"A PROPER INDEPENDENT SPIRIT":
Working Mothers and the Vancouver City Crèche, 1909–20

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Between 1909 and 1920 the Vancouver crèche served a variety of interests. A group of middle-class women concerned with the city's domestic servant shortage established the crèche in 1909 as a way to tap into a pool of employable mothers. Within a few years, the crèche was absorbed into the municipal welfare bureaucracy, and, by 1914, it was part of the City Health Department, making it the country's first public child care institution that also functioned as an employment bureau for mothers. Through the economic turmoil of the mid-1910s the Vancouver City Crèche was an essential component of the city's relief strategy for working-class families. By the latter part of the decade, amidst a rising tide of enthusiasm for mothers' pensions and a renewed focus on the "problem" of working motherhood, the city's support of the crèche was curtailed. Over the course of these ten years, the Vancouver City Crèche reflected – and helped to reinforce – the shifting ideologies about women, work, and welfare that conditioned the boundaries of social citizenship in early twentieth-century British Columbia.

Vancouver was a rapidly growing and industrializing city in the years between 1909 and 1920. With that growth, however, came a range of problems – including unemployment and poverty – that was exacerbated by an economic recession and Canada's entry into the First World War. These social pressures demanded a more comprehensive approach to welfare and relief. As a result, the 1910s were also marked by a transformation in municipal welfare delivery that included the expansion and increasing centralization of the city's network of social

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services. The crèche was part of this trend, which also covered services to neglected children, deserted wives, the "elderly infirm," and the "sick and convalescent."[1] Whether city residents were considered entitled to these government-supported services, and on what basis, was a reflection of their status as social citizens of this burgeoning local welfare state.

According to political theorist T.H. Marshall, who coined the term in the 1940s, social citizenship includes "the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security," along with "the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society."[2] As gender scholars have pointed out, Marshall's analysis cast that "civilized being" as an independent, white, male family head and did not consider the "sorts of resources a *female* worker might need to achieve equality."[3] Despite the limitations of Marshall's model – and because of the critiques developed in response to them – the notion of social citizenship remains a useful concept for attempting to understand how and why individuals are included and excluded from the services and protection of the state.

In this article I contend that social citizenship goes beyond the formal relationship between a male citizen and the state implied by Marshall's definition; rather, it builds upon the insightful work of historians who have used the notion of social citizenship to frame a more robust understanding of citizen-state relations.[4] As these studies suggest, social

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[1] Diane L. Matters, "Public Welfare Vancouver Style," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 14, 1 (1979): 3. To put Vancouver's municipal welfare development in provincial context, see Allan Irving, "The Development of a Provincial Welfare State: British Columbia, 1900-1939," in *The "Benevolent" State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*, ed. Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987), 155-74.

[2] T.H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development: Essays by T.H. Marshall* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1964), 72.

[3] Sonya Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2. Emphasis in original. Critiques of Marshall include Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "Contract versus Charity: Why Is There No Social Citizenship in the United States?" *Socialist Review* 22, 3 (1992): 45-67; and Barbara Hobson, "Feminist Strategies and Gendered Discourses in Welfare States: Married Women's Right to Work in the United States and Sweden," in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 396-429.

[4] For a discussion of the uses of citizenship as a conceptual tool with increasingly broad parameters, see Maria Bucur, "Gender and Citizenship: Difference and Power in the Modern State," *Journal of Women's History* 20, 4 (2008): 160-70. Bucur argues that citizenship goes beyond "specific legal obligations and rights of individuals who are citizens of a state": it "encompasses extra-legal parameters defined by policy, custom, and overall human behavior – both as sanctioned overtly by state institutions and also as accepted informally in society" (160-1). In the Canadian historiography, see, for example, Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); and the articles in the volume *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings*,

citizenship is more usefully considered as a fluid marker of boundaries. Inside the boundaries are those who are considered deserving of state protection and services, though access to these benefits is not granted to everyone for the same reasons or on the same terms. Inclusion within social citizenship's boundaries is conditional upon class, race, gender, and other factors, and it is often granted only on a limited or partial basis, which may include the assumption that social benefits are privileges rather than rights. The boundaries of social citizenship, in other words, are not rigid but flexible and permeable, often opened only temporarily, and subject to expansion and contraction based on specific economic, political, and social contexts. The experiences of working mothers at the Vancouver crèche demonstrates the degree to which social citizenship's benefits were variable and, often, vulnerable.

I also suggest that social citizenship is not just a matter for modern national and provincial welfare states. The history of the Vancouver City Crèche reveals that social citizenship's boundaries were also being constructed in local sites and contexts. In Vancouver, municipal planners and politicians, welfare officials, social agencies, women's groups, child welfare advocates, and the client mothers and families all had a vested interest in the crèche, and they all participated in discourses about women, work, and social welfare that helped to determine the extent of public support for working mothers and children vis-à-vis the crèche. All of these "little state" interests, as Warren Magnusson suggests, played a role in conditioning the parameters of social citizenship in early twentieth-century British Columbia, and their efforts would resonate throughout the century.[5]

Studies of British Columbia's early welfare state have confirmed that, as elsewhere in the country, one's access to state benefits was premised upon commonly held assumptions about gender, class, and race. BC historians have revealed – through studies of child welfare practices, workmen's compensation and other protective labour legislation, and mothers' pensions – that social welfare policy served to protect and reinforce the ideals of the middle-class, Anglo-Saxon, male breadwinner/female-homemaker family model.[6] In this context, women's and men's welfare

ed. Robert Adamoski, Dorothy E. Chunn, and Robert Menzies (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002). I would like to thank Karen Balcom for sharing her thoughts on gender, the state, and citizenship.

[5] Warren Magnusson, "The Local State in Canada: Theoretical Perspectives," *Canadian Public Administration* 28, 4 (1985): 575–99.

[6] Robert Adamoski, "Their Duties towards the Children: Citizenship and the Practice of Child Rescue in Early Twentieth-Century British Columbia" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 1995); Kenneth A. Venables, "The Making of Protective Labour Legislation in

entitlements were conceived along two different channels. The first tier of welfare, according to Barbara Nelson's typology, was represented most clearly by workmen's compensation and recognized the compensation due to male breadwinners. The second, styled along older models of charity, compensated women based on their maternal roles and was typified by mothers' pensions legislation.[7] Using Nelson's argument, Margaret Little shows, through her study of mothers' pensions, the extent to which the boundaries of social citizenship in British Columbia were conditioned by gender (as well as by race). A strong rights-based discourse around support for mothers' pensions, Little argues, was premised on white women's maternal service to the state, which was distinct from the employment-related claims made by men.[8]

My analysis of the Vancouver City Crèche adds another dimension to the complicated array of gendered, classed, and racialized regulatory objectives behind British Columbia's early social welfare programs. Though the historical literature has tended to focus on the "child-saving" aspects of crèches and day nurseries (and such a focus is not necessarily inappropriate), the fate of the Vancouver City Crèche was more clearly tied to the politics of mothers' employment.[9] As such, debates about the crèche reveal that women's social entitlements depended on much more

British Columbia: The 1912 Royal Commission on Labour and Its Aftermath" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1996); Gillian Creese, "The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work, and Unemployment in the Vancouver Labour Movement before World War II," in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, ed. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992), 364-90; Megan Davies, "'Services Rendered, Rearing Children for the State': Mothers' Pensions in British Columbia," in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, ed. B. Latham and R. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College Press, 1984), 249-63; Margaret Hillyard Little, "Claiming a Unique Place: The Introduction of Mothers' Pensions in BC," *BC Studies* 105-6 (1995): 80-102.

[7] Barbara Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State: Workmen's Compensation and Mothers' Aid," in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 123-51.

[8] Little, "Claiming a Unique Place," 8. Little points out that this rights-based discourse applied only to white Anglo-Celtic mothers.

[9] As Sonya Michel argues, when crèches and day nurseries do appear in social welfare history, they are "subsumed under the heading of 'child welfare.'" Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 3, 8. In Canada, this is apparent in studies such as Larry Prochner, "A History of Early Education and Child Care in Canada, 1820-1966," in *Early Childhood Care and Education in Canada*, ed. Larry Prochner and Nina Howe (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 45-51; and Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 70-76. Day nurseries and crèches were located in most major urban centres in Canada by the 1910s, including Toronto, Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg, Hamilton, and Victoria. More focused studies of some of these institutions include Larry W. Prochner, "Themes in the History of Day Care: A Case Study of the West End Crèche, Toronto, 1909-1939" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1994); Wendy J. Atkin, "Playing Together as Canadians: Historical Lessons from the West End Crèche," in *Changing Child Care: Five Decades of Child Care Advocacy and Policy in Canada,* ed. Susan Prentice (Halifax: Fernwood,

than their maternal service to the state. For the working-class mothers who used the crèche, claims to public assistance were premised upon their roles as wage earners and as family breadwinners. Though culturally entrenched beliefs about the importance of women's domesticity were certainly present in 1910s Vancouver, from the perspective of welfare officials those roles could and should have been suspended, at least temporarily, so that mothers could become workers, albeit only in appropriately feminine jobs such as domestic service. The boundaries of social citizenship were opened to working mothers on the understanding that their work would serve to meet labour market needs, to alleviate pressure on city relief structures, and, most important, to foster the self-sufficiency and moral character of working-class families. The crèche, in essence, was a work-for-relief project for mothers that fulfilled the fundamental goal of welfare provision identified by James Struthers and Nancy Christie: to promote the work ethic and to prevent the welfare dependency of poor and working-class families.[10] But working mothers' social rights were never absolute. As the debates about the purpose and meaning of the crèche throughout the 1910s illustrate, working mothers' access to social benefits were tenuous, and the terms of their social citizenship could shift with currents of economic, political, and social change.

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The crèche began as the private undertaking of women from Vancouver's small but influential network of suffragists and social reform activists. Its "founding mothers" included Helen Gregory MacGill, Mary Ellen Smith, Mrs. T.E. Aikins, and Mrs J.O. Perry.[11] MacGill, a member of the University Women's Club, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and the Local Council of Women, was an outspoken advocate for women and children's legal rights and the province's first female juvenile court judge.[12] Smith, a former schoolteacher, was a prominent suffragist and a member of assorted women's organizations, including the

2001), 27–38; and Christina Simmons, "'Helping the Poorer Sisters': The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905–1945," *Acadiensis* 14, 1 (1994): 3–27.

[10] James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[11] Elsie Gregory MacGill, *My Mother the Judge: A Biography of Judge Helen Gregory MacGill* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1955), 130. There is no indication of the location of the crèche in its initial years, though it is likely that it was located in the West End, near the homes that employed mothers.

[12] MacGill, *My Mother the Judge.*

WCTU and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE). When her husband Ralph died in 1917, Smith was elected to his seat in the BC Legislature and became the province's first female MLA.[13] Perry did not occupy such a prominent political position, though she was certainly part of the middle- and upper-class social strata from which female reformers were drawn: her husband John was a businessman who manufactured and sold bank and office supplies.[14] Less is known about Aikins, though it is likely that her position was similar to Perry's.[15]

Like other crèches across the country, the Vancouver crèche was very much a product of the women's sphere of social reform. In Toronto, Winnipeg, Halifax, Victoria, and elsewhere, crèches and day nurseries were established by voluntary associations and religious groups concerned about the well-being of their "poorer sisters."[16] The Jost Mission in Halifax, for example, included a day care service for children, employment services for charworkers, as well as educational programs for girls and women. Similar charitable impulses inspired the establishment of the Vancouver crèche in 1909, at least in part. The women who founded the first iteration of the crèche were involved in a range of charitable aid activities aimed at improving the lot of indigent mothers and children. Like the orphanages, children's aid homes, and hospitals that dotted the city by the early part of the twentieth century, the crèche certainly served as a place where "neglected" children could be fed and clothed,

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[13] Elizabeth Norcross, "Mary Ellen Smith: The Right Woman in the Right Place at the Right Time," in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, ed. B. Latham and R. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College Press, 1984), 357-64.

[14] *Henderson's City of Vancouver Directory* (Vancouver: Henderson's Publishing Company Ltd., 1909).

[15] T.E. Aikins does not appear in city directories around 1909.

[16] Simmons, "Helping the Poorer Sisters," 3. Unlike elsewhere in Canada, however, day nurseries in British Columbia did not have as strong a missionizing intent. As Gillian Weiss explains with regard to Vancouver: "The activities of the churches at this time no doubt served to enhance the climate of social reform within which women's clubs operated and no doubt some women were strongly influenced by their own personal religious convictions but there is no evidence that the women's clubs studied were one of the major media through which they worked." See Gillian Weiss, "'As Women and as Citizens': Clubwomen in Vancouver, 1910-1928" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1983), 255. Victoria's day nursery, established in 1913, reflected a similar lack of religious influence; its founders were drawn from the Children's Aid Society, the Local Council of Women, and the IODE ("Donation Party at Children's Home – First Anniversary of Charitable Institution Celebrated in Fitting Style Yesterday Afternoon," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 October 1914). British Columbia's irreligiousity is explained in Lynne Marks, "'Leaving God behind When They Crossed the Rocky Mountains': Exploring Unbelief in Turn-of-the-Century British Columbia," in *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901*, ed. Peter Baskerville and Eric W. Sager (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 371-404.

and where mothers could have access to both material and moral help with child-rearing.[17]

The founding mothers of the Vancouver crèche, however, realized that it could also serve another purpose. They envisioned the crèche as an institution that combined work placements with child care and thus allowed them to employ working-class mothers as domestic servants. This logic made sense for MacGill and her colleagues, whose reform efforts were infused with the largely class-blind ideology of maternal feminism.[18] Though these maternal feminists never questioned that a woman's natural role (and responsibility) was to be a mother in the home, this idealized version of motherhood did not extend across class boundaries. Like their contemporaries across the country, Vancouver's maternal feminists were "firmly rooted in the middle-class experience and expectations," and their campaigns rarely included calls for class equality.[19] As Gillian Weiss observes, the city's clubwomen assumed that working-class women would work for their entire lives, and their charitable projects – including the crèche – were designed to help working women carry out their duties, not to challenge entrenched class norms.[20]

The preservation of this status quo among middle-class Vancouver required, critically, a steady supply of domestic servants. But in the years immediately before the crèche's establishment, suitable household help was proving harder to find. The Provincial Council of Women declared in 1907 that shortages of domestic workers had reached "crisis proportions in BC."[21] At the National Council of Women's annual meeting during the same year, Vancouver's clubwomen called for the creation of a committee to investigate "the impossibility of procuring women to help in

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[17] MacGill, *My Mother the Judge*, 130-34; Adamoski, "Their Duties towards the Children," esp. chap. 3.

[18] Weiss, "As Women and as Citizens." Weiss argues that MacGill, Smith, and their colleagues believed that women, as "mothers of the nation," were best equipped to preserve and strengthen a society threatened by the challenges of rapid immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. Though historians have debated the distinction between "maternalism" and "feminism," Weiss argues that the rationale behind Vancouver's clubwomen's activities is best described as maternal feminism. On this issue, see Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[19] Margaret Jane Hillyard Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 26.

[20] Weiss, "As Women and as Citizens," 142-44. For example, women's support for the Minimum Wage Act, 1916, was based not on a belief in women's rights to a fair wage but, rather, on the fear of the potential "moral degradation" of young female workers, who, without a suitable wage, would be tempted to turn to prostitution to make a living. A minimum wage for women would also protect higher male family wages. See Creese, "Politics of Dependence," 364-90.

[21] *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 November 1907.

housekeeping," which they characterized as "a situation that threaten[ed] to annihilate [their] homes."[22] The uneven demographics of the province and the city explained this shortage: in 1911, females represented only 36 percent of British Columbia's population, a proportion that increased to only 39 percent in urban centres.[23] The domestic shortage was exacerbated by the fact that "well-trained women" were quickly "snapped up as wives" and thereby removed from the labour market.[24]

Vancouver's domestic help crisis was also complicated by the racism that permeated every aspect of city life. Without a readily available supply of female domestics, many families hired Chinese men as household workers. This state of affairs troubled many high-status city residents who were invested in efforts to protect British Columbia as a "white man's province." As Patricia Roy documents, this anti-Asian prejudice stemmed from the "threat they allegedly posed as 'cheap labour' and the fear that 'hordes' of Asians could overwhelm a white British Columbia."[25] At the height of the clubwomen's domestic crisis, the city was in the midst of violent anti-Asian agitation, including, in September 1907, a riot through Chinatown and Little Tokyo fuelled by the newly formed Asiatic Exclusion League. In this milieu, it is not surprising that the popular press deplored the employment of "Oriental" men in respectable white, middle- and upper-class homes.[26] Yet the employment of Asian men as domestic workers was more complex than was the employment of these men in traditionally male industries. Vancouver's middle-class women were horrified at the "exorbitant" wages that in-demand white domestic servants charged and, in some cases, appeared to prefer Chinese "houseboys" because they could be employed at a much cheaper rate. This was the case for a group of IODE women who circulated a petition calling for a reduction in the Chinese Head Tax, which they believed

[22] National Council of Women of Canada, *Annual Report* (Toronto: National Council of Women, 1907), 66 – quoted in Robin John Anderson, "Domestic Service: The YWCA and Women's Employment Agencies in Vancouver, 1898-1915," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 25, 50 (1992): 313. See also Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 99.

[23] Statistics Canada, *Rural and Urban Population of Canada, by province and sex, 1911*, available at http://www65.statcan.gc.ca/acyb02/1917/acyb02_ 1917008 49a-eng.htm (viewed 25 February 2011).

[24] Lilian Nelson, "Vancouver's Early Days and the Development of Her Social Services," paper given at the annual meeting of the Social Workers' Club, 18 May 1934, p. 20, City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), PAM 1935-53.

[25] Patricia Roy and John Herd Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2005), 91; Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989), 185-226.

[26] "The Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Daily World,* 5 February 1913; Nelson, "Vancouver's Early Days," 20.

would help to "increase the supply of household servants."[27] Even Ralph Smith, speaking of his wife Mary Ellen, privately deplored "his fate that his gallant wife should have to roast her comely face over the kitchen fire every day because the Chinese Head Tax ma[de] it impossible for him to get a Chinese cook."[28] The desperate position of households like the Smiths', however, could not entirely override deeply held anti-Asian views, and there remained an ongoing concern that "good white help was rare."[29] As Roy explains, "in the minds of many electors, it was better to go without help than to hire Asians."[30]

The establishment of the crèche in 1909 offered a solution to these intertwined labour problems. For clubwomen, white working-class mothers represented a reserve of domestic labour that was not being used to its full potential. The crèche's employment bureau was designed specifically to meet the needs of its middle-class clients: women, most of them from the prosperous West End, would place a request for a domestic worker, who would be supplied from the ranks of the crèche's working mothers. Working mothers, for their part, were much more likely to take on waged work if they could be assured of reliable child care. After all, as future matron Lilian Nelson later reflected, mothers were often all too "glad to return as a day worker to bring grist to the mill, if their little ones could be well cared for in their absence."[31] In this respect, the crèche actually had more in common with the employment bureaus proliferating throughout the city than it did with child welfare institutions.[32]

Until 1911 the crèche operated privately, during which time its day-to-day activities are largely invisible in the historical record. In late 1911, however, the crèche appeared on the city's agenda when a motion was raised during a November council meeting to "erect, establish, and equip" a "Day Nursery."[33] Soon after, council decided that, instead of opening a new crèche, the city would take over the existing one being operated by the clubwomen. This decision took place in the context of

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[27] Anderson, "Domestic Service," 313.

[28] Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 180. One popular history account also notes that Helen MacGill relied on a "Chinese cook" to run her household and care for her children. See Jean Mann, Beverley New, and Cathy Barford, *Women Lead the Way: A History of the University Women's Club of Vancouver, 1907–2007* (Vancouver: Ray Hignell Services Inc., 2007), 12.

[29] Nelson, "Vancouver's Early Days," 20.

[30] Roy, *White Man's Province*, 180.

[31] Nelson, "Vancouver's Early Days," 20.

[32] See Anderson, "Domestic Service."

[33] Vancouver City Council, minutes, meeting of the finance committee, 3 November 1911, CVA, City Council and Office of the City Clerks Fonds, ser. 33, vol. 18, 376. This motion also included plans for an old people's home and a free dispensary.

reforms to Vancouver's municipal welfare administration, which was evolving quickly in order to keep up with the city's growing population. Between 1901 and 1911 the number of city residents grew by 350 percent, and, in this context, the "piecemeal, voluntary" approach to social welfare was no longer adequate. A more "rationalize[d]" system was needed.[34] One important step in this direction was the formation of voluntary organizations with formal yet arm's-length connections to the city's welfare administration. The Friendly Aid Society, which was established in 1895 and transformed into the Friendly Help Society (FHS) in 1906, was the most important of these organizations. Its purpose was to provide volunteer investigators to act on behalf of the City Health Department, which handled all of the city relief cases. In 1909, the FHS evolved into the Associated Charities, a "more widely based operation of concerned citizens and societies."[35] Funded primarily through city grants (with the difference made up through public subscriptions), the Associated Charities had a close relationship with the City Health Department, and this included a joint board of management.[36] Through the Associated Charities, city relief was meted out in the form of food and meals, rent assistance, clothing, and coal. In some cases, welfare visitors even bought train tickets for men to leave town in search of work.[37]

Yet even as the Associated Charities was being consolidated with the city's welfare administration, the relief work it provided was still very much the domain of middle-class women. The crèche was located in this overlap between private and public welfare. While the city assumed financial responsibility for the crèche, its day-to-day operations remained largely within the purview of the women's social reform sphere. In January 1912, city council passed a by-law earmarking $7,500 to be put towards renovating and equipping a space for the crèche.[38] Shortly after this, the management and oversight of the crèche was assigned to the Associated Charities and, more specifically, to two of its female members,

[34] Matters, "Public Welfare," 3. The city population grew from 27,196 in 1901 to 123,902 in 1911. See *Census of Canada, 1901* (Table 1); *Census of Canada, 1911* (Table VII).

[35] CVA, City Social Service Department Fonds, Associated Charities of Vancouver, PR 447 (Finding Aid).

[36] The Board of Management consisted of the Associated Charities executive, the aldermen on the City Health Committee, the city medical health officer, and assorted other Associated Charities members. See Associated Charities, minutes of annual meeting, 5 February 1912, Minute Book 1912-14, CVA, PR 447, 106-A-1, file 6.

[37] Associated Charities, Case Book 1909, CVA, PR 447, 106-A-1, file 3.

[38] Vancouver City Council, minutes, 19 January 1912, CVA, City Council and Office of the City Clerks Fonds, ser. 31, vol. 18, 478.

Lillian Forbes MacDonald and Desiré Unsworth.[39] Both women, not surprisingly, were well established in reform circles. Unsworth was the wife of a United Church minister and an eventual president of the Local Council of Women and co-founder of the Women's Employment League.[40] MacDonald was a doctor's wife and, along with Unsworth, a founding member of the Richard McBride Chapter of the IODE.[41] In fact, the two women drew on their IODE chapter to populate the twelve-member Associated Charities subcommittee given responsibility for fleshing out the details of the crèche's establishment.[42]

Under MacDonald's guidance, the committee decided that the best location for the crèche was in the Vancouver Women's Building at 752 Thurlow Street. The Women's Building was the brainchild of Helen MacGill, who felt that the city's clubwomen deserved a dedicated space for their activities. Though their ultimate goal was to erect a building perfectly suited to their purposes (which they would achieve in 1926), in 1911 the Women's Building organization compromised by buying the "Tait House" on Thurlow Street.[43] In early 1912, they leased the annex of the Tait House to the crèche. In the Women's Building, the crèche committee would have access to the resources and support of the rich collection of women's organizations. Furthermore, the location was convenient for the mothers who had to drop off their children before heading to day work in the city's prosperous West End.[44]

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[39] Associated Charities, minutes of 29 February 1912 meeting, CVA, PR 447, minutes 1912-14, 106-A-1, file 6.

[40] *Vancouver Province*, 17 December 1938 (Rev. J.K. Unsworth Obituary); Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 108.

[41] *Henderson's City of Vancouver Directory* (Vancouver: Henderson's Publishing Company Ltd., 1912).

[42] The crèche committee consisted of: Mrs. Lillian Forbes MacDonald (Regent of IODE Richard McBride Chapter), Mrs. J.K. Unsworth (1st vice-regent), Mrs. McAlpine (the wife of a doctor), Mrs. F.C. Wade, Mrs. P. Donnelly (whose husband was the president and manager of Canadian Financiers Ltd.), Mrs. N.C. Kydd, Mrs. M. McBeath (the wife of alderman and future mayor Malcolm McBeath), Mrs. William M. Barnard (whose husband was a jewellery manufacturer at Henry Birk and Sons), Mrs. C.F. Campbell (whose husband was a partner in the law firm Campbell and Singer), Mrs. H.W. Baker (wife of the president of Northern Securities Ltd.), Mrs. A.E. Short (whose husband owned a real estate and insurance firm), and Mrs. R. Charles Stoddard. Information taken from Membership Lists 1912-13, Richard McBride/Valcartier Camp Chapter IODE, CVA, Add. MSS. 556, 566-A-6, file 4; and *Henderson's City of Vancouver Directory*, 1912. Members of the City Health Board also had voting privileges on the crèche committee: Vancouver City Council, minutes, meeting of the health committee, 9 February 1912, CVA, City Council and Office of the City Clerk Fonds, ser. 31, vol. 18, 522.

[43] MacGill, *My Mother the Judge*, 129-30; Vancouver Women's Building Ltd., Diary and Directory, CVA, PAM 1938-16.

[44] Chuck Davis, *The Greater Vancouver Book: An Urban Encyclopedia* (Surrey, BC: Linkman Press, 1997).

After a series of renovations, the grand opening of the crèche was held on 4 April 1912. Guests included the mayor, representatives from philanthropic societies and women's groups, and several clergymen. As they toured the "pretty and restful" quarters, visitors were encouraged to take note of the child-sized chairs and tables; the number of cots available for napping; and the variety of educational toys, games, and books with which the playroom was equipped. Next to the playroom was a dining room, where the children would receive a "good plain meal properly cooked" at noon and another meal at 5:00 p.m.[45] Upstairs were two "tastefully furnished" rooms for the matron, Ada McLean, and her assistant, Miss Needle. McLean was a well-travelled graduate of the Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, and had "wide experience" as a nurse throughout the United States as well as in Persia and Turkey. Needle (whose first name was never given) was a nurse who had received her training at St. Mary's Hospital in Manchester.[46] McLean and Needle performed the bulk of the daily work at the crèche: they greeted the mothers and children when they arrived at the crèche at 7:00 a.m., at which point mothers were assigned their day's domestic work and the children were changed into the "blue-striped rompers" designed to maintain a sanitary environment. Mothers returned in the evening – they could expect to earn two dollars for an eight-hour day, which included a noon meal – paid the ten-cent-per-child fee (or twenty-five cents for three children), and returned home with their charges. To accommodate mothers who had to travel long distances, the crèche's 6:00 p.m. closing time was later extended to 7:00 p.m.[47]

For all the congratulations that surrounded the grand opening, however, the establishment of the crèche under the auspices of the city was marked with a certain degree of controversy.[48] Criticism of the crèche was not about the care of children: the press provided glowing accounts of the matrons' work in "making proper citizens" of otherwise neglected children and praised the "generous-hearted women" who volunteered to lead arts and crafts and even kindergarten classes. By all accounts, the children

[45] "Tots May Play While Mothers Toil: Children's Day Nursery is Opened," *Vancouver Sun*, 4 April 1912; "The Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1912 (Editorial).

[46] *Vancouver Sun*, 4 April 1912; "Head of the New Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Province*, 10 July 1914.

[47] "The Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Daily World,* 5 February 1913. In addition, the mothers had to pay a one-dollar yearly membership fee to use the crèche. The crèche also employed a secretary and a housekeeper. See Associated Charities, minutes of 6 January 1913 meeting, CVA, PR 447, minutes 1912-14, 106-A-1, file 6.

[48] *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1912.

were "healthy and happy."[49] Rather, critics worried that the crèche represented a potential misuse of public funds because it encouraged mothers' employment. Indeed, the terms of welfare provision to working mothers were at the centre of debates about the purpose and meaning of the crèche – and would be for the next several years. Did working mothers "deserve" public assistance? On what basis? What were their obligations to the city in return?

As the crèche was folded into the city's spectrum of modern and rationalized public welfare delivery, it brought out debates about the gendered and classed conditions of the boundaries of social citizenship. Critics were suspicious of any welfare scheme that was at variance with women's maternal and domestic roles. At least two outspoken aldermen, Malcolm McBeath (who would be elected mayor in December 1915) and Frank E. Woodside, warned that the crèche would be misused by "selfish" West End mothers who needed someone to look after their children "when they went to bridge parties."[50] For McBeath and Woodside, who would consistently voice their criticisms of the crèche over the next several years, government-supported welfare provision should be designed to reinforce the middle-class gender order, not challenge it.

Yet even McBeath and Woodside admitted that welfare delivery could achieve class-based imperatives as well. Woodside suggested that perhaps the crèche was better off located "somewhere nearer Main Street," in closer proximity to the working-class mothers who *needed* to work.[51] Indeed, the chorus of support for the crèche – from other city councillors, sympathetic members of the press, welfare officials, and, of course, MacDonald and Unsworth – made it clear that "self-respecting," working-class, breadwinning mothers were suitable candidates for public support.[52] The crèche, in other words, fulfilled the overriding aim of social welfare provision: to preserve and promote the independence, self-sufficiency, and work ethic of working-class families. As MacDonald declared, the crèche was designed to make families "self-supporting" and to ensure that: "no woman need go without work who is willing

[49] "Here is a Home Where Kiddies are Always Welcome: Creche[sic] is Doing Noble Work in Caring for Children," *Vancouver Sun*, 12 October 1912; *Vancouver Daily World*, 5 February 1913. The latter article noted that members of the St. Andrew's Circle of King's Daughters provided volunteer kindergarten teachers.

[50] "Who Put Babies in City Creche[sic]?" *Vancouver Province*, 25 April 1912.

[51] Ibid. As Donna Varga explains, this rationale was often used to justify child care: it was acceptable only for mothers who "*had* to engage in paid labour in order for their families to survive." See Donna Varga, *Constructing the Child: A History of Canadian Day Care* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1997), 20.

[52] *Vancouver Sun*, 12 October 1912.

and able."[53] Of course, many defenders trotted out familiar refrains to justify the crèche, including the steady supply of white domestic help and charitable assistance to "bereaved" widows and their pitiable families.[54] Increasingly, however, the labour and character of working mothers were at the crux of the crèche's place in the city's expanding network of social services.

These questions took on new urgency by the end of 1912, only a few months after the crèche moved into the Women's Building. The crèche was outgrowing its quarters: daily attendance had grown from an average of three children per day in April 1912 to thirty per day by the end of the year.[55] Furthermore, the lease on the Women's Building was due to expire in the spring. The crèche committee recognized the opportunity – and the need – for expansion.

MacDonald again championed a proposal for increased public responsibility for the crèche. Her committee recommended the purchase of a lot on Haro Street and the erection of a completely new crèche building, designed specifically for the purposes of an employment bureau and day nursery. MacDonald also recommended that the crèche become a completely public institution, entirely under the financial and administrative control of the city instead of the arm's-length Associated Charities. From the city's end, this meant a substantial commitment since MacDonald's Haro Street proposal was estimated to cost $70,000. Alderman McBeath was firmly opposed to the plan. He accused MacDonald's committee of "extravagant" spending and mismanagement of the Thurlow Street crèche, and he questioned why the city should take on even more responsibility for such a project.[56] McBeath's protests, however, were largely in vain. Not only did the attendance rates prove its usefulness, but the crèche also enjoyed a high degree of public support. Both the *Sun* and the *Province* published editorials praising the "invaluable" service that the crèche provided to the city's working mothers.[57] On the basis of this support, council passed a by-law in December 1912 that allocated $70,000 for the purchase of the Haro Street lot and construction costs, and a

[53] *Vancouver Daily World*, 5 February 1913.

[54] *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1912.

[55] "The Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Province*, 27 November 1912 (Editorial); Vancouver City Crèche, Register Book 1912-19, CVA, Add MSS 124, 511-G-3, file 1.

[56] Associated Charities, minutes of 28 November 1912 meeting, CVA, PR 447, minutes 1912-14, 106-A-1, file 6. He also accused them of pocketing donated money, a claim that both the Associated Charities and the press dismissed as a "cock-and-bull story."

[57] *Vancouver Province*, 27 November 1912; "Alderman McBeath and the Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Sun*, 4 December 1912.

subcommittee of council, called the Associated Charities and Relief Committee, was given responsibility for overseeing crèche construction.[58]

Although a seemingly endless stream of contract disputes and construction problems delayed the crèche's completion, it finally opened on July 1914 to wide public accolades – and as a wholly public institution "entirely under the control of the city fathers."[59] The facilities were modern and functional, having been designed with input from the staff. The lower level housed a separate office for the employment bureau, to which one could gain access along a "sloping cement way for buggies," if needed. As with the old crèche, the employment service was designed specifically to place mothers in domestic service positions, and the ten-cent daily fee remained the same. Across the hall from the employment office was the "culinary department," complete with electric dumbwaiter and laundry room. The two main floors contained numerous "spacious and sunny rooms" in which the children would play, nap, dine, and attend kindergarten classes. A room was also reserved for doctors' visits.

The top level of the crèche housed a small apartment for Ada Paul, who replaced McLean sometime in 1913 and was soon herself replaced by Lilian M. Nelson, the former matron of the City Hospital on Cambie Street.[60] Nelson's long experience in various projects would lead to her appointment, in 1916, as the city's first female welfare officer.[61] As matron, Nelson ushered the Vancouver City Crèche through several significant years when its purpose was largely defined by its importance as a relief institution.

Key to understanding Nelson's tenure as matron, as well as the crèche's new administrative home in the Health Department, was the economic context of the middle years of the decade. The crèche opened in July 1914 in the midst of very different economic circumstances than had shaped its earlier years. Vancouver was no longer flush with the financial health that had allowed the city to designate $70,000 towards the crèche in 1912. The boom years under Premier McBride came to an end in 1913, and

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[58] Vancouver City Council, minutes, 2 December 1912, CVA, City Council and Office of the City Clerk Fonds, ser. 31, vol. 19, 185, 248. This committee was made up of five aldermen, the mayor, Relief Officer Godson, and three representatives of the Associated Charities.

[59] *Vancouver Province*, 10 July 1914.

[60] Ada Paul was a British-trained nurse who had worked in various international settings. She also had experience in "maternity and massage work" and was familiar with the management of large institutions, having served as matron of the Senior House University School in Victoria. See *Vancouver Province*, 10 July 1914. Paul earned sixty dollars per month and had two assistants who each earned thirty-five dollars per month.

[61] *Vancouver Province*, 17 September 1960 (Lilian Nelson obituary). Nelson was a native of England who moved to Vancouver in 1901.

recession conditions put an unprecedented strain on both public and private welfare services.[62]

Skyrocketing rates of male unemployment caused widespread panic among social agencies. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (VTLC) painted a picture of "thousands" of out-of-work men "walking the streets lacking food and shelter, and thousands more silently starving."[63] Yet Helena Gutteridge, a committed activist for working women's rights and the only female executive of the VTLC, sought to keep the plight of unemployed women at the forefront of public consciousness as well. In some female-dominated industries (including tailors, dressmakers, and milliners) unemployment rates reached as high as 75 percent by the summer of 1914.[64] The situation was just as dire among stenographers and clerical workers laid off by downsizing business firms.[65] In an attempt to deal with a situation "unusual in its severity," Gutteridge, along with Desiré Unsworth, spearheaded the creation of the Women's Employment League as a job placement and make-work project for unemployed women. Even that made only a small dent in the problem: of the 1,189 women who registered with the league between October 1914 and February 1915, only 483 found work.[66] Even more worrying, according to Gutteridge, was the rising number of married women and mothers who were seeking jobs. With their husbands out of work, more women were "seeking employment to help keep the family."[67] Of the women

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[62] For works that address cycles of economic boom and bust in 1910s British Columbia as well as effects on the labour market, see Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 189-251; Roy and Thompson, *Land of Promises*, 102-11; Robert A.J. McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver, 1886-1914: Urbanism and Class in British Columbia," in *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History*, ed. Robert A.J. McDonald and Jean Barman (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 33-69; Robert A.J. McDonald, "Victoria, Vancouver, and the Economic Development of British Columbia, 1886-1914," in *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, ed. W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981), 369-95.

[63] "Everything Hideous for Vancouver's Out-of-Works," *British Columbia Federationist*, 10 April 1914.

[64] *Labour Gazette* (Ottawa, August 1914), 190. Gutteridge wrote the *Labour Gazette's* Vancouver entry.

[65] "Workless Women Hold a Mass Meeting," *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 September 1914.

[66] Ibid., 19 February 1915. The Women's Employment League is well documented. See Howard, *Struggle for Social Justice*.

[67] *Labour Gazette* (Ottawa, November 1914), 577. It is worth noting that, for the VTLC, the solution to the female unemployment problem was considered to be full male employment: "The married women with children to keep were very much in need. The solution to this problem being to see that men were provided with employment – this being the problem that needs solving as soon as possible." See Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (VTLC), minutes, 15 October 1914, University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections (hereafter UBCRBSC), VTLC Fonds, box 16.4, minutes of regular meetings, 1912-16.

registered with the Women's Employment League in October 1914, for example, one-third of them had children to support.[68]

The unemployment crisis translated into a relief crisis. Not even the outbreak of war improved employment prospects: British Columbia's war economy would not gear up to reverse the recession until 1916. In fact, the war resulted in added pressure on relief agencies through 1914 and 1915. Growing numbers of working-class families were left without breadwinners as husbands signed up to serve overseas or travelled to Britain to take jobs in munitions factories. The Canadian Patriotic Fund, a pension for soldiers' wives established in 1914, provided only a limited amount of assistance.[69] The bulk of family relief work was left to private agencies and to the city. The VTLC reported in February 1915 that it had so far spent "$14,000 on the destitute," half of those families;[70] the Women's Employment League resorted to giving out meal tickets to the mothers who could not find work;[71] other relief agencies stretched their resources as thin as possible in order to ensure that children were fed and warm.[72] City relief rolls showed that by mid-1915 families represented one-third of relief recipients.[73] The creation of a permanent city relief department in 1915 reflected the need for a coordinated response to an urgent situation.[74]

Faced with these pressures, the crèche represented an opportunity for the city: it could serve as a relief project for working-class mothers and their families. By 1914, the logic of the crèche was no longer about the household needs of upper- and middle-class women; rather, the crèche served the interests of city welfare officials concerned with mounting relief rolls. The crèche allowed the city to transfer financial responsibility for

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[68] "Mothers, Children, and Deserted Wives," *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 October 1914.

[69] Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 190–91. "Some soldiers' families were so desperately poor," Morton writes of Vancouver, "that fourteen wives had applied for relief funds before their husband's signature was dry on the enlistment roll." Morton's statement is based on an anecdote from VTLC president J.H. McVety.

[70] VTLC, minutes, 18 February 1915, UBCRBSC, VTLC Fonds, box 16.4, minutes of regular meetings, 1912–16.

[71] "How Women Handle Unemployment Problem," *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 February 1915; "The Man's Problem that Needs Solving," *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 October 1914.

[72] Gutteridge, *Struggle for Social Justice*, 105.

[73] See "Analysis of Families Receiving Relief," 1915 Relief Officer, CVA, PR 20, 13-C-2, file 1. In March 1915 the *Labour Gazette* reported that six hundred to seven hundred of approximately nineteen hundred relief listings were families (p. 1,062).

[74] The Employment and Relief Association operated through 1914 (an organization that included representatives from city council, Relief Officer George Ireland, the Trades and Labour Council, the Board of Trade, clergymen, the Victorian Order of Nurses, and various benevolent organizations), along with the City Council Relief Committee, both of which had relied on the management of Relief Officer George Ireland. With the creation of a new department, relief structures were consolidated. See Matters, "Public Welfare," 3.

families to working mothers in that it turned mothers into breadwinners so that the family did not have to collect relief. The city capitalized on the fact that domestic service was the one sector of the female labour market that remained relatively stable throughout the economic recession. Indeed, many of Vancouver's commercial female employment agencies had given up placing stenographers, office workers, cooks, waitresses, clerks, hospital workers, and the like and had confined their business solely to domestic placements. As Robin John Anderson explains, this reflected the fact that "domestic service was the only work available for women after the summer of 1913."[75] The Women's Employment League faced a similar reality. Half of its successful job placements were in domestic work as those types of positions were easiest to find.[76]

Of course, with the wages that mothers earned, supporting a family of dependants was not easy. Even before the recession women could expect to earn 40 to 50 percent less than (white) men, and with the economic crunch women workers reported that their wages were being cut another 25 to 50 percent.[77] But these wages could at least partially offset the amount that the city (or another private agency) would otherwise have to pay in direct relief to families. The weighing of these financial considerations frequently appeared in discussions about the crèche. Critics frequently wondered whether the crèche was "serving its purpose as it should considering the investment it represented" – whether it was, in other words, a financially prudent relief strategy.[78] During the worst of the depression, at least, the crèche offered the chance to lessen the load on the City Relief Department.

But even more important, the crèche fulfilled a "fundamental goal" of relief provision: the promotion of a work ethic and the prevention of dependency.[79] Matron Lilian Nelson called this the "moral effect of the

[75] Anderson, "Domestic Service," 330.

[76] *British Columbia Federationist*, 19 February 1915. The remaining placements were for stenographers, dressmakers, office workers, clerks, waitresses, chambermaids, and a few teachers and nurses. Working women's advocates in the VTLC sought to capitalize on anti-Asian sentiment to improve female job prospects: "There were still a great many [women] out of employment who could do much of the work now being done about hotels by Orientals; as chambermaids, cooks, workers in the kitchens and as housekeepers. A good many people talked about a 'white British Columbia' and a good place to make a start was in domestic service. The duty of a community was towards iits[sic] own subjects first." See *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 April 1915.

[77] McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver," 42; *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 September 1914.

[78] "Plans to Transform Present City Creche[sic] to Infants' Hospital," *Vancouver Sun*, 31 October 1916.

[79] Christie, *Engendering the State*, 4.

crèche system," which "fully justified its existence."[80] As city welfare officials grappled with the nature of expanding public welfare provision in the turbulent mid-1910s, the need to stimulate work was pervasive in their discussions and actions. Relief measures were undertaken cautiously so as not to encourage dependency on welfare. In 1914, for example, the city established a work camp for two thousand unemployed men, which the relief officer called "a work test … to prevent the creation of a 'chronic crowd of dependents.'"[81] Crèche mothers were subject to the same standards: they were essentially treated as the objects of a work-for-relief project distinct only in the recognition that care for their children determined their capacity to work.[82]

Over and over, city welfare officials and concerned observers claimed the prevention of a "class of dependents" as the crèche's most important function. Indeed, it was usually the crèche's role in preserving women's (and their families') work ethic that allowed its opponents to reconcile themselves to its existence and to the city's increased responsibility for working mothers. Alderman McBeath insisted that if the city was going to invest in the crèche, the client mothers had to "establish their bona fides by going out to work by the day."[83] Others lauded the crèche mothers who, "by their own hard work," were "supporting two or three little children and doing it without a murmur" and thus deserved some measure of public support.[84] Even the crèche's most ardent supporters did not think mothers should receive something for nothing. Working mothers had to earn their access to public welfare by proving that they were humble and hard-working and that they did not desire to become dependent on the charity of others. It was these independent and self-reliant mothers – who would "indignantly refuse" direct charity because of its "pauperizing" and "stigmatizing" effects – who made the crèche a worthwhile investment for the city.[85] As Nelson reminded city officials, without the crèche, "a great deal of charity [would] of necessity have [had] to be dispensed."[86] "There was no doubt," she declared, "that being enabled to go to honest work kept a proper independent spirit among the women."[87]

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[80] *Vancouver Province*, 26 March 1917.
[81] Matters, "Public Welfare," 5.
[82] I would like to thank Shirley Tillotson for her input regarding these ideas.
[83] "May Abolish City Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Daily World*, 22 January 1917.
[84] "City Creche[sic] is the Home of Happy, Contented Children," *Vancouver Daily World*, 2 June 1917.
[85] *Vancouver Daily World*, 22 January 1917.
[86] "Appeal is Made for Day Nursery," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 17 October 1913.
[87] *Vancouver Province,* 26 March 1917.

The crèche's importance as a relief measure for working-class families was borne out by the numbers and characteristics of mothers and children who used it on a daily basis. Through the middle years of the decade, the crèche operated at or above capacity. Annual Reports of the City Health Department show steadily climbing numbers of children served. In 1913, the Annual Report of the City Health Department reported that 7,322 children were left at the crèche (although that number likely represented days of care rather than the total number of children). That number climbed to 9,032 in 1915 and to 9,140 in 1916.[88]

The vast majority of the crèche's client mothers were from the working-class industrial neighbourhoods east of the downtown core. The crèche register books list clusters of addresses around Hastings and Main, and along the south and east ends of Robson, Hornby, and Powell.[89] These were the areas of the city hardest hit by male unemployment, and wives in these neighbourhoods often took on breadwinning responsibility. And, indeed, the women using the crèche were much more likely to be married than single. While the press was eager to play up the plight of bereaved and noble single mothers, records show that the typical crèche mother was married and that her husband was unemployed or unable to work due to illness, injury, or otherwise. This was especially true in the years of economic depression: though single mothers averaged only about 20 percent of the crèche clientele through the mid-1910s, entries for married women were even more common after 1912.[90] Mrs. Cheadle's husband, for example, was an out-of-work painter and she left her son and infant daughter in the crèche while she was at her job. Mrs. Ross's husband was "unable to find work," while Mrs. Charles's husband was "not working" for unspecified reasons. Several mothers reported their husbands "idle," and others said that their husbands were "looking for work," "out of work," or, as in the case of the Frost family, had left town in search of employment.[91]

In most cases, then, crèche mothers were serving as their families' sole breadwinner. In a few rare instances both parents were employed. The members of the McGrath family, for example, new immigrants from the United Kingdom, used the crèche so that both parents could work to

[88] City of Vancouver, *Annual Report of the Medical Health Officer, 1913-16*, CVA, PR 604, PDS II. There were no crèche statistics in the 1914 report.

[89] Vancouver City Crèche, Register Book 1912-19, CVA, Add MSS 124, 511-G-3, file 1.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid. These are from 1912. A more systematic analysis is not possible because the entries are quite inconsistent and, in some cases, are left almost entirely blank. By far the majority of cases must be classified as "unknown." As per the CVA's Confidentiality Agreement, the names of these families have been changed.

save money for a new home. As for the Bernetti family, the six children stayed at the crèche during the day so that Mrs. Bernetti could "help" her husband at the store they owned.[92] As the Bernettis' situation suggests, not all mothers relied on the crèche's employment bureau to help them find work. Among the entries was a mother who worked as a cashier in the Vancouver Hotel, one who was a cleaner in the Empress Theatre, and another who was a piano player. Others worked in cafes, as store clerks, chambermaids, stenographers, waitresses, and, of course, as domestic workers in jobs they acquired independently of the crèche employment bureau.[93] Like the McGraths, many of these women were no doubt new immigrants without networks of family and friends on which to rely for child care. For them, the crèche was invaluable not only because it allowed them to work but also because it prevented them from resorting to other, less desirable child care options. Historians have documented, for example, the use of institutions like the Alexandra Orphanage by working parents desperate for child care.[94]

It was essential for these mothers (and the three single fathers listed in the register) that the use of the crèche did not render them "charity cases." Just as city welfare officials wanted the crèche to promote independent families, so the mothers who used its services wanted to be perceived as hard-working and self-reliant. As Helena Gutteridge explained, these "self-respect[ing]" women "shr[a]nk from charity" – they "did not want charity, but employment."[95] The payment of the daily ten-cent fee was one important way in which mothers laid claim to their independence from charity. Though sometimes immediate circumstances of "destitution" prevented that day's payment, mothers often returned days later to repay debts.[96] During the worst of the economic slump in 1915 the city actually suspended the fee, thinking that mothers deserved a break; however, mothers' insistence on paying prompted the city, only a month later, to authorize the matron to "collect fees from persons using the Crèche[]

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92 Vancouver City Crèche, Register Book 1912-19, CVA, Add MSS 124, 511-G-3, file 1.

93 Ibid. The diminished importance of the domestic employment bureau for middle-class homes is reflected in the declining numbers of mothers "sent out" by the crèche between 1913 and 1916. City of Vancouver, *Annual Report of the Medical Health Officer, 1913-16.*

94 Diane Barbara Purvey, "Alexandra Orphanage and Families in Crisis in Vancouver, 1892-1928," in *Child and Family Welfare in British Columbia: A History,* ed. Diane Purvey and Christopher Walmsley (Calgary: Detselig, 2007), 53-75.

95 "Women Organize an Unemployment League," *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 October 1914; *British Columbia Federationist*, 25 September 1914.

96 Vancouver City Crèche, Register Book 1912-19, CVA, Add MSS 124, 511-G-3, file 1. There is an example of this occurring in April 1913.

who [were] desirous to pay for services rendered."[97] Though the fee was admittedly "nominal," it was still "sufficient to remove the stigma of charity from the minds of the mothers."[98] The freedom from welfare dependency was a key part of mothers' own conceptions of their social citizenship.

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In 1916 the BC wartime economy kicked in, and employment prospects for both men and women improved.[99] The re-established labour market brought new questions about women and work. In industrial occupations (including munitions work), campaigns for equal pay for women gained steam, though advocates were more concerned, as Gillian Creese argues, to protect male wages and to ensure jobs for returning soldiers.[100] Cordoned off in predominantly female sectors of the labour market, crèche mothers were largely immune (at least in theory) from these debates about women's wages and working conditions. But the fate of the crèche was tied up with the larger discussions about women, work, and family that preoccupied city planners as the end of the war approached and as the rebounding economy alleviated the urgency around relief provision.

For one, the cost effectiveness of the crèche was called into question. A report commissioned by city council suggested that it would actually be cheaper for the city to board children year-round, orphanage-style, than it was to provide daytime child care and employment services through the crèche.[101] Though no one seriously proposed a city-run orphanage, one alderman suggested that, rather than "keep up the crèche," it would be "more economical for the city to maintain the mothers at home."[102] Some councillors, on the other hand, wanted to see the city give up its responsibility to the crèche entirely. Alderman Woodside advocated for the closure of the crèche because his sources told him that several of the crèche mothers were "under no obligation to go out [to work] at all" and

[97] Vancouver City Council, minutes of the relief committee, 12 July 1915, CVA, City Council and Office of the City Clerk Fonds, ser. 33, vol. 20, 662.
[98] *Vancouver Sun*, 12 October 1912.
[99] Roy and Thompson, *Land of Promises*, 107-8.
[100] Creese, "Politics of Dependence," 374-75. Women were first employed as munitions workers in 1917 for Vancouver Engineering Co. See "Women Employed in Local Munition Plants," *British Columbia Federationist*, 26 January 1917.
[101] "Creche[sic] Proves Very Expensive," *Vancouver Daily World*, 13 January 1917.
[102] *Vancouver Province*, 26 October 1916.

were simply (and selfishly) using up public resources.[103] A compromise was reached: the crèche would move into the "Old Hospital Building" on Pender and Cambie, and the almost-new building on Haro Street would become the city's new Infant's Hospital. This decision reflected the persistent lobbying of the medical health officer Dr. Frederick T. Underhill, who insisted on the city's need for a modern children's hospital to ensure the "physique and mental health of its future citizens." As the responsibility for rebuilding a postwar society loomed, no one could disagree with this sentiment, and the decision was made to repurpose the Haro Street crèche to allow "a wider scope for more important work."[104] In 1917, the crèche moved into a renovated wing of the Old Hospital Building. This physical transfer coincided with an administrative shuffle that made the scaled-down crèche the responsibility of the City Relief Department.

Moral as well as financial logic influenced challenges to the crèche's purpose in 1917. As the end of the war approached, there was a renewed emphasis on the importance of women's domestic and maternal roles and on the need for stay-at-home mothers to nurture a new generation of productive and healthy citizens. This ideology was reflected in, and reinforced by, social welfare policy. For one, social workers and child welfare experts developed a distaste for "institutional" child care. The Children's Aid Society, for example, proclaimed the need for "real homes" for children and began to replace its institutional system with foster home care.[105] The crèche was caught up in the current of this trend. Woodside suggested that not only would it be "cheaper … to furnish the women with relief money and let them stay at home with their children" but it would also be "better" for mothers and children.[106] Although supporters of the crèche pointed out that such an extensive provision of direct relief was "morally objectionable," it was increasingly becoming even more objectionable to encourage mothers to give up their natural roles as mothers in the home.[107]

Among the most outspoken critics of the crèche by 1917 were (somewhat ironically) middle-class women with a maternally based reform agenda. The shortage of domestic servants was a thing of the past, and, in their view, the crèche's continued existence only served to undermine the sanctity of home life. A delegation of women from the New Era League

[103] "For City Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Province*, 6 February 1917.
[104] *Vancouver Sun*, 31 October 1916.
[105] Adamoski, "Their Duties towards the Children," 118-19.
[106] *Vancouver Daily World*, 13 January 1917.
[107] "Creche[sic] is to be Continued," *Vancouver Daily World*, 25 January 1917.

Group portrait of children and supervisors, ca. 1917. The photo was taken in front of the Old Hospital Building at the corner of Pender and Cambie streets, which housed the Vancouver City Crèche beginning in 1917. *Source*: City of Vancouver Archives, Bu P48, photographer W. J. Moore.

suggested to city council that, "if the money that was spent in the maintenance of the crèche were given direct to the mothers under the administration of a board from the various women's organizations, the crèche could be done away with and the mothers, through being able to look after their children personally, it would be better for them [sic]."[108] As this delegation pointed out, mothers' earnings were less than the city spent in providing child care, and, thus, it made more sense to "give that amount to the mothers in the way of a pension or a grant."[109]

This plan, of course, was presented in the context of the powerful female-led campaign for provincial mothers' pensions taking shape across the province (of which Helen Gregory MacGill and Mary Ellen Smith were a part). The overwhelming support for mothers' pensions, as Margaret Little reveals, was rooted in the belief that mothers did not belong in the labour force but in the home and that their maternal "service to the state" should be compensated. Since the pensions were cast as a mother's "right" they were not associated with the stigma of charity, and, thus, even those reluctant to endorse public handouts could support the idea of a mothers' pension.[110] Not surprisingly, the crèche was

[108] "Would Aid Mothers Direct Instead of Through Creche[sic]," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 January 1917.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Little, "Claiming a Unique Place."

a frequent target of mothers' pensions advocates. This was apparent in the public hearings on pensions legislation that crossed the province through 1919 and 1920. Several respondents invoked the crèche as an example of how not to provide public support to mothers and their children, who were stuffed together like a "lot of little chickens" for hours every day. "It would be a splendid thing," a Nelson WCTU member urged the hearing's commissioners after her visit to the crèche, "to have these mothers care for their children instead of having to send them to some institution."[111] Another respondent declared simply that "a woman cannot support her children and look after them properly at the same time."[112]

Evidence also suggests that Vancouver's working mothers were in favour of mothers' pensions as an alternative to the crèche. The long hours and low pay of domestic work took its toll, and many mothers, as Lilian Nelson observed, were eager for the chance to give up the double day and devote more time to their children.[113] A mothers' pensions cheque was an attractive option, especially if their receipt of state assistance was considered an entitlement rather than charity. There were indications throughout the mothers' pensions hearings of women's right to public child care as a component of their economic and social citizenship, but for the most part these were ignored as the radical ideas of labour advocates.[114]

The passage of mothers' pensions legislation in 1920 did not mean the end of the crèche. Pensions were only available to widowed mothers, so working wives continued to use the crèche at high rates throughout the 1920s. The average daily attendance in January 1929, for example, was forty-seven children per day.[115] But, as the widespread support for mothers' pensions illustrated, it was ultimately more acceptable to include women within the boundaries of social citizenship on the basis of their maternal role rather than on the basis of their waged labour since the former model more closely mirrored ideal middle-class gender

[111] The mother's pensions commission was known as the BC Commission on Health Insurance. See *Report of the Hearing of the Health Insurance Commission, Nelson, BC*, 13 December 1919, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), GR-0706.

[112] *Report of the Hearing of the Health Insurance Commission, Nelson, BC*, 13 December 1919, BCA, GR-0706.

[113] "It is no small matter," she told the commissioners, "for these women to come out as they do every day at 8 o'clock in the morning with three or four children, it is bad for the children having to get them up and take them out so early … It is a terrible thing to know what those children have to go through." See *Report of the Hearing of the Health Insurance Commission, Vancouver, BC*, 20 January 1920, BCA, GR-0706.

[114] *Report of the Hearing of the Health Insurance Commission, Vancouver, BC*, 20 January 1920, BCA, GR-è 0706; *Report of the Hearing of the Health Insurance Commission, Fernie, BC*, 11 December 1919, BCA, GR-0706.

[115] Relief Officer, *Crèche Report, January 2, 1929 to January 16, 1929*, CVA, City Council and Office of the City Clerk Fonds, ser. 20, 14-F-5, file 5.

relationships. In this context, the crèche was relegated to the margins of social welfare as a last resort relief provision for the poorest families. In 1919, it stopped providing employment placement services and became solely a child care institution. And, throughout the 1920s, the public focus of the crèche was on the interests of neglected children. In 1932, the crèche's tenure as a city institution came to an end and its services were replaced by the private Vancouver Day Nursery Association, which provided home-based child care for the city's working mothers.[116]

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The first decade of the Vancouver City Crèche's existence was marked by tumultuous economic conditions, unemployment and relief crises, and the development of a local and provincial welfare state. The decade was also marked by changing public opinion towards the crèche: established with the support of middle-class clubwomen, within ten years it was denounced as an inferior form of public welfare by many of those same women, and, in between, it enjoyed support from welfare officials as a useful relief institution. Whether concerned officials and citizens were expressing support for the crèche or opposition to its existence, however, their statements always reflected public attitudes towards the labour and moral character of the crèche's working-class client mothers. While the history of child care institutions such as the crèche is often confined to the historical currents of child welfare, the Vancouver City Crèche's evolution as a public institution is very clearly a story about the politics of mothers' employment and about public responsibility to working mothers.[117] The crèche enjoyed support when working-class mothers were needed for domestic labour or when the imperative to promote the work ethic and working-class family independence was foremost; its value as a public institution declined when planners and politicians did not want to be seen to be encouraging mothers' employment amidst the postwar preoccupation with women's domestic and maternal "service to the state."

As a result, the crèche adds further nuances to our understanding of social citizenship during early twentieth-century British Columbia. Though by 1920 the success of mothers' pensions had defined entitlement predominantly in terms of motherhood, the crèche reveals that citizen-

[116] Vancouver Day Nursery Association, *Annual Report*, 1932-33, UBCRBSC.

[117] See Emilie Stoltzfus, *Citizen, Mother, Worker: Debating Public Responsibility for Child Care after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kimberly Morgan, *Working Mothers and the Welfare State: Religion and the Politics of Work-Family Policies in Western Europe and the United States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

ship's boundaries were not the same for all mothers across class lines. The expansion, contraction, and conditions of state responsibility could also hinge on the "working" part of "working motherhood," helping to fulfill both economic and moral objectives of social welfare.[118] Yet, even for the crèche mothers, those terms of social citizenship were never concrete. Perhaps most of all, then, the Vancouver City Crèche reminds us that working mothers had, and continue to have, an uneasy relationship with the state.

[118] See Eileen Boris and S.J. Kleinberg, "Mothers and Other Workers: (Re)Conceiving Labor, Maternalism, and the State," *Journal of Women's History* 15, 3 (Autumn 2003): 90-117.