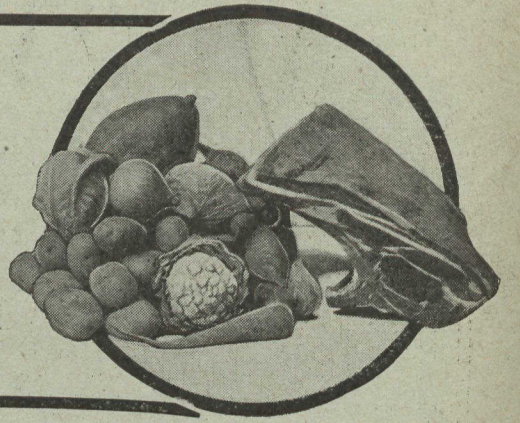




ALBERTA WOMEN'S WINNING FIGHT AGAINST HIGH COST OF LIVING

By LUCY F. LOGAN



HIGH Cost of Living has grown fat and formidable, but the women of Alberta attacked the problem with all the weapons at their command—and commandeered extra weapons when needed.

No success can be attained without the get-together spirit, and knowing this, the women of Alberta formed themselves into organizations covering the central parts of the Province. Most of these organizations had other important objects, but they all bent their best efforts to the fighting of the common foe—High Cost of Living.

Before the War many were too proud to economize, too proud and too foolish to save, but in these days of world-wide stress, with brave Belgium and famished Serbia crying for food, we have been drawn into a closer sisterhood, that we may work together for the good of all and the prosperity of the country.

What the Women of Calgary Did

In 1913 the Women's Local Council appointed The Home Economics Committee to look into the reason of the High Cost of Living in Calgary.

They found a most shocking state of affairs. The housewives were paying purse-wrecking prices for fruit from the United States, while carloads of British Columbia fruit stood rotting on the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks; and farmers, failing to find a sale for their produce in the Calgary retail stores, filled coolies with tons of potatoes, and dumped carrots into the Bow River; a wholesale market would have eventually brought these fruits and vegetables to the dining table.

The committee saw that one of the first needs was a public market. They knew that the City of Calgary had built a market two years before, but that it had entirely failed to be of any use owing to its inconvenient situation, and for want of advertising.

To tackle this problem when the city had failed seemed a waste of good energy, but in the dictionary of these capable women, the word "impossible" had been omitted.

A public meeting was called in June, 1913, and these facts were placed before it. Several things happened. It was decided to dissolve the Home Economics Committee, and to form an organization entirely separate and distinct from the Women's Local Council.

The Consumers' League of Calgary thus came into being, with Mrs. Newhall, whose energy and attractive personality made her invaluable, as President, Mrs. Hutton as first vice, and Mrs. R. R. Jamieson, now Judge of the Juvenile Court, as second vice president, and with a membership of seventy, which has since grown to about one thousand.

Relics of Cow Town Days

Many of the by-laws relating to the market were found to be relics of the Cow Town period, and with the co-operation of the Mayor and Town Councils these were rescinded or amended. Next the League sent Mrs. William Gale and Mrs. W. N. Davison as delegates to the Legislature urging an amendment to the city charter, which would permit the city to sell on commission. They presented a strong case for The League, and though the discussion was long, the clause was passed.

The success of the market was considered of first importance and one of the greatest factors in the reduction of household expenses. The city market had, in two years, achieved the name and fame of failure, but failure is not a word associated with the women of Alberta, and despite the inconvenient situation, they bent their energies to making it a success.

Organized efforts were made to bring the producer and the consumer together. Nearly five hundred letters were sent to the Farmers' Unions and Women's Institutes, asking searching and awakening questions. A carload of vegetables and fruits from British Columbia was brought into Calgary and sold by the League at the market with profit, and at much lower prices than were asked by the retailer. Later, at the market the immense productiveness of Alberta's own soil in the raising of vegetables and small fruits was abundantly proven. Every effort was made to encourage the Calgary housewives to acquire the market habit and to popularize the market basket—that outward and visible sign of an inward and practical economy. From June to September, the revenue jumped three thousand dollars. In November, throngs of housekeepers attended because of the lower prices of meat, and the

market being well heated, it was patronized all winter.

Fish was another item to which these energetic women turned their attention. They brought it in by the ton from Slave Lake and stood in the markets and sold it themselves, and those who bought that fish for the first time came back for more, having learned that but few fish are its equal and none its superior.

Reduction in the price of coal and flour followed—accomplished by the same hearty co-operation, the shoulder-to-shoulder campaign of these public-spirited women, who sank party differences and cheerfully gave time, money, and energy to the work of bettering conditions and reducing the cost of necessities.

The Five-Cent Piece

In the West copper coinage was practically unknown, the five-cent piece being the smallest coin; and thrifty Easterners, expecting smaller change, were superciliously referred to as being from the "Cent Belt." A petition signed by the allied societies of the Local Council of Women was sent to the Board of Trade, asking for copper coinage. The Board of Trade replied that the retailers said the time was not ripe. But the women of Calgary are resourceful, and imported a supply of coppers from the East, and in four months were using them at the market. Shortly after the "Morning Albertan" came down to one cent, the Hudson Bay Company store capitulated, and every one had to follow suit—the women had scored another success and the use of copper coinage was established.

Then they looked into the standardization of Canadian weights and measures, made experiments with seed potatoes, investigated the price of ice, gave their searching attention to the cleanliness and sanitary condition of bake-shops, dairies, meat-shops, laundries, and were active in each and every branch of merchandise and work that in any way touched the health of the home and the housekeeper's pocket.

It was some job! But they did it, these indomitable women of the western city of Calgary!

Edmonton Follows

The Edmonton Consumers' League was formed two years ago to investigate the High Cost of Living and to counteract it by every legitimate means; to study and to teach the principles of co-operation in connection with Home Economics; to watch, influence, and promote civic legislation that would foster home production and home buying.

The first president was Mrs. A. N. Mouat, who has the gift of doing all that comes to her hand graciously, charmingly, and well. Her enthusiasm carried The League through many a hard place in its difficult pioneer days, and now as first vice-president, her interest is still keen. Mrs. A. F. Ewing, the second vice-president, is one of the representative women of the city, and is known for her well chosen word and kind deed whenever and wherever the occasion offers.

Mrs. R. G. Russell, the present efficient president, young, enthusiastic, is wise with the wisdom of those who are eager to learn—none of the heights of knowledge for her until she has travelled

the valleys of investigation and made sure of the right paths for the upward climb. In her fertile brain new plans for economic betterment are constantly growing. Her earnest, practical talks at The League meetings are full of the spirit of co-operation. She urges most strongly, in the struggle for economy in the home and the betterment of conditions, the assistance of every home-loving, home-protecting woman in the city—that they serve as wheels, not brakes, on the car of progress. She emphasizes the point that the mission of The Consumer's League is to bring the consumers and dealers together on a basis of fair play.

"We wish the dealers to realize that the members of The Consumers' League are women who know what they want, intend to get it, and know where they do get it. Their intelligent discontent of abuses will right things for all concerned," is Mrs. R. G. Russell's ultimatum to the dealers.

At the meetings of The League, one is impressed with the efficiency of these big-brained, warm-hearted women—their brain and heart are in close connection with their fingers. Knowing how, and being eager to help, and eager, too, to learn, the spirit of comradeship and sympathy is apparent. The amount of work accomplished is due to the habit of cheering rather than jeering, and it is refreshing to remember that, instead of the political status of an idiot, each has attained citizenship through the granting of Equal Suffrage.

The executive and all others who give their time and attention and are constantly on the alert that full value is given for money spent should be well supported; for the work of investigation, planning, and bringing their plans to fruition is done in the midst of innumerable other duties and merely mean a curtailment of leisure—since one cannot curtail that which does not exist.

At the last meeting, reports showed that over sixty meat markets had been visited, and were now under the eye of The League. The majority of the meat men were active along lines of sanitation and proper refrigeration, but a few need to "change some trying habits to a habit of trying." The League has a list of meat shops on file classified according to value given, cleanliness, and sanitary handling of meat.

Mrs. A. L. Burt presented a report on the coal of the Edmonton district, which showed careful research; and practical suggestions were made regarding the most economical use of coal in its different forms. The ice report dealt with sanitation and the unnecessary high price in Edmonton as compared with other cities of similar conditions.

Mrs. Hutton brought in an interesting report on vegetables, urging the use of the more delicately flavoured home-grown. The discussion on the fruit report showed that The League was strongly in favour of giving British Columbia fruit the preference over that from the United States—better to wait a little later in the season and get better quality at a lower price. A conference was arranged with wholesale fruit representatives. Standardized size and weight of boxes are urgently needed. Dairies, bakeries, laundries, etc., are also on the calling list of these indefatigable committees, who maintain that the regulations must be respected.

The Buy-at-Home Movement

"The Consumers' League aims to encourage home industry, to help Alberta producers to build up a prosperous foundation for our Province, and to make Edmonton able to support its people by encouraging every branch of agricultural and industrial activity that is within our midst or may come to our city. Our idea is to use, whenever possible, Edmonton-made goods, and to deal with Edmonton business concerns where prices and quality warrant. We heartily endorse the Buy-at-Home Movement," declared Mrs. Russell, in outlining the plans of the League.

The League strongly urges the use of Edmonton flour and the buying of bread made from the home flour. Not only are the older manufacturers encouraged, but the new ones also investigated. Recently a committee of The League visited a new candy factory and found conditions so excellent that appetite grew, and their approval was speedily gained. Sending away for goods, when as good or better can be bought at home, does not appeal to the sense of fair play of the League. Distance may lend enchantment to the bargain, but it is *lent*, not given—the enchantment may prove difficult to hold, when the packages are opened. Besides, High Cost of Living is encouraged by the reckless sending away (Continued on page 54)



Whenever women co-operate in their efforts to reduce the High Cost of Living, their activities resolve into a monster fight against the forces of greed, graft, and corruption that are responsible for the abnormal price of food.