

CHAPTER 4

“FOOD FIGHTS FOR FREEDOM”: THE KITCHEN

Women’s articles and advice columns and propaganda focused more on the kitchen than any other room in the house. The government recruited women into the war via their kitchens through advertisements and articles. The war entered American kitchens where women fought to defend their country. The kitchen was the focal point for rationing, victory gardens, conservation and recycling, and the black market, so the room appeared to be a likely target for the propaganda. The kitchen also symbolized the role of a woman in the home. Women bought the groceries, planned the meals, and fed their families. Women continued these activities, even as the war disrupted their routines. Staples of the family diet such as sugar and red meat became scarce. The government encouraged women to grow vegetables and can them. Cooking fats became a valuable commodity to conserve and women were encouraged to save fat to provide bullets in the battlefield. These new stipulations created changes in normal eating patterns and forced women to spend more time in the kitchen canning vegetables and cleaning tin cans. Women living in Wilmington during the war recalled what would be interpreted as disruptions, but they did not remember these changes in a negative light.

The voluntary rationing of World War I would not be enough to combat inflation and citizen unrest during World War II. The government assigned the task of developing a rationing process to the Office of Price Administration (OPA). The OPA stressed the importance of rationing if the gap between rich and poor Americans was not to reach the most disproportionate level. Food shortages and rising food prices would make meat and

other rationed products more difficult for the working class to obtain. Overall, the committee met its goals.¹

The rationing system entailed more than the simple nutrition of Americans. The OPA received assistance in the endeavor. The National Academy of Sciences National Research Council developed wartime food consumption policies. The Council developed two satellite committees, the Committee on Food Habits (CFH) and the Food and Nutrition Board (FNB). The CFH focused on food consumption from a cultural and social standpoint. The FNB considered the physiological and psychological effects of nutrition. The committees concluded that a successful rationing system contained propaganda that targeted women, as they controlled the food consumption of the nation.²

The primacy of women's duties regarding food purchase and preparation remained unchanged. Even propaganda that encouraged women to enter the labor force stressed the home as their first obligation. Wartime propaganda emphasized the "nation as family". This link came most often by connecting food to women. Their duties remained the same, but the urgency of performing these everyday tasks was new.³

Women were confronted with this new urgency through their everyday readings. The Office of War Information sent suggestions on how to encourage citizens to properly use rationed items to eight hundred newspapers across the country. Newspapers devoted considerable space in the women's section to new recipes that made little or no use of difficult to obtain rationed goods. Even with such encouragement and suggestions,

¹ Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1998), Chapter 1; Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 3.

²Bentley, Chapter 2.

³Bentley, 30-32.

rationing made the task of food preparation and cooking more difficult for women.⁴

Preparing meals took more time and effort due to the inability to secure staples such as sugar and red meat. The rationing of canned foods also placed a burden on women, as they could no longer rely on them to reduce preparation time. Requests for gardening and home canning foods also created additional burdens for women.

Perhaps rationing affected the home front more than any other domestic policy during World War II. Unlike canning foods, preparing meals, or gardening, rationing was a new concept for American women. The task of convincing citizens to cooperate with this new stipulation required more effort than simply encouraging citizens to continue their familiar patterns. National articles in *Ladies' Home Journal* and articles on the society page of the *Wilmington Star News* covered the new policies extensively. Writers for the *Wilmington Star News* explained how rationing worked from the beginning of the process and continued to update citizens on newly limited items and the distribution of new ration books. Throughout the war, *Ladies' Home Journal* and the local society page promoted rationing by publishing cheerful articles that linked compliance with the system to patriotism. Advertisers for national brands and local grocery stores mentioned the ration point value of their products, or promoted their products as an item that either required few ration points or rationed products.

In addition to educating women about rationing, authors of women's articles criticized behavior that undermined the process. Dorothy Thompson wrote an article about hoarding, which was the antithesis of rationing, for the June 1942 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*. The article encouraged women to refrain from hoarding, to conserve

⁴ Bentley, 14; Martha Mary Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie, Alabama Women and the Second World War* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 104; Hartmann, 83.

materials that may become scarce, and finally, but most importantly, to remember the soldiers overseas and the sacrifices they faced. Rationing was associated with patriotism. “The well-behaved American, especially the well-behaved housewife, is now torn between patriotism and the desire to take adequate precaution for the protection of the family.”⁵ Protecting the family, in this case through nourishment, remained in the hands of women. The article attempted to convince women that they could not only continue to provide for their families while complying with rationing, but could also provide for the welfare of their country.

Thompson’s article glamorized cooking within the limitations of rationing by comparing cooking to writing poetry. Cooking within the limits of the rationing system was more rewarding for women. In reality, the rewards were few, and rationing provided more work for women, as it made meal preparation more difficult. Thompson gave women a good reason to comply with rationing. If additional pride of making due with less was not enough for women, the article’s conclusion connected rationing to patriotism by conjuring up images of soldiers who sacrificed their lives for their country.⁶ Any sacrifices made by women at home fell far short of those made by men overseas. Complaining about conditions in the home, in this case rationing, was selfish and unpatriotic.

On the local level, women’s columns addressed such unpatriotic behavior. The *Wilmington Star News* ran a message from H. J. Heinz, a national company. The large advertisement began with the headline, “THE TRUTH ABOUT FOOD SHORTAGES”. While the article addressed the grocers of America, running it in the newspaper made the

⁵ Dorothy Thompson, “On Hoarding,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, June 1942, 6.

message accessible to all citizens and thus spoke to everyone. The article warned against hoarding, over-purchasing, and spreading rumors. The theme of patriotism ran throughout the notice. Potential customers were reminded, "...that changing our menus slightly is about the easiest sacrifice we can make for the greatest country on earth."⁷ All citizens, not just the grocers understood the message. The newspaper which sponsored the advertisement, made clear the connection between patriotism and food. Men overseas fought and risked their lives as part of their patriotic duty; so American women at home could curtail their use of certain items.

Propaganda throughout the war attempted to motivate Americans to continue their cooperation with rationing. Articles maintained a positive tone about rationing and the changes it brought to managing kitchen duties. Women were reminded constantly of the sacrifices soldiers made overseas. Rationing brought the war directly into the kitchens of America and women needed to comply with rationing in order to help win the battle against the enemy.

Ladies' Home Journal ran an article by Louella Shouer in the May 1942 issue that offered suggestions for curtailing sugar consumption. The article set a positive tone in the opening paragraph. Rationing sugar not only contributed to the war effort, but it also improved the health and appearance of Americans. Shouer mentioned the figure of the reader, but only after she mentioned the obligation to the nation. Sugar rationing may have improved waistlines, but fighting for democracy remained the primary goal. The article's conclusion emphasized the positive, suggesting that Americans would eventually

⁶ Thompson, 6.

⁷ *Wilmington Star News* (Wilmington, North Carolina), 8 March 1942.

become accustomed to less sugar in their diets.⁸ The article failed to mention the length of the program. Rationing lasted “for the duration,” an unspecified amount of time, and during that time women needed to cook healthy family meals and maintain a positive attitude.

As part of the series “How America Lives”, *Ladies’ Home Journal* featured a New England family in its March 1942 issue. The family extracted syrup from their maple trees in response to sugar rationing. The article spotlighted the admirable traits of the pioneers who settled America and claimed that the readers could share in these same qualities.⁹ Just like their fellow pioneering citizens, the Smith family complied with sugar rationing with great enthusiasm. Like the pioneers, Americans during World War II faced hardships, but they moved forward. Conjuring up images of brave settlers made World War II era Americans feel as though they were not the first generation of Americans to struggle with adversity. Pioneers founded the country and their spirit would live on in the actions of citizens on the home front during World War II.

Ruth Millett wrote articles encouraging Wilmington’s female population to comply with rationing. Millett acknowledged that rationing made extra work for working women, but she also emphasized the necessity for rationing and the duty every woman had to her country. She reminded women that their situation was not nearly as difficult as that of the servicemen. “For even the tough job of running a household in wartime and holding down a full-time job is a snap compared with what our fighting men have to go through.”¹⁰ Certainly rationing placed a burden on women, especially those who worked

⁸ Louella G. Shouer, “Sugar Off Your Sweet Taste,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, May 1942, 56.

⁹ *Ladies’ Home Journal*, December 1942, 95.

outside the home. However, writers such as Millett encouraged women to think of the servicemen and their country before they considered their own needs. Such self-absorption during wartime was not only selfish, but also unpatriotic.

Millett continued to encourage utilitarian behavior throughout 1943. She took her inspiration from a young sailor whom she quoted as saying, “I was just one of a lot of guys.”¹¹ Millet applied his advice to citizens who had grown discouraged with rationing. Although Millett used the male pronoun, she knew her audience was women. Perhaps she used the male pronoun to encourage women to persuade their families to view rationing more favorably. The job of maintaining a positive family morale fell to women.

Advertisers kept their names in the kitchens of America even if the government rationed their products. Companies whose products relied on rationed goods provided alternative recipes in their advertisements.¹² Although consumers were not able to purchase products during the war, name recognition would be vital to sales after the war. Advertisements educated women about how to cook within the limitations of the rationing system. Such advertisements ran on the society page of the local newspaper. The responsibility of rationing fell to women because this task pertained to the kitchen.

Rationing and wartime schedules changed the ways in which Americans ate. Advertisers and authors of women’s rhetoric understood these changes and altered advertisements and women’s columns accordingly. Advertisers stressed planning meals for entire weeks in order to save time and conserve food. Authors introduced recipes that used little or no meat. A column in the local society page created for the duration of the

¹⁰ *Wilmington Star News*, 19 March 1942.

¹¹ *Wilmington Star News*, 5 January 1943.

war went by the headline “The War Kitchen”. The author, Gaynor Maddox, provided tips on preserving rationed goods and provided recipes and a daily meal plan.¹³ Articles in the paper encouraged citizens to grow their own food in Victory gardens. Advertisers and writers portrayed these changes as the patriotic duty of women.

A two-page advertisement for Del Monte canned goods ran in *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Del Monte promoted their products as part of the wartime way to buy groceries. It encouraged women to plan their meals in advance and buy for an entire week. The company sold the idea to women through patriotism by stating that planning meals and conserving food aided the war effort.¹⁴ The advertisement stressed to women that their actions in the kitchen could help win the war.

In the *Wilmington Star News*, national advertisements and local activities focused on changes in meal planning. Advertisements included recipes that either required little or no meat. Armour and Company advertised a “Low Point Favorite” and Quaker Macaroni advertised a “a NO-MEAT one-dish meal everyone likes”.¹⁵ More than likely, these products appeared on grocery lists. However, due to rationing, companies felt a new sense of urgency in making their products appear consumer friendly. Rationing disrupted meal planning and cooking during the war but women’s responsibilities for these actions did not change. Advertisers adjusted these disruptions and targeted women’s needs.

¹² *Wilmington Star News*, 16 April 1943; *Ladies’ Home Journal*, November 1943, 48.

¹³ *Wilmington Star News*, 1942-1945. The articles focused on tips such as preserving scarce foods, alternative proteins, and entertaining with a rationed menu.

¹⁴ *Ladies’ Home Journal*, November 1942, 40-41.

¹⁵ *Wilmington Star News*, 25 February 1944. Throughout the war companies ran similar advertisements. Not all contained recipes, but they sold their product with patriotism and stressed the health of the nation. See *Wilmington Star News*, 27 March 1942; *Wilmington Star News*, 20 May 1943, *Wilmington Star News*, 17 February 1944.

Rationing provided women with a new set of responsibilities and tasks. Government sponsored propaganda made the connection between these new womanly activities and their obligation to the country. The immediate enthusiasm for citizens to join in the fight for democracy often placed women firmly in the home with the kitchen as their battlefield. Local articles educated women about the changes they needed to make in the kitchen in order to help defeat the enemy.

The *Wilmington Star News* sponsored a series of cooking classes during the war. Ruth Chambers from the National Livestock and Meat Board hosted these classes. Women paid nothing to attend the four-day session. The advertisement encouraged women to attend these classes and read the complimentary handbook so they could learn more about proper nutrition for their families.¹⁶ Although women were always concerned about the health of their families and had managed the purchases of meat and other staples during peacetime without the assistance of a government representative, the war brought a new dimension to these routine activities. The private tasks of feeding a family and buying groceries became public acts in a nation campaigning to defeat foreign enemies.

The simple task of gardening, a hobby to many people, became an act of war against the enemy. Throughout the war, two-thirds of American homes included a Victory garden, by 1943, 75% of American women were engaged in home canning.¹⁷ In spring 1942, an advertisement and an editorial in the *Wilmington Star News* encouraged citizens to plant and tend a Victory garden. Two local seed stores along with other local businesses sponsored a full-page advertisement in a Sunday edition of the newspaper.

¹⁶ *Wilmington Star News*, 15 March 1942.

¹⁷ D' Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 181.

Roudabush's Seed Store encouraged citizens to "Enlist in the HOME GARDen". T. W. Wood & Sons requested that citizens join farmers who "...produce food for freedom..." The advertisement closed with, "Help America Win".¹⁸ According to the advertisers, growing food was equivalent to waging war against the enemy. On a more personal level, those who tended a garden protected their home and their family.

While domestic tasks such as feeding a family remained unchanged during the war, the rhetoric surrounding the performance of these duties was new. Previously routine tasks of food preparation took on a new meaning with women on the home front battling the enemy in their kitchens. *Ladies' Home Journal* ran a column entitled "Women Can Win the War" in the beginning of the May 1942 issue. "The nation which is best fed, and consequently the most alert, the most vigorous, the most able to withstand the tragic inroads of war, will win through."¹⁹ Women, responsible for feeding their families, were now equally responsible for the outcome of the war. Victory depended on the nutrition of Americans, and the nutrition of Americans depended on women.

Local women were called upon to shoulder more of the responsibility for adequately feeding their families. The New Hanover County Health department sponsored a women's health and education program with assistance from the United States Public Health Service. The article announcing the plans for such a program linked Allied victories to women and food production. Health was the first line of the nation's defense and the health of the country depended on its women. The article continued, "based upon the fact that 40 per cent of the men registering for the Selective Service were rejected for physical defects, the women's program for defense health education will work toward

¹⁸ *Wilmington Star News*, 8 March 1942.

improving health and protecting against disease.²⁰ New Hanover County officials established a second program called Health for Victory.²¹ Women continued their domestic duty as the family nutritionist, but with a new urgency in the rhetoric that encouraged women to hone their domestic skills for the sake of the nation.

In addition to giving helpful hints, “The War Kitchen” series also emphasized a sense of new urgency about nutrition. One column opened with, “every American woman must keep fighting on the home front. That means she must keep her family well fed...”²² The war entered the kitchens of America and drafted women into the total war. A series devoted to lunches for workers, presumably those in defense work, and school children promoted nutrition as part of the following headline “Don’t Cheat On Lunch-Box Meals; Make Them Tasty And Nourishing”. The series usually did not have a headline, so the rhetoric was as striking in its existence as it was in its language. Maddox reminded women that lunch should provide one-third of the food a person required in a day.²³ Women prepared boxed lunches for the family before the war, but the national crisis placed a new emphasis on women’s responsibility for ensuring the strength of the family.

The series played to the traditional duties of women feeding their families. Although the task did not change, meal preparation took on an added sense of urgency as men went off to defense work and joined the armed forces. Maddox devoted one series to meals for third shift workers. A woman was expected to provide a warm and satisfying

¹⁹ *Ladies’ Home Journal*, May 1942, 6.

²⁰ *Wilmington Star News*, 8 March 1942.

²¹ *Wilmington Star News*, 30 June 1943.

²² *Wilmington Star News*, 14 May 1942.

²³ *Wilmington Star News*, 12 September 1942.

meal for her man, no matter what time he arrived home. Maddox acknowledged that the man may have to prepare the meal for himself.²⁴ However, she did not shift the responsibility of meal preparation completely from women to men. She provided recipes that made food preparation easier by using limited canned goods. Even if a woman did not prepare the meal, she was still expected to purchase the necessary ingredients and educate her husband about preparing nutritious meals. The article, which ran on the society page, was directed at women, not men.

More urgent than the reminders of the value of nutrition and how to feed families, was the alliance advertisers attempted to establish between the companies and women. This alliance appeared as important as that of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin. Government propaganda, which influenced local advertisements, brought the war into America's kitchens. The strength of the nation rested on the strength of each individual family, which was determined by what happened in the kitchen. The government portrayed women as warriors in the kitchen providing nutrition for their families, abiding by rationing policies, canning foods, and saving cooking fat.

Advertisements reminded Americans that they needed to remain strong and healthy citizens.²⁵ Similar to the reminders about purchasing war bonds, these reminders were encouraged by the government, although they differed with respect to their goals. Reminders about purchasing war bonds appealed to consumers without reference to gender. They served to keep consumers familiar with product names, while establishing themselves as patriotic. Nutritional reminders, on the other hand, built an alliance

²⁴ *Wilmington Star News*, 15 September 1942.

between the company and the consumer, in this case, women. The company fulfilled its national obligation by producing healthy foods. Through advertisements, they encouraged women to complete the mission by feeding their families meal prepared with their special products.

The alliance between women and food companies became more conspicuous as the war progressed. Libby's, a national canned food company, sponsored a two-page layout in the November 1942 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*. The headline read, "PARTNERS? Yes, we really feel we are." The advertisement explained the common concern the company shared with American women.²⁶ Feeding their families was not new to women, but the circumstances under which they provided for their families had changed. In addition to a new sense of urgency, certain foods (such as produce) became more difficult to obtain. In an attempt to explain those food shortages, Libby's sold their company as patriotic by detailing the supplies they provided servicemen. More important to the war effort, however, was the emphasis placed on the sacrifices the company made for the good of the nation by donating canned goods to American soldiers. By equating these acts of sacrifice to the problems to those women faced because of food shortages, the company strengthened the perception of the community and a nation united by war.

A rival canned food company, Del Monte, sponsored a full-page advertisement in the *Wilmington Star News*. Del Monte established its alliance with American women by providing a nine-point checklist for women to abide by to ensure they did not waste food. Del Monte provided the food and women needed to use it efficiently. The advertisement

²⁵Junket Rennet Powder, Swift & Company, and The Visking Corporation were among many companies that included bulletins. *Ladies' Home Journal*, October 1942, 114; *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1942, 2; *Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1942, 57.

reminded women, “Food Fights for Freedom.”²⁷ Women became the liaison between food companies and their families, and were seen as the home front equivalent of America’s fighting forces.

Other advertisers partnered with women by associating their products with an Allied victory. The Visking Corporation advertised in *Ladies’ Home Journal* under the heading, “FOOD POWER will help Win the War.”²⁸ An advertisement for Pillsbury Flour in the local paper encouraged women to, “BAKE FIGHTING FOOD!”²⁹ Both advertisements implied that women contributed to the war effort when they served their families a specific product. Advertisements enticing women to buy named-brand products were not new, but associating it with the future of the country certainly was new.

Other companies used images of Uncle Sam, one of the most recognizable symbols of America to make their case. Uncle Sam left his usual duty of gracing recruitment posters and entered the kitchen of America. The Indiana Glass Company used the image of Uncle Sam to promote its canning jars in a 1942 advertisement placed in *Ladies’ Home Journal*.³⁰ A local grocery store, Reid’s Super Market, also used Uncle Sam to solidify the national community during the war. Uncle Sam requested that women bring their own shopping bags to the grocery store in order to conserve heavy paper.³¹

²⁶ *Ladies’ Home Journal*, November 1942, 56-57.

²⁷ *Wilmington Star News*, 11 November 1943.

²⁸ *Ladies’ Home Journal*, August 1942, 57.

²⁹ *Wilmington Star News*, 4 March 1942.

³⁰ *Ladies’ Home Journal*, October 1942, 156.

³¹ *Wilmington Star News*, 17 November 1944.

The actions of individual women in their kitchens affected the outcome of the war overseas.

The local power company, Tide Water Power, linked women in the kitchen to Allied victories throughout the war. In 1942, the company ran an advertisement that pictured a smiling woman holding a ham above a picture of a stove. The caption read, “A Woman’s Best Weapon for HOME DEFENSE good food- well cooked.”³² Another advertisement for a gas stove claimed that the stove was “...cooking for the Home of the FREE” and pictured a stove and women in an Army uniform and a nurse’s uniform saluting.³³ Even women who enlisted in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps or took jobs with the Red Cross bore the responsibility for providing their families with nutritional meals. The primary focus of all women, working or not, was their domestic responsibility. Their job in their homes was just as important as their work in the defense plants. In 1944, Tide Water Power Company again focused on women in the kitchen. This time, the company outlined proper ways in which women should cook vegetables on a gas stove in order to retain all of the nutrients. Cooking vegetables, even on a gas stove, was not new to women. What was new was the alliance they entered, whether they wanted to or not, with national and local companies and the nation at war.

In addition to conserving food and providing nutritional meals to their families, women were expected to save fat that could be converted into ammunition. A local advertisement sponsored by the *Wilmington Star News* pictured a woman in a Stars and Stripes apron and chef’s hat. Above the picture the caption read, “BE A ‘Kitchen

³² *Wilmington Star News*, 25 March 1942.

³³ *Wilmington Star News*, 17 April 1942.

Munition Mechanic’³⁴ In 1944, the OPA, WFA, and the WPB approved and promoted advertisements that encouraged women to conserve cooking fat. The advertisements urged women to continue to participate in the process throughout the war.³⁵ As late as 1944, propaganda reminded women of their vital alliance between food and the country. In order for the men overseas to be victorious, women on the home front had to maintain their vigilance in the kitchen.

Buying goods on the black market symbolized unpatriotic behavior in the kitchen. In actuality, the black market, defined by people purchasing goods without ration stamps, did not threaten the rationing system. The majority of Americans complied with the government regulations. However, hoarding and paying more than ceiling prices certainly occurred and possibly with some regularity.³⁶ The problem lay with the recording of such information. Certainly it was difficult to measure such indiscretions in the system.

The topic of the black market remained almost completely absent from *Ladies’ Home Journal* and the local society pages. The absence was ironic considering that hoarding and paying more than ceiling prices was a luxury only the middle and upper classes enjoyed.³⁷ *Ladies’ Home Journal* covered the topic of hoarding in a column mentioned earlier in this chapter, but never mentioned the phrase “black market”. Locally, Millett covered the topic once and then not until 1944. She wrote about the illegal activities of men and women such as patronizing a butcher who sold meat without collecting ration points, buying gas on the black market, and hoarding scarce goods. She

³⁴ *Wilmington Star News*, 16 August 1942.

³⁵ *Wilmington Star News*, 2 May 1944; *Wilmington Star News*, 11 April 1944.

³⁶ Campbell, 166, 181.

³⁷ Bentley, 35-36.

urged her readers to, "...admit once and for all that cheating on rationing is unpatriotic and unlawful..."³⁸ Worse than being on the wrong side of the law, the black market was labeled unpatriotic. The expectation remained clear that citizens fighting at home continued to put the needs of their country above their individual needs.

The majority of women interviewed remembered rationing and changes in food production as relatively benign. They mentioned those disruptions, but did not interpret them as significant inconveniences. When asked about rationing, most women recalled specific rationed items, mentioning sugar and meat most often.³⁹

Of the fourteen women interviewed, only one woman described negative aspects to rationing. Estelle Edwards' response was simple, but striking in its difference with the responses of the other women. "Oh, it was terrible!"⁴⁰ She did not elaborate on the conditions of rationing, or the specific ways in which it affected her routines.

The rest of the women interviewed recalled changes in cooking or routines, but they maintained an overall positive memory of rationing. Mary Bellamy remembered, "It was, you know, you just had to abide by the laws and if you didn't have a sugar stamp you managed to get honey or molasses. I don't remember that sugar was much of a problem and butter was rationed. You ate a lot of tough meat during that period (laughs) But, you never went hungry."⁴¹

³⁸ *Wilmington Star News*, 16 February 1944.

³⁹ Cornelia Campbell, interview by author, 14 November 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording; Caroline Swails, interview by author, 12 December 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording; Evalina Williams, interview by author, 11 December 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording; Manette Mintz, interview by author, 21 November 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina.

⁴⁰ Estelle Edwards, interview by author, 11 November 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording.

⁴¹ Mary Bellamy, interview with author, 15 November 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording.

Lethia Hankins recalled, “my mother always loved to bake, that was her forte. She loved it and she had to curtail quite a bit because you couldn’t get but a certain amount of things...And the sugar cut down on Momma’s baking. And it was, well, I won’t say it was all that bad because there was exchanging with a neighbor or a family member...”⁴²

Another woman recalled items her family did without in order to comply with rationing, but concluded, “we did well.”⁴³ These three women recalled disruptions in meal preparations but treated them as minor. Rationing may have altered women’s kitchens, but it did not change their fundamental obligations to feed their families.

Memories of the black market during World War II were striking in their similarities. Not one woman interviewed admitted knowing anything first hand about the black market, but some alluded to the illegal activities of people they did not know personally. Women acknowledged it occurred, but assumed that their friends and family members did not participate in such activities. Ms. Hankins stated, “I’m sure there was some [illegal activity], but not with the circles I ran around with.”⁴⁴ The recollection of Clara Welker sounded almost identical. “Probably some, but none that I knew of.”⁴⁵ Two other women acknowledged the existence of black market activity, but stressed that they did not have a presumable connection with such activities. Ms. Mintz said the only way she was familiar with black market activity was through second hand information; she

⁴² Lethia Hankins, interview by author, 25 November 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording.

⁴³ Clara Welker, interview by author, 14 January 2003, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording.

⁴⁴ Catherine Stribling, interview by author, 9 December 2002, Wilmington, North Carolina, tape recording.

⁴⁵ Clara Welker.

remained at arms length from illegal activity.⁴⁶ Estelle Edwards recalled, “I don’t remember anything about that, I heard a lot about it, but I wasn’t aware of it.”⁴⁷

The women interviewed placed themselves, their families, and friends on the right side of the law when it came to the rationing system. This made them patriotic soldiers on the home front. They sacrificed as did the servicemen sent overseas, and they believed that they contributed to the defeat of the enemy. Even sixty years after the war, the women interviewed portrayed themselves as both patriotic and law abiding. No doubt, many women struggled with hoarding scarce goods for the sake of their families and complying with the rationing system. However, none of the women interviewed admitted to such struggles. Women either focused on their patriotic behavior, or refused to admit to an outsider that they or someone close to them participated in illegal acts during the war.

Women fought the war from their kitchens. Daily routines in shopping, meal preparations, canning and gardening changed during the war. Scarce items, rationing, and food conservation increased women’s burdens in the kitchen. However, women continued to feed their families as best they could. Nevertheless, the government propaganda that influenced national and local advertisements placed a new sense of urgency on the tasks of purchasing goods and preparing meals. The obvious disruptions in the kitchens that resulted from rationing and scarce goods were magnified by the stress of the new urgency placed on domestic roles. However, sixty years after these disruptions, Wilmington women made light of these disruptions and recalled their roles as largely unchanged.

⁴⁶ Mannelle Mintz.

⁴⁷ Estelle Edwards.