,” she would say. “They come from places where there are no standards and they must be taught.”¹²¹ Cartwright held daily services in the chapel, where students took turns reading lessons to one another. There was the “procession” into dinner, led by Cartwright and any special visiting dignitaries. If students were late, “one was expected to wait near the centre of the dining room till Carty’s eye could be caught, nods exchanged, and then the latecomer could take her place at table.”¹²² The atmosphere was orderly and infused with discipline, and the women’s residence, built with

¹¹⁷ Margaret Ham, “Tmor Dei Principium Sapientiae,” in *Sanctum Hildam Canimus*, 17.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

¹¹⁹ King, “Centres of ‘Home-Like Influence,’” 40.

¹²⁰ Christine Hair Forster, Letter to Cartwright on the occasion of her retirement, December, 1936, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 3, Box 6, File 1.

¹²¹ Letter to Cartwright, Unknown author, October 7, 1936, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 3, Box 6, File 1.

¹²² Ham, “Tmor Dei Principium Sapientiae,” 20.

its female students in mind, was meant to ensure the safety of its residents and reduce the dangers of the city.¹²³

For many of the years Cartwright served as principal of St. Hilda's, she was not a faculty member at Trinity. In the eyes of her friend, Fern Wood, Cartwright felt the absence of an academic role deeply.¹²⁴ After teaching at the Bishop Strachan High School in Toronto, the transition to a non-teaching position was challenging. Cartwright was not alone in her frustration. Her counterpart, Margaret Addison, then Dean of Residence of Annesley Hall at Victoria College, had pushed for a position on the faculty. After a brief period as lecturer in German, Addison was removed from the faculty over a disagreement over the appointment and rate of pay.¹²⁵ As Jean O'Grady argues, it was not Addison's lack of Ph.D. that was the issue, for such accreditation was not mandatory at the time. Moreover, Addison, like Cartwright, also had teaching experience, so it was not her lack of experience that made her unfit for the task either. "It is hard to escape the conclusion," writes O'Grady, "that her sex was the decisive problem."¹²⁶ Like Addison, Cartwright deeply desired to serve and be useful to the broader intellectual community at Trinity. Yet like Addison, she found her usefulness confined to outside the classroom, at least initially.

Cartwright and Addison shared similar obligations in their respective residences, duties that pushed them both physically and mentally. The principal's responsibilities involved attending official functions, writing letters, receiving visitors, making announcements, managing banking, coordinating rooms, writing reports, booking train tickets, and even personally "nursing the sick." Like Addison, Cartwright stayed up until the

¹²³ King, "Centres of 'Home-Like Influence,'" 40.

¹²⁴ Wood, "Miss Cartwright."

¹²⁵ Jean O'Grady, *Margaret Addison: A Biography* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), 110.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

“last stray sheep was safely penned.”¹²⁷ “We would hear her step in the halls,” one student recalled of Cartwright, “as she visited each room to bid its occupants good night.”¹²⁸

Cartwright and Addison became close, bonded by a mutual love of England and their equally-devoted religious outlooks. As unmarried professionals, they also benefited from their camaraderie and that of other professional women. As Bonnie Smith tells us, growing numbers of professional women in western countries chose to remain unmarried. Some lived together as couples, or in sizeable boarding houses or women’s apartments or clubs.¹²⁹ Of Addison, O’Grady points out that, like many deans, she was unmarried, and longed to show that women could have a career. This contrasted with the generation that followed, and was determined to prove that both marriage and a career were possible.¹³⁰

The scarcity of women faculty became a preoccupation for the University of Toronto in subsequent years, leading its government to consider establishing a separate college for women in 1908.¹³¹ By this time, the University had long since federated with denominational colleges including St. Michael’s, Wycliffe, Knox, Victoria, and the non-denominational University College. It had also recently federated with Trinity in 1904, though it would only be in 1925 that Trinity would leave its Queen Street campus for Queen’s Park. The motion put forth in the senate by George Wrong, head of history, was that a committee be formed to study and report upon the “feasibility of establishing a separate college for women in the University.” With the senate’s blessing, the committee proceeded with Wrong as chairman. In his estimation, a separate college for women could be justified: the arts colleges were becoming increasingly crowded, and a separate college

¹²⁷ O’Grady, *Margaret Addison*, 107.

¹²⁸ Ham, “Imor Dei Principium Sapientiae,” 18.

¹²⁹ Smith, *The Gender of History*, 190.

¹³⁰ O’Grady, *Margaret Addison*, 8.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

would end the predominance of either women or men in a specific sphere of courses (for instance, the dominance of women in modern languages). Moreover, Wrong believed that women's courses should train students for their future roles as homemakers. A woman's lot, after all, was "to be that of a wife and mother." The main aim of women's education was to prepare her for "this sphere," he said, to be found in courses such as "good housekeeping."¹³²

Both Cartwright and Addison were uneasy with this proposal, particularly the religious nature of the proposed non-denominational college and its relationship to other residences.¹³³ As members of the University Women's Club, founded in 1903 to encourage friendship and advance women's educational positions, they pushed for greater representation of women on teaching faculties, and the senate.¹³⁴ When Wrong presented his committee's report in April of 1909, two critical components were left unaddressed. While the committee was supportive of a separate women's college, questions surrounding faculty appointments and the college's relationship with the federated colleges were left unanswered. In response, the University Women's Club, along with representatives of the alumnae associations of Victoria, University College, St. Hilda's, and medicine, submitted a collective response to the university senate. They argued that a separate women's college would unduly hurt the education of women students. Senior professors would be unlikely to offer separate lectures to women, they argued, and students would be forced to either attend the male-dominated classes, or contend with junior lecturers in their segregated classes.¹³⁵ Cartwright, responding to Wrong's report in the U of T *Monthly*, argued that there was a

¹³² Friedland, *The University of Toronto*, 229.

¹³³ O'Grady, *Margaret Addison*, 114.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹³⁵ O'Grady, *Margaret Addison*, 116.

“prejudice...that women may safely teach modern languages, but not classics or mathematics.”¹³⁶ “Is not co-education incomplete,” she asked, “unless women have some share in teaching as well as in learning?” The most substantial impediment to the present system, the *Saint Hilda’s Chronicle* argued, “is that the intellectual life of the women students is entirely controlled and directed by men.” The proposal would lead to the “curtailment of library and laboratory privileges,” the alumnae association argued. In addition, Victoria and Trinity students would lose their religious education if they joined the non-denominational college. Ultimately, the alumnae repeated that the university women were not unhappy with coeducation at the University of Toronto, but were dismayed with the lack of women appointments to its faculty and senate.¹³⁷ The issue was eventually dropped, with Wrong arguing that “if the women were not in favor of the College, that was the end of it.”¹³⁸

In the summer of 1909, Addison and the joint alumnae pushed the university on a second case: the necessity for the appointment of a Dean of Women at the University of Toronto. After soliciting information from leading universities across North America, the alumnae’s report stipulated that the position was “essential to the best interests of women students,” and that it was most beneficial if the dean also had a teaching appointment. As O’Grady describes it, the position in the United States had by this time been accepted as a subgroup of the American Association of Collegiate Alumni. By 1913, they would insist that any Dean of Women appointment include a permanent position on the faculty.¹³⁹

Cartwright had argued that her position as principal would be strengthened if she “met the students as a teacher,” but it would be many years before she did so.¹⁴⁰ And so it

¹³⁶ Quoted in Friedland, *The University of Toronto*, 231.

¹³⁷ O’Grady, *Margaret Addison*, 116. See also Friedland, *The University of Toronto*, 232-233.

¹³⁸ Friedland, *The University of Toronto*, 231.

¹³⁹ O’Grady, *Margaret Addison*, 116-117.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

must have been exceedingly difficult to hear Robert Falconer, the President of the University of Toronto, call upon his community to “find the highest good by serving your fellows through your intellect, your wealth, your position, or whatever talent you may possess.”¹⁴¹

The debate over opening a separate women’s college included debate over the proper function of the university. By 1910, Falconer’s concern with the broader community, as well as his colleagues’ mounting interest in the social sciences and concern for the city’s social problems, led the male faculty to organize its first university settlement house on Adelaide Street.¹⁴² Within the North American settlement movement, the “community” gradually became the focus and unit of analysis, representing a departure from the severe individualism of nineteenth century laissez-faire capitalism.¹⁴³ Despite the fact that groups such as the Toronto Local Council of Women and the University’s Women Club had backed earlier Toronto settlements like the Evangelina House (which opened in 1902), university women were initially excluded from the University Settlement. Yet the wave of change continued to flow through the university community as it struggled to come to terms with its role in a changing world. Growing interest in serving the wider community, originating from inside the university, was undoubtedly a reflection of this.

Cartwright eventually received a permanent position on Trinity’s faculty, first as a lecturer in the English department, and then as associate professor, but it was the First World War that propelled the initial appointment. As her friend Fern Wood recalls, many women were taken on the teaching staff when their male counterparts joined the war

¹⁴¹ Friedland, *The University of Toronto*, 222.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 221. Settlement houses existed as early as 1902 in Canada, such as the Evangelina House on Queen Street East in Toronto. It had close connections with the Young Women’s Christian Association. See Friedland, *The University of Toronto*, 52. See also Cathy James, “Reforming Reform: Toronto’s Settlement House Movement,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (March 2001): 63.

¹⁴³ The shift can be seen in other settlement homes, such as Hull House in Chicago, and the work of Jane Addams. See James, “Reforming Reform,” 63.

effort.¹⁴⁴ The Dean of Women position, for which Addison had fought so tirelessly, was approved by the university in 1915. Cartwright accepted the position. Even with the new responsibilities, she continued to serve as principal of St. Hilda's. She also continued as president of the Toronto WA.

Cartwright's role as teacher expanded considerably over the next decade, and it was not only in the women's residence or in the classrooms of Trinity that she served as educator. While concern with urbanization and an influx of new immigrants manifested itself in wide-spread fears over white slavery and the well-being of young single women, Cartwright expanded the WA's mandate to include local social service.¹⁴⁵ As the Superintendent of the Alexandra Industrial School for Girls pointed out at a WA meeting, "there was plenty of mission work to be done right in Ontario."¹⁴⁶ Cartwright's interest in the nation's young dominated her thoughts and growing interest in social work. Her daily "quiet notes" are filled with reflections on how to mould the next generation. An address she gave at the Pan-Anglican Congress in London in 1908, caught the attention of several writers, who described her speech as "one of the notable events" of the Congress. Entitled "The Responsibility of the Relation of the Church to the Young," Cartwright's speech to an audience of "three thousand" was met with the "deepest attention," and "frequent applause." Marjory MacMurchy, who described the event for the *Globe*, surmised that the

¹⁴⁴ Fern Wood, "Miss Cartwright."

¹⁴⁵ For more on the fears of white slavery in Canada see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁶ "Woman's Auxiliary in Annual Session: Miss Cartwright tells of aim to develop Social Conscience," *Globe*, May 6, 1919, 10.

future of university life for women in Canada hinged largely on “Canadian women of Cartwright’s character.”¹⁴⁷

Social purity advocates expressed concern for the young, immigrants, and the “aged or infirm.” “Cleansing” the city of social vice was a preoccupation for Cartwright. As she had when she was young, she implicitly imposed a self-righteous sense of responsibility on the Anglo-Saxon “race” to “lift” the masses. As Mariana Valverde puts it, social service work involved civilizing or colonizing the slums. In Toronto, this meant “Canadianizing” new immigrants and teaching them the tenets of Christianity.¹⁴⁸ For the WA, it meant expanding its mission from recruiting and training young women for mission work, to a wider canvas that embraced the social sciences and aimed to improve the city’s growing social problems.

In Cartwright’s presidential address to the Toronto WA in 1917, she announced that a social service department would be added to the organization. She spoke passionately about the soldiers fighting overseas, and, quoting from Donald Honkey’s book, *A Student in Arms*, reminded her audience that it depended upon “the women of England whether the land goes back into the old ruts of selfishness after the war is over.” If soldiers could be “knights for the Lord Jesus Christ,” women could fight the war of social vice in the city’s “darkest” slums.¹⁴⁹ The Toronto WA, increasingly concentrated on the “precariousness of life” and “our land,” turned to social services experts in order to address the “lack of spirituality in girls.” The WA worked in tandem with the Neighbourhood Workers Association. It looked to districts in both Canada and the United States for guidance, including the “Preventative League” in New York, whose workers prided themselves on

¹⁴⁷ Marjory MacMurchy, “Representative Women: Miss Cartwright: Principal of St. Hilda’s College,” *Globe*, August 13, 1910, A2.

¹⁴⁸ Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 116-118, 139.

¹⁴⁹ “Auxiliary Supports Sixty Missionaries: Womanhood should walk side by side with men,” *Globe*, May 3, 1917, 10.

being of “sisterly influence” to the young.”¹⁵⁰ As Valverde explains, the work of social purity was exactly this, guiding and educating the next generation, and lifting the moral tone of society more generally. The Church, as a leader in the social sciences, was a significant player in the larger movement to improve the moral health of society. Before the First World War, in particular, combatting juvenile delinquency, white slavery, and other social problems were largely in private hands.¹⁵¹

It was not always this straight-forward. The WA also worked closely with figures such as Dr. Peter Bryce, a key member in the Toronto-based Canadian Purity Education Association, an organization made up primarily of doctors. But he also worked inside the state, first as secretary of Ontario’s Board of Health from 1882-1904, and later as Chief Medical Officer of the federal Department of Immigration.¹⁵² Purity advocacy from inside the state was rare at this time, and the WA’s admiration of Bryce reveals something of its approach to social problems, one that combined both the scientific method and spiritual guidance. In introducing Bryce to a WA meeting, Cartwright insisted that there was no one “more honoured in social service work than Rev. Peter Bryce, who is not only a scientific investigator of social problems, but a living exponent of the spirit in which social work is to be done – the spirit of sympathy and understanding.” Cartwright’s group also worked closely with the well-known reformer and eugenicist Dr. Helen MacMurchy, who insisted that “the solution of social problems” was to be found in the “spiritual touch.” She also reminded the women of the WA that a “new power had been given to them,” the vote, and that men were “watching to see where we shall wear our new jewel.”¹⁵³ While she championed the newly

¹⁵⁰ “Women’s Auxiliary and Social Service,” May 5, 1915.

¹⁵¹ Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 17, 51.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵³ “Prepare in Homes even for famine,” *Globe*, May 2, 1917, 10.

won rights of women, MacMurphy's eugenic ideas, made popular by Canadian doctors of the time, concealed racist immigration policies under a scientific façade.¹⁵⁴

The WA's concern with guiding the young was closely connected to Canada's "social problem" of immigration. Canada needed immigration, but in "homeopathic doses." One-seventh of Toronto's population was foreign, it argued, and as the city's population swelled, so too did the responsibilities of social purity advocates. It was the duty of the WA and other organizations to make "Christianity attractive." Middle-class Anglo-Saxon women were to lead by example, presumably by showing non-British newcomers how to become good citizens.¹⁵⁵ Underlying these initiatives, as Valverde suggests, were growing fears about "strangers" and the failure of traditional systems of support.¹⁵⁶

It is not surprising that Cartwright, in her positions at both Trinity and with the Toronto WA, focused her attention on training. This was conducted through social work, and inspired by the spiritual touch. In addition to its regular duties of supporting domestic and foreign mission work, the WA under Cartwright focused on collecting social scientific data about the city's problems, raising money for local initiatives, and spearheading projects related to children, youth, and new immigrants. During the war, it also included helping educated women, "of the colleges," fill vacancies previously occupied by men.¹⁵⁷ Taken together, the work of the WA determined to treat the moral problems of the city and empower women as both educators and moral regulators. Most importantly, the "chief foundation-stone" of their work, Cartwright reminded the WA meeting in 1919, was prayer. Close behind it lay another basic need: "vocation." Girls and boys, she argued, needed to

¹⁵⁴ Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 107.

¹⁵⁵ "Auxiliary talks of Citizenship and its problems," *Globe*, May 8, 1914, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 103.

¹⁵⁷ "Women organize to replace enlistees," *Globe*, January 22, 1916.

keep both prayer and vocation in mind as they looked toward the future. Quoting from an address given by Rev. Ralph Sherman, she reminded the women that “God has given us minds to use in His service.”¹⁵⁸

For Cartwright, there was no contradiction between her social work and her religion. Over the years her commitment to both only intensified. One complemented the other; they were equally essential to the country’s moral health. “Is not the chief industry of any country,” she asked, “the making of men and women?” “Social work restores,” she was sure, and provided opportunities in society. “On the smallest scale,” she thought, it led to “the saving of babies,” and on the largest, “international relations.” She increasingly consulted works by social workers, such as Rich Cabot’s *What Men Live By*, A.J. Todd’s, *Scientific Spirit in Social Work*, and M. Richmond’s, *What is Social Case Work?* They seemed only to cement her belief that God’s will intended men and women to be “active workers” for Him, not just “passive recipients of his grace.”¹⁵⁹ The “spirit of social work never despairs.” In fact, she insisted, it was the “one job worth doing.” She called the man or woman who offered no contribution to public opinion, “not harmless but useless.”¹⁶⁰

“We all have our responsibility,” Cartwright wrote in March of 1924. She saw herself as a “little glow” in the “big heathen city,” and hoped that people would see “the light” through her. “Prayer and meditation,” she reminded herself, were close companions, and “must come first.”¹⁶¹ As Valverde explains, purity work was exercised and learned through parables, allegories, and poetic imagery. Cartwright’s “light,” in her own view, represented both her own power to uplift, and the “truth,” or light, of God. Her words were written in

¹⁵⁸ “Every dept. shows gains,” *Globe*, May 8, 1919, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Cartwright, undated, Quiet day notes, 1923-1924.

¹⁶⁰ This may be a direct quote from Canon Gould. *Ibid*, March 24, 1924.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*.

privacy and for her own personal benefit, but they mirrored the implicit day-to-day work of social purity advocates more generally, not in teaching people “step by step,” but “producing in them, through inspiring imagery,” Valverde writes, “the right type of consciousness as either rescuers or penitent fallen people.”¹⁶²

Strachan House

In an article appearing on January 23, 1925, the *Toronto Daily Star* reported that “St. Hilda’s College, sister institution to Trinity College, and situated on the same grounds is to become a home for the aged under the jurisdiction of the Anglican Church.” The “popular ladies’ college will be removed to a site on St. George Street,” the *Star* reported. The Bishop of Toronto had “expressed his approval” of the proposition, and had “discussed methods for successfully carrying it out.” The idea to convert St. Hilda’s into a home for old people, however, had originated with Cartwright. In carrying out the plan she had “the interest and support of all her co-workers in the diocese.”¹⁶³ Members of the WA presented Cartwright with \$1800 to be “used as she deems best in the equipping of the prospective Strachan Houses.” In her speech thanking members for their contribution to the home, she again pointed to the need to be useful. This time, however, she reflected on her own age and stage of life: “this was a time of testing, a time of difficulty.” “For us older ones it seems the day of the young and the expert, and those of us who are not young, and never have been expert, wonder where we can be of use.” She mused on the “the enthusiasm of youth.” She pointed to the wonderful enthusiasm of “middle-age.” God, she insisted, had “something for

¹⁶² Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 41.

¹⁶³ “St. Hilda’s College to be Home of Aged,” *Toronto Daily Star*, January 25, 1925, 22.

us all to be and do.”¹⁶⁴ Cartwright was fifty-six, and had lost both of her parents in recent years. Her professional experience and insight shaped her Strachan House initiative, but the personal loss of her aging parents, only one year apart, cannot be overlooked as a possible motivator.¹⁶⁵

The home for old people was originally intended to keep married couples together, an anomaly in Toronto at the time. Opening under the authority of the WA’s social services department, Cartwright envisioned that the structure of St. Hilda’s, the model “family home” where she had lived and worked since 1903, would be a fitting residence for aging “men, women, and married couples of modest means.” But because of the size and layout of the home, it was from the outset intended to be only for the “well elderly” or ambulatory.”¹⁶⁶ With three-storeys, private bedrooms only on the upper floors, and long, sweeping staircases, it was never designed to meet the unique demands of older age. It had for years been home to dozens of young undergraduate students, youthful and healthy women who thought nothing of running up and down the stairs, or “twirling” about the main floor common rooms, or throwing open the doors to the verandah.¹⁶⁷

The home was initially given the plural name Strachan “Houses” because there were originally two buildings on the site: The Lodge, situated next to St. Hilda’s, was a smaller building that housed the “overflow students,” but was later pulled down.¹⁶⁸ Mary Strachan, who had presided over the Lodge, suggested the name “Strachan Houses” for the newly

¹⁶⁴ “Touching Tribute to Zealous Friend of Mission Cause: Miss Cartwright Presented with Fund to Aid Aged People,” *Globe and Mail*, May 13, 1925, 22.

¹⁶⁵ “Ontario Suffers Loss: J.R. Cartwright Dies,” *Globe*, September 11, 1919, 6; “Mrs. E. Cartwright,” *Toronto Star*, November 17, 1920, 3.

¹⁶⁶ “Bridge to Tomorrow: 50 years in the lives of Anglican Women in the Diocese of Toronto, 1936-1985,” undated, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 30-32.

¹⁶⁷ Donald Jones, “St. Hilda’s ‘saints’ marched first on the road to higher education,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 23, 1982, F14.

¹⁶⁸ “Bridge to Tomorrow.”

opened residence. The name was also conceived to reflect the home's independence.¹⁶⁹ The plural "Houses" underscored that it was a place of *many* families, not just anonymous individuals living down a hallway of identical doorways. There was a second, more historical layer of meaning behind the home's chosen name. Both the name "Strachan" and its historical relationship to independence harkened back to the founding of Trinity College, when Bishop Strachan, in a fit of defiance and protest, opened his religious college on Queen Street.¹⁷⁰

In Cartwright's case, the founding of Strachan House was part of a wider social mandate, that occurred in the midst of growing social reform and alongside projects aimed at helping the deserving poor. The economic slump of previous years had carried through to 1925, and also became an important consideration. The Mackenzie King government withdrew from unemployment relief. The populations of the cities swelled. In 1924-25, 200,000 people were without work, and municipalities limited direct relief to married men with families. Relief, moreover, became conditional on residency. Without relief or employment, many workers became "jobless transients," leaving the city in search of work.¹⁷¹ For older people in need, the economic reality was frightening. Long before the advent of universal pensions or "senior citizenship," basic survival meant finding food, shelter and supplies through the House of Providence and the House of Industry. In the summer of 1925, many old men and women strove to maintain "their respect and independence."

¹⁶⁹ "Strachan Houses," *The Canadian Churchman*, April 14, 1932, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 1, File 5, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

¹⁷⁰ For more on Trinity College and its origins see Westfall, *The Founding Moment*.

¹⁷¹ James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 29-36.

Waiting lists at “old folks’ homes” were long, and made it next to impossible for “elderly people who may have a small maintenance fund” to find shelter.”¹⁷²

“Two sisters,” the *Globe* reported, who “belong to the superior middle class, have been reduced to want, one of the women having lost her eyesight, and the other attempting to provide a livelihood by plain sewing. An old-age pension,” it went on, “would be a godsend to these women.”¹⁷³ The Canadian Old Age Pension did not come into effect until 1927, was means-tested, and limited sharply the number of eligible applicants. As James G. Snell has shown, “the state insisted that family remain the primary source of support; and those elderly that took advantage of the program had, in effect, to mortgage their own scant property to the state.”¹⁷⁴ Elderly men and women faced remarkable barriers, both in securing work and finding affordable housing. The horrible situation endured by elderly people, the *Globe* reported, would “be helped somewhat with the opening of the Strachan House, which will in the autumn occupy the premises of the old St. Hilda’s College.” Perhaps most importantly, “both elderly folk who can pay a fee and those who cannot pay will be admitted.”¹⁷⁵

In an atmosphere of such obvious need, it is hard to imagine that the newly opened Strachan House, with a capacity of under forty, would have in any significant way alleviated the severe housing shortage facing older men and women in Toronto. The excitement about its establishment, however, points to its relative uniqueness. “It has been pointed out that aid

¹⁷² “Pension for Elderly Persons would make Years of Want Less Difficult to Endure,” *Globe and Mail*, July 22, 1925, 10.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ See James G. Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 186; See also James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 59.

¹⁷⁵ “Pension for Elderly Persons would make Years of Want Less Difficult to Endure,” *Globe and Mail*, July 22, 1925, 10.

for the aged destitute in Toronto has not been increased since 1902,” wrote the *Globe*. The city of Toronto leased the property for a “period of ten years at the nominal rental of \$1 per annum without taxes.” Still, the executive committee in charge of running the home faced a “tremendous task.” Funding its operation would become a long-term concern. Yet when it opened it fulfilled a “dire need for accommodation for the aged in the city.” Strachan House’s policy of accepting men and women together was also a significant departure from institutions that had historically segregated their residences by sex. For years after its opening, Strachan House was heralded as the only home in Toronto where husband and wife would not be separated. “The troubled hearts of many aged folk, provided with scant income and fearing separation,” the *Globe* explained, “have been gladdened with the institution of Strachan House, which will spell home to married couples.”¹⁷⁶

Strachan House’s focus on “married couples” was an important aspect of Cartwright’s initiative. Aging married couples were seen as both deserving beneficiaries of aid, and morally upstanding citizens. As Megan Davies explains, spinsters, widows, and “respectable couples” (especially those living in “quiet poverty”) were appealing to middle-class philanthropists.¹⁷⁷ The home’s focus on married couples was only one aspect of lifting the moral condition of society at large.

The annual convocation dinner of Trinity College, held on the evening of June 5th, 1925, was both a sad and hopeful event. As the *Globe* reported next day, it was to be the last at the old Convocation Hall. Soon the Trinity students would be off to Queen’s Park at the University of Toronto. Cartwright sat at one of the head tables and looked on as Provost

¹⁷⁶ “Blessing to Aged is Strachan House: Many Applicants for Residence in New Benevolent Institution, Will Open Tomorrow,” *Globe*, January 15, 1926, 13.

¹⁷⁷ Megan Davies, “Renovating the Canadian Old Age Home: The Evolution of Residential Care Facilities in B.C., 1930-1960,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 44.

Seager reminisced about the early days of Trinity. The students erupted into song after his speech, first with “Met’ Agona,” their college anthem, and then “Auld Lang Syne.”¹⁷⁸

Cartwright and the students of St. Hilda’s moved to the site on St. George Street shortly thereafter, and the structure long-known as St. Hilda’s in Trinity Park officially became Strachan House. As one student recalled, Cartwright “regretted the necessity for the move from Queen Street as much as anyone but realized that it had to be made – that Trinity and St. Hilda’s could not continue to be a full part of the University of Toronto at such a distance from the campus.”¹⁷⁹ The “old St. Hilda’s” in Trinity Park, however, would not remain vacant for long.

By the winter of 1926, Strachan House, once home to a mixture of boisterous undergraduate chatter, entertaining, and serious study, looked and sounded altogether different. In converting St. Hilda’s to Strachan House, Cartwright was reinforcing her belief that “social service without Christ and his Church could confer no lasting benefit.”¹⁸⁰ Like the young tenants who preceded them, the elderly residents of Strachan House would enter a highly-regulated atmosphere, where residents would be schooled in the home’s larger function. They became, by extension, subjects of Anglican social work.

¹⁷⁸ “Other Days at Old Trinity Brought to Mind at Banquet,” *Globe*, 5 June 1925, 11.

¹⁷⁹ Ham, “Tmor Dei Principium Sapientiae,” 17.

¹⁸⁰ *Canadian Churchman*, Apr. 21, 1955, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 9.



Image 1: Strachan House, 790 Queen Street West, Toronto. Undated.

Strachan House. Trinity College Archives, Cartwright and Wood Families fonds, F2182, Series 8, Box 12, File 4.

CHAPTER TWO

The Management Plan

On a fall night in 1926, the Lord Bishop of Toronto officially dedicated Strachan House. With Archdeacon Davidson and Canon Vernon at his side, the benediction was offered, and the small crowd that had gathered bowed their heads in quiet observance before drifting off into the night. With the ritual observed, St. Hilda's officially became Strachan House, and the home for old people became a permanent addition to Trinity Park in Ward Five.

There were two committees in charge of the management of Strachan House: the committee of management, which oversaw the home's daily operations, and the executive committee of the Toronto Diocese Women's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (WA), to which it reported. Through the WA's social service department, the committee of management and WA aimed to address the need of the "dependent aged in the city."¹ With the vacancy left by the departure of St. Hilda's undergraduate students in 1925, Mabel Cartwright, principal of St. Hilda's and president of the Toronto WA, envisioned a new purpose for the large residence in Trinity Park. It would become a haven for elderly people, a place where the aged man and wife would not have to be separated.² It seemed logical that a residence previously designed to shelter young women from the "dangers of the city" should be readily converted to a family home for elderly residents.³

¹ "Blessing to Aged is Strachan House," *Globe*, January 15, 1926, 13.

² "Strachan Houses Appropriate Name," *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

³ King discusses how women's college residences were based on the ideal of a middle-class family home. They were intended to offer safety and social guidance. See Alyson King, "Centres of 'Home-Like Influence': Residences for Women at the University of Toronto," *Material History Review* 49 (Spring 1999): 40.

In practice it was a difficult mission to uphold. In its first months of operation, confusion over authority and financial responsibility tested Cartwright's aim to assist elderly people in need. Within a year the committee of management threatened to disassociate itself from the WA and to run the home independently. At the same time, complaints regarding the home's tight bureaucratic control began piling up. Neither the committee of management nor the WA had any object in mind except "the good management of the home and the happiness and welfare of the residents," Cartwright wrote. The question, it seemed, was "one of method."⁴

Strachan House emerged from the convergence of a variety of influences. Cartwright was inspired by the almshouse system of the "old Country," while the committee of management and the social service department found models in the Protestant-run homes of New York City. In assembling a model, Cartwright and the committee of management emphasized independence and privacy for residents, in a homelike setting. The plan reflected ambition and innovation, but also inexperience. Exploring the founders' plan illustrates that the era for the elderly was, as James G. Snell has written, filled with contradiction.⁵ While the home championed independence, it was a highly structured environment in practice, with a tight screening process. Although residents' privacy was endorsed, it was regularly breached by the committee of management. The home was interdenominational in theory, yet observed regular Christian traditions and practices. A homelike atmosphere prevailed in its domestic appearance, yet an institutional character loomed large. While the result of various

⁴ Mabel Cartwright, Draft of Meeting Preparation, undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, F2182, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

⁵ James G. Snell, *The Citizen's Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 54.

influences and research, the home's management plan also lacked formal by-laws until 1927, exposing myriad ambiguities in the home's operation and leadership.

Assessing the home's difficult first years also charts a second narrative. Cartwright and the WA regularly bemoaned the era of "self-love" and "self-indulgence," and hoped to rally more young women to work in social service.⁶ The management plan put in place at Strachan House, including the ideals from which it was born, reflected the WA's active engagement in the social problem of old age, and an attempt to further its public role and leadership in new ways.

Strachan House as an Activity of Social Service

The day-to-day operation of Strachan House was under the direction of the committee of management. Appearing in the archival records by prefix and surname only, the majority of its membership consisted of married women of British origin.⁷ As Myra Rutherford has shown in her research on the "White, mostly middle-class, Anglican, and British and Canadian" women missionaries, their "religion, class, ethnicity, and gender were central to their perceptions."⁸ Collectively, they shared the era's wider concern with the moral betterment of society.⁹ Armed with the Lord Bishop's blessing, the committee of

⁶ "What Women are Doing: Christian Example Tremendous Power in Missionary Work," *Globe*, May 7, 1924, 16; "Woman's Auxiliary Shows Good Growth Throughout Year," *Globe*, May 13, 1931.

⁷ Initially the committee of management was called the "provisional committee," but graduated to a permanent committee of management in March 1926. In June 1926, the executive committee of the Toronto WA mandated that 75 per cent of its members on the committee of management be Anglicans. In March, 1927, it amended the bylaw, stating that members were required to be WA members or (at minimum) Anglicans. See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, June 1, 1926, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 1, File 4, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto; Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 23, 1927. For information on Toronto's overwhelmingly British population in the 1920s, see James Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: National Museums of Canada, 1985), 50.

⁸ Myra Rutherford, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), xxiii.

⁹ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 116-18.

management navigated the home's first steps, accepted applications, and hired staff. Attached to the social service department, the committee of management reported directly to the executive committee of the WA, making use of its status as an incorporated society to "hold property, receive legacies, and deal with public bodies like the Provincial treasury department and the Federation of Community Service."¹⁰ At the outset, the committee of management formed finance, house, and admissions sub-committees, elected a convener for each, and made the social service department its advisory committee.¹¹ Miss F.C. Kingstone, secretary of the social service department, recruited the expertise of "prominent" businessmen of Toronto, and reported to the committee regularly on her efforts to launch a "men's fundraising campaign." Campaign finances would be arranged by this "advisory committee of seven men," she explained, while the women were "urged to pray daily for the work and the wisdom required for its success."¹²

By the 1920s, the WA had grown into a powerful church organization, but its membership still functioned as separate and subordinate to the Church's male hierarchy. As Wendy Fletcher Marsh has shown, the male sphere of Church life "formed the structure that made decisions and decided upon policies."¹³ The formation of a "men's committee" to handle the "business" of Strachan House went initially unchallenged by the committee of management. As president of the Toronto WA since 1911, Cartwright had witnessed its growth, its changes in women's roles, and its expansion of its aims and plans. Not a century before, women were prevented from pursuing missionary work. Only in the late nineteenth

¹⁰ Mabel Cartwright, Draft of Meeting Preparation, undated.

¹¹ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 4, 1926.

¹² It was estimated that \$35,000 would be required to cover the first year's expenses of food, coal, and maintenance. See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, November 5, 1926. See also "Strachan Houses Appropriate Name," *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

¹³ Wendy L. Fletcher-Marsh, "The Limitation and Opportunity of Gender: Women and Ecclesiastical Structures in Canadian Anglicanism, 1920-1955," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Society* 37 (1995): 42.

century did the Anglican Church slowly begin to acknowledge the benefit of women's work. Even as women took on new roles and moved into new realms of Church work, what historian Rutherford has termed the "discourse of subordination" remained unchallenged.¹⁴ Women's supposed "natural" tendency towards caregiving, the belief that her ability lay in her influence over society's morality, prevailed among the men and women of the time. Ironically, as Rutherford writes, their belief persisted as increasing numbers of women left their domestic spheres and committed themselves to Church work. Thousands of women in the late nineteenth-century became volunteer workers, forming mission societies, rescue agencies, and creating Girls Societies and Mothers Unions. Church women were unmatched in public outreach.¹⁵

Beginning with only seven members in 1885, the WA's support of women in mission work had been largely executed in the shadow of the Domestic and Foreign Mission Society (DFMS). Formed as an auxiliary to the DFMS, the WA had fought for further control in developing its own educational and recruiting programs, sponsoring missions, supporting missionary training, and implementing its own regulations and organizational policies. It published its own newsletter, the *Letter Leaflet*, containing news from the mission field and letters from missionaries.¹⁶ Friction between the Board and the WA over its role, especially relating to its fundraising efforts, caused the Board to be dismissive. "The W.A. do work hard, but they are no real Auxiliary to us."¹⁷

¹⁴ Myra Rutherford, "Models of Grace and Boundaries of Culture: Women Missionaries on a Northern Frontier, 1860-1940" (PhD diss., York University, 1996), 65.

¹⁵ Rutherford, *Women and the White Man's God*, 15-16.

¹⁶ Alan L. Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada: Controversies and Identity in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 169.

¹⁷ Longtime WA member Emily Willoughby Cummings recalls that the Board initially believed the WA had the intention in "offering to be their Auxiliary, to undertake to collect the money required by the Board from house to house in the Parishes," while the "women never had such a thought in mind." See Cummings, *Our Story: Some Pages from the History of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, 1855 to 1928* (Garden City Press: Toronto, 1928), 17.

It was not until 1911, long after the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC) had taken the reins from the dissolved DFMS, and only once a new secretary, Sydney H. Gould, had come on board, that the MSCC began to relinquish some of its control to the WA. The outcome was an agreement, made official at the triennial meeting in 1911, that the two organizations should jointly coordinate their efforts. Beginning in 1912, the WA was permitted to elect delegates to the MSCC Board.¹⁸ Furthermore, the WA was officially designated to undertake “all the work among women and children in the Canadian Fields and the support of all women workers, thus working hand in hand with the M.S.C.C. and relieving them of this work.”¹⁹ By 1923, 43 per cent of the church’s mission work, both in domestic and foreign mission fields, was being financed by the WA.²⁰

In her history of the WA, long-time member Emily Willoughby Cummings recalled that by 1928 it had grown to a national membership of over ninety-four thousand. “We support 34 Missionaries in the Fields Overseas,” she wrote, “and we pay the salaries of 17 Missionaries and 76 Mission Helpers in the Home Fields.” In the late 1920s there were twenty-seven diocesan boards and over three thousand branches.²¹ The WA had by then launched a large number of related initiatives. Examples were the enrolment of babies, or “Little Helpers” in its flock; the sending of “huge bales” of supplies to the north on behalf of its Dorcas Society; and the opening of a Canadian School of Missions on St. George Street in Toronto.²²

¹⁸ The DFMS dissolved in 1902, the time “we ceased to think, to act, to legislate, provincially, and became instead the Church of England in Canada,” the time of the formation of the General Synod. See Cummings, *Our Story*, 54, 72. See also Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 170.

¹⁹ Cummings, *Our Story*, 77.

²⁰ Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 21.

²¹ Cummings, *Our Story*, 148.

²² Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 19-21, 134-135. See also Cummings, *Our Story*, 54, 118.

While the WA had experienced a growth in its numbers and initiatives, the addition of social service work proved a contentious issue for the majority of the diocesan boards.²³ Cartwright's report on social service work, appearing in the *Letter Leaflet* in December 1921, exposed a debate among the MSCC board and the WA that reveals something of the crisis of faith in which Strachan House operated. As WA presidents made clear with their resolution and adoption of recommendations in 1919, they believed that the WA had to "set itself definitely to study the social and welfare movements of the day" and that these movements were "incapable of fulfilling their aim apart from the inspiration of our Lord Jesus Christ." They also believed that "the fulness of the Gospel" was meant to include "social as well as personal regeneration."²⁴ As Cummings recalled of the triennial meeting of 1921, "the decision of the majority of the meeting was against the adoption of Social Service work." Although most diocesan boards opposed the undertaking of social service work, its incorporation by select boards, "if sanctioned by their Bishops, was agreed to."²⁵ As Cummings recalled, only five diocesan boards initially adopted social service work among their undertakings.²⁶

From Cartwright's point of view, differences of opinion took place on two fronts. While the MSCC and WA agreed that social service work should be done, many believed it was best left to others. Any adoption of social service work would only dilute the central tenets of the WA. The second perspective, endorsed by Cartwright, was that the new challenges of modern life posed an opportunity for the WA to strengthen everything that

²³ Cummings, *Our Story*, 109.

²⁴ Mabel Cartwright, ed., *These Fifty Years, 1886-1936*, Woman's Auxiliary, Series 18.27, Box 46, File 9, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 79.

²⁵ Cummings, *Our Story*, 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

encouraged “the true up-building of the nation.”²⁷ Missionary work and social work, according to Cartwright, were “so closely allied that it is almost impossible to determine where one ends and the others begin.”²⁸ An increasing number of WA members could no longer justify the “separation between two activities which God [had] joined.”²⁹ A WA commitment to confronting new social problems would align with Cartwright’s sense of purpose, that deeply-held Anglo-Saxon belief in bringing “light” to the darkness. Time, as Cartwright believed, unfolded by God’s infinite purpose.³⁰ If missionaries did social work overseas, “among Chinese and Hindus,” and in Canada, “among Indians and Eskimos,” why could the WA not do the same work “among the white population of our land as need requires”? “Our cities, towns, villages, countrysides,” she continued, “sometimes conceal conditions which are a disgrace to morality and therefore a reproach to Christianity.”³¹

Expressions from both sides of the debate doubtless reflected anxiety over rising secularism. As secular work ballooned in the 1920s, some members cautioned the WA away from this route. Selina Bompas, a British mission worker, warned the WA “not to become too secular.”³² The “greatest drawback to Christianity,” Mary Ferrabee, president of the WA proclaimed a few short years later, was “not the spread of other religions but the organization of society without God, the new peril of secularism.”³³ As the WA strove to attract young women and girls to its fold, Cartwright lamented the “division of our women,

²⁷ Cartwright, *Letter Leaflet*, December 1921, Woman’s Auxiliary Periodicals, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, 412.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 410.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 411.

³⁰ Like many Victorians in English Canada, Mabel viewed history as the natural unfolding of God’s plan. See Dianne M. Hallman, “Cultivating a Love of Canada through History: Agnes Maule Machar, 1837-1927,” in *Creating Historical Memory: English Canadian Women and the Work of History*, eds. Beverly Boutilier and Alison L. Prentice (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 26-27.

³¹ Cartwright, *Letter Leaflet*, 412.

³² Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 136.

³³ Cummings, *Our Story*, 146.

especially in the parishes, into competing groups of missionary and social service workers.”³⁴ Was social service work, Cartwright wondered, “to be left to those who accept no creed and acknowledge no Christian motive? Or to interdenominational groups working apart from the Church?” Cooperation and coordination, she declared, were “gaining strength everywhere.”³⁵

Toronto was abundant with all manner of social betterment advocates of various creeds. Religious orthodoxy was under fire. As Flora MacDonald Denison recalled of her time spent with the Toronto Progressive Thought Club, its aim had been to “acquire knowledge and apply it wisely to life...The books are along new thought, scientific and psychic lines...All theories for social betterment were expounded and advocates of single tax, socialism, spiritualism, theosophy, Christianity could be heard any Saturday night at Forum Hall.”³⁶ As Ramsay Cook has shown, this apparently strange mix of speakers had in common their renouncement of the traditional beliefs of late Victorian society.³⁷

For professionals like Edward Johns Urwick, who became director of social work and head of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto in 1927, the challenge of the modern age was “the riddle of social morality.” The religious influence of the churches was the solution, he argued, as their “evangelical tenets ensured a social order based on those Victorian verities of civility and self-control.” Urwick, like Cartwright, saw religion as the ongoing pursuit of harmony with “God, Reality, or the Good,” and that there was no “true” aim that was not spiritual, or “not consciously directed to bringing nearer the attainment of the absolutely good end, the realization of the true individual as supreme over

³⁴ Cartwright, *Letter Leaflet*, 411.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 411.

³⁶ Quoted in Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators, Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* 2nd Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

both society and self.”³⁸ Religious orthodoxy may have been under fire, but Urwick, Cartwright, and other leaders also saw it as a saviour in modern times. The “true social ideal” would be a “vision of the City of God.”³⁹

In responding to criticism that “a social service department in the W.A. would draw support away from missions,” Cartwright was adamant. The field “is indeed the world,” she explained, “and that world includes my street, my parish, my neighbourhood.”⁴⁰ In her presidential address to Toronto WA members in 1925, Cartwright warned members not to become dismayed about the “‘failure of the Church,’ over which people are so fond of lamenting. It fails in a sense because it is made of you and me and others like us; because we are proud, envious, ill tempered, lazy, unkind, insincere, selfish, self-loving.” And, she went on, “we are too much governed by sectional and exclusive interests, too confident in science and material progress to save us.”⁴¹ Since its triennial meeting of 1911, the aim and plan of the WA in the Canadian field had been to “consider impartially the field as a whole,” and to “place our help where most needed.”⁴² Not unaware of the threat of secularism, Cartwright pushed social service work directly because of it. Ignoring the problems “at home” threatened the very ideals of the WA: “Friendliness, helpfulness, prayer, worship, and service... if we fail in these,” she warned, “we can scarcely hope that God will bless our

³⁸ Quoted in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996), 150.

³⁹ Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 150. Cartwright would later reiterate Urwick's sentiment, pushing WA workers to build a city “which God had chosen.” See President's Address of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada and to Diocesan Missions, May 1931, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto, 6.

⁴⁰ Cartwright, *These Fifty Years*, 85.

⁴¹ “Touching Tribute to Zealous Friend of Mission Cause,” *Globe*, May 13, 1925, 15.

⁴² Cummings, *Our Story*, 77.

efforts to raise money or make gifts, because what we are trying to do with one hand we are undoing with the other.”⁴³

The parochial work of the Toronto WA began in response to the “march of time and the growth of the work.” As Cartwright recalled, “the immense immigration into Canada in the first 12 or 14 years of the century...brought fresh responsibilities and created new problems and situations. Then the war caused and brought to light a host of social problems.”⁴⁴ With the appointment of a parochial officer to lead in the assessment of the social needs of the diocese, as well as the diocesan social service secretary, the Toronto WA began to tackle the problems “at its door.” These included “Welcome and Welfare Work,” “Friendship Work,” and “Rural Work.” In all cases, Cartwright noted, social service work was an “educational activity.” It consisted of clothing distribution, English-language lessons, and home and hospital visits. “This work is peculiarly one of embracing opportunities as they arise,” Cartwright said. “The fears that a social service department in the WA would draw support away from the missions, has proved to be without foundation.”⁴⁵

Finding the Plan, and Model, for Strachan House

A flurry of activity took place behind the scenes before the first residents arrived at Strachan House. Preparing the home, investigating resident applications, appointing staff, and raising funds, it all had to be done. Mrs. Strathy and the applications committee were overrun with applications. Mrs. Blake, who oversaw the house committee, rushed to furnish the home,

⁴³ “What Women are Doing: Christian Example Tremendous Power in Missionary Work,” *Globe*, May 7, 1924, 16. In some northern dioceses, the adoption of social work was not a fundamental change. As Myra Rutherforddale explores, in the Yukon WA, for instance, social service and religious education had always been more connected. Sadie Stringer, president, reported in 1931 that the WA “had become more comprehensive than ever. In our social service work more hospital visiting is done as well as Welcome and welfare work.” See Rutherforddale, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 136.

⁴⁴ Cartwright, *These Fifty Years*, 77.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

find essential items such as pillows, and secure funds to cover “alterations, repairs and decoration.”⁴⁶ When the men’s committee reported that the fundraising campaign would be delayed until the spring of 1926, the WA approved a motion authorizing the “W.A. Finance committee...to negotiate a loan or loans not to exceed \$10,000” in order to cover essential repairs.⁴⁷ Mrs. Rae, meanwhile, consented to act as special treasurer for the home, urging the committee to form at once a “Women’s Committee” for the upcoming fundraising campaign.⁴⁸

Far from hampered by delays on the part of the men’s committee, Rae and the women’s fundraising team set to work soliciting funds and securing a loan. There was also the matter of finding staff. Part of Kingstone’s duties entailed appointing a matron, and, in the summer of 1925, she found a worthy candidate in Miss Mabel Louise McKinlay, a Canadian nurse with a diploma from St. John’s Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. McKinlay had previously worked for an institution, but it was her experience as a deaconess that sealed the appointment. Although interdenominational in theory, the home was managed by Anglican women of the WA, making McKinlay’s deaconess experience highly desirable. Chiefly educated to work as missionaries and parish workers, deaconesses were exhorted to “lead men and women to Christ” and to “exhibit familiarity with Church doctrine and biblical knowledge.” They were, as the leaflet promoting Canada’s first deaconess training program declared, “invaluable help to overworked clergymen.”⁴⁹ As Rutherford explains, deaconesses needed to be sociable, caring, and versatile. Their activities included home visits, prison work, caring for the poor and sick, volunteering with mother’s groups, and (if they

⁴⁶ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, June 4, 1925.

⁴⁷ Ibid., June 22, 1925.

⁴⁸ Ibid., November 3, 1925.

⁴⁹ Quoted from the pamphlet advertising a two-year program at the Toronto Church of England Deaconess and Missionary Training Home. See Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 18.

were nurses), working in Saturday morning clinics.⁵⁰ Kingstone was so certain of McKinlay's suitability that she received the consent, "by telephone," "of as many members of the executive committee as possible." With their approval, she wrote to McKinlay, offering her the position at \$75 per month.⁵¹ McKinlay entered Strachan House as a devout, like-minded woman, trained for mission work, the WA's *raison d'être*.⁵²

Kingstone also approved the appointment of Mrs. Nielson, who stepped into the role of assistant matron. Having just resigned from Toronto's House of Industry, she too was a graduate nurse, and came with high recommendations, though little else is known of her. She arrived at Strachan House with her two young boys; the committee agreed to accommodate them "as part remuneration to Mrs. Nielson."⁵³ McKinlay similarly arrived with dependent family, bringing her elderly mother along with her. It is likely she lived in the home, as Kingstone instructed McKinlay to "report" the case of her mother to the admissions committee.⁵⁴

With respect to the home's management plan, Cartwright envisioned that it would take after the almshouse, a system "so common in the Old Country."⁵⁵ Because the term almshouse has been clouded by terminological confusion, Cartwright's understanding of the word must be briefly described.⁵⁶ She used the general term "almshouse," but homes for the poor went by different names, sometimes nodding to the private name of the foundation (as in the case of the Norwegian *stiftelser*) or emphasizing the home's architectural style (as in the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17-19, 24.

⁵¹ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, July 10, 1925.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., August 11, 1925.

⁵⁴ Ibid., July 10, 1925.

⁵⁵ Ibid., February 4, 1925.

⁵⁶ See Nigel Goose and Henk Looijesteijn, "Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic circa 1350-1800: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 1051. See also Nigel Goose and Stuart Basten, "Almshouse Residency in Nineteenth Century England: An Interim Report," *Family and Community History* 12, no. 1 (May 2009): 65.

Dutch name *hofje*).⁵⁷ Pre-modern institutions providing accommodation for the poor in England were variously described as “lazar houses, spitalhouses, bedehouses, Godshouses, maisonndieu, hospitals.”⁵⁸ They could also serve diverse purposes, and were not then known distinctly as residences for the elderly poor.⁵⁹ In eighteenth century England, poor houses served as accommodation for the poor – elderly or not – and were administered by the local parish vestries. Church houses, established to serve as a meeting place and accommodation for church ales, could also house the poor. These homes functioned in tandem with privately-endowed almshouses.⁶⁰

Crucial to Cartwright’s conception of “almshouses” was its distinction from the public institution known as the poorhouse.⁶¹ “While local authorities might sometimes have intervened in the life of these institutions” and “the state may have become increasingly involved in their regulation,” Nigel Goose and Henk Looijesteijn write, “their defining characteristic is their provenance in the realm of philanthropy, whether founded by a private person or by an organization.”⁶² Cartwright had as her model the privately-run “more or less free and independent housing for the elderly” in place across Europe since the late mediaeval period. These were charitable initiatives founded by individuals, couples, or local parishes, places where “housing in private rooms,” as well as food, fuel and doles, were provided to old people of the middle-class.⁶³ Because almshouse founders could be

⁵⁷ Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Lex Heerma van Voss, “Provisions for the Elderly in North-Western Europe: An International Comparison of Almshouses, Sixteenth-Twentieth Centuries,” *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 62, no.1 (2014): 2.

⁵⁸ Goose & Looijesteijn, “Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic,” 1051.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ This distinction was not universally applied. See for instance Astrida Ilga Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged: Charitable Provisions for the Aged in New York City, 1865-1930,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1980), 12.

⁶² Goose & Looijesteijn, “Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic,” 1052.

⁶³ Van Leeuwen et al., “Provisions for the Elderly in North-Western Europe,” 5 - 8.

motivated by religious considerations, family commemoration, or social status, individual homes varied widely.⁶⁴ Differences included architectural style, though most houses were small, with a central garden.⁶⁵ According to Helen Caffey, common features of the homes, regardless of architectural differences, were: “small but sufficient units, an enclave within the local community, independence, and a healthy environment.”⁶⁶ Some offered free housing, while others requested a small advance upon entry, or charged a nominal rental fee.⁶⁷ Privacy was central to the almshouse model, and was thus impossible to attain in the hospitals, workhouses, and dormitories that predominated across Europe.⁶⁸ Pertinently, residence in the almshouses was generally available only to a select group of “respectable” citizens.⁶⁹ “There was a tendency,” Caffey writes, “whether or not overtly stated, to favour the more ‘deserving occupants.’”⁷⁰

Cartwright’s investigation of almshouses was in keeping with her habit of looking farther afield, particularly to Britain, for inspiration. Just as the Canadian deaconess training program had been inspired by its sister institutions in Britain, Cartwright rallied to acquire information on English almshouses for their application to Strachan House.⁷¹ With the general almshouse plan in mind, Kingstone set to work writing letters to Protestant-run

⁶⁴ Van Leeuwen et al. discuss the motivations for almshouse founders, including religious considerations, building community, or furthering the family name. See Van Leeuwen et al “Provisions for the Elderly in North-Western Europe,” 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Helen Caffrey, “Housing the Elderly Poor: From Philanthropist to Local Authority,” *Yorkshire Archeological Journal* 87 (2015), 186.

⁶⁷ Van Leeuwen, “Provisions for the Elderly in North-Western Europe,” 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ There were exceptions. Van Leeuwen et al. speak briefly of more inclusive almshouses, particularly in Copenhagen after 1850. These homes were generally run by wealthy founders desiring to “elevate” working-class families, imparting respectable family values. Almshouses were largely for the “middling sorts.” They could house, for instance, former elderly servants of a wealthy benefactor’s family. See van Leeuwen et al, “Provisions for the Elderly in North-Western Europe,” 9.

⁷⁰ Caffrey, “Housing the Elderly Poor,” 172.

⁷¹ For more on the Canadian deaconess movement, and its links to Britain, see Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 17-18. See also Fletcher-Marsh, “The Limitation and Opportunity of Gender,” 43.

homes in New York, hoping to acquire information on home management.⁷² Strachan House was, in theory, interdenominational, designed to be “useful to anybody and everybody who might require it.”⁷³ Yet the mechanisms put in place for its operation shared a good deal in common with Protestant-run institutions south of the border.⁷⁴

New York led other states in both the number of homes and capacity of residents. Across the state there were upwards of 190 homes, 78 in the immediate area of New York City.⁷⁵ Toronto, in contrast, had less than a dozen charitable homes for old people. Across Ontario, there were approximately 55 refuges housing roughly 3400 people. One-third of this population was in Toronto.⁷⁶ It is evident that Kingstone sought inspiration in New York State because of its large numbers of homes for old people. Many of the Protestant-run institutions were run by volunteer boards, had likeminded missions, and functioned on a similar scale. One institution, the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples in New York City, was the first in the United States to accept married couples.⁷⁷ The potential sources of

⁷² There are numerous references to New York Homes in the committee minutes. While it is unclear which homes Kingstone contacted specifically, a number of Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic-run Homes existed in the same period. One church (and home) with numerous references (into the late 1950s) was the Methodist Episcopal Church Home in Brooklyn. It similarly cared for aged men and women, and had a similar capacity. The New York area Bishop also spoke at WA events in Toronto. See “Bishop Defends Pronouncements by the Church,” *Globe*, January 6, 1932, 9; Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 3, 1925; Minutes of Strachan House Committee of Management, March 9, 1952, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 6, File 2, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto. For more on private homes see Sue Weiler, “Religion, Ethnicity and the Development of Private Homes for the Aged,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (1992): 64-90.

⁷³ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, January 22, 1925.

⁷⁴ There were several Protestant-run Homes in New York State, including the Association Home, the Methodist Episcopal Church Home, the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women, the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples, and the Baptist Home of Brooklyn. See Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 158-184.

⁷⁵ See Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 14-16; Weiler, “Religion, Ethnicity and the Development of Private Homes for the Aged,” 70-71.

⁷⁶ Even in 1929, after a means-tested old age pension scheme came into effect in Ontario, waiting lists were lengthy, sometimes “equal to half their resident population.” See James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 59.

⁷⁷ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 169.

inspiration were many.⁷⁸ No single institution appears to become the model for Strachan House, however. In atmosphere, application process, recreations, and structure, Strachan House shared a good deal in common with other homes. Yet the true shape of Strachan House only emerged over time.

The desire to create a “homelike atmosphere” at Strachan House was paramount to the committee of management. Its purpose was to provide a place for the “aged poor,” particularly married couples who might enjoy “a happy home in which to spend their remaining days together.”⁷⁹ In this, Strachan House shared the principles of the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples in New York City, whose founders had been similarly shocked by the separation of couples “in the public almshouse, where the spiritual climate was at best dubious.”⁸⁰ There was to be “as little of the institution, and as much of the home, about Strachan House as can be possibly managed,” Major Windeyer, a member of the men’s committee, proclaimed.⁸¹ Like the Baptist Home of Brooklyn, this meant ensuring Strachan House remained a Christian home.⁸² And, like its predecessor, a Christian home was synonymous with a family home, replete with numerous material comforts and rooms for interaction and recreation. The physical atmosphere lent itself to a feeling of domesticity, with flowers adorning the tables, and long flowing curtains covering the windows.⁸³

Communal spaces were located on the main floors, while bedrooms on the upper floors

⁷⁸ Homes that operated with a similar scale, and under comparable bylaws were the Methodist Episcopal Church Home, the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women, the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples, and the Baptist Home of Brooklyn. See Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 23. For a different view of New York City, consider the work of social reformer and novelist Lydia Maria Child, who called New York a “City of God,” in that religion there was like “vice, clothing, and storefronts in that it was diverse and plentiful.” See Dana Wiggins Logan, “Lydia Maria Child and the Urbanity of Religious Cosmopolitanism in Antebellum New York City,” *Journal of Urban History* 47, no. 3 (2021): 569.

⁷⁹ “A Cozy Nook in Strachan Houses,” *Globe*, February 16, 1926, 11.

⁸⁰ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 170.

⁸¹ “Will Provide Home for Aged Destitute: Women’s Auxiliary of Church of England Establish Strachan House,” *Toronto Daily Star*, January 8, 1926, 21.

⁸² Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 182.

⁸³ “A Cozy Nook in Strachan Houses,” *Globe*, February 16, 1926, 11.

offered privacy.⁸⁴ At the annual bazaar of 1927, the *Star* reported that the living room was “fragrant with lilacs, tulips, and other summer flowers.” In the reading room, “a table was centred with a great bowl of bronze tulips, bronze candles in crystal holders, and tiny vases of bridal wreath.”⁸⁵

“A basket of fruit and gifts for each resident,” “flowers for the chapel,” and donations of linen, books, and furniture were accepted to add to Strachan House’s homelike feeling.⁸⁶ Fostering a homelike environment was a central aim of the New York homes as well. The Presbyterian Home for Aged Women accepted regular donations of “furniture and rugs of good quality.”⁸⁷ The Home for Old Men and Couples provided residents with “a well-furnished room” and public spaces on the first floor “in the form of recreation rooms.”⁸⁸ The Methodist Episcopal Church Home was a “retreat,” a last reward for those who had “led lives of piety.” It also provided “a public area, the sitting room,” to “counteract the isolation of the private rooms.”⁸⁹

Pivotal to the homelike atmosphere was the goal of ensuring both quiet and rest. Trinity Park itself encouraged a sense of peacefulness. In emphasizing the location’s suitability, Cartwright referenced the “southern exposure,” “large verandahs,” “easy stairs,” and best of all, that the home was “situated away from street traffic.”⁹⁰ When the Lodge was pulled down, the committee reported on the nice “eastern view point.”⁹¹ More than this,

⁸⁴ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 179. For a description of Strachan House see “Strachan Houses,” *The Canadian Churchman*, April 14, 1932, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 1, File 5, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

⁸⁵ “Residents of Strachan Houses Hold Receptions,” *Toronto Daily Star*, June 15, 1928, 25.

⁸⁶ For examples, see “Report of Strachan Houses – 1939,” April 1940, Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary for the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, and to Diocesan Missions, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Series 18.27, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto; “Strachan Houses’ Report – 1930,” Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the WA, May 1931.

⁸⁷ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 165.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 158-161.

⁹⁰ “Strachan Houses Appropriate Name,” *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

⁹¹ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, September 11, 1928.

residents benefitted from the “healthful influence of this wide open space of land,” said the *Canadian Churchman*.⁹² Mr. C.E. Chambers, the Parks Commissioner responsible for Trinity Park, added to the attractiveness of the grounds “with plants and shrubbery.”⁹³

Political scientist Butners argues that many of the founders of the New York homes shared a conception of old age as a time when one awaited death, and that this was translated into the homes’ interiors. In the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples, the semi-monastic setting was meant to encourage inmates to “perfect themselves spiritually.”⁹⁴ In the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women, the setting was designed to be comfortable, and above all else, to be quiet.⁹⁵ Similarly, at the Methodist Home, a quiet setting befitting of rest was seen as vital for longevity.⁹⁶ “The managers saw as one of their prime tasks,” writes Butners, “the provision of material comforts so that the ‘last days’ would be made the ‘best days.’”⁹⁷ When Strachan House opened, similar assumptions were present in press reports. References to the “winter” of life and the residents’ “remaining days” were not uncommon. “The married couples,” reported the *Globe*, “will be privileged to spend the evening of their life in content.”⁹⁸ “The elderly were expected to rest,” James Struthers writes of the Toronto Aged Men’s and Women’s Homes, and “not cause trouble for the matrons or superintendents.” It was good enough for the directors, Struthers writes, quoting the annual reports, “to know that their last days [had] been made comfortable and their pathway smoothed in the decline of life.”⁹⁹

⁹² “Strachan Houses,” *The Canadian Churchman*, April 14, 1932.

⁹³ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, September 11, 1928.

⁹⁴ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 172.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ “Many Visitors Inspect New Home for Aged,” *Globe*, Jan. 18, 1926, 10.

⁹⁹ Quoted from the Annual reports (1935) of the Toronto Aged Men’s and Women’s Home. See Struthers, *Limits of Affluence*, 54-55.

Strachan House's committee of management aimed to afford its residents a degree of independence and privacy, thus suggesting a view of aging that was more complex than its New York counterparts. Cartwright proposed the installation of kitchenettes so that residents could prepare their own meals. This would save staff time, but also provide residents with "some diversion once or twice a day."¹⁰⁰ The addition of self-serve kitchenettes signalled a departure from highly regulated homes, where old men and women were summoned, like children, to eat. In the New York homes, as well as the Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes, meal times were part of a highly regimented atmosphere, and eating was communal.¹⁰¹ The system at Strachan House was essentially a "cafeteria plan," with food distributed at mid-day "from a central point on each floor controlled by Maid Service."¹⁰² Breakfast and supper were prepared by the residents. The *Globe*, commenting on the kitchenettes, wrote that it would be "the privilege of the inmates to prepare breakfast and supper for themselves," and to "enjoy an afternoon cup of tea when a friend drops in for a call."¹⁰³ The system of not eating in common, wrote the *Canadian Churchman*, "secures a good measure of privacy and makes the community dinner on Christmas Day and other special occasions a festival which is greatly enjoyed."¹⁰⁴

Trinity Park, too, encouraged independence. "There is the constant variety and interest afforded by people passing to and fro," wrote the *Canadian Churchman*, "and by games and sports carried on by the neighbourhood's children." Residents of the home could take a walk "without fear of motors."¹⁰⁵ The houseman, Mr. Adkins, tended a vegetable

¹⁰⁰ "Good Response Met by Appeal for Aged," *Globe*, February 2, 1926, 10.

¹⁰¹ Struthers, *Limits of Affluence*, 57-58.

¹⁰² Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, July 14, 1925.

¹⁰³ "Blessing to Aged is Strachan House," *Globe*, January 15 1926, 13. See also Leeuwen et al, "Provisions for the Elderly in North-Western Europe," 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ "Strachan Houses," *The Canadian Churchman*, April 14, 1932.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

garden, which proved a particular interest to the men residents. Mr. C.E. Chambers, the Parks Commissioner responsible for Trinity Park, provided the home with plants and flowers, and was a favourite guest.¹⁰⁶ The surrounding park was seen as both beneficial to the health of the residents and an opportunity to enjoy the larger community. In this way it was similar to other homes, such as the Baptist Home of Brooklyn and the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women, whose founders had gradually become more flexible with respect to encouraging contact with the outside world.¹⁰⁷

Entertainments provided the feeling of home, while encouraging independence. Entertainment included music, recitations, motor drives, or moving pictures, often supplied by the WA Junior League, Musical Clubs, Guilds, or the WA branches and their friends. Choirs from the nearby churches sang carols at Christmas.¹⁰⁸ The Bishop Strachan Orchestra serenaded the residents one fall night in 1928.¹⁰⁹ “Our radio is much appreciated and every evening we entertain any who come down with it or the victrola,” Miss Phillips wrote in 1934. “Several spend their evenings at a game of cards in the reading room.”¹¹⁰ Entertainments were, according to the annual reports, frequent and appreciated, especially for those residents who were house-bound in winter.¹¹¹ Donations of jam, fruit, and other groceries also arrived frequently, particularly at times such as Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ See “Report of Strachan Houses – 1928,” Forty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1929; “Report of Strachan Houses – 1934,” Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the WA, May 1935.

¹⁰⁷ Many of the New York homes restricted contact with the “secular” world, interaction being restricted to highly regimented activities, such as sponsored outings or events. By the early twentieth century, managers were permitting residents greater interaction outside the homes. See Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 167.

¹⁰⁸ For instance, “Report of Strachan Houses – 1928,” Forty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1929.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, September 13, 1928.

¹¹⁰ Cartwright, *These Fifty Years*, 90.

¹¹¹ “Report of Strachan Houses – 1929,” Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the WA, May 1930.

¹¹² “Report of Strachan Houses – 1933,” Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the WA, May 1934.

There were elements of Strachan House, nonetheless, that betrayed its institutional character. Monthly inspections were carried out by the house committee. This select group was tasked with visiting and inspecting the home, and reporting to the Convener, who “in turn reports to the Committee.” Its responsibilities were numerous, including ensuring “occupation and recreation,” providing necessary furnishings and decorations, addressing needed repairs, and reporting on any resident or staffing issues requiring the attention of the committee of management.¹¹³ Matters ranged widely, reflecting a need or problem concerning house materials, repairs, food or meal plans, and laundry service, to resident or employee disturbances.¹¹⁴ The rhythm of daily life was under regular scrutiny by the committee of management and WA, and the power to implement changes in the home rested with the matron and the committee of management, not the residents. Committee members reported on visits with the residents during inspections, but it is unclear whether they would have felt the freedom to articulate their views in ear-shot of the live-in staff.¹¹⁵

Committee of management members further restricted who was eligible to live at Strachan House, and interested parties were subjected to a highly regimented application process. Headed by Mrs. J.D. Tyrrell, Strachan House’s admissions committee included seven members who were tasked with reviewing and investigating prospective residents, and presenting accepted and rejected applications to the executive committee for final approval. The secretary of the committee, Mrs. Strathy, was the point person for those interested in

¹¹³ Mabel Cartwright, untitled, May 5, 1926, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹¹⁴ For instance, in April 1926, the committee of management reported “all seeming happy and contented.” In October 1928, it was the house committee that suggested a “conciliatory committee” be formed for the “adjustment of unhappy residents.” See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, April 8, 1926; Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, October 9, 1928.

¹¹⁵ In February 1927, the committee of management reported a total of 5 paid staff, and 1 janitor. Positions included the matron, assistant matron, cook, and maids. See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, February 25, 1927.

applying. From the time of the home's opening, access to the home was carefully guarded. As late as July 1925, however, the committee prohibited the "personal inspection of Rooms by proposed applicants."¹¹⁶ The archival records do not contain the applications themselves, but they do show the committee used the eligibility criteria of the Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes as a blueprint. The "agreement" presented to interested applicants included questions on age, nationality, religion (and church), finances, and health. Applicants were to be over 65, of "good moral character," and were asked to list a time and place where members of the Board could visit, a key part of the investigative process. Sponsors were also interviewed. "The bond securing payment," the agreement read, "must be signed by two parties approved by the Board, one of these to be a resident of Toronto." The bond held parties responsible if the resident became "troublesome," or proved to be "beyond the care" of the institution. Based on the arrangement of the financial agreement, which varied according to each applicant upon admittance, the agreement could also hold signatories financially liable for a resident's monthly upkeep.¹¹⁷

Assessing one's suitability for admission became an exercise in judging worthiness. Committee members alone decided who was "deserving." As Sue Weiler, Michael Katz, Brian Gratton, Carole Haber, Peter Townsend, and others have shown, private charities tended to select those from within their own church or society. The "worthy," in a sense, were one's own people who were destitute, but not for lack of industriousness. The "unworthy," in contrast, were the "others," the foreign-born, the poor who had fallen on hard times, and who had "failed to provide for themselves."¹¹⁸ Securing a room at Strachan

¹¹⁶ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, July 14, 1925.

¹¹⁷ "Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes," undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹¹⁸ Weiler, "Religion, Ethnicity and the Development of Private Homes for the Aged," 64-65. See also Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Peter

House, as in many private old-age homes, was conditional on stringent character and background checks.¹¹⁹ Strachan House did not, as in the case of the Baptist Home of Brooklyn, require a “certificate of good character” with a pastor’s endorsement, but the invasive screening process likely amounted to the same thing. Only those deemed “deserving” were shortlisted by the committee of management, and eventually approved or rejected by the board.¹²⁰ It was a “very fine net,” as Butners explains, that could distinguish worthy from unworthy applicants.¹²¹

As part of the admission process, residents also underwent a medical examination. The home’s medical advisor, Dr. R. Harcourt, hired in 1927, administered a physical exam to ensure that the residents were well enough “to care for themselves, and take the necessary daily care of their rooms.”¹²² Harcourt visited regularly, showing his “kind attention,” being “always ready to come if needed,” and “giving his services gratuitously.”¹²³ The home was meant only for the “well and ambulatory,” and signs of sickness could result in removal. The first reported removal was in November 1927.¹²⁴ In January 1928, a resident deemed “mentally defective” was removed.¹²⁵ Most removals in the home in subsequent years were health-related, and not as a result of “troublesome” or “rebellious” characters. This reflected

Townsend, *Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales* (London: Routledge, 1962); Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁹ Protestant-run homes opened their doors to their “unfortunate sisters.” By the end of the nineteenth century religious and fraternal organizations sought to save their own worthy aged poor from the poorhouse. See Weiler, “Religion, Ethnicity and the Development of Private Homes for the Aged,” 65.

¹²⁰ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 177.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 168. See also Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America’s Enduring Confrontation with Poverty*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85.

¹²² Untitled, undated, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Series 18.27, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto.

¹²³ “Report of Strachan Houses – 1927,” Forty-Second Annual Report of the WA, May 1928.

¹²⁴ “Miss T.” was removed to a rest home on Wellesley Street. See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, November 29, 1927.

¹²⁵ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, January 3, 1928.

the home's highly detailed screening process. As at the Baptist of Brooklyn, few "rebellious spirits found an entrance."¹²⁶

Strachan House's application process followed guidelines nearly identical to those of the Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes. It required a signed bond and two referrals, ensuring the applicant was a resident of the city, and posed questions regarding the applicant's age and state of health. It was not unusual for applicants to be refused outright. Applicants not living in Toronto for a minimum of two years were immediately ineligible, highlighting that benevolence was unavailable to the "foreign-born." The "good type," as suitable residents were commonly called, were likely white, Anglican, and from surrounding churches and backgrounds similar to the founders.¹²⁷ Crucial to a successful application was whether the resident was physically and mentally healthy. Prospective tenants were required to confirm that they could "dress and feed" themselves and were not suffering from "any disease, physical or mental."¹²⁸ The most common reasons for refusal were "ill health," "physical condition," or because the resident required "more attention than possible for us to give." Others were simply labeled "unsuitable," which was likely a veiled characterization of the "feeble minded" or "mentally defective."¹²⁹ The large demand for accommodation, coupled with the home's small capacity and rare vacancies, made accommodation in the home, for many, an impossibility.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Butners, "Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged," 181. See also Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 55.

¹²⁷ The "good type" was commonly referenced in the Superintendent's Reports of the 1950s. See for example, Minutes of the Superintendent's Reports, November 1952 - December 1958, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, Box 6, File 4, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

¹²⁸ "Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes," undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto. Strachan House was not alone. William H. Matthews, chairman of the Section on Aging for the Welfare Council of New York City, commented that applicants linked their rejection into homes with "rigid health requirements." See Weiler, "Religion, Ethnicity and the Development of Private Homes for the Aged," 73.

¹²⁹ See the Strachan House Annual Reports, 1926-1939, Woman's Auxiliary Fonds, Series 18.27, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto.

¹³⁰ Between 1927-1939, the annual reports of Strachan House do not always cite the number of applicants refused. Often, committee members simply recorded that "of numerous applicants, only fifteen were eligible

Applicants who were admitted to Strachan House became recipients of charity, receiving special treats, donations such as clothing and food and gifts during special festivities. As in the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women, Strachan House devised a plan that allowed individuals or churches to endow private rooms. While \$3000 was needed to “name” a room after the donor at the Presbyterian Home, a less rigid policy was in place at Strachan House.¹³¹ Donors (typically parishes or WA branches) could endow a room through donations of items such as furniture, or by funding updates to the room, such as gifting new flooring or rugs. Some donors extended their assistance to the room’s resident, sending personal items at Christmastime, such as blankets. In exchange, donors could have their benevolence acknowledged. A plaque or “brass plate,” with the donor’s name, was affixed to the room’s door.¹³²

Like many institutions of its day, Strachan House’s general operations were highly structured. For the management of residents, the committee followed similar rules as those

for consideration.” Due to gaps in the records, it is impossible to determine how many applicants were refused per year. What is clear is that between 1926 and 1939, Strachan House refused a minimum of 70 applications, though the number was certainly higher than this. Ineligible applicants outnumbered eligible applicants by far. It is also important to note that eligible persons, regardless of whether they were admitted, remained “eligible,” their names often transferred to the waiting list. In 1927, of 46 applications, “31 were not suitable cases.” In 1928, of 33 applications, “19 were not suitable cases.” In 1929, of 25 applications, “seven have been refused.” In 1930, “enquiries for admission have been numerous, although only 18 of the number proved eligible for consideration. Of these 8 were admitted, 4 placed on the waiting list, and 6, after investigation, were found not eligible.” In 1931, there was an unknown number of applications, “eighteen of these were found eligible... seven were admitted, three refused on account of ill health, seven were found upon investigation to be ineligible for various reasons.” In 1932, of an unknown number of applicants, only fifteen applicants were eligible for consideration, two were unable to be taken, requiring more attention than possible for us to give.” In 1933, of seven applications received, four were accepted. In 1934, of numerous applications, six were eligible for acceptance. In 1938, 39 applications were received, “many of these were not eligible, owing to age and physical condition.” In 1939, 48 applications were received, and three were not eligible. See the Strachan House Annual Reports, 1926-1939, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Series 18.27, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto.

¹³¹ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 166.

¹³² This was a regular occurrence into the 1950s. For instance, Trinity Church Thornhill WA sent a brass plate for the door of room #20 in January 1954. In December 1952, St. Martin’s-in-the-Field Church sent “two very nice rugs for their Room 32.” In November 1952, “one of the ladies of Grace Church on the Hill” provided their room with “lace curtains.” Minutes of the Superintendent’s Reports, November 1952 - December 1958, Anglican Churchwomen, Box 6, File 4, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

in place at the Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes. Ten rules governed the residents on Belmont Street, and included: "Implicit obedience to the Superintendent"; displaying good manners during communal meals; rendering "all possible service for the benefit of the Home and the comfort of those who are more helpless than themselves"; requesting a leave of absence before leaving the premises; attending morning prayers; agreeing to leave if the Board deemed it necessary; passing a medical examination; refraining from intoxicants; seeing visitors only on specified days; and bringing no personal furniture upon admittance.¹³³ These rules were similar to the ones in place in the New York homes. While some, such as the Baptist Home of Brooklyn, afforded residents a larger degree of privacy than others, all of the homes functioned with the strict understanding that the superintendent (or matron) was the home's chief authority. She had, as her central task, the responsibility of "enforcing the rules of the house" and was required to report any improper behaviour to the visiting (or house) committee.¹³⁴

In 1934, matron Phillips described the motto of Strachan House as "ordered freedom." The rules of the home, she said, were "as few and elastic as possible." This set it apart from institutions, she argued. Strachan House was "a real home."¹³⁵ But Phillips also had the power, as did the house committee of management, to intrude, inspect, and scrutinize the residents. Privacy and independence might have been priorities for the founders, but the day-to-day tone of Strachan House was, in theory, set by one individual, a not uncommon practice. At the Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes, "any failure to comply" with the superintendent was to be reported to the board. "Continued

¹³³ "Toronto Aged Men's and Women's Homes," undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹³⁴ Butners, "Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged," 148. For more on the strict discipline by matrons and superintendents, see also Struthers, *Limits of Affluence*, 57-58.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Cartwright, *These Fifty Years*, 91.

disobedience,” the rules stated, would be “followed by dismissal.”¹³⁶ At the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women, the Methodist Episcopal Church Home, the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples, and the Baptist Home of Brooklyn, the matron had the right to “interfere,” “inspect,” “intrude,” and generally “supervise” all activities.¹³⁷

Residents had responsibilities. Like other such homes, house rules (which were displayed) codified a collective sense of public duty and moral obligation. In this way, Strachan House was not unlike St. Hilda’s, where older students were responsible to the younger ones for the greater good of the home. Residents of Strachan House were to “render all possible service for the comfort of those who are more helpless than themselves.” At the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women in New York City, bylaws required that inmates “render all the service they can for the good of the institution, and for the comfort of those more helpless than themselves.” At the Baptist Home of Brooklyn, the residents were “expected in the way in which they are competent, to aid in the household duties.”¹³⁸ This meant ensuring one’s own room and “person” were kept in a state of cleanliness, as well as being cognizant of the needs of others.

Strachan House diverted from other charitable homes in important ways. The first, as previously mentioned, was that meals were not taken in common. Communal dinners were reserved only for special occasions like Christmas or a resident’s birthday.¹³⁹ Married couples were also permitted to live together, a characteristic that the home proudly celebrated. It was “the first of its kind in Toronto,” reported the *Globe*.¹⁴⁰ “Husbands and

¹³⁶ “Toronto Aged Men’s and Women’s Homes,” undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹³⁷ Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 160-180.

¹³⁸ “Toronto Aged Men’s and Women’s Homes,” undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto. See also Butners, “Institutionalized Altruism and the Aged,” 166, 180.

¹³⁹ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, July 14, 1925,

¹⁴⁰ “Aged Couples Enjoy Life in Cozy Home,” *Globe*, Feb. 9, 1934, 8.

wives are residents there,” reported the *Star*, “the only place in Canada where the aged are not separated.”¹⁴¹ Perhaps the more profound difference, however, was the home’s interdenominational character. From the outset, it was intended to welcome any resident, regardless of religious creed. The *Globe* said that the home sheltered “aged people of any denomination.”¹⁴² Residents of Strachan House were not required to attend morning prayers or religious services, and applicants of any religious denomination were eligible to apply.¹⁴³ In consideration of its non-Anglican residents, the committee of management briefly entertained the possibility of allowing clergy of other denominations to conduct service in the chapel. After some discussion, members thought better of it. It was not likely to meet with the Bishop’s approval, they speculated. They instead agreed that the option of non-Anglican clergy visiting with residents in their private rooms was “an entirely different proposition, and thoroughly endorsed.”¹⁴⁴

As Bettina Bradbury has shown in her research on the Montreal mother houses of the Sisters of Providence and Grey Nuns, residents here entered “vast, complex, religious” institutions. These nineteenth-century orders, however varied, were deeply integrated into the power structures and hierarchies of the Church.¹⁴⁵ Strachan House, while emerging in a different context, operated within a large, complex Church community, and the rhythm of daily life was marked by religious celebrations, or visits from dignitaries or clergy.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ “Old Folks Entertain at Strachan Houses,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Jun. 15, 1928, 25. The home came under critique at times for purporting to be the only home in Toronto that allowed married couples. One other home, the Jewish Old Folks’ Home in Toronto, built in 1916, also accepted married couples. See Struthers, *Limits of Affluence*, 54. At the Aged Men’s and Women’s Homes, couples could be admitted together but “they are required to live in separate homes and may visit back and forth.” See “Questions and Answers,” *Globe*, April 19, 1941, 6.

¹⁴² “Good Response Met by Appeal for Aged,” *Globe*, Feb. 2, 1926, 10.

¹⁴³ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, January 22, 1925.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 23, 1927.

¹⁴⁵ Bettina Bradbury, “Elderly Inmates and Caregiving Sisters: Catholic Institutions for the Elderly in Nineteenth-Century Montreal,” in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* eds. Wendy Mitchinson and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1998), 137.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

That the WA purposely welcomed an interdenominational approach was reflective of the social atmosphere in which it operated. Although some had warned the WA not to become “too secular,” the work of social service afforded opportunities for greater public engagement and leadership. The organization widened its scope, attempting to remain relevant in the eyes of young women in particular, steering them away, in the process, from alternatives to Christianity.¹⁴⁷ In Cartwright’s presidential address of 1926, she regretted the girls doing “not only all kinds of sewing on Sunday, but playing bridge and dancing.”¹⁴⁸ The “extravagance of women today,” Cartwright stressed, was “one of the most serious issues” facing the country.¹⁴⁹ At a service honouring Emmeline Pankhurst, held one year after the suffragette’s death, Cartwright used her address to speak specifically to young women. She pointed out that Pankhurst had been arrested thirteen times and served many prison sentences. Her early experiences in public life had “led her to feel strongly the tragedies of women and the need of new laws.” But “when suffrage was gained,” Cartwright continued, she did not stop there. She “turned her attention to other causes.” Cartwright imagined the suffrage workers of long ago as saying, “With a great sum obtained I this freedom.” The women of today, in contrast, might answer, “but I was freeborn.” The vote, she reminded the audience, could “not be abused.” There were numerous ways for young women to work for the “good of the [British] Commonwealth,” and the current times demanded it.¹⁵⁰

Growing numbers of WA women expressed an interest in social work. They worked in conjunction with groups such as the Downtown Church Workers Association, and the Neighbourhood Workers Association. In 1928, Kingstone reported that many requests for

¹⁴⁷ “Sunday Desecration by Church People Scored by Speaker,” *Globe*, May 12, 1926, 14.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ “Women Gambling in Stock Market Strongly Scored,” *Globe*, May 9, 1929, 18.

¹⁵⁰ “Women of Toronto Memorialize Work of Mrs. Pankhurst,” *Globe*, June 15, 1929, 18.

volunteers were coming from local agencies to the social service department, asking for co-operation. Workers “paid visits,” provided flowers to “old people and invalids,” administered care to the sick “in various ways,” and distributed “second-hand clothing.”¹⁵¹ “Perhaps Social Workers are realizing that the Churches have a contribution to make, to the welfare of the Community,” Kingstone wrote.¹⁵² By 1930 there were 70 social service secretaries across the WA branches in Toronto (up from ten in the previous year), including 16 in the out-of-town branches.¹⁵³

Implementing the Plan

In its first months of operation, the mission of Strachan House proved difficult to uphold. Some applicants with meagre incomes were turned away. Bills for repairs skyrocketed. Financial responsibility and questions of authority rattled both the WA and committee of management.

Cartwright’s aim had always been that the home be “for the benefit of people, who, while not destitute, are able to pay but a small sum towards their own support.” The committee adopted the practice of “making an individual agreement with each resident,” without the monthly payment exceeding “about \$15.00.”¹⁵⁴ This preliminary plan was dependent, a draft of the by-laws read, on the amount of support the home could generate from the community at large. Committee members speculated that residents might contribute “say, \$10 a month to their upkeep.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ “Report of Strachan Houses – 1928,” Forty-third Annual Report of the WA, May 1929, 53.

¹⁵² “Diocesan Missions and Social Service Report – 1926,” Forty-first Annual Report of the WA, May 1927.

¹⁵³ Ibid. See also “Diocesan Missions and Social Service Report,” Forty-fifth Annual Report of the WA, May 1930.

¹⁵⁴ “Strachan Houses Appropriate Name,” *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9. See also Cartwright, “Bylaws for the Government of Strachan Houses,” undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁵⁵ Cartwright, “Bylaws for the Government of Strachan Houses.”

Initially, the committee of management expected that rent would be set at approximately \$16 per month. With about 39 residents in the home, the estimated revenue from rent was about \$7400. The maintenance cost of the home was approximately \$15,000. In other words, Strachan House was never intended to be self-supporting. Rather, it relied from the outset on making up the additional revenue (about half its maintenance) through annual appeals for donations to its maintenance fund.¹⁵⁶ It is not known precisely how the committee of management determined the financial eligibility of its applicants, but the WA annual reports indicate that rent fluctuated according to residents' incomes, and that some residents paid no rent at all. Individual agreements were made with each resident, according to circumstance. In 1932, for instance, five residents paid \$30 dollars per month, fifteen (the majority) paid \$15 a month, and two paid nothing. In 1926, the majority had also paid \$15 per month.¹⁵⁷ After the means-tested Old Age Pension came into effect, there were more applicants with "no other income than the \$20/month which they receive from this source." These residents were asked to pay \$15 a month, which left "the sum of \$15 a month (half maintenance) to be met in some other way."¹⁵⁸

The "final authority" for Strachan House rested with the WA, but the financial responsibility, Cartwright explained, "would have to be borne by the church people of the diocese."¹⁵⁹ It fell to the committee of management, and not the WA, to launch the annual campaign that would garner the much-needed funds for the home's annual maintenance. The Bishop of Toronto, along with male clergy, offered to "support in every way possible"

¹⁵⁶ "Strachan Houses," *The Canadian Churchman*, April 14, 1932.

¹⁵⁷ "Report of Strachan Houses – 1932," Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the WA, May 1933.

¹⁵⁸ "Strachan Houses," *The Canadian Churchman*, April 14, 1932. For more on the means-tested pension, rolled out in 1929, see James Struthers, "Regulating the Elderly: Old Age Pensions and the Formation of a Pension Bureaucracy in Ontario, 1929-1945," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 2, no. 1 (1992): 235-255.

¹⁵⁹ "Strachan Houses Appropriate Name," *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

the endeavour of Strachan House, but offered no financial backing from the Church. The committee was thus tasked with “proposing a plan and working it out,” while the WA board and executive provided “their support and backing as well as such actual help as might be thought desirable.”¹⁶⁰

By the end of 1926, thirty-two residents had moved in, and that spring the committee of management proudly reported that all seemed “happy and contented.”¹⁶¹ Kingstone and Rae reported that over \$24,000 had been jointly raised by the men’s and women’s finance committees and that a loan for \$8000 had covered the alterations.¹⁶² But a slew of problems had become evident to the WA’s executive committee. The WA and committee of management had jointly assembled a provisional constitution, but the home was inundated with endless complication and pragmatic decision-making. The home’s first matron, Miss McKinlay, resigned after only a few short months, “apparently without reason,” and her assistant, Mrs. Nielson, was “terminated.” The second matron, Mrs. Kilner, fared little better, offering her resignation after a few brief months.¹⁶³ Initially the committee expected to accommodate “66-68” persons per house, using the Lodge, as St. Hilda’s had, as one of its two residences. But in the first year only a fraction of that number had moved in to the “old St. Hilda’s.” The Lodge was torn down due to disrepair.¹⁶⁴ In under a year the committee hired its third matron, Miss White, and its third assistant, Mrs. Bowler. Shortly thereafter, Cartwright began receiving complaints about the home.

¹⁶⁰ Cartwright, untitled, undated, notes in preparation for meeting, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁶¹ “Report of Strachan Houses – 1926,” Forty-First Annual Report of the WA, May 1927; Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, April 8, 1926.

¹⁶² Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 4, 1926.

¹⁶³ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, October 6, 1925; Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 2, 1926.

¹⁶⁴ The lodge came down in September 1928. Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, September 11, 1928.

Friends of prospective tenants expressed concern over the home's tight "bureaucratic control." One writer, Agnes Dodde, who was trying to have her elderly friend admitted to Strachan House, told Cartwright there had been "a long delay and a great deal of difficulty." Dodde's friend, a "most superior, neat, self-respecting person," was presently supported by the church, and could afford only \$16 a month. After being visited "at length," by a member of the committee, she was told to "stay where she was, as she would be better off than living two in a room in Strachan Houses." Dodde, so perturbed by this outcome, went to see the home herself, but was refused entry, being told that "no one was allowed to see the rooms without a written order from a certain member of the Committee." When she tried to follow up with Mrs. Strathy, the secretary of admissions, Strathy implied that the difficulty in admitting her friend was "a financial one."¹⁶⁵ "I feel very strongly," Dodde wrote to Cartwright, "that an institution appealing for Church support and receiving exemption from City taxes should not be under such autocratic control and that this system will militate very seriously against its success and usefulness."¹⁶⁶

Another writer, echoing concerns about the home's tight control, wrote to Cartwright about Strathy's interactions with a resident. When Mr. and Mrs. Jones entered Strachan House, their first six months' rent had been paid for by their church, Mrs. Vance explained. When this ran out, Strathy went after the two signatories on the Jones' application, Mr. Powell, as well as herself. Matters grew worse when Mr. Jones died, Vance told Cartwright, and when later, Mrs. Jones found herself in hospital. There was considerable disagreement over funds, with Strathy insisting that the home was at "quite an expense," and Mrs. Jones arguing that she had paid her bills. What most alarmed Vance, however, was that

¹⁶⁵ Agnes Dodde, letter to Cartwright, Jan. 2, 1927, Cartwright and Wood Families, Series 3, Box 6, File 1, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the matron forbade her to visit with Jones privately. The matron, was “very rude,” Vance explained, “advising them she’d been told to stay in the room while they visited.”¹⁶⁷

The home’s seemingly bizarre hierarchy was the central concern of Dr. Helen MacMurchy, Chief of the Ontario Division of Child Welfare. The physician and eugenicist was “instrumental in introducing the concept of feeble-mindedness to Canadians,” writes Carolyn Strange, recommending that “subnormal women be incarcerated so that those who could benefit from intensive training might be distinguished from women requiring ‘permanent custody.’”¹⁶⁸ In the 1920s, MacMurchy was also a provincial inspector of institutions, and visited prisons, hospitals, and charitable homes.¹⁶⁹ Attempting to visit Strachan House “about a lady,” the matron turned MacMurchy down, referring her instead to the chairwoman of admissions. “As you will be aware,” MacMurchy instructed Cartwright, “it has long been recognized to be a guiding principle in the conduct of institutions that the management of the House and the numerous details of institution life should be under the charge of the matron, as the representative of the Board of Management. It gives me some concern and even some anxiety,” she went on, “to find that this is apparently not the case at present in Strachan Houses, for any other plan is likely to prove detrimental to the best interests of the work.”¹⁷⁰

MacMurchy’s letter provides some insight about the abrupt departure of the first two matrons. While the matron should have had complete control over the home’s affairs, Strathy and the committee of management regularly circumvented her authority. Mabel

¹⁶⁷ E. Vance, Letter to Cartwright, Undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 3, Box 6, File 1, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁶⁸ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 115.

¹⁶⁹ For more on Helen MacMurchy see William H. Brown, “Making Representation: Dr. Helen MacMurchy and the ‘Feeble-minded’ in Ontario, 1906-1919,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2005).

¹⁷⁰ Helen MacMurchy, Letter to Cartwright, December 31, 1926, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 3, Box 6, File 1, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

Louise McKinlay's "attitude of independence," as the committee of management referred disapprovingly, was in fact a characteristic of an experienced matron who knew her place. The "misunderstanding of authority" lay not with the matron, as Strathy and the others suspected, but with Strathy and the committee of management. In the absence of by-laws or regulations that clearly set out expectations of duties or the home's chain of command, matrons continued to battle with the committee of management for authority.¹⁷¹

General confusion over hierarchy and financial responsibility plagued the committee of management in its first year, and to such a degree that its first chairwoman, Mrs. Bigwood, suggested the committee disassociate itself from the WA indefinitely. Besieged with applications, facing repair bills for new water pipes and a new furnace, and needing alterations "more complicated than anticipated," Bigwood's central concern was whether it fell strictly to the committee of management to ensure the home's financial viability. If it did, why report to the WA at all? Strathy supported Bigwood, raising concerns over the present admissions policy that made "prosperous applicants" ineligible for admission. Broadening the scope of who was accepted would surely "offset the deficits," she argued, lessening the burdensome financial pressures of the committee.¹⁷²

The mission of Strachan House seemed up in the air. In a hurried hand Cartwright dashed down a list of troubles: "not having a free hand," "not responsible for finances," "one man job," "difficulty of getting information," "letters of MacMurchy, Miss Dodds, Miss Vance...accessibility of house to visitors...doors locked." She lingered on the "authority for Mrs. Strathy's orders," the admissions secretary at the heart of so much

¹⁷¹ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, March 2, 1926.

¹⁷² Special Meeting, Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, January 24, 1927, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 1, File 5, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto. See also Cartwright, meeting notes, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

concern, including MacMurchy's.¹⁷³ At a special meeting called to discuss the possible disassociation of the WA from the Strachan House committee, Cartwright urged the committee members to "freely state [their] reasons for seeking separation. We are not seeking it," she said of the WA, "you are, so please support your view."¹⁷⁴ Bigwood emphasized that "if the W.A. wishes to control or run the Houses, they must finance them." Cartwright replied that the budget would remain a committee responsibility, but that the "final authority for all W.A. undertaking" would lie with the WA executive and board. The WA, she assured them, was "morally responsible," and in the last resort, "financially responsible." Cartwright further insisted that, if the committee of management planned to disassociate itself from the WA, it should present its financial plan. Strathy acknowledged that the finance committee had since dissolved, "and no new Finance Committee had been formed." Strathy lamented the number of Strachan House applicants who could pay only \$15 a month. At this, Cartwright paused, urging members to remember that the home existed "primarily to assist the Aged Poor."¹⁷⁵

When the third matron, Miss White, resigned in April 1927, Cartwright and the WA shifted their efforts into high gear.¹⁷⁶ Over the following months they attempted to steer the committee of management back on track, implementing several changes. The WA and select members of the committee of management drew up fourteen by-laws for the management of the home, clearly setting out the roles of the WA, committee of management, and the home's staff in relation to Strachan House work. "The general management shall be in the

¹⁷³ Cartwright, handwritten notes, undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁷⁴ Cartwright, meeting notes.

¹⁷⁵ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, January 24, 1927.

¹⁷⁶ White resigned in April 1927. Cartwright personally asked her to stay on, if only temporarily. When the new permanent committee was put in place, the executive committee reported that they were "helping her." See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, April 25, 1927; Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, May 31, 1927.

hands of a Committee, which like all other Committees of the W.A. shall be responsible to the Executive.” All members of the committee were to act as “visitors to the Home,” and admission forms were to be “obtained on application to the Matron.” Most notably, the matron was to have *complete charge* of the “internal affairs of the Home,” and was required to make “a formal report at least once a month” to the committee. The committee would still draft forthcoming budgets and fundraising campaigns, organize the home and chapel maintenance, investigate resident applications, and hire the matron and assistant matron, but the home would be managed by the matron.¹⁷⁷ As “head of household,” she alone would lead morning prayers, inspect rooms, report illnesses, engage and discharge servants, approve housekeeping accounts, and ultimately be “responsible for [the] general running of the Home.”¹⁷⁸

In advance of the spring annual meeting, Cartwright and the WA executive committee forwarded the new by-laws to each committee of management member, along with a personalized letter. Here the WA’s concerns were clearly communicated, including what the executive committee saw as unnecessary power in the hands of the admissions committee. The executive hoped to ascertain, given the new by-laws, the “future attitude of each member.”¹⁷⁹ It is clear that some committee of management members, including Strathy, were asked to resign. “I didn’t want to give up Strachan House work,” Strathy wrote

¹⁷⁷ The president and corresponding secretary of the Toronto WA were *ex officio* members of the committee of management, as authorized by the bylaws, 1927. Likewise, the committee had a representative on the Toronto WA executive committee. As per by-law three, the officers of the committee “shall be appointed annually by the Executive of the W.A., but the Representative to the W.A. shall be appointed by the Annual Meeting.” See “Report of Strachan Houses – 1926,” Forty-First Annual Report of the WA, May 1927; “Report of Strachan Houses – 1928,” Forty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1929; Cartwright, handwritten notes, undated.

¹⁷⁸ Cartwright, Matron’s Duties, undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁷⁹ The executive committee did not want any mention of “religious body” in the application process. The committee of management had clearly “overstepped” on this point. See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, April 5, 1927.

to Cartwright, “but when told the Executive had lost confidence in me, it was the only honourable thing to do.” The home was well organized, she insisted, and “should run smoothly.” But she had frequently taken up work “half finished, left by someone else,” and she would “do the same again rather than have the old people or the work suffer.” It was not fair to judge a person “from the other side of the fence.”¹⁸⁰

And Strathy may have had a point. Cartwright and the WA had managed the home at an arm’s length, while the committee of management had overseen the busy logistical process of the home’s day-to-day operation, and with little guidance (save from the matron) or previous experience. “We all make mistakes,” Strathy surmised, “none of us are infallible.”¹⁸¹ Strathy’s resignation followed five others, including chairwoman Bigwood’s, yet fifteen others agreed to stay on. As per the by-laws, approved at the annual meeting of May 1927, the new committee chairwoman was mandated to serve as well on the executive committee of the Toronto WA. The committee of Strachan House officially came “into closer relation with the W.A.” With guidelines reinforcing a clear hierarchy, including rules for the home’s governance, the WA ensured that its original mission –to help the “aged poor”– could be upheld.¹⁸²

In formulating a management plan, the founders prioritized independence and privacy for its elderly residents, and in a homelike atmosphere. The WA-led, interdenominational home, which welcomed married couples and residents with little means, was an anomaly in the city of Toronto, and also an innovation. Its numerous influences, both from the United States

¹⁸⁰ Strathy, Letter to Cartwright, undated, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 3, Box 6, File 1, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² See Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, April 25, 1927; “Report of Strachan Houses – 1927,” Forty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1928.

and Britain, reflected the strong organizational prowess of the committee's voluntary members and an ability to mould the home in its own image. The home benefited from the support of the exceedingly large, complex, and growing church organization of the WA and its influential president, who was successful in drawing more women, and support, to the work of social service.

In the first months of its operation, the challenge of launching Strachan House severely tested Cartwright's vision. The home's central aim of sheltering the aged poor came under fire from its own committee of management. The activity exposed myriad contradictions for those seeking shelter. While the home purported to accept Toronto's "dependent aged," a highly invasive admissions process selected only those judged "deserving." The "ordered freedom" celebrated by matron Phillips concealed the home's structured, institutional spaces. The management plan exposed inexperience among the committee of management and the WA, particularly with respect to the hierarchical structures of residential institutions. The home suffered greatly from competing authorities as a result, with members unaware of the need to defer to the matron—or perhaps unwilling. Operating without firm by-laws or a constitution until 1927, workers and committee members were essentially flying blind. The home's management plan was, at best, a work-in-progress. As one member put it, opening a home for old people had been "somewhat more complicated than at first had been thought."¹⁸³

The way in which the committee of management and WA approached the endeavour of Strachan House provides a glimpse into a particular historical moment. With few homes in Toronto from which to draw inspiration, the home reflected the disordered nature of social provisions available to old people, as well as a women's religious organization that

¹⁸³ "Strachan Houses Appropriate Name," *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9.

rallied—and adapted—to offer its support. The WA's journey into social service included care of the aged poor, a project that necessitated debate over the meanings that old age would carry in the modern age. Despite the limitations of its first years, Strachan House, like St. Hilda's, was an innovative addition to Ward Five.

CHAPTER THREE

The Workers

Sadie Wilson, chairwoman of the committee of management, attributed Strachan House's "happy homelike atmosphere" to matron Marian Phillips' "very fine spirit and influence." It was remarkable, Wilson said in 1932, considering that "the work is by no means free from difficulties." Despite the Depression that was now apparent to all, Wilson assured her colleagues that there had been "no need for retrenchment" in the provision for the "comfort of the aged in our care."¹

Occupying the former bedroom of Mabel Cartwright, principal of St. Hilda's College before it was transformed into a home for old people, Phillips had a good deal in common with her former counterpart. The house was her domain, the place where she led morning prayers, and upheld regulations. She worked morning to nighttime to ensure that Strachan House's domestic atmosphere was preserved. She had domestic workers to assist her with the task, women who worked and lived alongside her. The workers and residents under Phillips' charge, like the undergraduate students under Cartwright, recognized her supreme authority.

Yet Strachan House was not the only social service initiative undertaken by the Toronto Diocese of the Women's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (WA). During the 1930s, the WA also supported the work of three other deaconesses. Unlike Phillips, the women worked with volunteer members across the

¹ "Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1931," Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England and to Diocesan Missions, Woman's Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, May 1932, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 62-63.

diocese's more than 400 branches, visiting old people, shut-ins, the sick, and the poor, and collaborating with religious bodies in the distribution of relief.² The WA pledged to help wherever possible in order to "alleviate suffering and distress among families."³ Addressing the prevailing social hardship in her presidential address in 1931, Cartwright, then sixty-two, spoke of the "multitudes on relief," those who were "living in fear of what a day may bring forth."⁴ She urged her WA colleagues to "work...so that there may be decent houses for its people, safety and right training for its children, care for its aged and helpless."⁵

As social conditions deteriorated, the WA's social service department faced its greatest test. William Katerberg writes that "even if protestant churches did contribute to the very early evolution of the welfare state in Canada during the late 1930s and the 1940s, their growth stagnated as a result of the Great Depression." The number of seminary students and graduates in missions, for example, decreased measurably in the 1930s.⁶ The social work of the WA flourished, however, as members visited families, led classes for new Canadians, assisted unemployed men find work, prepared donations, and managed Strachan House. Yet the women organization's public influence in social service has been little explored by scholars, who have focused on the WA's relationship to mission work.⁷

² For example, see "Diocesan Missions and Social Service," Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1932, 54; "W.A. Social Service Department," Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1933, 51; "Social Service Department," Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1934, 61; "Social Service Department, 1934," Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1935, 59.

³ "Treasurer's Statement," Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1933, 54.

⁴ President's Address of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada and to Diocesan Missions, May 1931, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, F2182, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto, 7.

⁵ President's Address, May 1931, 7. By 1933, "Almost every branch," said secretary F. C. Kingstone, had "reported Social Service work in their branch." See "Social Service Department," Reports of the Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1934, 61.

⁶ William Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), 143-44.

⁷ See Alan L. Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada: Controversies and Identity in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver; Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2002). For a study that considers social reform in the diocese of Toronto, see Hayes, "Repairing the Walls: Church Reform and Social Reform 1867-

Assessing their working duties, and the conditions under which they laboured, this chapter situates Strachan House workers in the larger environment of Depression era Toronto. The chapter examines Strachan House as a workplace, one that was shared by deaconesses and domestic workers, the latter being lower on the social status pole. The chapter illustrates that while deaconesses and domestic workers confronted different pressures, they were collectively answerable to the WA, underscoring a complex worker hierarchy. Strachan House work was also gendered. Overworked deaconesses were frequently praised by the WA for their tireless allegiance to social work. The home's domestic workers fared financially better than many in similar working situations, but they worked for long hours and under difficult conditions. Compared to men, they had limited employment options, and little access to shelter, if they became unemployed.

Investigating Strachan House workers further highlights the growth of the WA's social service department, including the staggering workloads of diocesan deaconesses. Like Strachan House's matron, the workers held considerable influence in their respective communities, but occupied an ambiguous place within the Anglican Church of Canada. The deaconesses nevertheless filled important roles as social workers, and were supported by thousands of volunteer women.

Deaconesses

Matron Phillips, a deaconess since 1911, managed Strachan House with a "wise and gentle rule."⁸ She possessed ultimate authority in the home, yet limited power in the Anglican

1939, in *By Grace Co-Workers: Building the Anglican Diocese of Toronto 1780-1989*, ed. Alan L. Hayes (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1989), 43-96.

⁸ "Three Deaconesses Ordained," *Globe and Mail*, June 7, 1911, 8. See also Mabel Cartwright, ed., *These Fifty Years, 1886-1936*, Woman's Auxiliary Fonds, Series 18.27, Box 46, File 9, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 89.

hierarchy. The position of deaconess was created in England in the 1860s, emerging as a result of three characteristics of Victorian society: the rise of evangelism; fear over “redundant” women; and a moral panic about worsening social conditions.⁹ As Myra Rutherdale explains, the Lambeth Conference of 1897 had sanctioned the order, but omitted to recognize any official power within the Church of England.¹⁰ When bishops from all the provincial churches again gathered to discuss policy at the Lambeth Conference in 1920, a committee stressed that “the office of deaconess was the one and only order of ministry for women to be recommended for recognition by the Anglican branch of the Catholic Church.” The committee’s recommendation was passed, but the status of deaconess remained confusing. Some worried that the resolution of 1920 had established a Holy Order of deaconesses comparable to that of deacons. As Wendy Fletcher-Marsh has shown, the suggestion caused “considerable conflict,” with many arguing that women “had never been and should not be allowed in Holy Orders in the Anglican Church.” At the Lambeth Conference in 1930, the issue was settled when a resolution passed, confirming that “the office of deaconess was in no way to be regarded as equivalent to the male order of deacon.”¹¹

Despite grumbling within the church over the status of deaconesses, Phillips’ role at Strachan House paralleled “that of the traditional male household head.” It was the matron, as Jenny Hockey has written, “who orchestrated the illusion of a ‘homely’ environment despite the undermining evidence of loss and decay.”¹² Deaconess training, including course

⁹ Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ Wendy Fletcher-Marsh, “The Limitation and Opportunity of Gender: Women and Ecclesiastical Structures in Canadian Anglicanism, 1920-1955,” *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Association* 37 (1995): 43.

¹² Jenny Hockey, “The Ideal Home: Domesticating the Institutional Space of Old Age and Death,” in *Ideal Homes? Social Change and the Experience of Home*, eds. Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 111.

curriculum in nursing and domestic arts, reinforced Victorian norms about gender. But in practice deaconess work brought Phillips and other women, “a significant step away from the private sphere and into independent life.”¹³ Middle and upper-class women had the opportunity to make claims “for inclusion on the basis of individual ability and enhanced educational qualifications.”¹⁴

Phillips held firm to Cartwright’s vision of upholding a family or “Christian” home, where couples would not be separated.¹⁵ Unlike “grim institutional housing,” where residents were “stripped of all individuality and privacy,” the home implied “all that was caring, comfortable, and warm...a foreshadowing of the eventual heavenly home.”¹⁶ According to *These Fifty Years*, a Toronto WA commemorative publication, Phillips had earned the “trust and loyal affection” of the committee of management, the residents, and the home’s staff.¹⁷ The matron’s portrait of Strachan House, which she provided for the publication, was infused with romanticized descriptions of the residents. Daily prayers, weekly Communion, evening entertainments, all of it produced a feeling that the “Lord and Master is truly in our midst.” Of a recent Christmas, she reflected: “It is a pretty sight to see our dear old friends dressed in their best, a number with lovely white hair looking so pretty against the red and green decorations of the sitting-room.” The home’s chapel offered a “great source of comfort.” Of Trinity Park, the beauty of the changing seasons, “God’s wonderful world,” could all be witnessed from the windows. Strachan House was a “real home,” she wrote, “not an institution.”¹⁸

¹³ Rutherforddale, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 18.

¹⁴ Leonore Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide’: Public and Private in British Gender History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no.1 (Spring 2003): 20-21.

¹⁵ “Old Folks Entertain at Strachan Houses,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Jun. 15, 1928, 25.

¹⁶ Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide,’” 18.

¹⁷ Cartwright, *These Fifty Years*, 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

Phillips' 1927 starting salary, \$65 "at her own request," was increased to \$75 per month a year later, where it remained in 1931.¹⁹ Her salary included board. As a deaconess conducting social work for the diocese, Phillips earned what was then a typical salary, approximately \$900 per year. This was considerably less than social workers employed by secular agencies, who took in approximately \$1200 annually.²⁰ Compared to the ministries of ordained deacons, as Alan Hayes explains, deaconesses were "far less readily employable, less well remunerated, less secure in their appointments, and less supported in their retirement."²¹ Church officials remained indifferent or divided on deaconesses' status, including whether they were "ordained" or "set apart," whether they were "clergy" and thus entitled to pensions, and who appointed and paid them.²² Yet deaconesses could hold a great degree of authority in their respective workplaces. Working in a range of environments, from urban parishes, remote parts of Canada, to overseas churches, they served in prisons, hospitals and medical facilities, residences for women and girls, and residential schools. They nursed the sick, visited old people and shut-ins, delivered health care, evangelized, led classes and bible studies for teen-aged girls, and organized mothers' meetings.²³ In ministering to those

¹⁹ On Phillips' starting salary, see Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, November 1, 1927, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 1, File 5, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives. For adjustments to her salary, see "Strachan Houses Report – 1931," May 1932, 62-63.

²⁰ This was not a hard-and-fast rule. In 1929, the Council for Social Service was paying its social worker, Evelyn Jay, \$1264.90 per annum. See Meeting of Executive Committee, Feb 27, 1930, Council for Social Service Fonds, Box 4, File 3, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives. For more on deaconesses see Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 184.

²¹ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 175.

²² Hayes writes that the Bishop's Committee (1932-35), which formed to assess the role of women in the Church, conducted a general survey of the then current ministries of women in Canada. Its report, published in 1935, tried to tally the number of deaconesses, Women's Auxiliary missionaries, Sunday school teachers, summer van workers, and women staff of numerous missions, dioceses, and General Synod boards. The report found thousands (including 38,000 in the WA nationally) across Mother's Unions, Girls' Friendly Societies, and Daughters of the King. It acknowledged Anglican membership in community groups such as the National Council of Women, the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire, Girl guides and Canadian Girls in Training. The report also assessed the salaries of deaconesses, learning that deaconesses conducting social work earned, on average, less than social workers employed by secular agencies. Despite evidence of women's large and sustained involvement in the Church, the Bishops were unsure of how to approach women's scant wages, pensions, or status more generally. See Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 175, 184.

²³ *Ibid.*, 175.

communities without a resident clergyman, deaconesses visited the “many lonely families,” provided advice about “neglected children,” and cared for old people. One Toronto diocese deaconess, Miss Taylor, was stationed in the village of Wilberforce. F.C. Kingstone, secretary of the WA’s social service department, noted that Taylor had traveled 5000 miles by car in one year alone, and had paid 700 visits. She gave “stability to the work,” Kingstone said, “and expert knowledge.”²⁴

In addition to Taylor, the social service department supported the work of a “friendship worker” who provided outreach to new Canadians, and whose part-time annual salary of \$575 had been given “a place in our budget,” Cartwright announced in 1931.²⁵ In the early 1930s, as Church congregations in Canada responded with outrage over the persecution of Christians in Russia, Florence Lea worked closely with Russian refugees, supporting the small community in Toronto as they opened their first church on Glen Morris Street.²⁶ For mothers, Lea provided English lessons and steered them to join Mothers’ Unions.²⁷ The women were responding “wonderfully under the leadership of Jesus Christ,” she reported, and were “upholding the ideal of Christian womanhood.”²⁸ For children and girls of “foreign parentage,” Lea’s link with groups such as the Canadian Girls in Training was vital to imparting a “Canadian” education. Lea’s summer Vacation School included lessons in “bible study, memory work, handicrafts, and sports.”²⁹ As Cartwright

²⁴ “Diocesan Missions and Social Services,” Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the WA, May 1932, 54-55.

²⁵ President’s Address of the WA, May 1931, 4.

²⁶ “Among Ourselves: A little Bit of Russia,” *Globe*, October 26, 1932, 7.

²⁷ Becoming popular after 1903 in Canada, the Mothers’ Union was a national women’s organization committed “to uphold the sanctity of marriage; to awaken in all mothers a sense of their great responsibility in the training of their boys and girls...; to organize in every place a band of mothers who will unite in prayer and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life.” See Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 172.

²⁸ “W.A. Social Service Department,” Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the WA, May 1933, 53. For more on the CGIT, Girls Friendly Societies, and other girls’ clubs, see Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 172-173.

See also “Gift to W.A. Head to be Added to Fund,” *Toronto Star*, April 25, 1936.

²⁹ A “Canadian” education was synonymous with Christian teachings. “Memory work” was memorizing scripture. See “W.A. Social Service Department,” Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the WA, May, 1933, 53.

commented, “in building up the Russian Christian Church, there would be built up a wall of defense against bolshevism.”³⁰

Evelyn Jay, the Toronto diocese’s social worker, was the third deaconess working for the WA’s social service department. Her salary of approximately \$1300 annually, funded through the Council for Social Service from 1922, later fell to the diocese in 1930, the Toronto WA and city parishes each contributing a portion. In a sign that social work was being recognized as increasingly necessary by the parishes, Cartwright insisted that “this branch of work” should not be attached to the Council for Social Service, “but should be diocesan work.”³¹ During the Depression, the WA in Toronto did not suffer, as the women’s auxiliary in Chicago did, from a “reorganization of church structures.” In the Chicago case, its women’s auxiliary was discontinued and incorporated into the diocese’s social service department. The shift offered “women voices in diocesan (and national) agencies,” Katerberg writes, “but it sacrificed their independence to male and professional policy makers.”³²

The Toronto diocese was generally supportive of Jay, who assisted single women, deserted wives, unmarried mothers, and children, and arranged for their visits to fresh air camps.³³ Her work did not directly target immigrants, as did the friendship worker’s,

³⁰ Cartwright addressed social service work at a session by the Council for Social Service. See “Insurance Urged for Unemployment by Anglican Synod,” *Globe*, May 22, 1930, 13.

³¹ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council for Social Service, February 27, 1930, 4. For more on when Jay’s salary later fell to the diocese of Toronto, see “Insurance Urged for Unemployment by Anglican Synod,” *Globe*, May 22, 1930, 13. In 1938, despite “the value and great need of more and more social service,” Jay’s salary was reduced on account of the “failure of some parishes to pay allotments.” See “Gambling to Aid Church Condemned at Synod,” *Globe*, May 6, 1938, 5. According to the WA Annual Report for 1934, in some branches, there were one or two large parishes with a full-time deaconess or social worker. It is unclear whether these positions were paid. In some instances, the report refers to the “voluntary parochial worker,” and in others, simply “Social Worker.” See “Social Service Department, 1934,” Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1935, 62.

³² Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities*, 140-141.

³³ Jay sent children and mothers to Mooreland Camp, a fresh air camp founded by Reverend Canon Robert James Moore. The camp was for “undernourished or delicate children,” a place where they could receive “the

although Jay's work with "newcomers" was often referenced in annual reports. She worked in treating those with "a great variety of problems," helping those "coming from the West," or families wanting to return "to the Old Land." She tried to get young men back to work.³⁴ She assisted families in rural areas, who did not qualify for relief.³⁵

Throughout 1933, the *Globe* reported that many Toronto families were "struggling through the months of depression, and not eligible for relief in Toronto." Those who "pulled most on the heartstrings" of Jay were the "little old ladies" who had not "conformed to the prescribed length of residence in the city."³⁶ Men and women over seventy, in need of financial assistance, were particularly at risk. To qualify for Ontario's means-tested old age pension scheme, residents had to be British subjects who had resided in Canada for twenty consecutive years, and five in Ontario. Further, to receive the maximum pension payment of \$20 a month, applicants had to have an annual income of no more than \$365 (including the maximum monthly pension of \$20). Canada's old age pension legislation –as with Britain's– was designed to supplement income, not ensure a basic standard of living.³⁷ One "dear old lady of more than 80" found herself ineligible for the pension, and "stranded in Toronto." Jay placed her "in a home where she [was] happily well cared for."³⁸

The helpless bystanders of the economic crisis, especially women and children, most captured Jay's attention. Her focus on women and children was especially vital in work with individuals and families who did not qualify for relief. In 1932, Jay and her volunteers visited

full benefits of Lake Simcoe's invigorating air." See "Mothers, Children Will Forget Want in Summer Camps," *Globe*, July 5, 1930, 15.

³⁴ "Social Service Department, 1934," Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1935, 62.

³⁵ "Social Service Report," Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the WA, April 1936, 72.

³⁶ "Church Aids Needy Not City Residents, Anglican Offices Established in Scadding House, Trinity Square, Aged Women Helped," *Globe*, June 29, 1933, 12.

³⁷ James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 64.

³⁸ "Church Aids Needy Not City Residents, Anglican Offices Established in Scadding House, Trinity Square, Aged Women Helped," *Globe*, June 29, 1933, 12.

at least 300 families receiving relief from the House of Industry.³⁹ A year later, the number of visits jumped to 559.⁴⁰ Volunteers provided families with donations of canned fruit and vegetables, with warm clothing that had been sewn, gathered, or mended.⁴¹ “As you know, most of these homes have nothing coming in,” reported one Toronto branch, “only what they receive from the Relief Board.”⁴² After 1935, when Mitchell Hepburn’s Liberals were in power in Ontario, ever more individuals and families did not qualify for relief.⁴³ Like other social agencies that the WA worked alongside, including the Neighbourhood Workers’ Association, and the Downtown Workers’ Association, the WA believed profoundly that the family was the “fundamental institution in society.” Keeping families together, and providing for them “spiritually, psychologically, or materially,” was crucial in promoting “the welfare of the individual and of the family.”⁴⁴

Supporting the deaconesses, WA volunteers were 15,000 strong in 1931. They served in parishes in a variety of capacities, including with food and clothing distribution, hospital visiting, and administrative duties.⁴⁵ Kingstone remarked that an increasing number were “finding scope for their leisure time,”⁴⁶ while Cartwright celebrated “the faithfulness

³⁹ “Diocesan Missions and Social Service,” Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1932, 54-57.

⁴⁰ “W.A. Social Service Department,” Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the WA, May 1933, 51-53.

⁴¹ “Diocesan Missions and Social Service,” Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1932, 54-57.

⁴² “W.A. Social Service Department,” Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1933, 51-53.

⁴³ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 94-95.

⁴⁴ “Purpose of the Service of the Neighbourhood Workers Association,” March 16, 1928, Neighbourhood Workers Association Fonds, F413, 1810, 1, City of Toronto Archives, Toronto; President’s Address, May 1931, Trinity College Archives, 6. See also James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 50.

⁴⁵ WA membership in the Toronto diocese experienced a surge in growth in the early 1930s, peaking at 15, 145 members in 1931. Membership fluctuated throughout the decade, dipping to approximately 13, 032 members by decade’s end, where it remained until the mid 1940s. See “Diocesan Missions and Social Service,” Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1932, 54. See also “Woman’s Auxiliary Shows Good Growth Throughout the Year: Members Urged to Broaden Outlook and Increase Their Efforts,” *Globe*, May 13, 1931, 14; “Danger of Provincialism to Canada is Stressed by Dr. Mabel Cartwright: Woman’s Auxiliary Urged to Spirit of Brotherhood, Federation,” *Globe*, April 27, 1938, 9; “May Not Relax Efforts, Diocesan Auxiliary Told,” *Globe*, May 2, 1945, 10.

⁴⁶ Diocesan Missions and Social Service,” Reports of the Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1932, 54.

and the loving spirit of those who are old in years as well as in service.”⁴⁷ Working out of a room at 6 Trinity Square, Jay’s department of volunteers coordinated their time and resources, with one worker “kindly taking Miss Jay in her car” to home visits, and another “assist[ing] with typing records.” Volunteers assembled daily to accumulate, sort, and distribute emergency items for the needy. In 1932 “943 articles of clothing were given out,” and “148 pieces of household furniture were placed.”⁴⁸

Many city and out-of-town branches pitched in, sending “new and second hand articles for their city friends in need.” WA members regularly sent Jay “money, furniture, household linen, firewood, bedding, fresh vegetables, eggs, cod liver oil, groceries, Christmas toys and clothing,” to be dispersed among the needy.⁴⁹ In 1933, “100 families, 121 single women,” and “31 unmarried mothers” had been helped. “None of them were eligible for assistance from city organizations,” reported Kingstone at an annual meeting.⁵⁰ In 1935 Jay delivered 24 Christmas baskets to families and 42 gifts to single men and women. She conducted an astonishing 3233 phone calls, 1331 office interviews, and made 521 home visits.⁵¹ With over a decade of experience in the diocese, organizations such as the Council for Social Service, Girls’ Friendly Society, the Canadian Women’s Hostel, and the Children’s Aid Society had learned to send potential cases directly to Jay’s attention.⁵²

The work settings and duties of deaconesses varied widely, and Phillips’ employment with Strachan House, compared to the highly mobile lives of Taylor, Lea, and Jay, afforded a degree of predictability. Phillips was at liberty to create, as principal Cartwright had before

⁴⁷ President’s Address, May 1931, 21.

⁴⁸ “W.A. Social Service Department,” Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1933, 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-53.

⁵⁰ “Social Service Department,” Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1934, 62.

⁵¹ “Social Service Report,” Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the WA, April 1936, 72.

⁵² “Social Service Department,” Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1934, 62.

her, a residence “under distinctly Christian auspices,” a setting where protocol and public duty were prized and upheld, and where residents and workers lived together “in close fellowship.”⁵³ “Perhaps it sounds all receiving and not giving,” Phillips wrote of the residents, “but though none have much to give, all do their share and there are many calls upon their generosity.”⁵⁴

Unlike the diocesan deaconesses, Phillips’ central commitment was to one population and place, and to assisting the socially marginal within its walls.⁵⁵ While she had the benefit of a familiar environment and a consistent schedule, Strachan House offered little reprieve and demanded constant attention. From leading morning prayers, inspecting rooms, managing and hiring staff, coordinating laundry schedules, organizing chapel service, making doctor’s appointments, and assisting residents of sometimes advanced age, Phillips worked endlessly, and with little rest.

Phillips ruled a house that might be called, as Michel Foucault describes, a *crisis heterotopia*, a “privileged or sacred or forbidden” place, “reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis.”⁵⁶ In providing the aged poor with a “homelike” environment, Phillips’ task was partly to hide the poverty and stage of life that had brought residents to Strachan House in the first place, by upholding the illusion of domesticity and safety. Yet work of the matron came at

⁵³ The idea of creating a residence under “Christian auspices” is Margaret Addison’s phrase, former Dean of Residence of Annesley Hall at Victoria College. She was referring to the type of residence Cartwright hoped to create at St. Hilda’s. See Addison, letter to Cartwright, Oct. 5, 1936, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, Series 3, Box 6, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

⁵⁴ Cartwright, *These Fifty Years*, 90.

⁵⁵ “W.A. Social Service Department,” May 1933, Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the WA, 51.

⁵⁶ *Crisis heterotopias* (“places for adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly”) were gradually replaced by *heterotopias of deviation*, explains Foucault, which included psychiatric hospitals and prisons. Foucault suggests that old age homes occupy a blurry place between the two, since old age is both a crisis and a deviation. See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), 24. In the 1930s context, however, old people were not seen as “deviant” so much as a social problem to be managed. See James G. Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

considerable physical and mental cost. In the absence of federal protective legislation mandating a standard for maximum hours or minimum wages, there was nothing preventing workers such as Phillips from working themselves to exhaustion.⁵⁷ In May 1931, she took a three-month leave-of-absence, due to illness. The committee of management asked the assistant matron, Mrs. Bowler, to take over the helm while Phillips recuperated.⁵⁸

Substitutes were occasionally brought in to assist Phillips and Bowler, or to relieve them in case of sickness. Extra help was also found for fundraising events, such as the fall bazaar, or for special occasions, such as the home's tenth anniversary party. Rugs and furniture were moved out or pushed against the walls to accommodate the dozens of visitors traipsing through the home. Large tables were brought in to display the handmade goods for sale. Visitors and donors were entertained, provided with refreshments, and taken room to room.⁵⁹ In addition to the daily demands of the matron, public events offered the opportunity to showcase and recognize the good work of the Toronto WA. But ensuring the domestic comforts and homelike appearance of Strachan House required professional attention and elbow grease. As Willcocks, Peace, and Kellaheer have written, the ideal of affording a "homely" setting was a "genteel façade" concealing institutional patterns and characteristics.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ The Factories Act of 1884, and the Minimum Wage Act of 1920, were both provincial responses to the rise of children and women workers in Ontario. The Factories Act established maximum hours of 10 per day and 60 hours weekly. The Minimum Wage Act created a provincial board to set weekly minimum standards, but excluded domestic workers and farm workers. Both Acts lay the groundwork for future legislation, including the Employment Standards Act, 1967, but both were ineffectively enforced. See Mark Thomas, "Setting the Minimum: Ontario's Employment Standards in the Postwar Years, 1944-1968," *Labour* 54 (2004): 58; Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 88.

⁵⁸ "Strachan Houses Report – 1931," Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the WA, May 1932, 62.

⁵⁹ "Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1935," Fiftieth Annual Report of the WA, May 1936, 76-77.

⁶⁰ Dianne Willcocks, Sheila Peace, & Leonie Kellaheer, *Private Lives in Public Places: A Research-Based Critique of Residential Life in Local Authority Old People's Homes* (London and New York: Tavistock Publication, 1987), 1.

Maids

In contrast to the home's matron and assistant matron, maids did not have professional training, nor did they automatically prescribe to the tenets of social reform work. Maids had less social status, and were relegated to tasks such as household cleaning. They were expected to practice deference and to follow orders.⁶¹ Prior to their employment, maids were not always affiliated with the WA, although church membership, if applicable, was noted. The reality of women differed from those of WA members, who were commonly middle to upper-classes, and had leisure hours that could be spread over several church organizations. In many cases, Strachan House maids shared little with their superiors. The paid labour performed by Strachan House maids highlights the multiple faces of WA work.

Depression women generally shunned domestic service work. Its unpopularity stemmed partly from its low social status. In domestic service, a woman's job was to be subservient.⁶² Domestic service workers were not, unlike factory and shop workers, protected by labour legislation, standardization of working conditions, or the possibility of collective action.⁶³ In the wake of industrialization, domestic service was all but absent from political discussion, deemed "non-productive" labour, and commonly viewed as an insignificant part of the economy.⁶⁴

The dismal economic times brought diverse women into the field of domestic service. As Genevieve Leslie explains, the employment bureaus of women's organizations, such as the YWCA, connected unemployed women with jobs in domestic service, an area

⁶¹ On maids and practising deference, see Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," in *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, eds. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974) 85.

⁶² Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada," 86.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

where workers were still in demand.⁶⁵ Among those steered toward domestic service jobs were homeless women, reformed prostitutes, ex-convicts, immigrants, single mothers, widows, older women, and women with unemployed husbands. “Women who had no other skills, but who could do housework passably well,” Leslie writes, “took domestic situations as a last resort.”⁶⁶ Early in the Depression, women who worked in domestic service were expected “to be happy to have any work at all.”⁶⁷ By 1936, despite the Hepburn government’s insistence on purging the relief lists of “all employable persons,” Toronto’s department of Public Welfare still reported that “many complaints ha[d] been received that domestic help cannot be secured.”⁶⁸

As Margaret Hobbs has shown, the specific circumstances of homeless, single women remained mostly unknown to public officials in Toronto, but press reports and social service groups emphasized high levels of joblessness among specific groups, especially stenographers and typists.⁶⁹ Unemployed factory, shop, and clerical workers were chastised by employment bureaus if they did not move enthusiastically into domestic service, even though employers much preferred workers with domestic service experience.⁷⁰ In the realm of domestic service, considered “the most dreaded employment of last resort among women,” unemployment persisted.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 18.

⁶⁶ Leslie, “Domestic Service in Canada,” 95.

⁶⁷ Margaret H. Hobbs, “Gendering Work and Welfare: Women’s Relationship to Wage-Work and Social Policy in Canada during the Great Depression,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1995), 173.

⁶⁸ D.B. Harkness, Acting Secretary, Unemployment Relief Branch, Department of Public Welfare, letter to Municipal Clerks and Relief Officers, July 26, 1935, Department of Public Welfare, F220, 100, 235, File 5, City of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

⁶⁹ Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 162-163.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷¹ With the exception of a slight rise in domestic service employment during the Depression, the percentage of domestics in the female workforce fell both preceding and following the Depression years. See Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 163, 170; Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 18.

In recruiting maids, Strachan House initially sought young women with domestic service experience.⁷² Young, experienced women seemed best equipped to endure the hard work and long hours of domestic labour.⁷³ As live-in workers, their remuneration included room and board. Magda Fahrni has written that young, “unattached” women were the only women suited, as far as many employers were concerned, for live-in work.⁷⁴ While the maids’ ages (throughout the Depression) were not recorded, the home, for the lifespan of its operation, diverted from the norm of hiring only young, single women. Over time the home employed women who were young, middle-aged, and old, as well as single, married, or widowed, including women with children. The home’s first assistant matron lived in the home with her two young sons.⁷⁵ In some cases, older maids became residents.⁷⁶ Why the home was less demanding in how it recruited workers, particularly in later decades, was likely because of domestic labour’s plummeting popularity among women workers.⁷⁷ Whether or not the home secured the young women workers it preferred during the Depression remains unclear. Nor are her other important characteristics known, such as her race, class, marital status, working experience, and place of origin.⁷⁸ While the risk of generalizing becomes

⁷² “Domestic Help Wanted,” *Star*, June 29, 1926, 37.

⁷³ Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 172.

⁷⁴ Magda Fahrni, “‘Ruffled’ Mistresses and ‘Discontented’ Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880-1914,” *Labour* 39 (1997): 71.

⁷⁵ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, August 11, 1925.

⁷⁶ See Matron O’Grady’s comments about Bessie, a maid who became a resident of Strachan House in 1952. Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Report, April 16, 1952, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, Box 6, File 4, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

⁷⁷ Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 16-20.

⁷⁸ The Council for Social Service employed domestics through its empire settlement program. Government-sponsored recruitment campaigns of domestics, however, particularly from the British Isles, were all but suspended by the early Depression. It is unknown whether the home employed immigrants. See Meeting of Executive Committee, Feb 27, 1930, Council for Social Service Fonds. See also Fahrni, “‘Ruffled’ Mistresses,” 75.

dangerous as a result, it is still possible, following historian Leonore Davidoff, to “ground such abstractions in historical time and place.”⁷⁹

Strachan House maids were not, unlike those in private homes, lone workers reporting to one mistress.⁸⁰ Lack of privacy, long hours, and low pay may have been universal problems for domestic workers,⁸¹ but Strachan House maids benefited from the camaraderie of coworkers. It is unclear whether their matron, like some middle-class women with domestic servants, adopted a maternal interest towards them, attempting to mould both character and behaviour.⁸² The servant/master relationship differed from that in private residences, not only because the home employed several domestic workers (instead of one), but because the matron and her assistant were likewise employed by the Toronto WA.

Strachan House’s setting and management style made work life different for domestic workers, particularly compared to state-operated institutions of “last resort.” In theory, Strachan House maids had little in common with the staff in such institutions, except for low wages, their live-in status, and the fact that each institution housed elderly people.⁸³ The male and female staff of St. John’s Home for the Aged and Infirm, for instance, were hired as nurses, orderlies, and attendants, and performed a range of duties, from washing and feeding residents to ensuring hygienic conditions. The staff had little training and received little oversight, much to the detriment of “inmates.”⁸⁴ Strachan House maids were domestic labourers who were expected to have experience. Their duties were principally connected to the home, and not to the care of those residing in it.

⁷⁹ Leonore Davidoff, “Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England,” *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 407.

⁸⁰ Fahrni, “‘Ruffled’ Mistresses,” 82.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 95.

⁸³ Ibid., 84. See also Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 51, 56.

⁸⁴ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 57.

The management's focus on creating a "home" supported the recruitment of domestic labourers and not orderlies. Unlike the poorhouse, the majority of Strachan House's elderly residents were in good health, paid monthly rent, enjoyed a certain degree of independence, and, to that end, did not partake in institutionalized behaviours such as communal eating. In a home where residents had their own (albeit, supervised) space, and where only the healthiest were admitted, Strachan House maids were employed to assist with kitchen duties and maintain general cleanliness and order, much like in a family home. The home, it was generally thought, had no need for nurses, orderlies, or attendants. Nurses were not brought on staff until 1938.⁸⁵

Strachan House did not, like Toronto's poorhouse, have a hospital wing or infirmary. At the House of Industry on Elm Street, the elderly "inmates" slept in either the women's or men's infirmary, since most of them were "very aged patients."⁸⁶ They were separated from the homeless men who bunked in the Wayfarers' Lodge.⁸⁷ The absence of an infirmary at Strachan House, however, did not preclude maids from witnessing illness or death. Even with the required medical examination before admittance, residents inevitably, because of advancing age, faced sickness that required medical intervention. Between 1930 and 1934, nineteen deaths occurred in the home. The home's physician, Dr. Harcourt, made regular visits, and nurses were occasionally employed for urgent cases on a temporary basis.⁸⁸ Later, some committee members argued for a "sick bay" or infirmary to be added on, not only to

⁸⁵ "Report of Strachan Houses," April 1939, Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the WA, 78.

⁸⁶ For a description of the men's and women's infirmaries, see Charles J. Copp, "Report of the Visiting Physician, House of Industry, Toronto, for the Year Ending March 31st, 1925," House of Industry Annual Report, F1035, Series 810, File 2, 15, City of Toronto Archives.

⁸⁷ Hobbs, "Gendering Work," 155.

⁸⁸ There were 3 deaths at Strachan House in 1930, 4 deaths in 1931, 5 deaths in 1932, 2 deaths in 1933, and 5 deaths in 1934. Expenses for medical attention and nursing, totally \$111.00 in 1931, are included in the home's budget. See annual reports, including "Expenditure – Statement "A", 1931, May 1932, Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the WA, 63.

give residents peace of mind, but to ensure they could remain in the home for longer periods of time. Others argued against an infirmary, citing cost.⁸⁹ The home's policy was to remove residents at the first sign of illness, but many endured health complications before their removal to other institutions. Despite the home's reluctance to build an infirmary, the bed-ridden, while not the majority, were certainly among the home's supposedly "independent" residents, requiring food, washing, general care and medical intervention. The maids, as cleaners who climbed and polished every inch of the home, as well as lived in it, were the eyes and ears of the institution, witnessing the first signs of trouble. That maids' tasks were confined to household cleaning and cooking remains highly doubtful.

Strachan House maids were supported, in principle, by Church pronouncements advocating the "protection of childhood by proper education and recreation, and the abolition of child labour." The Social Service Creed, established by the Council for Social Service (in which Cartwright served), put in writing its commitment to the "adequate protection of workers against accidents and occupational diseases," the necessity of "Sunday rest for every worker," and the payment by every industry of a living wage."⁹⁰

Strachan House maids worked within a socially volatile context, with little available recourse should they become jobless. Yet they appear to have been a satisfactory group, rarely eliciting the attention of the committee of management, which did not record a dismissal or resignation until 1936.⁹¹ Several reasons may account for the workers' longevity. As with all of Ontario's domestic workers, Strachan House maids were excluded from

⁸⁹ Whether or not to build an infirmary was a topic that came up regularly in the 1950s. See for example, Minutes of Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1952, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Church Women, Series A, Box 1, File 2, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

⁹⁰ Memorandum read at the Meeting of the Council held in Montreal, October 18th, 1916, Council for Social Service, reproduced by the National Library of Canada, page 16, Canadiana, accessed 16 February 2021 <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.66142/6?r=0&s=1>

⁹¹ "Report Strachan Houses," Fifty-First Annual Report of the WA, May 1937, 75.

minimum wage laws.⁹² In Strachan House, however, maids were fortunate, relatively speaking, to earn roughly the minimum wage for women, or about \$12 per week.⁹³ Compared to other employers, including upper-class Toronto homemakers, who took advantage of the hard times, and paid domestic workers as little as \$4 per week, Strachan House wages appear almost generous.⁹⁴ Most maids were exploited and poorly paid. Mrs. McFarland, who ran the Local Council of Women (LCW) employment bureau, thought it was not unacceptable for women to work solely for their room and board, with no wages.⁹⁵ Strachan House maids received consistent work, and better wages than many of their counterparts.

For women who became jobless, resources were also scarce. An unknown number received relief through the Central Bureau or were placed in homes as domestic workers.⁹⁶ The Employment Service of Canada office was the only formal registration centre. At the same time, its “women’s section” dealt primarily with domestic service placements, not relief distribution.⁹⁷ Many women turned to charity and women’s organizations as a result. Women’s groups, like the Salvation Army, YWCA, and the LCW, operated with few resources and had little relief-distribution experience. Clients were not registered, either with individual groups such as the YWCA, or the Social Service Exchange, the central registry

⁹² The minimum wage for women in Toronto was \$12.50 per week, “a figure based on calculations of the bare minimum cost of living for an unmarried self-supporting ‘girl’ with no dependents.” See Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 172.

⁹³ Between 1931-1933, maids’ wages ranged from \$11.30 to \$14 per week. See the WA annual reports, including “Strachan Houses Report – 1931,” May 1932, Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the WA, 63; “Strachan Houses Report,” May 1933, Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the WA, 57.

⁹⁴ Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 172-174.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹⁶ The Central Bureau was established on recommendation by Board of Trade manager F.D. Tolchard, who led a Civic Unemployment Relief Committee in 1930 to manage the crisis. One of the Bureau’s central functions was to register homeless men and women for the purpose of separating residents from non-residents. A meal ticket program was also initiated, which provided sixty cents a day for food in exchange for sawing wood. According to James Struthers, homeless women, in contrast, were placed in private homes as domestic servants. See Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 80.

⁹⁷ Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 160.

that prevented “doubling-up.”⁹⁸ Women had no formal equivalent of the Central Bureau, the city-run office established in 1930 to register unemployed men and provide them with relief.⁹⁹ Women workers who sought food, shelter, and job placements did so informally and privately. The 1930 and 1931 Unemployment Relief Acts incorporated direct relief (food, fuel, shelter) and work relief (usually a small supply of government-funded jobs on public works projects), but acquiring either was dependent on gender, marital status, and residency. Eligibility was defined by subjective assessments of whether or not they were judged to be “deserving.”¹⁰⁰

Prime candidates for relief were married men with children who had resided in Toronto for at least one year. Those who were approved received food from the House of Industry, in quantities that were both grossly inadequate and nutritionally insufficient.¹⁰¹ Single men who were Toronto residents, while ineligible for work relief, fared better than transient men, who were given only one night’s lodging and one meal.¹⁰² Like married men,

⁹⁸ Each agency registered its clients with the SSE to prevent people from receiving more than their fair share. See Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 148.

⁹⁹ According to the Civic Unemployment Relief Committee’s 1931 Report, the Bureau was intended to register both men and women. The CB, however, was not really intended for women. Even after an inquiry assessing the City’s work with respect to needy women, Commissioner of Public Welfare, Bert Laver, insisted that there was “no central registration for women, because there have not been enough destitute to warrant it.” On another occasion, he said there were “no hard and fast rules” and that women could register for relief. See Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 159-160. Struthers writes that the Central Bureau registered both men and women, and that in 1930 “almost 8100 men and women were registered that winter through the bureau. On average, about 1400 beds and 4400 meals were provided each day.” See Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 79-80. But single women did not have the same access to city hostels, jobs, or relief. They are also invisible in the historical data. In a report provided to the Department of Public Welfare by the Central Bureau, for instance, its statistical data for 1930-1940 refers to men registrants at the Bureau only. Between 1930 and 1940, it registered over 52,000 men. In all likelihood, women seeking formal assistance were sent to family agencies or women’s organizations, or sought them out independently of government assistance. See “Statistical Data, Dec. 1, 1930 to Oct. 31, 1940 Inclusive,” November 13, 1940, Department of Public Welfare, Hostels and Single Men, F220, 100, 235, File 3, City of Toronto Archives.

¹⁰⁰ Applicants could be denied for a variety of reasons, including lifestyle, using liquor, having children in the home old enough to work, having bank accounts, etc. See Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 80; Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 146.

¹⁰¹ Hobbs, 146-149; Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 79-81; Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario’s Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 158).

¹⁰² Public officials did not want to encourage multitudes of men coming to the city for fear they “...created fertile ground for the spread of communist ideas.” See Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 154.

single men could seek assistance from private agencies, though most aid was directed toward families. They could also turn to soup kitchens or flop houses.¹⁰³ Most agencies directed their attention to the aid of nuclear families, and only a small number of individuals were deemed eligible for relief.¹⁰⁴ By 1931 several hostels had been established, and a card issued by the Central Bureau entitled the holder to shelter and food at one of the hostels or soup kitchens. Homeless men needing shelter could also turn to the House of Industry, which supplied “casual” indoor relief.¹⁰⁵

Women workers did not have equal claims to relief, principally because their status as workers was not recognized. The LCW employment bureau, in placing women with jobs, first tried to get them to return home, the idea being that they were daughters and mothers first, not workers.¹⁰⁶ Bert Laver, the city’s first Public Welfare Commissioner, assumed that women would find public unemployment assistance by proxy, through relief applications completed by sons, husbands, or fathers.¹⁰⁷ Sent down a variety of informal avenues as a result, unattached, unemployed women seeking assistance were left with few options. For those who could afford it, low-cost meals could be purchased at the YWCA cafeteria. Free meals could be obtained at the Business and Professional Women’s Club. The LCW employment bureau offered soup, bread, and tea to its clientele. The Scott Mission reportedly offered meals to “deserving” women as well as men.¹⁰⁸

The live-in status of Strachan House maids may have also encouraged workers’ longevity. Nowhere was women’s invisibility more evident than in the lack of available

¹⁰³ Ibid., 154-155.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹⁰⁵ T. D. Patton, “Report of the Unemployment Relief Committee, For the Season 1931-1932,” Department of Public Welfare, Hostels and Single Men, F220, 100, 235, File 5, 1-4, City of Toronto Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Hobbs, “Gendering Work,” 248.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 164-165.

shelter for needy women of Toronto, another reason enticing Strachan maids to stay where they were. At the House of Industry, unemployed women were simply turned away.¹⁰⁹ In 1930-31, approximately 4500 women and girls found temporary shelter, for a fee, at Georgina House (a women's residence for business girls), or in one of the four residences of the YWCA. As the economy worsened, both organizations gradually shifted into relief terrain, offering meals and shelter to women at greatly reduced prices. Transients could pay \$1 per day for shelter, which included meals.¹¹⁰ The Canadian Women's Hostel gave shelter to unemployed immigrant women. Barbara House, operated by the United Church, sheltered homeless women and men. In addition to these options, an unknown number of private shelters and boarding houses housed women and girls, though many did not admit old women.¹¹¹

The crisis of single unemployed men held the attention of public officials; responses to poverty were chaotic and disordered. Municipal authorities had no firm grasp of how many people were out of work, what amount of aid was necessary to support them, or how it was to be delivered. In the first few years of the 1930s, municipal leaders rushed to devise a plan for administering aid to thousands of unemployed men across the city, with little instruction from the provincial or federal governments.¹¹² According to Struthers, three central problems confronted Toronto with respect to relief management. The transient crisis was chief among them. Thousands of single, unemployed men descended upon the city in search of work, food, or lodging. Municipal authorities had to determine, with only a short supply of relief work available, who among the unemployed men would be entitled to work.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 139.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 167.

¹¹¹ Hobbs, "Gendering Work," 167- 168.

¹¹² Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 79.

By 1931, with almost 23,000 families reliant upon outdoor relief from the House of Industry, the city was also forced to consider what to do about the rising numbers of Torontonians dependent on relief for their basic survival.¹¹³

In 1931, under Laver's leadership, a series of hostels for single men were established by the Department of Public Welfare.¹¹⁴ "In order to meet the pressing need of sleeping accommodation for homeless single men," the Board of Control reported, the Department of Public Welfare had arranged the rental of the Wellington House building, "to be operated as a hostel."¹¹⁵ The second city-run hostel, Seaton House, was exclusively reserved for men who had been discharged from hospital. Both Wellington and Seaton officially accommodated approximately three hundred men each, though in practice it was often twice this number. The privately-run hostels, including the Red Cross Hostel, the Salvation Army Metropole, the Church of England Hostel, and the Toronto Men's Hostel, each had a capacity of less than two hundred. Further, they had private Boards of Directors, but worked in tandem with the Department of Public Welfare, "providing either lodging or meals, chargeable to this department, only upon presentation of the department's identification card, issued by the department's central bureau, 75 Church Street."¹¹⁶ In these, as in Wellington and Seaton Houses, the Department of Public Health conducted regular

¹¹³ Relief work was funded by all three levels of government. There was a limited number of relief jobs. In 1932, the House of Industry was providing outdoor relief to almost 23,000 families. By 1935, more than 35,000 had been processed through the Central Bureau. Of these, 16,500 were single men. See Bryan Palmer and Gaetan Heroux, *Toronto's Poor: A Rebellious History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016); Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 79.

See also Palmer and Heroux, "Once Upon a City: Homeless Battled Unsafe Shelters During the Great Depression," *Toronto Star*, July 27, 2017, accessed October 11, 2021 <https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/once-upon-a-city-archives/2017/07/27/homeless-battled-unsafe-shelters-in-1930-in-downtown-east-toronto.html>

¹¹⁴ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 80.

¹¹⁵ City Clerk, Board of Control, Letter to A.W. Laver, Commission of Public Welfare, October 8, 1931, Department of Public Welfare, Hostels and Single Men, F220, 100, 235, File 5, City of Toronto Archives.

¹¹⁶ A.W. Laver, Letter to Controller and Acting Mayor R. C. Day, May 21, 1937, Department of Public Welfare, Hostels and Single Men, F220, 100, 235, File 5, City of Toronto Archives.

inspections, with the reports forwarded to the Department of Public Welfare. In both Wellington and Seaton, “the policy agreed upon was to promote and supply entertainment, educational facilities and personal counselling.”¹¹⁷

The hostels were plagued with problems from the beginning, from bad wiring, outdated buildings, improper storage of coal, lack of adequate lighting near exits, steel bars on the windows, a “domestic cat” permitted to roam the kitchen, and reports of overcrowding, spoiled food, unsanitary conditions, and forced work tests. Over the decade, health inspectors had the tendency to view men’s hostels as temporary solutions to an acute crisis, sometimes tempering their professional assessments as a result.¹¹⁸

Equally revealing is that, as the Depression progressed, Laver’s attention remained on managing the unemployment crisis, a problem he believed was confined to unemployed men. Known for his modern methods of reporting, including the use of surveys and statistical data in managing the crisis and answering critics,¹¹⁹ the former City Chief tax collector continued to argue that women simply fared better. “The fact that few of these problems have presented themselves...for single unemployed women can be attributed to their natural inclination towards domesticity,” he reported to the Board of Control about the availability of women’s shelter. “Experience has shown,” he went on, that “the majority of these women establish themselves in rooms regarding them as their temporary homes and fitting into the life of the family with whom they are domiciled.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ T. D. Patton, “Report of the Unemployment Relief Committee, For the Season 1931-1932,” Department of Public Welfare, Hostels and Single Men, F220, 100, 235, File 5, 1-4, City of Toronto Archives.

¹¹⁸ For examples, see Medical Officer of Health, letter to Laver, April 5, 1935, on the inspection of Seaton House, F220, 100, 235, City of Toronto Archives; Commissioner of Buildings, Chief of the Fire Department, letter to Laver, April 2, 1935, on the inspection of Seaton House, F220, 100, 235, City of Toronto Archives.

¹¹⁹ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 80, 88-89.

¹²⁰ A.W. Laver, Letter to Controller and Acting Mayor R. C. Day, May 21, 1937, 7.

Whether it was the enveloping economic crisis, or a satisfactory working environment that encouraged a consistent staff among maids, the home's working conditions remain opaque in this period. That domestic workers flew under the radar of the committee of management's reporting may also point to Phillips' prudence with staff dismissals and engagements, as well as the dispensable place that domestic workers occupied more generally in Toronto society. Phillips' firm but "gentle" leadership may have also encouraged workers' longevity.¹²¹

Disruptions, Resignations, and Cutbacks

The Strachan House committee of management recorded that "a new maid" was hired in 1936, but the news appeared alongside another much more significant development. After working for the home for nearly ten years, Phillips offered her resignation. The committee of management did not initially accept it, instead suggesting that the matron take a three month leave-of-absence.¹²² Offering rest, rather than support or the permanent addition of more workers, was a common solution of the committee of management with respect to workers' problems. Phillips eventually stepped down, as did Mrs. Bowler two years later, who gave "ill health" as the reason for her departure. In 1938, "owing to the number of residents over 80 years of age," the committee of management agreed to hire a resident nurse, who, in addition to nursing duties, agreed to "help with the general work also."¹²³ One year later, the new nurse had gone, also giving "ill health" as the reason for her departure. Phillips' replacement, Miss Norah Carlisle, died unexpectedly in 1939, after serving the

¹²¹ Cartwright, ed., *These Fifty Years*, 89.

¹²² "Report for Strachan Houses," May, 1937, Fifty-First Annual Report of the WA, May 1938, 75.

¹²³ "Report of Strachan House," Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1939, 78.

home for three years.¹²⁴ If the first half of the decade had been marked by stability, the latter half was hounded by disruption and inconsistency. “The sudden passing of our beloved Matron,” wrote chairwoman Wilson, had “shed quite a gloom over the Home.”¹²⁵

Like matron Phillips, the social service department’s friendship and social workers were troubled with increasing pressures and little reprieve from duties. Friendship worker Helen Kenney (Florence Lea’s replacement) laboured long hours at arduous administrative tasks, and met regularly with families. In 1936, Kingstone reported that Kenney was working with 131 families, conducting home visits in nearly 600 homes, and interviewing 186 individuals in the office. Much time was required, she explained, “especially in determining when assistance is needed to put the families in touch with the proper authorities to receive care.”¹²⁶ Kenney met with five “clubs” weekly, coordinating her efforts with the Red Cross Housekeepers, Public Health nurses, and the Bishop Strachan Association to provide instruction in “healthful recreation, home management, child care, and nutrition.”¹²⁷

In responding to Kenney’s work, Cartwright seized the opportunity to highlight the WA’s role in meeting the current social distress. She advocated mental and spiritual “stretching exercises” to “broaden and strengthen their vision of the Church and its needs, as well as their own religious lives.” It was a sly commentary on what she perceived as an over-abundance of needless attention devoted to beauty and “stretching exercises” in the daily newspapers. There was too much focus on “beauty aids; personal adornment,

¹²⁴ Carlisle was a former deaconess with Christ Church Cathedral in Ottawa, and St. George’s Anglican Church in Toronto. According to the *Globe*, Carlisle was also a graduate from the social service program at the University of Toronto. See “Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1939,” Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the WA, May 1940, 80-81; “Norah Carlisle Dies in Hospital,” *Globe*, October 28, 1939.

¹²⁵ Mrs. R. E. Coleman was quickly hired to fill the matron’s role. See “Report of Strachan Houses – 1939,” Fifty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1940, 80-81.

¹²⁶ “Report of the Social Service Department, 1936, Fifty-First Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1937, 72.

¹²⁷ “Dr. M. Cartwright Talks on Beauty,” *Globe*, April 30, 1938, 10. See also “Report of the Social Service Department, 1936, Fifty-First Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1937, 72.

fashions,” and the like, she said, with something like a laugh in her voice, which, according to the *Globe*, “provoked a ripple of mirth through the audience.”¹²⁸

Kenny worked full-time, but earned a part-time salary. She was paid \$600 annually by the Toronto WA, an amount that went unchanged after a raise of \$25 annually was granted to her in 1934.¹²⁹ It was expected that volunteer workers would help to fill the gap, supporting Kenney and friendship work wherever possible. In practice, Kenney’s workload remained unchanged, and the WA made no attempt to lessen it. Instead, Kenney’s extra “voluntary” hours were celebrated as evidence of her supreme devotion to the Church. “Miss Kenney insists that it is a real joy to her to devote to this work her extra time as her voluntary contribution to the work of the Church,” said Kingstone.¹³⁰ Underscoring Kenney’s loyalty, Kingstone took the opportunity to praise the volunteers. “We are dependent on volunteer workers,” she stressed in 1939, “and could undertake more, if help could be obtained.”¹³¹

The unemployment crisis was so dire that the social worker, Evelyn Jay, arranged for some men in her caseload to return to England, “with jobs assured.”¹³² By 1936, the federal Liberals had closed relief camps, made cutbacks to grants-in-aid to the provinces, and established a National Employment Commission to track provincial spending and classify

¹²⁸ Kenney and Cartwright address the fifty-second annual meeting of the WA. See “Dr. M. Cartwright Talks on Beauty,” *Globe*, April 30, 1938, 10.

¹²⁹ Though the WA reports discuss her part-time status, it is unclear, specifically, how the WA differentiated between part-time and full-time status. She was paid \$575 annually in 1933, and \$600 annually in 1934, where it remained in 1939. For details on her salary, see “Social Services Department,” Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the WA, May 1934, 75; “Diocesan Social Service Report,” Fifty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1940, 88.

¹³⁰ “Diocesan Social Service Report – 1938,” Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1939, 75.

¹³¹ In 1938, there was approximately 13,000 WA members in the Toronto diocese, an increase from the preceding year, which had dipped to just under 10,000. See Mary E. James, “Dr. Cartwright, Re-Elected, Sounds Call to Practice Active Christianity by W.A.,” *Globe*, May 5, 1937, 15; ‘38; “Danger of Provincialism to Canada is Stressed by Dr. Mabel Cartwright: Woman’s Auxiliary Urged to Spirit of Brotherhood, Federation,” *Globe*, April 27, 1938, 9; For Kingstone’s report, see “Diocesan Social Service Report – 1938,” Fifty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1939, 75.

¹³² “Social Service Report,” Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the WA, April 1936, 72.

those on relief. The unemployment rate sat at 16%.¹³³ The heads of six families had returned to England, wrote Kingstone following their departure, and “were all working, had comfortable homes, and were happy and contented.”¹³⁴ Over the remaining decade, however, Jay reported increasing difficulties, unemployment, and its accompanying problems. Often families were referred to Jay by clergy, arriving with needs both “many and varied.” Wrote Kingstone, “it is impossible here to go into details of the families looked after.” She said of Jay that “she has been able to help in a great many cases, but much more could have been done to help, had more funds been available.”¹³⁵

In 1938, with an ever-increasing caseload, Jay’s salary was unexpectedly reduced. According to the *Globe*, Jay’s pay cut was caused by “the failure of some parishes to pay allotments.”¹³⁶ As Katerberg explains, the Depression “damaged religious institutions, as money needed to pay clerical salaries, run social programs, fund missions, build churches, and maintain seminaries disappeared.”¹³⁷ While parishes held back their allotments to the diocese towards Jay’s salary, the social worker remained as busy as ever. Clients were increasingly referred to her by the Diocesan Council for Social Service, the Council for Social Service, hospitals, the Mothers’ Allowance Board, and secular social workers. Jay worked to secure two scholarships for women, one through Big Sisters for a secretarial course, another for an Arts school course. She continued to visit families, follow up with patients discharged from hospital, and arrange camp holidays for mothers and children. And she continued to report “much hardship, especially among families on low wages, the

¹³³ Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 151, 215.

¹³⁴ “Social Service Report,” Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the WA, April 1936, 72.

¹³⁵ “Diocesan Social Service Report – 1938,” Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1939, 76.

¹³⁶ It is unclear by how much Jay’s salary was reduced. See “Gambling to Aid Church Condemned at Synod,” *Globe*, May 6, 1938, 5.

¹³⁷ Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities*, 139.

outbreak of war not having materially altered the situation by the end of the year.” If there was a bright spot, Kingstone noted, it was that “more interest on the part of clergy” was now being reported of Jay’s work.¹³⁸

The social landscape of Toronto’s Depression years was shaped, in part, by the paid and unpaid labour of WA workers. The workers’ varied circumstances illustrate the diversity of women connected to the WA. Volunteers met with families, visited patients in hospital, acquired and mended clothing and boots, delivered food, gave rides to the diocesan deaconesses, and performed administrative duties. Strachan House maids endured physically demanding work in a widely unpopular field, laboured for long hours, and were beholden to the matron and committee of management. They faced few employment options or access to shelter, compared to men, if they became jobless. They were, however, better off than many in their field, earning minimum wage, as well as room and board. Though peripheral to the WA, maids were vital to Strachan House’s daily operation.

Strachan House matrons faced less consistent employment compared to deacons, worked long hours, and received little support in their retirement.¹³⁹ After working as a deaconess for twenty-five years, it is unclear what Phillips did after she left Strachan House, but she did so without compensation or a retirement allowance. The pressure to work hard, and as long as possible, was strong for women in her field. That many Strachan House workers, by the mid-1930s, had resigned due to ill-health, speaks to this pressure.

But Phillips, and subsequently others, benefited from consistent work and pay, and, in contrast to diocesan deaconesses, a stationary workplace. As a workplace, Strachan House

¹³⁸ “Diocesan Social Service Report,” Fifty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the WA, April 1940, 77.

¹³⁹ Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada*, 175.

was a site of service. Deaconess work at Strachan House provided an opportunity for leadership and stable employment. Phillips ruled Strachan House with the same religious fervour as Cartwright had at St. Hilda's, but with different pressures. With older residents in the home, there were the daily realities of illness and death, even as the home's management stressed residents' independence.

While diversity existed among the deaconesses, there was also much to unify them. Deaconesses shared a commitment to social service, yet performed duties under increasing pressures and mounting caseloads. In the case of the deaconess stationed in the Haliburton deanery, funding cuts eventually prevented Taylor's continued employment.¹⁴⁰ Parishes and clergymen increasingly recognized the importance of social work, while their financial support remained tenuous. Deaconesses were regularly commended for their obedience and commitment, even as some neared the breaking point. That the WA could proclaim that there had been "no need for retrenchment" in the "comfort of the aged in our care,"¹⁴¹ speaks to the diligence of the home's workers.

In the Depression era, the Toronto diocesan motto of the WA, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," took on heightened significance.¹⁴² There was no retreat in religious work, but a growth in social service. Thousands of WA-affiliated workers contributed to social work. As Cartwright would insist in 1946, the WA was not a sewing society, but "an organization pledged to work."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ "Social Service Department," Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the WA, May 1934, 61.

¹⁴¹ "Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1931," Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the WA, May 1932, 62-63.

¹⁴² Mrs. Willoughby Cummings, *Our Story: Some Pages from the History of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, 1855 to 1928* (Garden City Press: Toronto, 1928), 58.

¹⁴³ "Religion on Trial, W.A. Told, in Period of World Unrest," *Globe*, May 1, 1946, 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

O’Grady’s Residents

During the 1940s, Beatrice Thorne, head of Strachan House’s committee of management, began to use the word “family” more regularly when referencing the home for old people in the *Bulletin* of the Toronto Diocese of the Women’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (WA). Updating her fellow members on Strachan House news, “family,” always fixed uncomfortably between quotation marks, was her common word for residents, not “our old people,” or “inmates,” then an unfashionable term.¹ “Family” was her way of affirming the founders’ goal of creating a homelike atmosphere. Yet her use of punctuation raises a larger question of whether the home lived up to the founders’ ideals.

The historian is afforded the best glimpse into this question from the records of Kathleen de Courcy O’Grady, hired matron in 1947. O’Grady was an occupational therapist who had previously worked with the Home for Incurable Children, and served as the first treasurer for the Ontario Society for Occupational Therapy, formed in 1918.² With

¹ “Strachan Houses,” *Bulletin of the Woman’s Auxiliary, Toronto Diocese*, April 5, 1945, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 87-5, Box 5, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto; “Annual Report For Strachan Houses – 1943,” Fifty-Eighth Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England and to Diocesan Missions, May 1944, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 82-83.

² For a glimpse of O’Grady as a worker with the Home for Incurable Children see “Incurable Lucky Guys Meet Benevolent Santa,” *Globe and Mail*, December 19, 1936, 15. O’Grady wrote to Public Welfare Commissioner, Bert Laver, on behalf of the Toronto Association of Occupational Therapy. See Kathleen de Courcy O’Grady, letter to Laver, October 22, 1934, F220, Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Fonds, 100, 235, City of Toronto Archives. On O’Grady’s hiring at Strachan House, see “Annual Report for Strachan Houses,” Sixty-Second Annual Report of the WA, May 1948, 74. The name of the OSOT was later changed to the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists. See Judith Friedland, *Restoring the Spirit: The Beginnings of Occupational Therapy in Canada 1890-1930* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen’s University Press, 2011), 150.

O'Grady's arrival to the home came professional record keeping from Strachan House's matron. The vagueness of earlier years was replaced by vivid accounts of Strachan House and its residents, all at a time when the concept of "home" in Ontario was becoming a powerful symbol.³

O'Grady's superintendent reports, delivered to the home's committee of management monthly until 1958, illustrate that the home's committee was among those voices calling for renewed ways of thinking about aging and housing. Throughout the decade, Strachan House underwent upgrades and renovations, implemented programs such as occupational therapy, and adopted a resident budgie bird named Jimmy, all with the aim of promoting a "homelike" feeling. Yet in this period of new ideas, new pensions, new public policy, and new construction, aging also continued to be about tangible, practical things, such as navigating burdensome staircases, shared bedrooms, long corridors without handrails, and inaccessible entrances. While providing a homelike setting, the building that housed Strachan House residents was also an obstacle course, thwarting mobility, independence, and agency, even at a time of professed transformation.

Research on old age in the period has tended to focus on state responses to poverty, as well as the impact of shifting policy on elderly populations.⁴ The lives of elderly residents, including how they lived and traveled through institutional spaces, have been little

³ Megan J. Davies, "Renovating the Canadian Old Age Home: Residential Care Facilities in B.C., 1930-1960," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12, no. 1 (2001), 163.

⁴ See James Struthers, "'A Nice Homelike Atmosphere'" State Alternatives to Family Care for the Aged in Post-World War II Ontario," in *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, ed. Anne Lorene Chambers, Edgar-André Montigny (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1998); James Struthers, "Grizzled Old Men and Lonely Widows: Constructing the Single Elderly as a Social Problem in Canada's Welfare State, 1945-1967" in *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700-1975*, eds. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Norma Rudy, *For Such a Time as This: L. Earl Ludlow and a History of Homes for the Aged in Ontario, 1837-1961* (Toronto: Ontario Association of Homes for the Aged, 1987).

examined.⁵ O’Grady’s records offer a rich assessment of daily life inside the home. Her attention was fixed on both the residents as well as the aging building that they called home. O’Grady’s fastidious record-keeping detailed how many times Communion had been celebrated, what donations of articles of clothing or food had been received, how many visits Dr. W.W. Cruise, Strachan House’s resident doctor, paid to the home, and which groups or individuals had offered entertainments to the residents.⁶ O’Grady also identified problems with the building, which, by the start of her tenure, demanded major repairs. In 1951, a Department of Public Health inspection resulted in orders to eliminate fire hazards.⁷ The subsequent renovation tested O’Grady and the committee of management, prompting a reflection about whether the building most adequately reflected the needs of its population.

Throughout the decade, O’Grady also recorded recurring cases of falls, illness, and decline among residents, which were not unusual in homes for old people. While chairwoman Thorne referenced the Strachan House “family,” O’Grady’s reports exposed challenges among individuals, particularly when they faced acute or chronic health conditions. In contrast to facilities which “essentially served as places for the aged poor to die,”⁸ Strachan House was strictly for the well and ambulatory, and this policy was regularly enforced through eviction. But it was also a home for old people. O’Grady regularly dealt with the real-life health challenges of aging residents, even if they had been judged healthy on admittance. How did resident illness challenge the homelike atmosphere so celebrated by

⁵ An exception is Megan J. Davies, *Into the House of Old: A History of Residential Care in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, April 16, 1952, and July 8, 1953, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, File 4, Box 6, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto. See also Strachan Houses Committee of Management Reports, April 11, 1951, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, File 5, Box 6, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

⁷ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, February 14, 1951.

⁸ Davies’ study assesses public and private institutions in British Columbia. See Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 143.

the WA? What, if any, concessions were made by the WA for those experiencing illness and decline? Answering these questions emphasizes the home's limitations, revealing the complex ways in which it remained more institutional in character than homelike. While the home underwent mandated safety upgrades, renovations to its heating and plumbing systems, and new aesthetic enhancements to lend a "homey" feeling, the building remained, in very everyday ways, unfit for aging bodies. Paradoxically, the committee held firm to its policy of expelling ailing residents.

Firetraps

In the early 1950s, as new Homes for the Aged were built across Ontario, Strachan House, tucked inside Toronto's Trinity Park, was unlike them in most ways. Far from those modern dwellings on the outskirts of cities, Strachan House sat, old and bulky, in the urban neighbourhood. Its charitable function and small population distinguished it from its public counterparts, but so did its physical presence. The building was never intended to house old people like the modern Homes for the Aged, with their breezy open hallways, and single-story designs.⁹ The dated architecture remained an impediment to Strachan House residents, who lived on the upper floors, and without an elevator, until 1955. Built in 1899, Strachan House had a leaking roof, heating problems, and a chimney that needed work. And it was not alone. Homes and buildings across Ontario were in desperate need of attention.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, when the cost of ordinary maintenance became unfeasible, homes and buildings sat battered and worn down. With sagging foundations, structural

⁹ For more on the design and construction of Homes for the Aged in Ontario after the Second World War, see Rudy, *For Such a Time as This*, 107.

problems, unsafe stairways, interior walls and ceilings with missing plaster, many buildings demanded major work.¹⁰

In 1947, Ontario's Homes for the Aged Act acknowledged that an aging population presented policy challenges, and committed to "50% provincial funding for the capital and operating costs of municipalities and counties willing to construct modern institutions for the care of the elderly." Most significantly, the legislation recognized that the criteria for admission should be based on "medical and social barriers to independent living," instead of destitution. Residents would be seen as "paying guests," regardless of whether or not their board was subsidized by welfare departments.¹¹ The province would at last develop "a new kind of home for the elderly."¹² On the surface, the policy addressed concerns of provincial inspectors, who noted overcrowding, poor ventilation, and beds squeezed into attics and basements, as well as "a constant question as to the fire hazard" in county refuges. Building new "cheerful" homes to replace the "bleak and cheerless" poorhouse became an important postwar symbol of renewal. More quietly, however, the policy aimed to address growing hospital bed shortages, due in part to the "bed-ridden elderly" who were lingering in chronic care wards. Homes for the Aged, as James Struthers has shown, allowed the government to free up expensive hospital beds for acute cases, all while championing the non-institutional quality of its newly built "homes."¹³

Where the characteristics of Strachan House intersected with those of the new Homes for the Aged was in its homelike feeling, increasingly a priority for those spearheading the construction of Homes for the Aged across the province. This widespread

¹⁰ Joy Parr, "Introduction," in *A Diversity of Women: Women in Ontario since 1945*, Joy Parr, Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995): 4.

¹¹ Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere" 336-337.

¹² Rudy, *For Such a Time as This*, 99.

¹³ Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 345.

effort reflected a general admonishment of the punitive-style workhouses of the past, those dismal places entered only out of desperation.¹⁴ Newly built homes had “modern style, bright colours and lighting, spacious reading and television areas, tuck shops, beauty parlours and barber shops,” and opportunities for recreation and exercise. Their comforts and amenities reflected the postwar welfare state, including the hard-won rights of “pensioners.”¹⁵ While Strachan House was unlike the newly built and sprawling Homes for the Aged that sprung up in the countryside throughout the postwar period, in structure, size, and location, it epitomized many of the same tenets. In appearance, Strachan House was the picture of a family home. Its walls were painted in pastel shades, and chosen by the residents themselves. Entertainments, offered by community and church groups in communal sitting rooms, encouraged social activity and interaction.¹⁶

In sensibility, however, the home’s approach to offering “consolation” to residents in a homelike setting did not resemble a shift away from a bleak past. Strachan House’s emphasis on fostering the tenets of “home” were well ingrained, even as the province’s Homes for the Aged, in the postwar period, represented a “new kind of home for the elderly.”¹⁷ When it celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1950, chairwoman Thorne, in paying tribute to Mabel Cartwright and the WA founders, remarked that “the fact that the caring for our aged citizens has now become a national major problem must impress us all with the wisdom and foresight of this group, and surely gives us cause for a deep thankfulness to them for providing a means whereby we, as W.A. members can participate in ministering to

¹⁴ Davies, “Renovating the Canadian Old Age Home,” 162.

¹⁵ Struthers, “A Nice Homelike Atmosphere,” 338.

¹⁶ For example, see Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 10, 1953.

¹⁷ Rudy, *For Such a Time as This*, 99.

many in this 'age group' which is certainly as much a part of God's plan as is infancy and adolescence."¹⁸

Homes for the Aged, including government officials' constant appraisal of their family-style comforts, were particular to the postwar context. They betrayed a cultural uncertainty about the evolving nature of institutional care, especially as Ontarians lived longer lives.¹⁹ At Strachan House, the attention to creating a homelike atmosphere had remained a priority since the home's inception in 1925, inspired not by government policy, but the founder's goals, and the building's Christian legacy. By the mid twentieth century, its committee of management remained as committed to the postwar policy "problem" of aging as government officials and social workers, but it also had to confront the new realities of an old and demanding building.

Eden Smith's creation increasingly attracted the committee of management's concern. Members were regularly documenting the home's long list of maintenance requirements, enumerating which issues were urgent and which could wait. Committee member Mrs. Bond relayed a phone call from O'Grady about "water coming in the basement," and in her room "from the bay window," and that "the roof above same needs re-roofing."²⁰ Funds were always an issue. The committee of management chipped away at repairs as it could. In 1951, when the Department of Public Health's inspection resulted in orders to undergo mandatory alterations, the committee of management had little choice but to pay attention.²¹ Shortly thereafter, Mr. Sinclair, a contractor hired by the committee, made another inspection with "one of the City Hall men" and "was all over the house."²² Of chief

¹⁸ "Annual Report of Strachan Houses," Sixty-fifth Annual Report of the WA, May 1951, 52.

¹⁹ Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 342.

²⁰ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 11, 1951.

²¹ Ibid., February 14, 1951.

²² Ibid., March 14, 1951.

concern was that Strachan House had become a “fire trap.” The Buildings Commissioner and Fire Chief at City Hall demanded that the committee close the third floor to residents. With that, a substantial renovation began to take shape.²³

Firetraps were a growing problem in the city of Toronto, not just in rooming and “flop houses,” but in homes and apartments plagued by overcrowding, open stairways, and shady exits. A fire at the Vaughan Gardens Apartments on Vaughan Road left one-hundred-and-fifty residents homeless in March 1951. Several people, including a seventy-four-year-old resident, had to be rescued from the upper floor, “when flames cut them off.”²⁴ Homes that housed elderly residents were particularly at risk. As Earl Ludlow, Director of Homes for the Aged in Ontario, emphasized in his report to Deputy Minister Heise in the same year, many older homes had become fire traps, with their “sleeping quarters on the second and third floor” and their lack of “adequate fire escapes.” Strachan House was particularly vulnerable, with its large and open stairways, and bedrooms on the upper floors. “One of the greatest fire hazards in buildings are vertical, open stairways and shafts,” Ludlow reported. “These shafts open on to each floor and act as vast chimneys capable of sucking fire and toxic gases to the various floors.” The fireproofing of Strachan House required that each floor be “closed off” from the open stairwell by a fire door, and that residents be kept only on the main and second floors.²⁵

The safety of Strachan House’s aging residents was of great concern to the committee of management, but so too were the financial costs of undertaking a renovation.

²³ Mr. Love, Parks commissioner, also wrote a letter to the committee of management, expressing his anxiety that they not use the third floor to house residents. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 11, 1951, and November 19, 1952.

²⁴ “150 Homeless, 6-Hour Fire Sweeps Apartment House,” *Globe and Mail*, March 1, 1951, 1.

²⁵ In the late 1940s and early 1950s, under the direction of Minister of Public Welfare William A. Goodfellow, inspections of Homes for the Aged were carried out across the province. See Rudy, *For Such a Time as This*, 107.

Upon closer inspection, Mr. Sinclair and his foreman, Mr. McKenzie, urged chairwoman Thorne to address heating and plumbing problems at the same time, bringing the total cost of the renovation to nearly \$25,000. The city provided the home with a grant of \$5000, but all other expenses fell to the committee. After prolonged deliberation, the committee of management committed to doing all of the proposed work, deciding, in addition, to “patch and paint” the home, and give it a well-deserved face-lift. The committee of management used funds from its maintenance account (about \$12,000) towards the cost of the renovation, and drafted its annual appeal letter to highlight the special orders they were under from the city. A letter arrived from Mr. Fleming, the home’s lawyer, stating that the home’s endowment fund, the capital of which was normally left intact (approximately \$11,000), could also be used for alterations if necessary.²⁶ The committee of management expressed hope for “donations, bequests, a last resort, a bond cashed.”²⁷ The annual bazaar, the committee suggested, could also be combined with a grand opening in the fall, a chance for the WA to champion its work, and draw more community support in the process.²⁸

Between February and October 1952, O’Grady recorded the progress of the renovation, noting the accomplishments and the setbacks. She said that Harry, the home’s houseman, had “put down the new Linoleum in six rooms and he has been painting a lot of the furniture.” “My rooms are very nice, but I have not had time to get them settled.”²⁹

O’Grady expressed her wish, late that summer, that more men might be “hired on,” a sign

²⁶ Strachan Houses had several legacy accounts, mostly from individuals’ estates, “to keep husbands and wives together.” See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, Special Advisory Meeting, March 24, 1952.

²⁷ The committee paid for the renovation in installments. The total cost, \$36,309, was paid for using donations, legacies, and the home’s Maintenance Fund. The Maintenance Fund, which constituted the interest raised from the home’s Endowment fund, was used for regular upkeep and renovations. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 16, 1952, and October 8, 1952.

²⁸ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 16, 1952.

²⁹ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, July 9, 1952.

that the work was beginning to drag on.³⁰ In her appraisal of how residents were coping, she commented that “our old people have really been just splendid, considering the noise that is going on, the smell of plaster and paint they have managed very well.”³¹ She also reported cases of illness. Mrs. Reith was “confined to bed,” Mr. Dane was “not well,” and Bessie, the former maid-turned-resident, had been admitted to the Toronto General Hospital Outdoor Clinic. “They are helping her,” O’Grady reported of Bessie. Two residents had died. Mrs. Arnold, who was sent to hospital in late May, died on the 31st, and Mrs. Stuart, a former resident and a friend to many in the home, had died in June. “A number of our old people went to the funeral.” Despite the ongoing work, O’Grady remained characteristically focused, reporting death and sickness on one line of her report, work that had been done on the next. Such was the ever-evolving balance sheet in the charitable home: a list of problems, and another of problems solved. “I have 6 new blinds for the rooms that have just been completed and towel racks and curtain poles. New mirrors have been put in some of the frames. We have new pads for the stairs in the East Tower and mats for the doors.”³²

When the renovation finished in the fall of 1952, Toronto’s mayor, Allan Lamport, hosted the open house. Guests traveled through the greenery of Trinity Park off Dundas Street West, along the crushed-stone laneway, and up the stairs of the building. Inside they were greeted by the smell of fresh paint. Chairwoman Thorne led them through the newly-renovated home. The open house was a chance to raise funds for operating costs, but it was also an opportunity to showcase the positive impact of the renovation on the residents.³³

Many rooms, including the kitchen, pantry, and linen closets, had been extensively

³⁰ Ibid., September 10, 1952.

³¹ Ibid., June 11, 1952.

³² Ibid., July 9, 1952.

³³ “Board Considers Aid for Home,” *Globe and Mail*, March 13 1952, 5.

remodeled. The radiators were upgraded with new valves; the furnace was given a new distributing pump to ensure more even heating; the chapel, kitchenettes, board room, dining room, and bathrooms had been patched and painted, and the stairways fireproofed. Canopies were put over the outside doors, the hot water boiler moved, and new copper traps added to the kitchen sink. Over 300 visitors traveled through the home, up and down three flights of stairs, into the residents' bedrooms, all carefully tidied for display. The local press was there to capture the event, and one resident, posing for a picture, remarked to Mayor Lamport, "I don't care where you go, you will never find a lovelier home than this."³⁴

Aside from the public display of transformation, the special dignitaries, the hand-shaking, and the congratulatory spirit that filled the air, the renovation's impact on the residents remained more ambiguous. The bedrooms had been spruced up and painted, lending a domestic quality to the home. The idea of installing an elevator had been quashed, so stairs remained an impediment.³⁵ At least one resident feared that the renovation, open house, and appeals for financial assistance had given the public "an impression they were living on charity."³⁶ Residents were still placed in bedrooms on the upper floors, even though "due to the closing in of the staircase...the fire gong is not heard all over the Home."³⁷ One month following the open house, chairwoman Thorne thanked the staff and residents for the "splendid way they had reacted to all the trouble" of the renovation, and reported that the committee's greatest accomplishment was "gaining consent of the Buildings and Commissioner and Fire Chief at City Hall to continue using the third floor of

³⁴ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, Annual Meeting, November 19, 1952.

³⁵ The idea for an elevator was put forward by a determined Mrs. Wells. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, March 19, 1952.

³⁶ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, October 8, 1952.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, December 17, 1952.

the building for housing some of the elderly residents.”³⁸ How was the committee able to explain this, particularly in light of the immense concern which propelled the renovation in the first place? It is possible that installing fire doors off the stairways assuaged some of these fears, in that it reduced the risk of a rapidly-spreading fire to the upper floors. With the majority of the home’s bedrooms on the upper floors, permanently closing the third floor would have also jeopardized the home’s survival. In late spring of 1953, however, one committee member found “climbing the stairs very hard,” and thought that residents housed on the third floor “were virtually prisoners due to this.”³⁹ Residents would live with the consequences of the committee’s decisions long after the workers had gone.

The committee’s worst nightmare, that fire would destroy the home and put residents in danger, never materialized. In the lifespan of the building, fire touched the home three times, with no grave consequences. The first fire occurred in 1940, reported the *Toronto Daily Star*, when engineer Norman Blakeman saw flames in Strachan House, “sprinted across the park, broke the glass in the window, and carried out 75-year-old James Peters, who was slouched in a chair apparently unaware of his danger. Thirty-nine other residents, all between 70 and 91...were aroused and they coolly walked away from the danger area.”⁴⁰ The second fire occurred two years later, when, “on a very windy day sparks blew from the chimney and set fire to the roof.”⁴¹ The third fire happened in 1955, when the home’s cook “had a nasty accident with the stove.”⁴²

³⁸ Ibid., November 19, 1952.

³⁹ Ibid., May 13, 1953.

⁴⁰ “What’s Going on at Home,” *Toronto Daily Star*, January 20, 1940, 13.

⁴¹ “Annual Report of Strachan Houses,” Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the WA, May 1943, 77.

⁴² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, January 12, 1955.

Sprains, Broken Bones, Illness

For O’Grady’s residents, daily life involved negotiating a large, cumbersome building. It involved climbing stairs, both to enter the home, and to reach the upper floors. Two bedrooms were located on the ground floor, but the remaining rooms were found on the second and third levels. Each floor had a kitchen and two (women’s and men’s) washrooms. The home’s communal spaces, including the library, chapel, living room, dining room, boardroom, and outdoor access, were located on the ground level. Without an elevator until 1955, those with mobility or health challenges living on the upper floors were largely confined to their rooms. The new elevator improved the situation in 1955, but it did not prevent falls, which occurred regularly in bedrooms, communal spaces, and in Trinity Park. Nor did the addition of an elevator encourage changes to the home’s admission policies, or become a factor when determining if an ailing resident was to be removed from the home permanently.⁴³

O’Grady noted when sickness gripped the home’s residents, when someone broke a bone due to a fall or a “stumble,” and when there were occurrences of “blackouts,” “sick spells,” or more serious conditions. Dr. Cruise made regular house calls, providing medical examinations, and ordering x-rays or trips to hospital. O’Grady chronicled frequent visits to hospital, including long periods in waiting rooms.⁴⁴ Falls that resulted in sprains and broken bones were the most frequently reported health problem. “Mrs. Reith fell and fractured her hip.”⁴⁵ Mrs. Mee “sprained her wrist” getting out of the bathtub.⁴⁶ Miss Whatmough broke

⁴³ Mrs. Godfrey was removed in 1958 because she could no longer climb stairs. See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 11, 1958.

⁴⁴ O’Grady often accompanied residents to hospital. In regards to Mrs. Abel, “It took me a little over four hours sitting with her in the waiting room for admission.” See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 9, 1955.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, November 18, 1953.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

her wrist.⁴⁷ Mrs. Thomson “had an accident and hurt her hip.”⁴⁸ Mrs. Boyes had her “arm in a sling,” owing to an “old injury.”⁴⁹ Mr. Wilson “stumbled on the sidewalk” and hurt his knee.⁵⁰ Mrs. Wilson had a “severe fall on the slippery path near the Home, dislocating her shoulder.”⁵¹ Miss Steele “fell and broke her upper denture.”⁵² Miss Henderson “fell again on her face hurting herself very badly,” which “involved stitches.”⁵³ Mrs. Breeze had a “nasty fall” in the park and fractured her ankle.⁵⁴ Miss Tozer’s fall sent her to hospital with a fractured hip, and four years later, a second fall resulted in a fractured pelvis.⁵⁵ Over the course of three years, Mrs. Wood broke “two bones in her wrist,” “dislocated her right shoulder,” and fractured her hip.⁵⁶

There were other acute problems that required medical intervention as well, such as Mrs. Alston’s ruptured appendix, Miss Arnold’s peritonitis, and Mrs. Hines’ ulcer. Mrs. Langdon underwent “some very severe treatment for her eyes, which has made her feel quite ill.” In the case of Mrs. Mee’s “severe nose bleed,” an ambulance had to be summoned, and she was hospitalized for a week.⁵⁷ Chronic health conditions additionally afflicted the residents, including Mrs. Willing, who had an “asthmatic condition,” Mrs. Peasgood, whose “arthritic condition” was “getting worse,” and Mrs. Devinish, who, for a number of years, had a hernia.⁵⁸ Mrs. Lloyd, with her high blood pressure, was “not well.”⁵⁹ Mrs. Neale had

⁴⁷ Ibid., February 9, 1955.

⁴⁸ Ibid., September 12, 1956.

⁴⁹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 9, 1958.

⁵⁰ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, Jun 12, 1957.

⁵¹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, February 14, 1951.

⁵² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, July 14, 1954.

⁵³ Ibid., May 19, 1954.

⁵⁴ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, December 18, 1957.

⁵⁵ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, December 15, 1953, September 11, 1957.

⁵⁶ Ibid., February 10, 1954, May 15, 1957, June 12, 1957, September 11, 1957, November 12, 1957.

⁵⁷ Ibid., May 13, 1953, May 14, 1952, February 1, 1958, October 12, 1958, February 12, 1957.

⁵⁸ Ibid., May 14, 1958, December 18, 1957, May 1, 1957.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Oct. 12, 1955.

muscular rheumatism, and “finds it very difficult to dress her hair in the morning and she is no longer able to carry her trays.”⁶⁰

As grave as these problems could be, more serious conditions touched the residents of Strachan House. Those afflicted with serious illness— cancer, heart conditions, and strokes—faced the risk of being removed. Mrs. R. A. Clark had had a “possible stroke,” and “cannot carry on a conversation.”⁶¹ Mrs. Githerto “was taken to Mt. Sinai Hospital” for an “operation for cancer of the breast.”⁶² Mrs. Black’s unnamed “serious condition” landed the resident of room 32 in hospital.⁶³ Her roommate, Miss Benham, had a “bad heart attack.”⁶⁴ Mr. Hannah had a stroke, and was “growing weaker everyday [sic].”⁶⁵ Mrs. Willoughby “took a heart attack,” and was “prescribed bed rest.”⁶⁶ Miss Jellyman, a resident who had taken ill “with a coronary,” had a “poor appetite” and was confined to bed.⁶⁷

O’Grady’s accounts of illness expressed concern, but betrayed a view of residents as dependent, defenceless, vulnerable to accidents, and in need of management. At times, she faulted the residents themselves for their varied health challenges, attributing their predicaments to poor judgment. Her paternalistic attitude towards the aged was not uncommon. As historian James Snell has argued, the processes that helped to reshape public policy, including “the culture of entitlement articulated by the dependent elderly,” also helped to redefine old age: “Singling out the elderly as automatically in need of aid encouraged paternalism and legitimated ageism.”⁶⁸ O’Grady chastised Miss Devinish, a

⁶⁰ Residents were responsible for getting their own food, and washing their own trays. See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 12, 1957.

⁶¹ Ibid., April 9, 1958.

⁶² Ibid., September 8, 1958.

⁶³ Ibid., December 21, 1955.

⁶⁴ Ibid., December 18, 1957.

⁶⁵ Ibid., October 13, 1954.

⁶⁶ Ibid., November 12, 1957.

⁶⁷ Ibid., January 12, 1955, December 15, 1954.

⁶⁸ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 220.

resident with a hernia, for “foolishly” leaving off her belt “which apparently caused the upset.”⁶⁹ Miss Tozer had fallen because she went to the Drug Store by herself, “although we had forbidden her to go out alone.”⁷⁰ O’Grady attributed Mrs. Willing’s heart trouble to the fact that “she does not obey the Doctor’s orders with regard to her eating habits. She is very much over weight [sic] and does nothing about it.”⁷¹ Miss Henderson, who fell and required stitches, had been warned “not to attempt to walk in the halls without her cane or someone to assist her.”⁷² Mrs. Drew, who still had a cast on, had ventured downstairs “last Monday by herself,” which was “very plucky but not wise.”⁷³ Mr. Cathcart was becoming “rather a problem,” O’Grady wrote, but she hoped his attitude would “improve.”⁷⁴

At the same time, O’Grady’s descriptions of residents also recorded when their worlds were set right again. Miss Steele, was “quite ill,” but “seems to be improving.”⁷⁵ Mrs. Willoughby “seems much brighter and has been taking a little walk on the verandah every day and sits for a short time every morning in the sunny window of the Living Room.”⁷⁶ Following her operation for breast cancer, Mrs. Githerto was “back at the home and doing well.”⁷⁷ Bessie Longman was “in bed but is now improving.”⁷⁸ Mrs. Peasgood “appears to be improving,” O’Grady wrote. She “has charge of the Library books and was able to come down last Monday night to look after the books,” and she “stayed afterwards to play a game

⁶⁹ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, May 1, 1957.

⁷⁰ Ibid., September 11, 1957.

⁷¹ Ibid., November 12, 1957.

⁷² Ibid., May 19, 1954.

⁷³ Ibid., October 12, 1955.

⁷⁴ Ibid., April 15, 1953.

⁷⁵ Ibid., March 10, 1954.

⁷⁶ Ibid., March 12, 1958.

⁷⁷ Ibid., September 8, 1958.

⁷⁸ Ibid., July 9, 1952.

with some of the residents.”⁷⁹ Miss Jellyman “seems to be getting better.”⁸⁰ Mrs. Willing had “lost some weight” and was now “feeling better.”⁸¹

When donations arrived that could prove useful to a resident, O’Grady appeared as delighted as the residents themselves. Mrs. Thomson received “a new set of upper teeth she badly needed...they are a perfect fit and most comfortable.”⁸² Mrs. Neale was given a hearing aid, and was “glad to get it. Her relatives were having it repaired.”⁸³ “Woolen goods, ladies vests and bloomers,” it was “thrilling to receive so many useful and beautiful things,” O’Grady exclaimed. “We are doing our best to distribute the things fairly [and] where they are suitable and most needed.”⁸⁴

For those confined to their rooms, O’Grady recorded checking in on ailing residents, assisted by the home’s staff, as well as the Reverend Moore Smith, who led the chapel services. Residents were also visited by friends or family. Miss Wright “looked in several times” on Mrs. Simpson, and “found her sleeping.”⁸⁵ Mr. Wiltshire, who had just returned from hospital, had been given his “special tablets,” as prescribed.⁸⁶ Mrs. Holton, unable to attend chapel service, was given “private communion in her room.”⁸⁷ On Christmas morning, Reverend Smith offered the same service to “Mrs. Emily and Mrs. Gertrude.”⁸⁸ Miss Benham, who had suffered a heart attack, was on bedrest for her eightieth birthday.

⁷⁹ Ibid., February 1, 1958.

⁸⁰ Ibid., February 9, 1955.

⁸¹ Ibid., February 1, 1958.

⁸² Ibid., March 13, 1957.

⁸³ Ibid., May 19, 1954.

⁸⁴ The home received monthly donations, typically from church groups and private donors. See for example, Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 9, 1954, and February 11, 1953.

⁸⁵ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, May 14, 1958.

⁸⁶ Ibid., June 11, 1958.

⁸⁷ Ibid., February 12, 1957.

⁸⁸ Ibid., January 9, 1957.

“Some very dear friends came in and gave her a lovely party,” O’Grady wrote, “which made her very happy.”⁸⁹

The sick lived precariously. Residents whose health was unlikely to improve, were, in O’Grady’s words, “too ill to remain.” The committee’s policy was well-known, evident in the medical examination required of new applicants, ensuring the resident was not afflicted by “any disease, physical or mental.”⁹⁰ Residents routinely watched their fellow housemates leave for nursing homes and hospitals, each dismissal further evidence that health problems, in addition to their physical and mental impacts, increased the risk of being ostracized. Mrs. Godfrey, who was sent to hospital with a bleeding ulcer, “will not be able to return because she isn’t to climb stairs.”⁹¹ Mrs. Willing’s condition “makes it impossible for her to remain a resident.”⁹² As Miss Jellyman had grown “more difficult to manage and her illness was likely to continue for a long time,” O’Grady took her “by ambulance to the Mrs. Margaret Crawford Nursing Home.”⁹³ Miss Henderson, whom O’Grady found “slumped in her chair,” was transferred to hospital, and was “leaving permanently.”⁹⁴ Mrs. Reith stood her operation “very well” but “would not be back...so the room was immediately prepared for another occupant.”⁹⁵ In room 23, Mrs. Sauer’s illness turned so severe that, “while she regretted leaving Strachan House, she realized there was nothing else to be done,” and she “went quite willingly.”⁹⁶ Residents could spend months in hospital, and once admitted, were

⁸⁹ Ibid., December 18, 1957.

⁹⁰ “Toronto Aged Men’s and Women’s Homes,” undated, Cartwright and Woods Families Fonds, F2182, Series 4, File 6, Box 8, Trinity College Archives, Toronto. Strachan House was not alone. William H. Matthews, chairman of the Section on Aging for the Welfare Council of New York City, commented that applicants linked their rejection into homes with “rigid health requirements.” See Sue N. Weiler, “Religion, Ethnicity and the Development of Private Homes for the Aged,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (1992): 73.

⁹¹ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 11, 1958.

⁹² Ibid., September 8, 1958.

⁹³ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 8, 1955.

⁹⁴ Ibid., January 9, 1957.

⁹⁵ Ibid., November 18, 1953.

⁹⁶ Ibid., July 8, 1953.

at risk of not returning to Strachan House. Such were the cases of Mrs. Breeze, Mrs. Black, Mrs. Clark, Mrs. Corney, Mr. Crocker, Mrs. Devinish, Mrs. Edwards, Mr. Hannah, Miss Henderson, Mrs. Lloyd, Mrs. Reith, Mrs. Sale, Mrs. Sauer, and Mrs. Whittlesey. Bessie Longman, a former domestic worker and resident of the home, was also removed.⁹⁷

Seemingly ordinary behaviours, such as deciding when to get fresh air, or traveling the stairs, or taking a bath, or doing any of the normal things that everyday people did, presented the daily risk of physical impairment. While Strachan House's purpose was to provide a sense of home, it was in the home—simply by living and moving throughout it—where old people sustained injuries. The committee of management scarcely reflected on why this was so, attributing the long list of injuries, all those marks of monotony and independence, to unfortunate mishaps, overextending, disobeying.

With removal almost certain if residents fell sick, some attempted to conceal their afflictions. Despite a heart attack and frequent blackouts, Miss Benham “keeps on going,” O’Grady wrote.⁹⁸ Mr. Hannah, who “frequently has spells of illness...can hardly be kept in bed,” and “insists very kindly on taking our letters to the Post Office several times a day.”⁹⁹ Miss Boyes’ old injury was giving her trouble, but “it is not slowing her down.”¹⁰⁰ O’Grady suspected that Mr. Wiltshire, a resident who helped out tirelessly with odd jobs around the home, “actually isn’t too well.” With the exception of Mr. Wiltshire, the residents who “pushed on” eventually became too ill to remain.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ In contrast to most residents, O’Grady often referenced Longman by her first name, “Bessie,” likely because she had been a former worker at Strachan House. See *Ibid.*, 1951-1958.

⁹⁸ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, January 15, 1958.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, April 7, 1954.

¹⁰⁰ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 9, 1958.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1956.

The desire to stay in the home, regardless of one's physical condition, was felt acutely by the residents, including Mrs. Abel, who was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1954. She lived in room 25 on the third floor, a curious placement for a resident in her condition. "It was thought she would enter Hospital for treatment but this she refused to do," said O'Grady. Mrs. Abel preferred "to remain here as long as she was able to do some things for herself. This was also the wish of her daughter."¹⁰² "Dr. Cruise who saw her yesterday said the disease is advancing rapidly," O'Grady told the committee, "and in his opinion, she would not be with us long."¹⁰³ Throughout her illness, Mrs. Abel remained "determined not to go into hospital," and was "putting up a brave fight." Her daughter visited daily and did her best. Still, Mrs. Abel was "suffering a good deal," wrote O'Grady, and "seldom having a good night." Despite her condition, "she sits up in her chair most of the time, and does everything she can to help herself."¹⁰⁴ It was only for this fact, even while living with cancer, that saved Mrs. Abel from being permanently expelled. Two months later, O'Grady accompanied her to hospital, where "she died on Friday."¹⁰⁵

The elevator came too late for Mrs. Abel, but it was welcome news to many of the residents. According to O'Grady, members of Grace Church on the Hill had committed to paying for it, and the city approved of the installation, "so long as the materials are fire resistant."¹⁰⁶ The workers "were able to arrange it very nicely."¹⁰⁷ Residents were finally free of heavy stairs, but not of the rule that left them vulnerable to eviction.

¹⁰² Ibid., November 9, 1954.

¹⁰³ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, December 15 1954.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., February 9, 1955.

¹⁰⁶ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, December 15, 1954, and April 13, 1955.

¹⁰⁷ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, April 15, 1955.

Wanderers: Residents with Dementia

Residents were free to come and go as they wished, but those who were frail or ill had to be accompanied outside the home. Despite this rule, residents who required assistance, including those in various stages of cognitive decline, frequently made it through the front door alone and undetected. O’Grady did not call it “wandering behaviour” or “elopement”—as these are contemporary terms that were not yet in use.¹⁰⁸ Residents who slipped away at all hours of the day or night, who disappeared without fair warning, or who were found inappropriately dressed for the weather, alone and often confused, had simply “walked out.”¹⁰⁹ There was no name for it in O’Grady’s world. The increasing number of residents who wandered away merely presented the matron with one more problem to wrestle.

Beginning in 1951, O’Grady began to note the decline of two residents, Mrs. Fares and Mrs. Cummings, insisting that something “had to be done about them.” On more than one occasion, she had discovered the pair “dressed in their street clothing going outside without our knowledge.”¹¹⁰ Mrs. Elgood was “not able to care for herself in any way,” and had begun to recite poetry in Trinity Park “to anyone who has the patience to listen.” She was generally making herself “a nuisance to everybody.”¹¹¹ Mrs. McKinley, who was “becoming noticeably mental,” had been found “on several occasions of late...with her hat and coat ready to go out.”¹¹² Mrs. Emily Smith, who was “deteriorating physically and mentally,” was often found “wandering at night,” and was giving everyone in the home

¹⁰⁸ Since the early 1980s, wandering behaviour has become more widely studied, along with other behavioural changes of those living with dementia, including depression, irritability, psychosis, agitation, and aggression. See Ladson Hinton, Yvette Flores, Carol Franz, Isabel Hernandez, and Linda S. Mitteness, “The Borderlands of Primary Care: Physician and Family Perspectives on “Troublesome” Behaviors of People with Dementia,” in *Thinking about Dementia: Culture, Loss, and the Anthropology of Senility*, ed. Annette Leibing, Lawrence Cohen (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 43-44.

¹⁰⁹ For example, see Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, January 14, 1953.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, March 14, 1951, September 21, 1955.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, September 8, 1958.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, September 21, 1955.

“great anxiety.”¹¹³ Miss Helen Steele, “who had been with us for a long time,” was becoming “increasingly difficult to manage,” O’Grady noted, and was wandering away again, “without our knowledge.”¹¹⁴

The most severe case, recorded in January of 1953, was Mr. Dane’s unescorted travel by foot to Sherbourne and Queen, a distance of over four kilometres from the home in the dead of winter, before the “police found him” and “brought him back.” “He says he will do it again if he gets a chance,” and O’Grady arranged for a “nurse during the day but as soon as she goes we have to lock the door and some of the Residents get very mad. We tell them it is only for a short time.”¹¹⁵ Like other residents facing illness or cognitive decline, Dane had not arrived to Strachan House with apparent health problems. When the Danes moved to the home in 1945, they were, by all accounts, ideal residents.

Unlike the Homes for the Aged, who admitted applicants “incapable of looking after themselves in the community and require care,” incoming Strachan House residents were required to be healthy, and capable of dressing and feeding themselves.¹¹⁶ As was the case in institutions more generally, however, doctors “had yet to clearly differentiate between the infirmities of age and active medical conditions.” Strachan House likely admitted residents whose medical problems “were beyond the knowledge or capacities of their staff.”¹¹⁷ Throughout the decade, “the amount of nursing care required” in select Homes for the Aged caused Ontario Welfare Minister Bill Goodfellow to question whether their

¹¹³ Ibid., February 12, 1957.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., September 21, 1955.

¹¹⁵ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, January 14, 1953.

¹¹⁶ The criteria for admittance to Homes for the Aged could be ambiguous, from physical disability, to problems finding living accommodation. They were not designed as nursing facilities, and therefore under the supervision of Ontario’s Department of Public Welfare. See Struthers, “A Nice Homelike Atmosphere,” 339-340.

¹¹⁷ Struthers, “A Nice Homelike Atmosphere,” 339.

designation should be “a home for the aged or a hospital.”¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Mr. and Mrs. Dane, both in their nineties, had been deemed “ambulatory” before their admittance to Strachan House.¹¹⁹ Having worked previously as a florist, and later for William Rennie Seeds Ltd., Mr. Dane had for many years assumed the role of Strachan House’s unofficial gardener, planting seedlings and tending to all kinds of plants and flowers.¹²⁰ After his wife’s death, he began a slow and steady decline. The *Globe and Mail* covered his one-hundredth birthday celebration at the home in 1952. “He has only to touch a flower and it grows,” said O’Grady.¹²¹

O’Grady never referred specifically to dementia, defined not as a disease, but a “group of symptoms.”¹²² Alzheimer’s Disease, first articulated by Dr. Alois Alzheimer in 1906, would not be widely recognized until the 1970s.¹²³ There were then, as today, a variety of conditions that could lead to cognitive impairment, or, as O’Grady would have termed it, “senility.”¹²⁴ The diagnosis of “senile dementia” was widely but loosely applied in the 1950s, as a “poorly understood, catchall diagnosis.”¹²⁵ Following the Second World War, North American psychiatrists, such as American David Rothschild, increasingly viewed modern

¹¹⁸ The Minister’s comments were in regards to Lambert Lodge, Toronto. See “Ontario Approves 50 p.c. Increase to Lambert Home,” *Globe and Mail*, July 6, 1951, 5.

¹¹⁹ “Bridge to Tomorrow: 50 years in the lives of Anglican Women in the Diocese of Toronto, 1936-1985,” undated, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 30-32.

¹²⁰ “‘Natural Green Thumb’ Nearing Century Mark,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 May 1952, 5.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Marlene Goldman, *Forgotten: Narratives of Age-Related Dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease in Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 13.

¹²³ Nina M. Silverstein, Gerald Flaherty, and Terri Salmons Tobin, *Dementia and Wandering Behavior: Concern for the Lost Elder* (New York: Springer, 2002), 9.

¹²⁴ The term “senility,” used widely in the period, referred generally to those with “mental impairment.” Senility has also been used, incorrectly, to refer to Alzheimer’s disease. In contemporary scientific literature, senility refers to normal parts of aging, including physical and mental changes, musculoskeletal problems, hearing, and vision loss. See Silverstein, Flaherty, and Tobin, *Dementia and Wandering Behavior: Concern for the Lost Elder*, 9.

¹²⁵ Martha Holstein, “Aging, Culture, and the Framing of Alzheimer Disease,” in *Concepts of Alzheimer Disease: Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Peter J. Whitehouse, Konrad Maurer, and Jessie F. Ballenger (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 169.

society, with its fraying social bonds, loosening family ties, and loss of identity, as the cause of mental deterioration.¹²⁶ Some took it a step further, suggesting that “the fear and frustration associated with growing old in our society,” was “adequate to explain the whole picture of senility.”¹²⁷ While psychiatrists debated the definitions of senile dementia, and while diseases of old age remained largely “the most obscure subjects in the field of biology,”¹²⁸ patients like Mr. Lloyd, a former Strachan House resident, lingered in a psychiatric hospital. His wife was “quite upset” on his removal from the home, O’Grady reported, but understood that he “could never be well.”¹²⁹

O’Grady viewed residents with dementia as persons living through a kind of madness, one that rendered them “feeble,” “mental,” “mentally ill,” or “mentally incapable.” Sometimes she used the more ambiguous term, “not well.”¹³⁰ The diseases which caused the symptoms of dementia were not understood at the time, and O’Grady expressed little understanding of brain disorders or other diseases that might have afflicted the residents. Reasons for “walking out” might have included (according to twenty-first century scientists) “a substitute for social interaction,” an “expression of agitation, anxiety, sleep disorder, or unmet physiological needs,” a “result of boredom, excess energy,” “an attempt to escape crowds or noise,” “experiencing fear, seeking exercise or companionship, looking for a childhood home, or trying to get to a former workplace,” but these were yet to be widely

¹²⁶ Psychiatrists regarded Alzheimer’s Disease and Senile Dementia not as cognitive disorders produced by biological determinants, but mental illnesses caused by psychodynamic factors. See Jesse F. Bellenger, “Beyond the Characteristic Plaques and Tangles: Mid-Twentieth Century U.S. Psychiatry and the Fight Against Senility,” in *Concepts of Alzheimer Disease*, 84 and 93.

¹²⁷ Quote by David Stonecypher in the *New York Times Magazine*. See Bellenger, “Beyond the Characteristic Plaques and Tangles,” 95.

¹²⁸ Holstein, “Aging, Culture, and the Framing of Alzheimer Disease,” 164-165.

¹²⁹ Lloyd was admitted to the Ontario Hospital. See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Report, September 23, 1953.

¹³⁰ For examples, see Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 11, 1952, July 8, 1953, September 14, 1955, January 9, 1957, February 12, 1957, September 8, 1958.

studied or articulated.¹³¹ Strachan House residents who left for the Ontario Hospital, such as Mr. Lloyd, were assessed by psychiatrists and sometimes given occupational therapy. Work, as historian Megan Davies has explained, became “a new form of therapy for mental health patients.”¹³² For those who remained in the home, O’Grady documented every symptom of decline. Dr. Cruise sometimes prescribed “a tonic.”¹³³ Research of what was then termed “senile dementia” was in its infancy, but residents and staff alike felt its impact.

As more Strachan House residents walked out, became forgetful, or showed other signs of mental impairment, keeping them free from harm became O’Grady’s main priority. Increasing numbers, she worried, were found to be growing “a little mental.” Mrs. Edwards was “growing increasingly feeble and less inclined to do things for herself.” Mrs. Ward gave pillow cases and rags to the janitor “to be burned,” and had developed a particular distaste of her roommate. Mrs. Braham “fell and cut her head,” and “does not know what she is doing half the time.”¹³⁴ Mrs. Sauer, who had had a fall in her room, “felt very humiliated to have us find her sitting on the floor,” and “could not tell us very well how it happened.”¹³⁵ Mrs. Forster was sent into “the most violent tantrums accusing members of the staff and residents of stealing her money.”¹³⁶ Mrs. Smith was causing a lot of trouble, and “demanding almost constant attention.”¹³⁷ Mr. Dane, in the summer before his four-kilometer stint, was “not well today.”¹³⁸

¹³¹ The definitions and causes of wandering behavior have varied from study to study. Silverstein, Flaherty, and Tobin provide a wonderfully accessible overview of the scientific literature. See *Dementia and Wandering Behavior*, 33.

¹³² Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 92.

¹³³ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, October 12, 1955.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, June 11, 1952.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1953.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, September 8, 1958.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1952, May 14, 1952; Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, January 23, 1952.

¹³⁸ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1952.

At times, unexpected mercies, such as a donated television, a used radio, a beloved pet, could offer diversion. At minimum, they kept residents temporarily in place. At best, they offered openings to greater social connection and belonging. O'Grady located a radio for Mr. Dane, who for a time got "so much pleasure out of it and does not disturb other people the way he did."¹³⁹ A Motorola Television, donated to the home by a WA branch, proved a blessing to the resident population at large. Its introduction "caused a good deal of pleasure, particularly to Miss Steel, O'Grady reported, and pleased "our residents who are unable to get out very often."¹⁴⁰ "They were able to join in the Service at Ottawa on Remembrance Day and again to view the Santa Claus parade."¹⁴¹ Jimmy, the home's resident budgie, provided joy and companionship. According to O'Grady, he was "such a beloved member of our family." Residents doted on him, wrote poems in his honour at Christmastime, and suffered collectively when he grew ill.¹⁴²

Other more formal strategies to engage residents' minds, such as occupational therapy, were offered twice weekly, and designed for the benefit of all residents. Such initiatives reflected O'Grady's governance and professional expertise. The introduction of the occupational therapy programs in old age homes, more generally, "transformed poor low labour into a therapeutic experience."¹⁴³ Residents were instructed in "weaving, leather work, and other handicrafts."¹⁴⁴ But lack of resources hampered the program. Beginning in the late 1940s, the home was plagued by occupational therapists who came and went, were brought on only temporarily, or who were equipped with varying levels of accreditation, or none at

¹³⁹ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, March 14, 1951.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., January 4, 1954.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., December 21, 1955.

¹⁴² Ibid., January 4, 1954, September 21, 1955.

¹⁴³ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 92.

¹⁴⁴ "Strachan Houses," Bulletin of the WA, October 7, 1948.

all. Nonetheless, some of the residents benefited greatly from the program. “The thrill that it has given one resident alone, at the age of 75,” wrote chairwoman Thorne, “to completely master the art of weaving from start to finish, is surely evidence in itself of the value of this addition to the program of Strachan Houses.” The benefit of keeping minds occupied became a priority for the committee of management, and chairwoman Thorne testified that “lack of interest creates apathy, and enlarges worries and irritations in all our minds. Old people do not become different persons because of their age,” she noted, “they are people with the same needs and desires as anyone else.”¹⁴⁵

In 1953, Mrs. Marie Griffiths, who ran the classes, urged the committee to expand its department, and to devote a room specifically to “carpentry and woodwork,” though such a feat proved financially impossible.¹⁴⁶ “Recreation and crafts,” however, were seen as increasingly vital to “a residence for the aged” as “money and material,” chairwoman Thorne declared, “and we are endeavouring to carry out this idea at Strachan House.”¹⁴⁷ Donations of velvet, used material for aprons, and odds and ends were accumulated towards the effort. The committee of management, reported Thorne, “are to be commended on their desire to have the residents under their care feel they are keeping themselves usefully occupied, and therefore, happy and contented.”¹⁴⁸ Mrs. Drew, a Strachan House resident, assumed the position of the home’s occupational therapist in 1955, after spending two days, at the chairwoman’s request, receiving training at Lambert Lodge.¹⁴⁹ She was “working untiringly,”

¹⁴⁵ “Annual Report of Strachan Houses,” Sixty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1949, 57-58.

¹⁴⁶ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 15, 1953.

¹⁴⁷ “Strachan Houses,” Bulletin of the WA, October 7, 1948.

¹⁴⁸ “Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1950,” Sixty-Fifth Annual Report of the WA, May 1951, 53.

¹⁴⁹ Lambert Lodge was a 700-bed Home for the Aged in Toronto. It opened in the old Christie Street Veterans’ Hospital, and was named for Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Lambert, a veteran of the First and Second World Wars. Accessed 9 November 2021, <https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2012/02/heritage-toronto-moment-christie-street-veterans-hospital> See also Struthers, *Homelike*, 340.

O’Grady told the committee.¹⁵⁰ It was nevertheless hard “to keep up the interest,” especially as Drew herself “doesn’t feel well at times.”¹⁵¹ By then, however, Strachan House had acknowledged that there was a need for “a resident Occupational Therapist,” and Mrs. Errol D’Clute was hired. She became a “permanent supervisor,” as well as the home’s occupational therapist.¹⁵² But like Drew, D’Clute received little training, except for a few classes at Lambert Lodge.

A fresh perception of what older people needed to remain healthy was championed by social workers and thinkers of the mid twentieth-century. Many of them challenged the view of the “dependent elderly,” Snell writes, stressing instead the importance of recreational programming to keep older people happy, healthy, and productive. A shift towards bettering oneself through an assortment of leisurely activities was encouraged, in order for older people to lead “full-valued, productive, interesting lives in the later years.”¹⁵³ It was the day of the Second Mile Club, a group that characterized old age as a time “to make new friends and find new interests,” and to meet in club rooms for the purpose of recreation and socializing.¹⁵⁴ “Activity,” as Harry Moody puts it, became “a refuge from the limbo state of aging,” the preferred solution “to the problem of late-life meaning in the modern world.”¹⁵⁵ Ushered from the workforce, and now entitled to a pension, the best thing for old people without “real jobs, real family relationships, real functioning in society,” was to have “proxy lives,” psychologist George Lawton argued, “recreation centers, arts and crafts centers,

¹⁵⁰ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, December 21, 1955.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Feb 9, 1955.

¹⁵² Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, February 15, 1957.

¹⁵³ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 216.

¹⁵⁴ “The Second Mile Club of Toronto, 52A St. Nicholas Street,” Eunice Dyke Fonds, F294, Box 411543, File 8, City of Toronto Archives.

¹⁵⁵ Harry R. Moody, “The Meaning of Life and the Meaning of Old Age,” in *What Does it Mean to Grow Old? Reflections from the Humanities*, eds. Thomas R. Cole and Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 22.

sheltered workshop, adult playgrounds, marriage brokers...¹⁵⁶ Professional interest in the health and productivity of older people grew throughout the 1940s and 50s, but was often founded on a “patronizing attitude aimed at ‘granting’ the elderly a fuller and better life.”¹⁵⁷ In the early 1950s, Strachan House reflected the social changes occurring around it, including a renewed desire to care for older people differently, to emphasize home, wellbeing, and productivity, and to keep minds “busy” in order to keep minds well. At the same time, residents could still be viewed as helpless, dependent on services, and in need of guidance. As Davies explains, by the end of the Second World War “Canadian doctors, social workers, and bureaucrats saw the aged as a vulnerable group with specific social and medical problems.”¹⁵⁸

Although radio and TV, a beloved budgie, and occupational therapy may have helped to keep wanderers in place, and to promote health and interaction more generally, they did not extinguish the problem entirely. It is also important to stress that not all “senile” residents of Strachan House were wanderers, and that challenges could frequently arise inside the home itself. Problems erupted between residents in shared spaces.

The majority of residents enjoyed little privacy. Only a select few benefited from the tranquility of a single room. Sharing a bedroom encouraged a regular storm of disagreement and anxiety. Curtains or plywood partitions provided an ounce of privacy, at best. Mrs. Willing “has a very bad asthmatic condition and sits up night after night gasping for breath which makes it very difficult for Miss Henderson.”¹⁵⁹ Mrs. Adamson, who suffered frequent

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Thomas R. Cole, “The “Enlightened” View of Aging: Victorian Morality in a New Key,” in *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does it Mean to Grow Old?* eds. Thomas R. Cole, Ruth E. Ray and Robert Kastenbaum (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 128.

¹⁵⁷ Snell, *The Citizen's Wage*, 217.

¹⁵⁸ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 89.

¹⁵⁹ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, May 14, 1958.

“sick spells,” as well as jaundice, shared a room with Mrs. Mary Delaney, whom O’Grady worried was “becoming a problem.”¹⁶⁰ Mrs. Simpson, who had a heart condition, shared a room with Mrs. Smith, a serial complainer who regularly voiced objection to Simpson “talking aloud to herself.”¹⁶¹ The room occupied by Mrs. Forster and Mrs. Elgood, two women O’Grady described as “mental,” proved an exceptionally hard case to manage. Forster screamed while Elgood recited poetry. Forster kept her side of the room tidy, and Elgood’s fell into disarray. Elgood was kind, while Forster raged.¹⁶²

It was not uncommon for O’Grady to shuffle residents around, hoping to put out small fires, or, in the case of Miss Tozer’s removal to Mrs. Alston’s room, to provide a setting that would be “more congenial.”¹⁶³ Sometimes it was to address a particular issue, for instance to give “an arthritic resident a warmer room.”¹⁶⁴ For those experiencing cognitive decline, however, sudden change could wreak havoc. Mrs. McKinley was “quite disgruntled about being moved permanently to another room.”¹⁶⁵ Mrs. Glithero, who had been known to “interfere” in the kitchen, was moved to Mrs. Brown’s room, which caused considerable “disturbance.”¹⁶⁶ Solitude seemed the best short-term solution for some, and O’Grady pushed for single rooms for select residents. Miss Tozer, she argued, should have a private room, “but she cannot afford it.”¹⁶⁷ Mrs. McKinley, O’Grady later reflected, should “be given the choice of another room when one becomes vacant.”¹⁶⁸ At other times, residents in single rooms could become lonely. “One lady whose room is on the top floor across from

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., February 9, 1955, March 14, 1956.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., April 9, 1958.

¹⁶² Ibid., September 8, 1958.

¹⁶³ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 12, 1957.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., May 14, 1952.

¹⁶⁵ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 9, 1952.

¹⁶⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, March 18, 1953.

¹⁶⁷ The minimum monthly cost for a single room was \$40. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 9, 1952.

¹⁶⁸ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 9, 1952.

the kitchen has been left out,” and needed more visitors. “On looking at the location of this room one can easily see how it was missed.”¹⁶⁹ Inevitably, the mixing of residents of varying medical histories could cause considerable strain on the population at large. The departure of one resident could set off a string of other changes for the home, which were all beyond the control of residents and resulted in frequent disruptions.

If Elgood insisted on walking out, on reciting poetry in the park and bothering the area’s residents, O’Grady worried, “the public would come to the conclusion that only a bunch of ‘nuts’ live here.”¹⁷⁰ But at what point were wanderers, and others experiencing cognitive decline, banished from the home? For those experiencing cognitive decline, the point of removal was blurry. A select few, for instance, were never removed from the home, and died there. In these cases, other illness had taken hold. In room 28, Mrs. Braham took to her bed and died suddenly on January 11, 1953. “We had two nurses with her,” O’Grady recorded.¹⁷¹ In room 34, Mrs. Kellogg’s family “consented to having a nurse on duty,” before she died suddenly on April 23, 1954.¹⁷²

Upholding the committee’s policy could prove a difficult endeavor for O’Grady, especially if residents’ mental conditions were inconsistent. Mrs. Wells, on visiting a resident who was “becoming a problem,” came back mystified, reporting that “she seemed perfectly normal.”¹⁷³ In other cases, residents’ mental conditions could decline rapidly and never recover. The decision to remove a resident appeared more straightforward in such instances, the yardstick being whether one could “physically and mentally” care for oneself.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., March 9, 1955.

¹⁷⁰ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, September 8, 1958.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Jan 14, 1953.

¹⁷² Ibid., April 7, 1954.

¹⁷³ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 14, 1954.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., February 15, 1957; February 12, 1957.

Confusion, walking away without notice, being untidy in one's person, verbally assaulting the home's staff, all placed a tremendous burden on O'Grady and the workers, who had neither the time nor the sufficient expertise to care for ailing residents. The highly subjective criteria used to warrant dismissal, however, illustrates not only the resounding power wielded by O'Grady and the committee of management, but also how little was known of dementia more generally. When to have residents removed, and where they would go, remained recurring questions.

Some on the committee of management wondered if a change to the policy was in order, and whether the addition of an infirmary or "sick bay" was not long overdue. The idea came, in part, from the residents themselves. Their thoughts appear briefly in the records, slipping through the comments of Mrs. Wells, convener of applications, when the committee gathered for its monthly meeting in June of 1952. It was the practice of the committee to send one member, each month, to visit the home. Mrs. Wells had visited in May. At the next meeting, she reported that she had found "a feeling of insecurity with some of the residents due to the fact they cannot remain here if they get very ill."¹⁷⁵ Several residents had gone to hospital and come back. Others, such as Mr. Lloyd, remained in hospital permanently. Mrs. Thornber and Mrs. Smith had been discharged from the home, and the health of many long-time residents, such as Mr. Dane and Mrs. Reith, had become of increasing concern to the staff.¹⁷⁶

Residents had good reason to feel insecure. The ambulatory residents of Strachan House once had been among the growing number of older Torontonians struggling to afford the high cost of living. Waiting lists to enter public institutions were long, and private

¹⁷⁵ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1952.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., February 28, 1952, and April 16, 1952.

accommodation was scarce. Shelter was particularly difficult to secure on the monthly \$40 Old Age Security pension. A single older person needed on average \$51.55 a month to cover necessities such as food and rent, said Jean Goode, executive secretary of the Toronto Welfare Council's Old Age Division, and former social worker with the city's Department of Public Welfare.¹⁷⁷ In 1952, most of Strachan House pensioners paid \$32 monthly board, and the home continued its policy of making a rental agreement with each incoming resident, based on the applicant's income. As the home was targeted only to residents of modest means, it accepted no applicant whose monthly income exceeded \$75, with Strachan House receiving 75% of residents' income. Strachan House residents who faced expulsion, then, confronted a double disadvantage. Many earned only \$40 a month, and received, like their counterparts in public Homes for the Aged, food, shelter, companionship, access to a doctor, and programs like occupational therapy, advantages "far beyond what they could afford if they were living in the community."¹⁷⁸

The committee's policies focused largely on residents' admittance to the home, not on their exits. Part of Mrs. Wells' duties as convener of applications was to ensure that every incoming resident was healthy. Of Emily Smith's application, Wells had initially reported that "she is 80 years of age but would pass for 70," and that "Dr. Cruise gives a wonderful report of her mental and physical conditions."¹⁷⁹ Those found "beyond our care" or "doubtful," as unhealthy applicants were described, were denied admittance.¹⁸⁰ Miss Rose Humphries, for

¹⁷⁷ Good made the appeal to provincial and federal governments, in support of an increase to public pensions. See "In the minutes read by Mrs. Goode the following figures were quoted," Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, undated. See also "Deploras Shelving of Aged People," *Globe and Mail*, May 1, 1951, 13; "Oldsters Double in Two Decades," *Globe and Mail*, July 24, 1946, 5. Note that Jean Good's surname appears as both "Goode," and "Good" in the various historical documents.

¹⁷⁸ Quote by Lambert Lodge official, Toronto. See Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 341.

¹⁷⁹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 9, 1952.

¹⁸⁰ For examples, see Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, May 14, 1952, October 8, 1952, February 11, 1953.

instance, “next on the list,” had her application declined, “due to her having Parkinson’s Disease.”¹⁸¹ Even healthy applicants in wheelchairs were denied admittance to Strachan House on account of the entrance stairs.¹⁸² After being allowed to move, Emily Smith grew increasingly unwell, slipped out the front door in the early hours, and caused anxiety on the part of staff and residents alike.¹⁸³ Incoming “healthy” residents often did not remain so.

In response to the residents’ concerns, Mrs. Wells suggested that the committee of management consider building an infirmary, a room within the home that could house residents requiring nursing care, in order to keep them in the home. An infirmary may have also prevented the forced and prolonged separation of couples when one partner grew ill, as was the case of the Lloyds. Chairwoman Thorne initially voiced caution, suggesting that the idea be put on hold, citing cost.¹⁸⁴ When the issue came up several months later, again at Mrs. Wells’ urging, the committee of management agreed that they “could not start anything until we had the funds.” One member put it in more directly: Strachan House was “not a nursing home.”¹⁸⁵ In one final attempt in January 1953, Mrs. Wells urged the committee of management to “consider turning one of the larger rooms into one to accommodate sick residents.” While the committee debated the pros and cons of such an arrangement, the members ultimately shelved the idea, agreeing that “nothing could be done about it.”¹⁸⁶

When the decision was finally made to remove a resident, their references were contacted. As signatories of the resident’s bonds, they remained responsible for their board, as well as future placement. In the case of Mrs. Forster, O’Grady concluded that “it was

¹⁸¹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, May 9, 1956.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, October 8, 1952.

¹⁸³ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 12, 1957.

¹⁸⁴ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1952.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, February 11, 1953.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1953.

finally decided to ask her to leave.” A former Eaton’s employee, her reference, “Mr. Lush of their Welfare Department” had signed her bond, so it was “now in their hands.” Eaton’s “sent their doctor to see her last week,” O’Grady said, “and we do trust she will be removed before long as she has been a great trial to the residents and to the staff.”¹⁸⁷ She was finally removed to the Anderson Nursing Home, “where she was kept under sedation until they took her by ambulance to the Ontario Hospital.”¹⁸⁸

The psychiatric hospital (formerly the Provincial Lunatic Asylum) on Queen Street became the destination for many, including Mrs. Smith, whose relatives clashed with Mr. Harris, Smith’s reference. On learning of her removal to the Ontario Hospital, her relatives “were very upset about it and made it unpleasant for me,” wrote O’Grady, as well as “Mr. Harris who has signed her bond and was looking after all her affairs at Mrs. Smith’s request.”¹⁸⁹ Still, once the decision was made, Dr. Cruise “completed the necessary papers,” and Dr. Lynch, superintendent of the Ontario Hospital, decided whether the resident could be admitted.¹⁹⁰ The references of other residents, such as Miss Steel’s, strove to find a placement in rest homes or public institutions. Steel was sent to the Poplar Rest Home on Dundas,¹⁹¹ Mrs. Edwards to the Allan Private Hospital,¹⁹² Mrs. Delaney to the Central Nursing Home on Wellesley Street,¹⁹³ and Miss Tozer to Green Acres, a Home for the Aged in Newmarket.¹⁹⁴ Others were removed to a variety of private nursing homes or boarding houses.¹⁹⁵ Mrs. Ward ended up paying \$84.50 a month to stay at Mrs. L. McKay

¹⁸⁷ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, September 8, 1958.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., October 20, 1958.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., February 12, 1957.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., November 9, 1955.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., September 21, 1955.

¹⁹² Ibid., September 23, 1953.

¹⁹³ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, May 9, 1956.

¹⁹⁴ See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, October 8, 1957.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., February 13, 1952, and May 14, 1952; Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, January 23, 1952.

Summerfield's Rest Home on Bloor street, but O'Grady thought the arrangement would be "very good. It is very hard to get a blind person in anywhere."¹⁹⁶

For other residents, finding a suitable placement was more trying. Even with references, required on admittance, some residents were left without friends, relatives, or adequate resources after their removal. In these cases, O'Grady, chairwoman Thorne, Reverend Smith, and members of the committee cast a wide net, working in conjunction with the Toronto Welfare Council, and its network, to find suitable accommodation. By 1951, the Council was helping to coordinate the work of 350 social welfare agencies, linking groups like Strachan House with various social service initiatives, both public and private. Through the Council, Strachan House received house calls from visiting nurses, who assisted O'Grady with hospital and nursing home applications, and resident placement.¹⁹⁷ In regards to Mrs. Elgood, "her care is in the hands of the Welfare," O'Grady said, "and it is hoped she will be removed before long."¹⁹⁸ Of Mrs. Holton, "we have not yet been able to place her," wrote O'Grady, who repeated that the Queen Elizabeth Hospital had refused to admit the resident, "as she did not require medical treatment." She instead contacted "the welfare nurse," who "promised to come in and complete the necessary papers for her transfer to a Rest Home."¹⁹⁹ On at least one occasion, Earl Ludlow, Director of Homes for the Aged, "sent a representative" to the home on his personal behalf, in order to assess the resident's needs and determine the best approach forward.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, January 14, 1953.

¹⁹⁷ The Toronto Welfare Council (1937-1957) was renamed the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto in 1957, with Florence Philpott as executive director. The council's predecessor agency was the Federation of Community Service (1919-1937). See "List 350 Services Engaged in Welfare," *Globe and Mail*, March 21, 1951; "Social Planning Council Will Assist Metro United Appeal," *Globe and Mail*, May 8, 1957, 12. See also Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, September 8, 1958, and November 9, 1958.

¹⁹⁸ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, September 8, 1958.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, November 9, 1958.

²⁰⁰ This was in regards to Mrs. Conway. See Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, February 13, 1952, and May 14, 1952; Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, January 23, 1952, and April 11, 1956.

The mechanisms that led to a resident's removal were often varied, but the outcome was mostly the same. Hospitals and nursing homes became the common placement for exiting residents, even as Jean Goode and other welfare advocates continued to call, not for more institutionalization of old people, but sustained independence in "small housing units interspersed with family dwellings." In England, Goode noted, "less than 2 per cent of old people live[d] in institutions."²⁰¹ Lacking postwar resources, the British had developed "community services to a greater degree rather than spend money on buildings."²⁰² Ontario, with its ample fiscal resources, took "the wrong policy path," historian Struthers argues. Instead of turning towards alternative, decentralized, community, and home-based approaches to caregiving, institutional responses to aging, regardless of the homelike public rhetoric, remained the chosen government policy, even as British critics warned that Ontario's Homes for the Aged Act was "outmoded legislation."²⁰³

Policy demanded that ailing residents be removed from Strachan House, and O'Grady, conscientious worker that she was, followed the home's regulations without question. Residents may have been asked to leave, but ensuring they were as comfortable as possible in their new surroundings appears to have been an important priority for the matron. Having lived side-by-side with them, attended hospital visits and medical appointments, and been kept apprised of every intimate bodily symptom, O'Grady continued to watch over Strachan House residents even after they had gone, hoping to receive assurance that they had found adequate accommodation. Age and illness, through

²⁰¹ "Oldsters Double in Two Decades," *Globe and Mail*, July 24, 1946; "12,000 Seek Homes," *Globe and Mail*, February 17, 1948; "Low Rental Housing, Aid for Jobless Urged," *Globe and Mail*, March 17, 1954, 5; "Information on Welfare Given to All," *Globe and Mail*, March 24, 1954, 12; "Boarding Plan for Seniors Explained," *Globe and Mail*, February 18, 1956, 14.

²⁰² Quote by the head of Ontario's Office on Aging, 1969. See Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 346.

²⁰³ Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 342, 346.

O’Grady’s eyes, rendered residents not unlike children: it amplified their needs, as well as her duty to meet them. Professional concern pervaded her comments, which carried a strong current of paternalism.

O’Grady frequently visited former residents in their new accommodations, providing the committee with updates of their physical conditions. O’Grady also faithfully attended their funerals. Mrs. McKinley “made no fuss,” assured O’Grady to the committee, describing the moment at which she left her at the Ontario Hospital. “It was a very trying ordeal...she apparently did not realize where she was going.”²⁰⁴ Upon visiting Miss Tozer in her new room at Green Acres, O’Grady highlighted the positive: she was not well mentally, but “a good deal better physically.”²⁰⁵ As for Mrs. Ward, she was “getting on very nicely,” and was “very happy in her room.” Ward’s matron, O’Grady said, was even a “trained nurse.”²⁰⁶ Of Miss Holton, O’Grady hoped she could stay at Strachan House until Christmas, “if possible,” but only if “it did not jeopardize her chances of getting into a good nursing home.” Miss Wright, “who took her to the nursing home, was favourably impressed with the nurses and thought they would be kind.” Mrs. Drew, who paid Holton a visit, also “came back feeling quite happy about her.”²⁰⁷

In the 1950s, the concept of home across Ontario’s various institutions had different meanings and origins. In Strachan House, the focus on creating a “haven” for old people had arisen in the 1920s, and was steeped in the religious principles of the WA and St. Hilda’s

²⁰⁴ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 9, 1955.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, October 8, 1957.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1953.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, November 17, 1958, and December 15, 1958.

College.²⁰⁸ In contrast, the province's Homes for the Aged, which rose in a period of postwar reconstruction, were part of an emerging welfare state, and manifestations of both postwar wealth and cultural uncertainty.²⁰⁹ Despite their distinct origins, the two paths had merged by the 1950s, as Strachan House joined a chorus of institutions, advocates, politicians, social workers, and thinkers in the adoption of new programs, collaborations, and ideas about old people.

At the same time, O'Grady's reports expose a dated mission, a stubborn committee of management, and the inhumane expulsion of "family" members once they became the most vulnerable versions of themselves. If Strachan House was innovative in the 1920s, it can also appear inflexible by the mid twentieth-century, even stuck in its ways. But was this really the case? And why was the committee of management so unwilling to amend its policy on removing sick residents? The home's charitable status, including the years of struggling to stay afloat, made the committee wary of financial risk, including the cost of constructing and maintaining a new infirmary. In a different vein, the ever-evolving set of ideas that had begun to stress that old people "did not become different persons because of their age" was a further impediment to residents' long-term future in the home. While it could be argued that Thorne and others were merely blind to the realities of old age, and unwilling to absorb ailing residents into the Strachan House family, they were in fact among a growing number of advocates pushing for renewed ways of thinking about age, which involved reconsidering the tropes of dependency and frailty.

²⁰⁸ At the time of its opening, Strachan House was frequently called a "haven." See "Strachan Houses Appropriate Name," *Globe*, February 5, 1925, 9

²⁰⁹ Struthers, "A Nice Homelike Atmosphere," 342.

The stance that old people had “the same needs and desires as anyone else”²¹⁰ was off the mark. Old people could become *vastly* different, requiring more accessible buildings, assistance with mobility, and for many, increased medical and social services. If illness voided one’s familial membership, it also placed unneeded strain on an already vulnerable population. Wasn’t one allowed to get sick at home? Wasn’t that the very best place for one to be? Mrs. Wells’ repeated calls for an infirmary, however, are evidence that ideas about aging were far from uniform among committee of management members. Debates carried on about the future of Strachan House and how it might be reimagined. There was more than one way to envision the lives of the home’s residents, and it is apparent that some saw no contradiction between the “homelike” quality of Strachan House and the addition of an infirmary. Change (or lack of change) reflected the dominant beliefs of the time, themselves in a state of flux.

Both the building and the committee’s policies worked against the home’s population. As new ideas about old age emerged, there were still limited long-term care opportunities in Toronto, and no sustained effort to make Strachan House residents with medical problems more comfortable. A renovation was meant to increase safety, and fireproofing the stairwells partly accomplished this. But the alterations also exposed the ways in which the residents remained vulnerable to injury and isolation from living in a building incompatible with immobility and illness, and to forced removal if they grew sick. The home’s physical footprint, layout, its steep stairs; the cramped quarters and shared bedrooms; its residents made to sleep on the upper floors, the home’s architecture and configuration affected the daily life of residents in profound ways. The home could prove a

²¹⁰ “Annual Report of Strachan Houses,” Sixty-Third Annual Report of the WA, May 1949, 57-58.

barrier to the outside world. It could also expel those who could no longer safely master its spaces.

Whether the home lived up to the founders' ideals is not so black-and-white. With only O'Grady's reports to evaluate, it is her picture of the residents that emerges. And what can be seen? Residents in various states of movement, chaos, effort, pain, sickness, removal. Residents pushing back, defying the rules. Residents struggling to remain at home. Her reports are sketches of a charitable institution, written by a matron who had little time to linger on what was not broken. Ill residents could be lumped together with flooded bathrooms, and a worn-out rug. A faithful record keeper, O'Grady was a good manager, her eye trained always on what needed doing, which resident took ill, and what item could be of use. At times her reports appear clinical, even insensitive, but she was, in fact, highly sensitive to need, aware of who might benefit from what donated good, and ever cognizant of each resident's capabilities and limitations. She could also report, occasionally, on small victories, such as when a resident regained her strength, and when another felt well enough to get fresh air. These instances, however fleeting, suggest that O'Grady herself was bonded to the residents, and invested in their wellbeing. Given her role, that is not surprising. She had insight that the committee of management did not, an intimate daily knowledge of what "home" meant to the residents in very everyday ways. Stairs could cause pain and anxiety. A cool room could be dreadful for arthritic joints. A particular bedroom on the third floor could make one feel cut off, lonely even. Home, in addition to ideas, trends, and policies, was the practical, basic, ordinary stuff of living, the roof and walls. For its elderly residents, these were no small things.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Community

Throughout the 1950s, occupants' connection to Strachan House began to shift. As matron Kathleen de Courcy O'Grady reported higher household expenses, a growing waiting list for admission, greater instances of staff turnover, and more problems with the aging building, the worlds of residents and workers began to drift more closely together. Almost imperceptibly, residents and workers began to adopt new roles, take up duties not traditionally their own, and use and see the space differently. While the Canadian old age home was arguably, as historian Megan Davies has written, "an instrument of social control,"¹ Strachan House was also a space where residents and workers exercised agency and claimed membership. According to the founders, the home was a haven for the aged poor. But it was also where occupants contested assigned roles and perceived needs. Residents took on household chores. Long-time workers grew old and became residents. Occupants' actions and illnesses disrupted the intended purposes of designated spaces.

Through an opening made possible by growing challenges at Strachan House, including worker shortages, maintenance problems, and more reports of elderly women among the home's staff, residents assumed new authority over the home. Strachan House began to resemble a community, that is, an interplay of experiences, actions, and reciprocities. Willcocks, Peace, and Kellaher have argued that the "ideal philosophy" of

¹ Megan J. Davies, *Into the House of Old: A History of Residential Care in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 11.

managers, in which “residents retain control of their private world,” is an illusion.² In the period under study, however, residents of Strachan House held considerable power in the home. Institutional life did not always resemble “a battleground between individual and organizational needs,”³ but moved closer in line with Mabel Cartwright’s vision, that is, as a home that afforded independence and privacy. By the mid-twentieth century, residents were claiming the home for themselves, and each other.

Peer through the windows and look around. What can you see? As James Opp and John C. Walsh explain, “spaces are never neutral or empty of meaning, especially those designated as proper sites of home, work, and play.”⁴ Strachan House affords a unique opportunity to assess how the domestic and work spaces of the old age home were utilized in practice, as well as how they could contain, at once, myriad spaces and meanings. Through an exploration of O’Grady’s superintendent’s reports, this chapter casts light on how the community of Strachan House found expression, through reciprocal acts of acquiring and fixing the home’s goods, furniture, and other necessities; by assisting fellow residents and workers, including with workers’ household duties, and in the unofficial social gatherings that highlighted the spaces that workers and residents shared. The discussion calls into question the passive role usually assigned to elderly residents of domestic institutions, particularly as the postwar professionalization brought the institutionalized elderly more

² Dianne Willcocks, Sheila Peace, & Leonie Kellaher, *Private Lives in Public Places: A Research-Based Critique of Residential Life in Local Authority Old People’s Homes* (London and New York: Tavistock Publication, 1987), 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., *Home, Work, and Play: Situating Canadian Social History*, third edition (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxii.

“comforts.”⁵ Moreover, it brings the labour of elderly women into the narrative of postwar reconstruction.⁶

Home

Strachan House was a tangible, messy, ever-shifting space, filled with temporary subjects, and objects meant to move life forward, keep it spick-and-span, and failing that, its occupants fed and clothed like school children. A fussy washer, a long-awaited Frigidaire, a grate that leaked air, chair coverings faded with so much use. There were homemade walkers for the injured, and, in their absence, the anonymous faces of domestic workers to help the residents along. Home was not only ideas and people, but a building with rooms and walls, bones and plaster, wiring and plumbing, objects, furniture, and appliances. Matron O’Grady spun through the to-dos, the ever-expanding list of chores and hand-me-down furniture in need of fixing, clothing and appliances and odds and ends associated with the living, all those seemingly frivolous glanced-over things so integral to the daily breathing in and out, the shifting of the momentous building filled with so much life, and as a result, so much work. Was it a new light for the chapel? New screens for the windows and doors? A partition of plywood to replace a shabby dividing curtain? It was not only O’Grady and the

⁵ In the British Columbia context, Davies illustrates how the “professional colonization” of old age homes included medical and social welfare staff, and occupational therapy and physiotherapy. By 1950, residents “were transformed from poor law inmates to social work clients and medical patients.” See Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 94.

⁶ Emphasis is routinely on young families, wives and working mothers, including the postwar debate on women working outside the home. For examples, see Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 16; Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 222; Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill/Queen’s Press, 1992); Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

workers but the residents themselves who built, bolted, polished and scrubbed, and who claimed the spaces as their own in so doing.

Community was found in the ephemeral, in the fixing and finding, in the making a home out of donated goods, in trying to make the space amenable to the occupants. The home received items and parcels regularly from private individuals, church and charitable groups, goods that were meant to soothe, assist, clothe, or entertain. Woolen underwear, a chesterfield chair, doilies, a floor lamp, pillow cases, a hospital bed and bedpan, crochet threads, a hearing aid, streetcar tickets, a hamper of apples, Kleenex, lifesavers, bone china, teacups and a teapot, stationary, potted plants, bureau scarves, a heating pad, a new radio, ballet tickets, a card table, Easter lilies, a cake and cake plate, a turkey, a ham, ice cream, handbags, used clothing, a subscription to *Time*, linen and afghans, an electric juicer.⁷ The list of household items received, documented scrupulously by O'Grady, were united by their ordinariness, their domesticity, their everyday quality. More than this, they were tokens of charity, their usefulness connected to the gendered helm of home. They made their way to owners imagined to be shut-ins, in possession of leisure time but not health, wanting for little but the basics of existence, and beyond that, some kind of distraction to pass the hours. They were gifts for the non-worker, the senior citizen, perpetually ill or at rest. They were gifts for older women. Old age, as historian James Snell has shown, had a gendered character. Old women were more likely to be widowed, to live in urban centres, and to be economically dependent than old men.⁸ As a result, Strachan House residents were

⁷ For a few examples of donations see Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, November 19, 1952, and June 10, 1953, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, File 5, Box 6, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

⁸ James G. Snell, *The Citizen's Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-51* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 25.

overwhelmingly female.⁹ Women's perceived "natural" tendency towards domesticity meant they were typically offered different amenities inside Toronto institutions. At the House of Providence, women were provided with a bed, "a locker, a chest of drawers," and "a screen for privacy," while men received only a locker, table, and bed.¹⁰ At Strachan House, gifts of kitchen gadgets, bedroom linen, and prepared food were akin to get-well greetings, or worse yet, expressions of sympathy.

The home may have been greatly assisted by donors' good deeds, but donations did not always hit the mark. While the home received regular donations of food, for instance, it commonly needed such basic items as toasters. How particular people "lived with goods," Joy Parr writes, is historically determined by "a particular time and place."¹¹ While the home remained commonly stocked with Kleenex, candy, and flowers, O'Grady was made to hunt, assess, and advocate for products. In her petitions to the committee of management, she requested items including brooms, frying pans, carpet sweepers, ladders, and pads for the stairway. She lobbied for repairs to the garbage shed, the home's plumbing, and windows. These were practical goods and services, devoid of sentimentality, useful not only for home, but also work. As a sign of her commitment to Strachan House, O'Grady purchased items from her own wallet on occasion, mostly things for the kitchen, such as tea towels. At other times goods were rescued, scrounged up, or borrowed, chairs for the verandah from a sister, chintz curtains and chair coverings from a friend. The home's houseman spruced up old items; a forgotten table retrieved from the basement found a new home in Mrs. Kellog's

⁹ For example, in 1958 the home accommodated 31 women and 7 men. See "Strachan Houses – Report for 1958," Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, 86-5, File 5, Box 6, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

¹⁰ James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 54.

¹¹ Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 166.

room.¹² O’Grady purchased an electric polisher (“very badly needed”) “by selling two used fur coats” which had been given to her by friends.¹³ She purchased a cupboard for Miss Whatmough’s room out of the “flower money,” as the cupboard she had was “falling to pieces.”¹⁴ Cheese cloth was purchased for the kitchen curtains.¹⁵

Big-ticket items were another affair. Appliances, mattresses, and other pieces of bedroom furniture were rarely, if ever, purchased new, and yet so essential to the home. Operating with a modest budget, the house committee nevertheless heard O’Grady out on extraordinary items, including the home’s first refrigerator. “The milk went sour last week,” she reported in her petition to the committee of management. Two members assisted with shopping and price comparison, and discussed the merits of various styles and sizes.

Beginning in the early 1950s, as more refrigerator models became available, competing manufacturers vied for “eye-appeal.”¹⁶ Facts and figures were laid before the committee of management, where they finally settled on a “41 c.f. refrigerator at a cost of \$791.60.”¹⁷ Regularly, essential items that could not be scrounged or found at a reduced cost were purchased incrementally, the house committee deciding to “wait till fall to consider new mattresses.”¹⁸ Intermittently, O’Grady asked for upgrades or installations, such as an intercom system “to save continual going up and down stairs,” and a switch from Yorkville Laundry to New Method for laundry services.¹⁹ In all cases, O’Grady and the committee relied on the generosity of others to assist when and where they could. Mrs. Ross’ husband

¹² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, September 23, 1953.

¹³ Ibid., December 21, 1955.

¹⁴ Ibid., September 23, 1953.

¹⁵ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 14, 1954.

¹⁶ Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 248.

¹⁷ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, September 10, 1952.

¹⁸ Ibid., July 9, 1952.

¹⁹ Laundry service was an ongoing issue. The home changed again to Toronto Laundries in Oct. ’53. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, March 19, 1952, May 14, 1952, Oct 14, 1953.

installed lights in the chapel, “and was able to get them at a reduced cost for us.”²⁰ The cost of the kneelers for the chapel would be \$85, but a member “offered to see if she could have the cost lowered.”²¹ Resident Miss Jarreat donated a toaster, “it toasts four slices at one time.”²² Mr. Neilson offered “to give a used electric mangle to the home. This is being gratefully accepted,” O’Grady wrote.²³

Ordinary household items, brought in and used faithfully, bore the marks of community, but so did the building that housed them. How it was treated and mended, its imperfections addressed, its push towards improvement always top-of-mind, was a testament to the effort of both workers and residents. No person knew more of the home, and its condition, perhaps, than its live-in houseman, Harry McGregor. Records place him in the home throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. He performed an array of duties, preparing rooms for new residents, washing the walls, washing and waxing the floors, installing new linoleum and carpet, laying rugs, hanging drapes and blinds, painting, and repairing and staining the furniture. A grinder in the kitchen, “so hard to turn,” was wrestled into submission by one person alone. “We have to appeal to Harry for help to manipulate the thing,” said O’Grady.²⁴ When Mrs. Edwards stumbled “over a piece of her floor covering which was torn,” it was Harry who was called, and who “immediately put some tacks in it” to ensure it was secure.²⁵ He cleaned the chapel, conducted minor repairs, and performed his annual spring cleaning, for which he was given extra remuneration.²⁶ He washed the exterior

²⁰ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, March 18, 1953.

²¹ *Ibid.*, September 9, 1953.

²² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, October 8, 1957.

²³ A mangle was used for household laundry purposes, to both wring water from fabrics, and to flatten them. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1958.

²⁴ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 20, 1958.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1953.

²⁶ Harry typically received an extra \$25 for the spring cleaning. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 11, 1958.

walls and windows, and put new screens in the windows and doors. He moved furniture to accommodate the guests, aided by O’Grady, the workers, and the residents.²⁷ While the city tended to some repairs (in 1955, for instance, it repaired the chimney and roof, and put up new eaves), many tasks fell to Harry.²⁸ When the residents remarked on the tired-looking verandah, Harry repainted it. When the weather turned cold, he installed new furnace grates. When a storm blew the home’s sign down at the Queen Street gate, Harry fetched it and put it back up.²⁹ O’Grady may have managed the home, but Harry held it standing, by patching, painting, and waxing, by venturing where others did not, up the rungs of the ladder to the tallest windows and the roof, and down to the basement’s furnace room.

Harry was not alone in caring for the building. Like the houseman, the residents came to know the building through its failings, because of the things they were forced to address or repair. The residents played their part in tackling their own list of house projects, not only handiwork, make-work projects, or occupational therapy, but also tasks borne out of circumstance and financial necessity. In a home where every penny was meticulously counted, and where some residents reported being financially *worse* off after the Old Age Security pension came into effect in 1952, industriousness was a fact of life.³⁰ Residents were

²⁷ Harry’s tasks are too numerous to mention. See for example, Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 19, 1952, April 15, 1953, March 10, 1954, April 7, 1954, May 19, 1954.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1955.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, May 13, 1953, October 7, 1956, September 12, 1956, February 20, 1958.

³⁰ Beginning in February 1952, the committee began to note that many of the home’s residents were financially worse off under the new OAS pension (\$40 monthly at age seventy). In other rare cases, residents’ monthly incomes improved, which prompted the committee to raise their monthly board by \$4 in 1952. See for example, Strachan House Committee of Management Meeting, February 28, 1952. As Struthers notes, the OAS pension had a detrimental effect on Ontario’s neediest. Those aged 65-69, who had previously been on the city relief files, became the responsibility of the provincial Old Age Assistance (OAA) caseload. “When they were on relief,” Struthers writes, “the city paid their entire rent, plus a food allowance, which often came to more than \$40 a month. Once transferred over to the OAA, the pensioners discovered, ‘I can pay my rent, perhaps, but what am I going to eat?’” For those over seventy receiving the OAS pension, \$40 was the maximum payment, regardless of need. Unlike western provinces, who provided an additional \$10 on top of the \$40 federal payout, Ontario’s Premier Frost declared “there would be no provincial supplementation for the elderly unable to live on the monthly \$40 maximum.” See James Struthers, “Grizzled Old Men and Lonely Widows: Constructing the Single Elderly as a Social Problem in Canada’s Welfare State, 1945-1967,” in *Mapping the*

not shielded from the everyday problems that arose. Rather, many participated in the polishing and adjusting, in bringing old objects back to life. Mr. Stevenson repaired a worn chair and chesterfield.³¹ When one of the organ's pedals broke during evening service, O'Grady declared, "our Mr. Henry was able to repair it."³² Mr. Wiltshire, already a resident in the home when O'Grady's reports begin, was perhaps the quintessential fixer among them all, a resident endlessly occupied, who could assess a problem and instantly devise some creative solution.

Initially, Mr. Wiltshire kept his work to his own bedroom, where he painted it "with a little help from Harry," and hung "new curtains for his window and screen."³³ Gradually he branched out, fixing lamps, plastering walls, arranging "wires, lamps, toilets," installing an "electrical plug," making a "very useful cupboard out of an old radio case for Mrs. Adamson's room," making "three screens," which were "so well made," and which had "special handles so that they can be taken off very easily by anyone." When he spotted Mrs. Wood using a chair "to assist her back and forth to the bathroom," he built her a walker from "some of the metal piping that was no longer being used." Wood was "so pleased with it."³⁴

The "fixers" among the home, in addition to Harry, were male residents, retired workers profoundly discomforted by retirement, who shunned idleness, who looked for innumerable ways to remain active, often by fixing, moving, or constructing items around the home. Male residents did not labour, as they did in the past, in exchange for food or

Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700-1975 (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen's Press, 2004), 356-357.

³¹ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, March 18, 1953.

³² *Ibid.*, March 9, 1955.

³³ *Ibid.*, June 10, 1953.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, December 17, 1952, November 18, 1953, September 21, 1955, November 14, 1956, December 18, 1957, May 14, 1958.

board, but to remain useful. As Gregory Wood explains, postwar North American men needed to be “at once, good soldiers, productive workers, selfless team members, capable leaders, and successful providers of affluent middle-class lifestyles.”³⁵ The Second World War and Cold War had “elevated the importance of service and usefulness as men’s cardinal virtues.”³⁶ Old men, in particular, could recall “the troubles they and others experienced during the ‘lean years’ of the depression decade,” and so pushed to work “as long as they could.”³⁷

Women residents were keen contributors to the home as well, but in similarly gendered ways, by doing housework, or caring for residents who needed extra assistance.³⁸ Recognition of their efforts was customarily understated. O’Grady was apt to highlight men’s work, likely because their efforts were visible and involved physical labour (a freshly painted wall, a newly constructed cupboard.) In the home that was regularly in need of repair, men’s work appeared indispensable. Women’s duties, in contrast, were quiet and difficult to measure: a hand held, a dirty tray wiped clean. Their tasks conformed to prevailing social “norms” that linked women with a perceived “natural” aptitude for caregiving and homemaking.³⁹

When a new resident, Mr. Fox, moved into the home in March of 1953, he found a kindred spirit in Mr. Wiltshire. He matched the resident not only in a desire to be unfailingly useful, but also in his skill and experience as a carpenter. Mr. Fox, like Mr. Wiltshire, was forever observing what needed doing, eyes darting around, sizing up what could be

³⁵ Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960* (Landham, Md., University Press of America, 2012), 117.

³⁶ Wood, *Retiring Men*, 115.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁸ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 9, 1955, November 9, 1958.

³⁹ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 94.

improved upon. By O'Grady's accounts, their help was not construed as meddling or overstepping. Quite the opposite, she welcomed it. Mr. Fox's arrival, which coincided with greater instances of staff turnover, represented a gradual shift in the home's overall character. Residents and workers began to share communal space in O'Grady's reporting. When Harry began drinking in the fall of 1954 and was temporarily dismissed (the only stain on the worker's otherwise exemplary record), O'Grady remarked that Mr. Wiltshire had been "most helpful" throughout the ordeal.⁴⁰ When one of the maids promptly quit, Miss Elizabeth Wright, a Strachan House supervisor, reported that Mr. Hannah was being "very helpful and kind" around the home.⁴¹ Residents could fill the gaps left by drifting or absentee workers.

Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox were individually resourceful, but together, the men tackled innumerable problems, moving bulky furniture, repairing old cupboards, and conducting minor repairs. The pair greatly assisted the home at large, running to fix problems when Harry was otherwise occupied. When Mr. Hannah, a new resident in room number 1, complained of a drafty bedroom, the pair closed up the grate with "a piece of wood... which has stopped the draft and should help to make the room warmer."⁴² When a storm broke the window in Mrs. Boyes' third-floor bedroom, Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox "fixed it temporarily."⁴³ The pair plastered and painted numerous walls, and assisted Harry with odd jobs. They repositioned doorways, lending cramped rooms more space. "As the wall where the cupboard had been was broken down," wrote O'Grady, "Mr. Fox very kindly plastered it and then Harry painted it. We think it is a great improvement."⁴⁴ Mr. Wiltshire

⁴⁰ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, September 15, 1954.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, July 14, 1954.

⁴² *Ibid.*, May 19, 1954.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, October 8, 1957.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, September 23, 1953.

and Mr. Fox plastered the third-floor kitchen. O'Grady remarked on the "splendid piece of work."⁴⁵

Mr. Fox and Mr. Wiltshire began to build handmade furniture. As Canadian households pinched pennies and bought furnishings "one piece at a time,"⁴⁶ Strachan House lucked upon two eager and skillful residents among their group. The pair's handmade furniture was not only seen as stable and longer lasting than buying new, but the addition of freshly constructed pieces complemented the home's prudent financial sensibility. In the charitable old age home, in particular, necessary items were generally acquired through donation, or picked up second-hand. Residents' rooms were furnished with broken, weathered, or impractical cupboards and tables as a result, some of them "hopelessly inadequate."⁴⁷ At one point, another handy resident, Mr. Price, requested lumber to build his own cupboard, and the house committee obliged. The results, according to O'Grady, were "very well" indeed.⁴⁸ In the years that followed, lumber and plywood were regularly brought in, and Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox built cupboards for the home, setting them up in bedrooms when their predecessors were judged too far gone to warrant repair. O'Grady, who had to account for the cost of the materials, documented their progress. Mr. Fox and Mr. Wiltshire "were very tired when it was finished," she wrote of one project, but the results were "splendid."⁴⁹

It was not only cupboards, but handmade plywood partitions that Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox gradually added to the home's bedrooms.⁵⁰ The new partitions replaced the

⁴⁵ Ibid., May 15, 1957.

⁴⁶ Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 170.

⁴⁷ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, September 23, 1953, March 13, 1957.

⁴⁸ Ibid., May 13, 1953.

⁴⁹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, February 8, 1956.

⁵⁰ Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox built too many cupboards and partitions to mention, including for Miss Jellyman, Mrs. Black, Mrs. D'Clute, Miss Tozer, and others. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting,

traditional curtain or blanket, suspended haphazardly from the ceiling, which had previously “divided” shared bedrooms in two.⁵¹ Together, the arrival of new cupboards and partitions were worth more than the sum of their parts. Cupboards were one of few household items that residents did not share, a vessel where they could safely stow clothing and other personal possessions, an item (apart from beds) that was uniquely their own. Partitions sealed off one’s space more concretely, and were infinitely more stable than a piece of hanging cloth, which was akin to a line of chalk drawn onto the floor. “They think it has given them a great deal more privacy,” reported O’Grady of Mrs. Mee and Mrs. Sale’s new partition, “and are very happy about it.”⁵² When the partition went up in room 35, Miss Wright remarked on the great improvement, relaying that it “should give a feeling of privacy to the occupants.”⁵³

Work

It was not only through the building and its goods that occupants claimed ownership of the home. Residents and workers also claimed each other, by assisting, intervening, and expressing concern. By validating, and remunerating. By bending the rules. By adopting roles not traditionally their own. By fluctuating, if necessary, between the status of resident and the status of worker. Residents could take on workers’ duties. Workers who fell ill or retired could become residents. Workers and residents’ lives inside Strachan House were not similar, but they were shared. It was in these in-between spaces that a sense of community can be gleaned, particularly as daily life presented new challenges for the home.

July 13, 1955, February 8, 1956, April 10, 1957; Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, July 14, 1954, September 23, 1953.

⁵¹ See for example, Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, December 17, 1952.

⁵² Ibid., March 10, 1954.

⁵³ Ibid., July 14, 1954.

On the surface, the home, while poor, appeared to run smoothly, its successful operation attributed to workers and residents alike. But did the committee of management pour over O’Grady’s reports closely? Had anyone had the time to do it? Did they look past the number of times communion was celebrated, what goods were donated or needed repair, or how many times the doctor had visited? If they did, they would have found evidence that all was not well. As with the matrons who had come before her, the job demanded a good deal from O’Grady, and by the winter of 1954, it had begun to take a mental and physical toll.

O’Grady was apt, however, to keep her focus on the task at hand. Any sign of exhaustion slipped through her reports only by happenstance. Following a renovation in the home – city-mandated to meet fire-safety regulations – she reported that “my rooms are very nice but I have not had time to get them settled.”⁵⁴ When she left for holiday the following summer, her departure was customarily delayed, as she was “busy the whole day long and did not leave the building until about 5 p.m.”⁵⁵ Members reviewed her reports, but nothing appeared amiss. On the contrary, her busyness warranted commendation. Members applauded O’Grady’s devotion, marvelling that, despite the stress of the job, she “did not look a day older,” and that the home’s long waiting list was no surprise, “as you just feel happiness when you go in the front door.”⁵⁶ Yet for two years O’Grady had reported on a regular stream of maids who came and went, who demanded better remuneration, and who butted heads with Miss Broadbent, the home’s long-time cook. Posting newspaper ads and finding new workers had become a regular duty.⁵⁷ Broadbent broke her arm and left her

⁵⁴ Ibid., July 9, 1952.

⁵⁵ Ibid., July 8, 1953.

⁵⁶ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 15, 1953.

⁵⁷ See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, March 19, 1952, September 10, 1952, April 15, 1953, July 8, 1953, November 18, 1953.

duties temporarily, and O'Grady was forced briefly to step in to the role until a substitute could be secured.⁵⁸ Broadbent returned to her duties, but she was "very short tempered and two maids will probably be leaving as a result."⁵⁹ Residents began complaining about the food, as Broadbent's replacement had reportedly been "a very good cook."⁶⁰ All of this occurred amidst reports of resident illness, including Mr. Dane's surprise exits, that saw the long-time resident fleeing the home without warning. Worried over his increasing forgetfulness, O'Grady had spent hours tracking the missing one-hundred-year-old resident down.⁶¹

In the spring of 1953, O'Grady made an unusual request to the committee, a sign the matron was nearing exhaustion. She requested an increase in salary, reporting that she had been offered another position, "with much less responsibility at double her present salary." After "considerable discussion," the committee of management agreed that the matron was "considerably underpaid, particularly considering her capabilities for the job," and agreed to raise her salary from \$100 a month to \$150.⁶² The demands of her job, however, did not cease, and by January, when "the call came that there was a bed ready for her," O'Grady left for the St. John's Convalescent Hospital. Supervisor Wright, who assumed O'Grady's duties while she was in hospital, did not elaborate on O'Grady's illness, only that on the day of her departure, "everything seemed to go wrong." O'Grady had "worked right up until the last minute at her office work so that everything would be in order."⁶³

⁵⁸ The committee gave O'Grady three days off because of the added strain. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 16, 1952.

⁵⁹ Ibid., July 9, 1952.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, January 14, 1953.

⁶² Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, May 13, 1953.

⁶³ Elizabeth Wright, on behalf of O'Grady, Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, January 4, 1954.

Over the following month, O’Grady recovered at the hospital run by the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine, where “the physical and emotional needs of each patient are studied, and remedial treatments given, as a means of rehabilitation.”⁶⁴ For the first time since becoming Strachan House’s matron in 1947, O’Grady had time to rest and recuperate, and within an environment suited to her sensibilities. Situated on thirty acres just north of the city limits, the newly expanded hospital was surrounded by gardens, and patients were encouraged to enjoy the fresh air, and to socialize with others. There were sun decks and sun rooms, and a large terrace. There was the hospital’s chapel, “an integral part of the hospital life,” and open at all times for “private prayer and meditation.” Moreover, the sisters did all the nursing, and O’Grady, recovering from some unnamed medical event, sought rehabilitation among them, in a hospital founded on treating the “whole person.”⁶⁵

When O’Grady returned to Strachan House, she discovered that “while I was in hospital 3 of our old ladies that had been with us died, Mrs. Fare, Mrs. Reith, and Bessie Longman.” Mrs. Wood had taken to bed with shingles, and Mrs. Godfrey had begun to accuse the staff of stealing her Christmas presents.⁶⁶ The home stirred with the traditional buzz of problems and complications, including the “maid problem,” as O’Grady would later term it, which, by that point, was becoming acute.⁶⁷ But the residents were stepping up where and when they could, helping the workers with the home’s general operation. She began to report more frequently on their work. In the summer of 1954, Wright, completing

⁶⁴ *When Convalescence is Urgently Needed, St. John’s Convalescent Hospital Will Provide it* (St. John’s Convalescent Hospital, Newtonbrook, Ontario, 1955), Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine Fonds, M80-16, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto. See also Laura Harris, ed., *A Journey Just Begun: The Story of an Anglican Sisterhood* (Toronto: Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, 2015), 68, 84.

⁶⁵ Harris, *A Journey Just Begun*, 40.

⁶⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 10, 1954.

⁶⁷ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, November 9, 1955.

the Superintendent's Report on O'Grady's behalf, reported that "when anything goes wrong, we go to Mr. Wiltshire."⁶⁸

Workers came to rely more heavily on residents, and over the following years, the line between resident and worker became increasingly indistinct. Residents stepped in to fulfil a variety of working roles. In O'Grady's view, residents offered their assistance freely. "I have found certain of the residents," the matron relayed to the committee of management, "both men and women – very helpful on occasions when we were short of staff."⁶⁹ The work itself had a gendered quality: men performed tasks and repairs that were physically demanding and required strength; women did light housekeeping and offered care to the sick. Mrs. Mee and Mrs. Thompson "were a great help to Miss Wright while she had no maid relieving her," washing residents' trays and "helping in other ways where they could."⁷⁰ Miss Jellyman, who was in bed recovering from a heart attack, was assisted by fellow resident, Mrs. Lloyd, "when the nurses had to be relieved for meals."⁷¹ Mrs. Boyes frequently assisted Mrs. Henderson, who had difficulty walking.⁷² When Miss Holton grew increasingly "helpless," Mrs. Drew sat endlessly at her bedside, and if it were not for her kindness, O'Grady warned, "it would be very difficult to care for her."⁷³

Mr. Fox and Mr. Wiltshire began relieving Harry when he went on his annual holiday, receiving the same rate of pay as the home's trusted houseman.⁷⁴ O'Grady also began to request that Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox be compensated for building handmade furniture for the home, and the committee obliged, providing the two residents with

⁶⁸ E. Wright, Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, July 14, 1954.

⁶⁹ Ibid., September 15, 1954.

⁷⁰ Ibid., December 21, 1955.

⁷¹ Ibid., June 8, 1955.

⁷² Ibid., February 9, 1955.

⁷³ Ibid., November 9, 1958.

⁷⁴ Relieving Harry over his annual holiday became routine for Mr. Wiltshire. See for example, Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, September 23, 1953, September 21, 1955, September 12, 1956.

amounts between \$10 and \$17 each, per cupboard.⁷⁵ The work of women residents was not similarly put forth as deserving of monetary compensation, mostly because their contribution was not acknowledged as work. While women received O’Grady’s gestures of gratitude, Mr. Wiltshire and Mr. Fox received remuneration, often at O’Grady’s urging. “Miss O’Grady wondered if some recognition could be given Mr. Wiltshire,” one member suggested, “for all the many things he does for the home.”⁷⁶ Male residents also voluntarily performed traditionally female gendered tasks, such as housecleaning. Mr. Wiltshire took on tasks that maids found too physically strenuous, such as waxing the floors. Mr. Wiltshire helped Emma, the main floor maid with the difficult task, which, according to O’Grady, “means a great deal to her as she is not at all strong.”⁷⁷ Mr. Wiltshire was “untiring in his efforts” at assisting Hilda, a 62-year-old maid, with her daily duties, especially the physically demanding “waxing and polishing.”⁷⁸

The mid to late 1950s were particularly difficult for the home’s workers, helping to explain why men and women residents frequently stepped into their roles. In 1955, the committee conceded that the maid problem was “acute,” and that the “tenure of employment” was of “short duration.”⁷⁹ As Joan Sangster explains, women increasingly turned to jobs in finance, trade, and service, and more than half worked in ten occupations (for instance, clerks, typists, waitresses). Personal domestic service was a last resort for many women workers, and the federal government turned to labour recruitment from the

⁷⁵ See for example, Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 8, 1956, April 10, 1957.

⁷⁶ O’Grady’s earliest requests were met with small gestures from the committee, in this case, the committee gave Mr. Wiltshire \$10 in appreciation. See Strachan Houses Committee of Management meeting, December 16, 1953.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, September 15, 1954.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1955.

⁷⁹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management, November 9, 1955.

Caribbean and Europe in order to fill job vacancies.⁸⁰ “There has been a certain amount of trouble with the maids,” one member remarked again in 1956, “which seems to be a chronic situation all over.”⁸¹ Between 1954 and 1957, twenty-three resigned their positions in the home, and a minimum of eight were dismissed. “We have had four maids on the third floor since Amanda Anderson left,” O’Grady wrote in the fall of 1954, “the first one was a drug addict, the second stayed only two or three days and was found not suitable, the third, after working a day or two, simply packed her things and walked out and next day called by phone to say the work was too hard and the hours too long.”⁸² Margaret, a maid who worked on the main floor, was reported for drinking, “it happened just after pay day.”⁸³

The home had trouble both attracting and keeping its domestic workers, and a diversity of women were employed as a result, not the traditionally young, single, white women of years before. The home’s first Black maid, Jane Anne Fletcher, was hired in 1956. “We now have a coloured maid,” O’Grady confided to the committee, adding that, “she is a member of St. Barnabas church.”⁸⁴ Old women, including widows, were routinely found among the home’s staff, a seemingly invisible demographic in the historiography of women’s postwar labour.⁸⁵ Violet McNaughton, hired in 1955, “was employed here for a short time in 1948 before her marriage,” O’Grady observed, but “she is a widow now.”⁸⁶ Widowhood, as

⁸⁰ Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 20. In the previous decade, the Canadian state also recruited, disciplined, and contracted Indigenous women for domestic service work. Some worked in private homes, non-Indian hospitals, tourist resorts, and homes for old people. See Mary Jane McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History: 1940-1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 24-25.

⁸¹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, February 8, 1956.

⁸² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 9, 1954.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, October 12, 1955.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1956.

⁸⁵ Historians have tended to focus on nuclear families, working mothers, and family politics. For examples, see Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 16; Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 222; Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*; Fahrni, *Household Politics*; Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*; Doug O’wram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 6.

⁸⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 9, 1955.

Struthers explains, was a “fast track to pauperism for elderly females, as the predominance of women in the urban refuges indicates.” But older women confronted dismal prospects in the labour market as well, employing numerous strategies of economic survival as a result, from domestic chores such as washing and sewing, to taking in boarders if they owned property.⁸⁷ In Ontario, over 45,000 elderly people lived alone, “two-thirds of whom were women. “Among all the aged, single women were by far the most vulnerable to poverty.”⁸⁸

While old women were regularly hired as domestic workers at Strachan House, many eventually proved unfit for the job’s long hours and gruelling labour. Reports of drunken maids, insubordinate maids, or maids not strong enough to perform the job were commonplace.⁸⁹ Of one worker O’Grady wrote, “her memory is gone almost completely – she could not remember from one day to another what was told to her.”⁹⁰ Another was “over sixty years of age,” and “not a well person.” She left shortly after being hired.⁹¹ Ida Rutherford was a “splendid person,” but found the “duty downstairs difficult,” and had a rheumatic hip.⁹² At least two maids were apparently so hard of hearing that they could not hear the doorbell.⁹³ One maid quit because “the stairs are too much.”⁹⁴ Others routinely advised O’Grady that the work was too “strenuous,” or that it made them “nervous.”⁹⁵ Others left for more money. Receiving only \$55 a month at Strachan House, Eunice Taplin gave her notice, advising that she had been offered \$100 a month to work in a private

⁸⁷ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 60.

⁸⁸ Struthers, “Grizzled Old Men and Lonely Widows,” 362.

⁸⁹ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, October 12, 1955.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1957.

⁹² *Ibid.*, September 11, 1957.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1952, January 15, 1958.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, January 23, 1952.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1957, September 11, 1957.

home.⁹⁶ The complaint of one maid, that “the work was too hard and the hours too long,” provides a succinct summary of why the majority of maids left.

The economic hardship faced by many older Ontarians changed the face of Strachan House workers. Old women toiled as domestic workers, performing duties that even young workers found physically difficult, and under the supervision of a matron who valued both quality of work, and speed.⁹⁷ That explains why some residents, including Mr. Wiltshire, attempted to assist an increasing number of older workers with the more physically demanding parts of their job. Workers not only faced long hours, but were remarkably susceptible to injury, including falls, broken bones, and burns.⁹⁸ A variety of factors were at play: an array of potentially hazardous staircases; a gas stove in need of repair; the strictest expectations in regards to cleanliness; a surge of older workers; and long hours leading to physical exhaustion. Elizabeth Marr “fractured her wrist while waxing the floor,” and had to be taken to the Western Hospital for treatment.⁹⁹ Another worker “fell down three steps and broke her arm.”¹⁰⁰ Accidents and injury became so frequent that the committee made an application to the Workmen’s Compensation Board, and staff “officially” received coverage as of April 1955.¹⁰¹ Coverage under the scheme was gendered and exclusionary, making the home’s application for coverage appear all but redundant. As Robert Storey has shown, the Workmen’s Compensation Board was preoccupied mainly with the “dangerous trades.” Coverage, for example, did not extend to “domestics in private homes, textile work in sweatshops, office work, education, and health.” “Given the exclusion of these

⁹⁶ In 1956, in order to attract a “higher calibre of girl,” Strachan House offered new maids \$55 per month, up from \$50. See *Ibid.*, April 11, 1956, May 1, 1957.

⁹⁷ When Margaret Pratt replaced Alex, O’Grady commented of the new maid: “...so far I am favourably impressed, she seems much faster than Alex.” See *Ibid.*, November 18, 1953.

⁹⁸ For examples, see *Ibid.*, November 19, 1952, January 12, 1955, May 1, 1957, November 9, 1958.

⁹⁹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, November 13, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 19, 1952.

¹⁰¹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, April 13, 1955.

occupations,” Storey writes, “the name workmen’s compensation was not a misnomer.”¹⁰² After Etta Gardiner “took a dizzy spell and fell down a short flight of stairs...breaking her right arm,” O’Grady conceded that the maid would “not be able to continue her work here.” She was relieved of her duties. Jean Ellis was brought on to replace her.¹⁰³

The committee of management attempted, imperfectly, to address workers’ long working hours. Mrs. Wells, an outspoken committee member, pushed for an eight-hour work day as early as 1954, and was adamant that her views be “recorded in the minutes.” Her appeal was heard at the same time as O’Grady’s hospitalization, and chairwoman of the committee of management, Mrs. Bond, agreed that a “a system could be worked out to put the staff on an eight-hour basis.”¹⁰⁴ But it was not until November of 1955 that another supervisor was brought on to the staff permanently, “through the kindness of the committee,” wrote O’Grady, “in order to permit us to have better working hours.”¹⁰⁵ However, while Ontario’s *Hours of Work and Vacations with Pay Act* of 1944, “reduced hours of work standards to eight per day and 48 per week,” a number of “exceptions and special provisions were built into the Act, ensuring that employers could exceed the new hours standards.”¹⁰⁶ As late as October of 1957, the eight-hour day had not come into effect at Strachan House, and workers received little time off.¹⁰⁷ When Miss Broadbent took a leave

¹⁰² The Ontario Workmen’s Compensation Act was passed in 1915, due to the “pressures and turmoil of the times.” It was not until 1982, in response to challenges to the scheme’s gender and racial dimensions, that the name “Workmen’s Compensation Act” was officially changed to “Worker’s Compensation Act.” See Robert Storey, “From Invisibility to Equality? Women Workers and the Gendering of Workers’ Compensation in Ontario, 1900-2005,” *Labour* 64 (2009): 79, 83.

¹⁰³ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, October 20, 1958.

¹⁰⁴ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, January 13, 1954.

¹⁰⁵ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 9, 1955.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Thomas, “Setting the Minimum: Ontario’s Employment Standards in the Postwar Years, 1944-1968,” *Labour* 54 (Fall 2004): 65-66.

¹⁰⁷ While Strachan House workers received only a half day off per week, annual vacations were written into the bylaws. The home’s matron received one month off annually, while supervisors received two weeks off, and three weeks after they had accumulated three years of service. Maids’ time off is not listed explicitly, though the reports suggest they received two weeks off per year. For example, see Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, June 10, 1953.

of absence in 1957, her replacement “flew into a terrible rage...complaining about the heavy work, the long hours, and the only half day off a week. She had been used to an eight hour day,” wrote O’Grady, “and a whole day off each week.” Ultimately, O’Grady relieved the worker of her duties, but only after “she was most insulting to me personally.” “She knew what the hours were when she took the work over so it was hard to understand why the terrible temper.”¹⁰⁸

In circumstances such as these, residents fulfilled important daily duties, clearing trays, washing dishes, polishing the floors, and assisting fellow residents. But how did residents manage this? If increasing numbers of old workers proved unfit for the demands of domestic service, how did elderly residents manage with workers’ duties? Residents, for one thing, did not face the same number of duties, pressures, or hours that workers did. Residents, nonetheless—and male residents in particular—heard mixed messages from the home. They were routinely rewarded for being active and physically capable because they relieved staff pressures; on the other hand, physical health and manual labour could set male residents apart, calling into question their suitability as residents in the home. As caretakers, gardeners, carpenters, and jacks-of-all-trades, men could appear ill-suited to the home for old people. O’Grady was overcome with gratitude for the extra help in one minute, and bewildered the next. “As Mr. Fox is fit, and has a family,” she surmised in 1954, “he should be asked to find accommodation elsewhere.” At issue was Mr. Fox’s room, which was better suited to a couple than to a single man.¹⁰⁹ Male residents were not always as “fit” as they let on, however, but pushed to keep up as best as possible. Even if they were generally perceived as healthy compared to their female counterparts, they were not immune to

¹⁰⁸ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, October 8, 1957.

¹⁰⁹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, October 13, 1954.

sickness, disability, and injury. Mr. Wiltshire, whose employers abruptly discontinued his pension in 1952, continued to work “tirelessly” around the home, despite asthma (“his old trouble”) and chronic throat and ear pain.¹¹⁰

Mr. Fox was ultimately allowed to stay, but not before considerable discussion and debate took place. As he explained to O’Grady, he “could not go to his family as all the bedrooms are needed”; there were also “young children there” which he found difficult to cope with at his age. He preferred to stay where he was.¹¹¹ Women residents did not face the same kind of arbitrary ill-treatment, their suitability as residents never called into question on account of good health or available family support. Moreover, their “extra help” did not warrant the special attention so often ascribed to male residents’ labour. Light housekeeping and tending the sick were not seen as extraordinary tasks; they were compatible, it was thought, with older women’s largely idle lives. Men, on the other hand, found themselves in a highly feminized space, where their inclination to work was not only celebrated, but encouraged. It was Mr. Fox’s good health that prompted O’Grady to invoke long-standing beliefs about families’ moral obligation to support their kin.¹¹² Although he was a relatively active, independent resident, however, neither O’Grady nor the committee of management appeared to take Mr. Fox’s wishes into account during their deliberations. The committee of management finally fell back on the by-laws in arriving at their decision. Quoting from the Bond of Agreement (signed when residents moved in), a committee member reminded her

¹¹⁰ Mr. Wiltshire’s worker’s pension was abruptly discontinued when the universal OAS pension was introduced. In 1955, a throat specialist diagnosed the resident with a “heavy inward goitre.” See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 9, 1955, June 11, 1958.

¹¹¹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, October 13, 1954.

¹¹² Filial responsibility legislation, enacted in Ontario in 1921, was founded on the belief that families were morally bound to financially support their aging parents. Those living in state-operated old age homes, for instance, rarely had family with the means of caring for them. The legislation allowed dependent parents to legally seek support payments from children. See Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 79. See also Edgar-André Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government? State Responsibilities, Family Obligations, and the Care of the Dependent Aged in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen’s University Press, 1997).

colleagues that “when a person is taken into Strachan House automatically there is established a definite responsibility towards the person.” The matter was dropped.¹¹³

If residents, such as Mr. Fox, could at times fill the role of workers, workers could also become residents. As more old women entered Strachan House as domestic workers, their names began to appear on the home’s long waiting list for admission, and a select few became residents. Bessie Longman, a former maid, moved into the home in February of 1952.¹¹⁴ Her colleague, Annie Griffiths, became a resident in July of the same year.¹¹⁵ Other Strachan House residents, including Sarah Peasgood, continued to work in domestic service in Toronto institutions, though as a “supply,” or temporary worker. Despite worsening arthritis, Peasgood, who was also the chapel’s organist, supplied for Georgina House in the summer of 1956.¹¹⁶

In the fall of 1957, two long-time workers grew ill: the houseman, Harry, and Broadbent, the cook. For brief periods they fluctuated precariously between worker and resident status. Harry took ill “with a chill.” “We did what we could for him as he did not wish a Doctor,” wrote O’Grady, “but during the night he became gravely ill and had the most terrific pain.” The culprit, on closer inquiry, was “prostate gland trouble,” for which he had been “treating himself and got infection.” When a doctor was eventually summoned, Harry refused treatment, preferring instead “some very expensive capsules as well as a heavy sedative.” It was one of very few occasions he had been waited on, a rare moment when he was off his feet. Workers were sent running to his bedside. Despite the doctor’s warnings that his condition was “very serious,” he was reportedly up very shortly thereafter, adamant

¹¹³ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, November 10, 1954.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, February 28, 1952.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, July 9, 1952.

¹¹⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 20, 1956.

he get back to work. “He has been going around ever since,” O’Grady wrote in awe. But “this is the second attack,” she went on, “and we think he does not look well.”¹¹⁷

Broadbent’s illness proved the most striking example of a worker’s shift to resident status. According to O’Grady, when the cook finally sought medical attention in October of 1957, “her great loss of weight shocked her own Doctor.”¹¹⁸ After surgery for cancer the doctor informed O’Grady that Broadbent “might live for three years and on the other hand, she might go suddenly.”¹¹⁹ Despite the grim prognosis, Broadbent was determined to resume her duties at Strachan House, and returned in November, “presenting a letter from the Doctor to the effect that she could resume her work.” O’Grady and the committee of management welcomed the cook back heartily, but remained secretly wary. “I feel she will not be able to carry on for long,” wrote O’Grady, “she is a tragic looking figure.”¹²⁰ After a month, O’Grady reported that the cook was eating very little and “working under great difficulty.”¹²¹ The “reliable kitchen maid,” Katherine Martilla, was working each day, “including Sunday” to relieve the pressure, and was offered “more money for added responsibility.”¹²² It became increasingly clear that Broadbent was suffering terribly, even with extra help, and the committee of management moved to give the cook “priority as a resident if she found it impossible to carry on.”¹²³ The committee of management “does not like to see her struggling,” remarked one member, expressing her wish that Broadbent cease working as soon as possible. Members moved her to the top of the waiting list, breaking a rule they typically obeyed without question.¹²⁴ In January Broadbent finally conceded that

¹¹⁷ Ibid., September 11, 1957.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., October 8, 1957.

¹²⁰ Ibid., November 12, 1957.

¹²¹ Ibid., December 18, 1957.

¹²² Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, October 9, 1957.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., November 13, 1957.

“she could not do the work any longer,” and O’Grady hired a new cook. Broadbent officially became a resident. She stayed only until the beginning of February, before leaving permanently to live with her sister.¹²⁵

Play

It might have been difficult to attract and retain workers throughout the 1950s, and residents might have greatly assisted in keeping the home afloat. Residents did far more than work, however. O’Grady and the committee organized regular entertainments, from musical guests to car rides. Sometimes the residents took a boat trip on the “Sam McBride.”¹²⁶ Church groups sent tickets to the Royal Alexander, the Royal Winter Fair, the Exhibition, and the ballet.¹²⁷ Community theatre groups sent tickets to dress rehearsal performances.¹²⁸ There were various Christmas concerts, a trip to see Cinderella at Eaton’s Auditorium in one year, and Peter Pan the next.¹²⁹ A variety of formal outings and events were carefully planned and executed. Yet it was largely in the home’s private, informal social gatherings that residents and workers marked each other and their space, by drawing on a shared history, by nurturing friendship bonds, and by engaging with the outside world.

Where before a good “inmate” was one who “conformed to the rules and regulations of the institution, worked hard and co-existed peacefully with other residents,” by the postwar period residents were expected to be sociable. As Davies explains, ideal residents were “willing and able to participate in therapeutic and recreational activities.”¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Ibid., May 1, 1958.

¹²⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, June 11, 1952.

¹²⁷ Ibid., December 15, 1953, February 1, 1958, September 8, 1958.

¹²⁸ Ibid., May 11, 1955.

¹²⁹ Ibid., January 14, 1953, January 4, 1954.

¹³⁰ Megan Davies, “Renovating the Canadian Old Age Home: The Evolution of Residential Care Facilities in B.C., 1930-1960,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 172.

Events and recreation were nothing new at Strachan House. But over the decade they began to look different. As before, Christian holidays were significant events in the home's annual calendar. For Easter service the chapel was cleaned and decorated by Harry, and gifts sent to the residents by various church groups.¹³¹ The Reverend Moore Smith "very kindly had Holy Communion for us at eight o'clock on Christmas morning," said O'Grady, rearranging his own services "so that he could come on that morning."¹³² The committee organized Bible study periods during Lent.¹³³ The home's residents, however, did not unanimously participate in Christian traditions and offerings. There were "eighteen at the first meeting and they all found [Rev. Smith's] talk very interesting and helpful," O'Grady reported to the committee of management.¹³⁴ On other occasions, she told the committee that, while bible study had been conducted every Wednesday, there were "not many residents interested."¹³⁵ At one time Reverend Smith asked O'Grady for "confirmation candidates," but was advised by the matron that "as Strachan Houses is an Inter-denominational Home this subject is not to be pressed."¹³⁶ The holidays had a solid Christian foundation, but other influences were employed to mark the occasions.

Aside from the formalities of chapel service and bible study, the home celebrated holidays with communal dinners, musical entertainment, and visits with clergy and other friends of the home. In 1953, Mabel Cartwright, then eighty-three, joined the residents for their annual Christmas party.¹³⁷ Mr. Hunter played the part of Santa Claus (year after year), while Mr. Wiltshire "looked after getting our Christmas tree up and decorated."¹³⁸ On other

¹³¹ For example, see Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, April 9, 1958.

¹³² Ibid., January 9, 1957.

¹³³ Ibid., March 14, 1956.

¹³⁴ Ibid., March 13, 1957.

¹³⁵ Ibid., September 11, 1957.

¹³⁶ Ibid., March 13, 1957.

¹³⁷ Ibid., January 4, 1954.

¹³⁸ Ibid., December 17, 1952.

occasions O'Grady and the residents ventured to outside Christmas parties and functions, where they were "warmly welcomed" and entertained. Of one dinner, O'Grady remarked that the tables had been "gaily decorated for the occasion," and the residents given "the most delicious turkey dinner. After dinner, Mr. Lark, the Rector, showed two excellent films," she wrote, adding, "it was one of the happiest evenings we have ever spent."¹³⁹

During the holidays, the home's list of donations swelled, as well-wishers sent everything from biscuits, candy, and ice cream, to canned goods. It enabled the home to serve an elaborate meal, and O'Grady, documenting it all in detail for the committee of management, described a traditional family celebration: "It was a lovely dinner," she wrote of one year, "we had tomato juice, turkey, potatoes, peas, cranberry sauce, Christmas pudding, candy and Christmas crackers." Overwhelmed by a surfeit of food, Broadbent rushed each holiday to make "good use of everything."¹⁴⁰ O'Grady's friend, Kate Sparkett, "sent the sum of \$10 to be used for the Home in any way I wished." Residents too donated items and money to the home at Christmastime. Miss Jellyman, for instance, "donated \$10 for the Christmas turkey," while another resident "gave a large bottle of liquor for our medicine chest."¹⁴¹ They found all means to contribute. Miss Holton gave a poetry reading about Jimmy, the home's budgie, before a highly attentive audience. "It pleased everybody as he is such a beloved member of our family," wrote O'Grady. After the residents had finished their dinner, they "insisted on having Miss Broadbent and Agnes come in afterwards, so that they could express their appreciation with a hearty hand clap."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ibid., December 15, 1954.

¹⁴⁰ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, October 13, 1954.

¹⁴¹ Miss Jellyman was a remarkably generous resident. Aside from donating money at Christmastime, she also donated ice cream and cake for Thanksgiving dinner. She replaced the chapel's prayer books. See for example, Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, December 15, 1954, October 14, 1953.

¹⁴² Ibid., December 15, 1954, January 4, 1954.

Other formal gatherings included scheduled recreation, usually provided by a community or church group (the WA, the Kiwanis Club), which arrived to entertain the home's residents. They came to socialize and drink tea. On other evenings they played games, put on plays, or performed music. On these occasions the residents sat like spectators in the communal living room, the chairs all lined up in a row. Church choirs were a regular feature: St. Michael's, Wesley United, or All Angels.¹⁴³ Sometimes Mrs. Phillips brought her concertina and Mrs. Frisbee sang.¹⁴⁴

Over time, the entertainment changed. It was not only Brownies and Girl Guides, or young musical groups and choirs who came in the spirit of service and charity. Old men and women began to arrive too, lugging their decorative costumes and instruments through the front door, and turning the Strachan House living room into a temporary stage. As groups like Eunice Dyke's Second Mile Club (collectives of old men and women who got together to work, make friends, develop new interests, and serve the community) became increasingly popular, social gathering was more readily viewed as an antidote for loneliness by old people themselves.¹⁴⁵ New friendships and interests in old age were more widely appreciated, and even celebrated. There was a group of fourteen elderly women under the direction of Mrs. Moore, who called themselves the Gay 70s. "They love," O'Grady smiled, "to entertain senior citizens being senior citizens."¹⁴⁶ There was Mr. J. Lee, who went by the far more interesting stage name, The Wandering Minstrel of St. Jude's.¹⁴⁷ By the time O'Grady's reports abruptly ended in late 1958, old performers were becoming a more regular fixture on

¹⁴³ Ibid., May 19, 1954.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., November 19, 1952.

¹⁴⁵ The Second Mile Club was founded by Eunice Dyke in 1937. See "The Second Mile Club of Toronto," Eunice Dyke Fonds, 294, File 8, City of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

¹⁴⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent's Reports, April 9, 1958.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., October 20, 1958.

these nights, bringing music and theatre, and leading the residents in song and dance. “It was a splendid programme,” wrote O’Grady of the Gay 70s. “They were a ‘care free fun making group’ and everybody had a good time.”¹⁴⁸

Progressive for the era, recreation became a powerful tool in old age homes of the period,¹⁴⁹ an attempt to provide what families could no longer, a sense of home amidst growing institutionalization. There was something exceedingly paternalistic in the offer of entertainment, however, the assumption that old men and women not only needed entertaining, but were somehow ill-equipped to provide it for themselves. The emergence of older performers challenged these assumptions, because the “entertainment” was now led by one’s peers, and was interactive. The new championing of activity and recreation was far from amenable to everyone, especially those residents largely confined to their rooms. Games, music, and fun were not a social balm for all. Either by choice, or on account of the stairs, some residents attempted to sit these evenings out.¹⁵⁰ Entertainers and well-wishers attempted to involve all of the residents, however, sometimes filing up the stairs to bring the “show” to residents on the upper floors. Miss Wright observed that one entertaining group “took great pleasure in going around to the rooms of the residents who had not come down.”¹⁵¹

Forays beyond the home seemed only to highlight the residents’ collective identity. Whether it was to celebrate a religious holiday, or to attend or participate in a scheduled recreation, one’s membership in the home was synonymous with charity. Residents who

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., April 9, 1958.

¹⁴⁹ James Struthers, “‘A Nice Homelike Atmosphere’: State Alternatives to Family Care for the Aged in Post World War II Ontario,” in *Family Matters: Papers in post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, eds. Lorene Anne Chambers & Edgar-André Montigny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 160. See also Davies, “Renovating the Canadian Old Age Home,” 160.

¹⁵⁰ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, February 9, 1955.

¹⁵¹ O’Grady once remarked that “the residents who came down seemed to enjoy it very much.” See Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, January 4, 1954.

accepted invitations to Christmas parties were doted on like children, given warm meals and gifts, all while the charitable hosts gushed exuberantly over their needy elderly guests. One Christmas, after the residents had finished dinner, “Santa Claus appeared,” and called each resident up “by name to the platform to receive a gift from off the Christmas Tree.”¹⁵² It was not uncommon for the home to receive “white gifts” as well, anonymous packages dressed all in white, addressed to no one and anyone at all.¹⁵³ Elderly recipients of aid were in ways like this viewed as anonymous members of a distinct social group; like children, their age (or stage of life) worked to conceal their personhood, their capacity to act freely. If age dampened one’s individuality, membership in Strachan House all but snuffed it out.

Select residents’ resistance to sociable functions suggests a more complex reading of the advent of greater activities in old age homes, zoning in on how residents themselves responded to the new amenities. Recreation was not one-dimensional (an offer or service), but a choice. Yet O’Grady liked to fawn over the thoughtfulness of well-wishers, eager to relay residents’ collective gratitude: “The little packages were so attractively done up,” she wrote at Easter, “it was a pleasure to see the packages being opened – each one eager to show the other what they had got.”¹⁵⁴ “We had the usual good dinner,” O’Grady recalled of the holiday season, “and afterwards we all went into the Living Room where it took me almost two hours to distribute the gifts that had come to us so generously from different persons and groups. Each one went out loaded with parcels.”¹⁵⁵

These marks of generosity were not insignificant, and many of the residents benefited from such gestures. Genuine moments of community are hard to capture in such

¹⁵² Ibid., December 15, 1954.

¹⁵³ Ibid., January 14, 1953.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., April 9, 1958.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., January 9, 1957.

offerings, however, partly because the home's formal events were the exception. Broadbent did not have the luxury of so much food or variety on ordinary days. Residents were not so highly visible to benefactors day-to-day. The smaller daily moments, informal and fleeting, capture more of the ordinariness that made up the bulk of residents' time.

The introduction of a Motorola Television in 1953 – a gift from the WA – provided residents with a thoroughly new and captivating form of entertainment. As it did for many households of the day, it became a portal to the outside world. In June of the same year residents awoke promptly at 5 a.m., and, sitting in cramped rows of borrowed chairs, they joined the workers in the living room to watch the coronation of Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey. The entire home was utterly absorbed by the day's events, O'Grady recalled, which were broadcast on CBC television. "Tea was served to the Residents and all the Staff in the Livingroom," so that "everyone could see the pictures, they were really very good." Later, she remarked that "the television was on most of the day."¹⁵⁶

Residents and workers tuned in to watch other broadcasts of importance, such as the Remembrance Day Ceremony in Ottawa. "On such occasions we always set out chairs so they may be seated comfortably," wrote O'Grady. "We are so grateful to have our television" she went on. "It means so much to many of our residents who are unable to get out very often." Residents who could not stand for hours on end could now watch the broadcast of Eaton's Santa Claus Parade.¹⁵⁷ Others, such as Miss Steel, had an excuse to linger in the company of others. "I must say it is giving a good deal of pleasure," O'Grady remarked of the television, "particularly to Miss Steel, who has always gone to bed shortly

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., June 10, 1953.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., December 21, 1955.

after supper.”¹⁵⁸ When the television needed repair in 1956, O’Grady reported: “it is missed when it’s not working.”¹⁵⁹

The television offered both entertainment and social connectedness, especially for those who rarely left the home. In a similar vein, drives were a favourite resident pastime, another way to connect to the world beyond the home, to relax and have fun, and to do so unrestricted by the bonds of the home. Mrs. Messervy, a committee member who was often absent from the meetings, had nonetheless endeared herself to the residents. She would arrive in her car, inviting residents out for long drives throughout the city. Sometimes they stopped somewhere for dinner.¹⁶⁰ Other friends dropped by with similar invitations, taking residents “to see the blossoms,”¹⁶¹ or for “a drive around the City.” Mr. Fraser attempted to take as many in his car as who wished to go, and twenty-three took him up on it. They left in small groups at one time, reporting “a lovely drive” on their return.¹⁶²

Residents regularly visited with, and entertained each other, free from the tether of heavy scheduling and fundraisers. After Mr. Dane died, Mrs. Mee and Mr. Fox took over the gardening enthusiastically.¹⁶³ Mrs. Boyes and several other residents enjoyed long walks through Trinity Park.¹⁶⁴ O’Grady reported that a night of impromptu hat making had turned into “one of the happiest evenings we had had.” Residents sang songs, played games, and served refreshments. A competition was held for the best hat, and there was “a grand march at the end displaying the millinery – even Miss Steel was able to enter into the fun much to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., January 4, 1954.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., December 19, 1956.

¹⁶⁰ For a few examples, see Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 19, 1952, February 11, 1953, September 23, 1953, October 13, 1954.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., May 11, 1955.

¹⁶² Ibid., June 11, 1952.

¹⁶³ Ibid., May 13, 1953.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., April 9, 1958.

the amusement of everybody.” Mrs. Drew and Mr. Henry “took the prizes,” O’Grady recalled. They had “the best creative idea according to the judges.”¹⁶⁵

Other spontaneous acts encouraged social interaction. After the home’s annual bazaar, an event that brought over eighty guests “to see Strachan Houses and have tea,” Dr. Cruise appeared with “a case of beer for the residents,” perhaps sensing they had earned it.¹⁶⁶ Miss Jellyman liked to surprise her fellow residents with ice cream and cake.¹⁶⁷ Mr. Wiltshire, likewise, “treated all the residents to Ice Cream on his birthday.”¹⁶⁸ Residents’ gifts of food could become a retreat from Broadbent’s cooking, which, according to O’Grady, was not always wonderful. When the cook went on holidays, residents’ “spirits” often improved.¹⁶⁹ For the in-between moments, small acts, such as gifts of food and drink, became tokens of mutual understanding, an acknowledgment of shared experience.

Residents additionally connected to each other through a shared past at Strachan House. Several long-time residents recognized the home in their wills, paying tribute to the place where they had lived for many years. One resident, dying in in 1944, acknowledged Strachan House as her “good home” since 1926.¹⁷⁰ Others, including Miss Jellyman, left money to the home after their deaths.¹⁷¹ In other instances, residents’ sense of ownership and connectedness to the home can be gleaned from reactions to their own place in its history. When chairwoman of the committee, Mrs. Bond, arrived with some “coloured pictures” taken “some time ago,” broadcasting them on a large screen in the home’s living

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., May 11, 1955.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., May 13, 1953.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., October 14, 1953.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., September 21, 1955.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., September 11, 1957.

¹⁷⁰ “Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1944,” Fifty-Ninth Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England and to Diocesan Missions, May 1945, Box 45, File 1, Woman’s Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Anglican General Synod Archives, Toronto, 77.

¹⁷¹ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, July 13, 1955.

room for residents to view, many were “surprised and delighted,” remarked O’Grady. They depicted the home and its residents of some years before, she explained, and some residents, still living in the home, “apparently did not know they had been taken.” They were so pleased with the photos, said O’Grady, that “many expressed the wish that they could be shown again.”¹⁷²

Connectedness was further visible in the home’s collective mourning, apparent when residents and workers died. While Davies is right in suggesting that historians “should not assume that all deaths, or even those of close friends, were necessarily difficult for fellow residents,” Strachan House residents also did not react to death “with acceptance rather than sadness,” as studies of old age have found.¹⁷³ O’Grady’s reports suggest that death was viewed as part of the regular rhythm of the home, yet occupants openly grieved, and were freely permitted to do so. For particularly hard losses, O’Grady reported how residents and workers were coping, defying the suggestion that institutions of the era were not seen as legitimate places for “strong emotional responses to death.”¹⁷⁴ Residents and workers regularly paid their respects to the dead, attending social gatherings, services, and burials together, and updating residents who could not attend memorials in person. When Mr. Dane died, Mrs. McEwan made a special trip to the funeral parlour, advising the others on her return that the long-time resident “looked very nice.”¹⁷⁵ Mr. Crocker’s absence was felt by many in the home in 1953. “We miss him very much,” O’Grady wrote.¹⁷⁶ When Mr. Hannah died, there was a private funeral, but Miss Wright, Mrs. Drew, and Mr. Wilson all managed

¹⁷² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, March 10, 1954.

¹⁷³ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 131. See also Jaber F. Gubrium, *Living and Dying at Murray Manor* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 204; Peter Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales* (London: Routledge, 1962), 96.

¹⁷⁴ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 131.

¹⁷⁵ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, February 11, 1953.

¹⁷⁶ Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, January 14, 1953.

to attend.¹⁷⁷ Long-time resident Miss Steel died in 1957: “Mrs. Mee, Mrs. Jerreat, Mr. Fox and myself went to the funeral parlour at Mimico where the service was held,” the matron reported.¹⁷⁸ When the home’s long-time budgie died, “it was a dreadful shock to all of us who loved him. Miss Holton penned some lovely lines in his memory which you will find on the Board in the Main Hall.”¹⁷⁹ Miss Broadbent died in the spring of 1958, and many in the home attended the funeral. Flowers were sent to her sister on the home’s behalf.¹⁸⁰ When Miss Jellyman died, “as many of us as could go went to the funeral service,” wrote O’Grady, “while a few followed her to her last resting place in Norwood Cemetery.”¹⁸¹

Like death, residents’ expulsion on account of sickness could both threaten and highlight the Strachan House community. Gathering socially during periods of collective grief connected workers and residents, lessening the distinct separation of roles. As observed in the previous chapter, residents who became ill were removed from the home. But eviction did not always spell the permanent separation of residents. Mrs. Henderson, a former resident who had recently “lost the use of her limbs,” and was subsequently evicted from the home, had continued to see her friends and former residents, but in safety of the park, away from the home’s troublesome stairs. Mrs. Boyes, in particular, who still lived in the home, liked to accompany Henderson on long walks. Boyes now stood tall over her seated friend, her hands gripped firmly to the wheelchair’s handles.

Sensing that her friend was missing home, Boyes put a plan in action for “a happy surprise.” One Sunday afternoon, when the friends were due to meet for their scheduled walk, Boyes’ nephew arrived to Strachan House with Henderson in his car. “[Henderson]

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., November 9, 1954.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., January 9, 1957.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., September 21, 1955.

¹⁸⁰ Strachan Houses Committee of Management Meeting, May 14, 1958.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., July 13, 1955.

had no idea she was coming here,” O’Grady later told the committee of management.

Instead of retrieving Henderson’s wheelchair from the trunk, she was lifted from the front seat by the young man, then carried up the steps of Strachan House. Boyes’ and Henderson’s friends, waiting anxiously in the front hall, smiled as she was brought through the door. “She was very bright,” O’Grady relayed, getting the chance to visit with all her old friends. Being back home made her “so happy.”¹⁸²

The social spaces of Strachan House, including their functions, illuminate how occupants’ roles were not fixed, but in a regular state of transformation. The home’s work and domestic terrain had never been distinct, yet by the mid-twentieth century they had become increasingly nebulous. As a result of frequent staff turnover, maid shortages, difficult working conditions, and a tight financial budget, residents and workers adopted new roles. Their fluctuating duties had an impact on the home itself, as occupants built, fixed, and procured items of practical necessity, bringing more privacy and functionality to Strachan House.

While recreation became an important cultural priority in old age homes of the era, residents’ adoption of work (relieving staff pressure, assisting less able residents) became a way of claiming ownership and asserting membership in the home. Older women worked as domestic workers. Residents contributed their labour towards the home’s daily operation.

At the same time, the work of residents and workers was gendered. Male residents were encouraged to work, and were financially compensated. The work of women residents, including caring for residents or relieving staff, was not similarly acknowledged. Observed as finely suited to the home’s domestic spaces, a strong social belief persisted that women were

¹⁸² Strachan Houses Superintendent’s Reports, November 12, 1957.

“vital nurturers” and “homemakers.” Women were also over-represented among institutional staff of the era, reinforcing the link between women and caregiving.¹⁸³ The tasks taken up by women residents were not seen as unusual, but rather the fulfillment of women’s “natural” role. Perceptions of sex differences in the home worked against the male population as well. Being *too* fit and healthy, as in the case of Mr. Fox, could call into question one’s suitability as a resident of the home.

Amidst unfair policies and an overstretched matron, residents and workers worked to form their own community. Entertainments, increasingly offered by older people themselves, began to depart from earlier offerings where residents merely watched or listened. Addressing the house’s physical deterioration became a way for occupants to claim authority over the home. Gifts of food, exchanges of duties, and unplanned social gatherings reveal occupants’ commitment to the home. Taken together, they help to explain how Strachan House was not an instrument of social control, but a shifting, living space, and one where the occupants worked to make it their own.

¹⁸³ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 94.

CONCLUSION

Established by Mabel Cartwright and the Toronto Diocese Women's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (WA), Strachan House promised "consolation of the aged," in a family setting.¹ The establishment of Strachan House reflected a departure from the WA's central mandate of supporting mission work. Stirred by a variety of social welfare challenges, including homelessness, poverty, and unemployment, Cartwright joined fellow educators and Christian reformers in considering how to "make religion count in social work and the present day."² When the WA's social service department committed in 1917 to studying the "social and welfare movements of the day," it exposed a lack of available accommodation for Toronto's "dependent elderly."³ Responding to the era's social challenges, including the problem of old age, brought more religious women into the public sphere after 1920.

In a period when, historians argue, the majority of the institutionalized elderly were "expected to rest, not cause trouble for the matrons and superintendents, and prepare for death,"⁴ Toronto's Strachan House was an exception. Residents prepared their own meals, and husbands and wives were not separated when admitted. The founder's vision of a

¹ A plaque inside the home's entranceway read: "This Home was established to the Glory of God and for the consolation of the aged." See "Annual Report for Strachan Houses – 1950," Sixty-Fifth Annual Report of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England and to Diocesan Missions, May 1951, Woman's Auxiliary Fonds, Diocesan Reports, Box 45, File 1, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 52-55.

² Cartwright, undated, Quiet day notes, 1923-1924, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, F2182, Series, 4, Box 8, File 5, Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

³ Mabel Cartwright, ed., *These Fifty Years, 1886-1936*, Woman's Auxiliary Fonds, Series 18.27, Box 46, File 9, Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives, Toronto, 79.

⁴ James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 55.

“happy” home encouraged self-sufficiency in a healthy, homelike environment.⁵ As members of the Strachan House family, residents became beneficiaries of Cartwright and the WA’s brand of social Christian leadership, its “friendliness, helpfulness, prayer, worship, and service.”⁶ Establishing the home became part of the WA’s larger push to meet the challenges of the modern age, to build, as Cartwright urged her colleagues, a city “which God had chosen.”⁷

Yet Strachan House’s family mission was rife with contradiction. In appearance, the home resembled a private house, the “classic location for both family and private life.”⁸ Eden Smith’s design epitomized the family home, with “public” rooms at the front of the house, and “private” rooms at the back. The elderly residents, like St. Hilda’s students before them, lived, like children, under a head-of-household. The building’s location in Trinity Park, at a safe distance from street traffic, promised shelter and comfort. During the 1920s and 1930s, when the state viewed the family as a vital solution to social problems, the establishment of a family home was the WA’s response to increasing poverty, including the social problem of old age. The result was the creation of a family home that not only underscored perceptions of old age as a time of rest, but also cast residents as vulnerable subjects in need of protection.

In practice, the home’s institutional spaces were concealed under family home aesthetics. Private and public spaces were not distinct. The home’s regulations were publicly displayed. Matrons and maids regularly encroached upon residents’ private spaces in the

⁵ A Cozy Nook in Strachan Houses,” *Globe*, February 16, 1926, 11.

⁶ “What Women are Doing: Christian Example Tremendous Power in Missionary Work,” *Globe*, May 7, 1924, 16.

⁷ President’s Address of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada and to Diocesan Missions, May 1931, Cartwright and Wood Families Fonds, F2182, Series 4, Box 8, File 6, Trinity College Archives, Toronto, 6.

⁸ Leonore Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide:’ Public and Private in British Gender History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no.1 (Spring 2003): 18.

fulfillment of duties. Residents shared bedrooms and washrooms. While annual fundraisers fostered the illusion that residents' worlds were kept "cozy" and private, Strachan House's survival was dependent on public support. Institutional life could become "a battleground between individual and organizational needs."⁹ The rhetoric of the family home and the reality of its institutional setting stood in sharp relief.

The home's original name, the plural Strachan *Houses*, was chosen to reflect the many families that the WA hoped would find a home there, as well as the independence that the married couples—the intended residents—would enjoy. Yet the home's occupants were overwhelmingly single or widowed women who inhabited tight, shared bedrooms. Their private quarters were small, with privacy, until the 1950s, afforded only by the hanging of a curtain down the centre of each bedroom. An elevator was not installed in the three-storey building until 1955. With most of the home's bedrooms on the upper floors, residents with mobility challenges were forced to contend with stairs, or were confined to their rooms. Comfort and safety did not always materialize in the family home.

The home's family was restricted to only the "deserving poor." Worthy applicants were distinguished according to racial, religious, and gendered characteristics. Strachan House was not, as it initially proclaimed, a home "useful to anybody and everybody who might require it,"¹⁰ but conditional on character and background checks. The committee of management alone determined who was worthy of membership in the community. In race, religion, and gender, residents mirrored the committee that selected them, and were largely white, Anglican women of Toronto, and from similar parishes and communities.

⁹ Dianne Willcocks, Sheila Peace, & Leonie Kellaher, *Private Lives in Public Places: A Research-Based Critique of Residential Life in Local Authority Old People's Homes* (London and New York: Tavistock Publication, 1987), 1.

¹⁰ Minutes of Executive and Board Meetings, January 22, 1925, Toronto Diocesan Anglican Churchwomen, Box 1, File 4, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto.

The home's family mantra was regularly undermined by the expulsion of the sick and dying. As a home restricted to the "well and ambulatory," those who fell sick were evicted chiefly because Strachan House was a home for the aged poor, poverty being the key qualification. By championing independence, the home's managers relinquished responsibility for the medical care of residents. The WA's policy towards the sick complemented the home's private atmosphere appearance. Cleanliness and order, the legacies of Victorian modesty, conflicted with bodily excretions, unpleasant odours, and the "indecent of death."¹¹ As perceptions of old age evolved—from a time of rest to a time of increased activity—prevailing attitudes that championed greater equality remained compatible with the WA's decades-old policy of removing the sick. The family home was an ideal setting for occupational therapy, socializing, and entertaining.

As this thesis reveals, Strachan House was also more than its leadership or mission. It was a home filled with diverse people in a range of positions: residents, workers, volunteers, and matrons. Their narratives cast light on the family home from those who lived and worked there. Residents viewed the home as an uncertain space where sickness and injury could result in eviction. Others worried that the home's public image cast them as living on charity, which for most, was not their reality. The home offered a means of engaging publicly in social service for committee of management members, as well as the opportunity to debate new approaches to managing old age institutions. While the home was a site of service for matrons, it was a job that included physically demanding duties for maids, and afforded little time off.

¹¹ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), 568-569. See also Ariès, *L'homme devant la mort* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977).

Strachan House was a living, breathing space, an assemblage of physical and structural components, a specific building with an age and a history. The home itself was an agent; its design and deterioration presented daily challenges for the occupants. From a leaking roof, heating and plumbing issues, and a chimney in disrepair, to broken windows and screens, maintaining the building demanded ongoing financial resources as well as physical labour. While a costly renovation to fireproof the home took place in 1951, the building remained generally unsafe for aging residents and overstretched workers. With steep stairwells, upper-floor bedrooms, loose carpet and hallways and bathrooms without handrails, injuries due to falls were commonplace. The building was an obstacle course that hindered mobility.

This study poses a challenge to historical interpretations that cast the Canadian old age home as “an instrument of social control.”¹² Erving Goffman’s concept of “total institutions” has been influential for historians of age and aging.¹³ In their separate studies of old age homes, Canadian historians Megan Davies and James Snell have found that the rules, daily schedules, staff governance, and residents’ vulnerability worked together to create a distinct culture that reshaped residents’ understanding of aging, and even of their own identity.¹⁴

If Strachan House can be considered an instrument of social control, it was also a multifaceted space where residents’ lives and roles in the home were neither peripheral nor passive. The home for old people was not only a site of rest or recreation, but also a

¹² Megan Davies, *Into the House of Old: A History of Residential Care in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003); Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Peter Townsend, *Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales* (London: Routledge, 1962).

¹³ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago, 1961), 1-124.

¹⁴ Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage*, 47; Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 11.

workplace. Residents built furniture such as cupboards, walkers, and partitions for bedrooms. They addressed problems that arose in the building, including heating and plumbing problems. In the 1950s, elderly women became a more common feature among the home's domestic working staff. Male residents assumed tasks normally viewed as feminine in their effort to assist maids, scrubbing and polishing the floors. Residents tended to a garden, performed light housekeeping, and assisted other residents in need. Often out of financial necessity, the home's residents and workers worked together to assemble a home to their own liking, constructing items in service to themselves, and the home more generally. Elderly people were workers, fixers, and shapers of Strachan House.

Strachan House presents a revisionist history of the era of postwar reconstruction by underscoring, as Mona Gleason has written, that the period is often falsely construed as “a golden era’ in the history of the family, when prosperity, happiness, innocence, stability and confidence reigned.”¹⁵ Magda Fahrni has argued that a “range and complexity of postwar families” lived in a variety of settings, such as “crowded walk-up apartments and brick triplexes.”¹⁶ Strachan House uncovers a further place of postwar life: the institutional spaces where old people lived communally. The rhetoric of family life, so integral to postwar Ontario, did not preclude the home for old people. Strachan House, like the world around it, was full of contradictions. Programmes, recreations, and entertainments were introduced, while the home struggled financially. Despite postwar progress, including a universal pension, new construction of Homes for the Aged, and suburban developments, the worlds of Strachan House residents remained precarious.

¹⁵ Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 6.

¹⁶ Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 15.

Exploring Strachan House, including the house as an agent, reinforces James Struthers' call to consider the social conditions of old people by prioritizing the "peculiar wrinkles" of local settings.¹⁷ Strachan House was particular to both the setting of Trinity Park in Toronto, and the women's organization that managed the home. The physical structure of the home was as vital to the occupants as the policies that governed them. Yet in contrast to Norma Rudy's *For Such a Time as This*, a study that has emphasized the role of government leadership in contributing to change in residential institutions across Ontario,¹⁸ this thesis canvases how elderly residents themselves lived and traveled through their institutional worlds, and how integral the physical structure was to their practical day-to-day lives. The Strachan House family mission was hampered by a crumbling, unfit building. By exposing the building's failings, their impact on residents, and how occupants intervened, contested, struggled and adapted to them, this project, following the historian Davies, highlights that the history of aging must also be "a feeling and an experience, not a statistic."¹⁹

During the period under study, old people were increasingly recognized as members of a distinct group. An attitude of paternalism toward the residents was pervasive at Strachan House. As James Snell had written in *The Citizen's Wage*, the first half of the twentieth century was marked by foundational changes to Canadian pension legislation, shifting perceptions about old people, and a developing sense of old peoples' own collective self-worth, and their claims on society. Government policy worked to redefine old age, offering financial assistance for the retired, while also reinforcing a belief that old age and paid work

¹⁷ Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 62.

¹⁸ Norma Rudy, *For Such a Time as This: L. Earl Ludlow and a History of Homes for the Aged in Ontario, 1837-1961* (Toronto: Ontario Association of Homes for the Aged, 1987).

¹⁹ Davies, *Into the House of Old*, 13.

were mutually exclusive.²⁰ Snell's analysis has been integral to this study, especially for appreciating the structural changes that old people experienced and how paternalism was closely connected to state action.

At Strachan House, a culture of paternalism toward the elderly was reinforced by residents' poverty and stage of life. While a romanticized conception of aging as a time of rest endured in the 1930s, old age was increasingly seen as a time for greater activities and interests by the 1950s. Not all workers and committee of management members shared these attitudes, however. In the 1950s, matron O'Grady viewed residents as dependent, defenceless, prone to accidents, and in need of management. As an occupational therapist, however, she also championed greater activity and social stimulation in later life, and introduced more programs and entertainments to the home as a result. Others saw old age as inconsequential; by flatly rejecting its negative connotations, committee of management members also adopted an attitude that denied its realities. Still others argued that Strachan House should recognize the limitations of old age by introducing a sick bay to the house. For some, the family home was not incompatible with housing the sick and dying.

The home's multiple narratives represent the home as a *practiced place*, situated, as de Certeau describes, as "the act of a present (or a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts."²¹ The home cannot be understood apart from its myriad occupants and diverse spaces. Its connection to the "old St. Hilda's College," however, is equally important. In following the building's transition from one population of women to another, this thesis further highlights a Christian idealism that connected Mabel Cartwright's roles of educator and Christian reformer, and made the public venture of Strachan House

²⁰ Snell, *The Citizen's Wage*, 220.

²¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

alluring to the WA. For Cartwright, an expanding state provided greater opportunities for religious women in the public sphere. Social scientists had not replaced “the amateur” by the end of the 1920s, while “loudly proclaiming their secular nature.”²² The distinction between religious and secular work was much more tenuous. The WA adopted social service to assert its public role, and social responsibility in new ways. In assessing Strachan House as a social Christian undertaking, this project has joined historians of religion in demonstrating that social reform after the First World War was “far from a secular process.”²³ The WA’s public engagement in social causes only intensified in the years under study. By the mid 1950s, its membership across the Toronto diocese had ballooned to 19,000.²⁴

Cartwright’s intellectual contributions were numerous. As principal of St. Hilda’s and a professor of English at Trinity College, she was an influential mentor to young women. In her social service work as president of the Toronto WA, she encouraged women to engage in municipal politics, serve as school trustees, and sit on social service councils. Cartwright drew from influences in Britain and New York, as well as from St. Hilda’s in devising a plan for Strachan House. Despite the breadth of her contribution in Toronto, Cartwright has been overshadowed by figures such as John Strachan, and by studies exploring myriad ministers, writers, and intellectuals such as Adam Shortt, Stephen Leacock, and O.D. Skelton.²⁵

²² Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 122.

²³ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), xi.

²⁴ At the same meeting that announced the Toronto diocese’s growth in membership to 19,718, WA members voted to “set up a memorial foundation in honor of the late Dr. Cartwright next fall.” See “Life Membership to WA President,” *Globe and Mail*, May 3, 1955.

²⁵ See Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation*; Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark and W.A. Macintosh, 1890-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Norman Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton: A Portrait of Canadian Ambition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

A study of Strachan House spotlights Cartwright's professional influence on thousands of Toronto women. It unmaskes the WA's work in the realm of social service, including the organization's public attempt to fill important gaps in social welfare provision for the aged. Exploring Strachan House not only addresses the peripheral role usually afforded to the WA in the historical scholarship, following Myra Rutherdale, it reveals that women's status within the Anglican Church of Canada "was continually being redefined and contested."²⁶ Adopting social service work represented an emerging leadership opportunity for the WA, and an integral way of meeting the challenges brought by modern life.

Strachan House reflected the religious leadership of the WA, and the social problem of old age that became a significant alternative mission of the women's organization. Strachan House was also an evolving social space of debate, reinvention, contestation, protest, and adaptation. The institution of Strachan House and the family home were always in play. This thesis highlights the active agents that formed the Strachan House mission in practice, including how the residents, workers, volunteers, and matrons challenged authority, adopted non-traditional roles, and advocated for changes to the home and its policies.

²⁶ Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 4.

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